



ABOUT THE LATINO RESEARCH INITIATIVE

The Latino Research Initiative is an interdisciplinary, research-focused entity within the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin. The mission of the Latino Research Initiative is to provide the infrastructure for the creation and dissemination of quality information about issues affecting Mexican-origin and Latino populations in the region, state, and nation.

The Latino Research Initiative supports the production of research and community-based projects that focus on key areas in Mexican American and Latina/o Studies: policy studies, language and cognition, cultural studies, health and social equity, and an archive of materials and data relating to these areas.

By creating and supporting community of scholars in Latino studies and building a comprehensive archive, the Latino Research Initiative serves as an invaluable resource for community volunteers, activists, policy makers, and other groups working to create programs and policies which directly affect the lives of Latinos in the United States.

210 W. 24th Street
Mailcode F9200
Austin, Texas 78712
512-232-2264
liberalarts.utexas.edu/lri

Housing Affordability in Austin Brings New Attention to Mobile Home Parks

GABRIEL AMARO, PH.D.

BACKGROUND

In this brief, the Latino Research Initiative examines the role of mobile home parks in housing affordability in the city of Austin, Texas.

Austin, along with its metropolitan area, is consistently ranked one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation. Steady job growth in the technology, transportation, and warehousing sectors (Austin is ranked 10 out of all U.S. metropolitan areas for job growth¹) contributed to the city's population growth from 656,562 in 2000 to 949,587 in 2017, an increase of 45%.

The topic of housing affordability in Austin continues to dominate discussions among city leaders, real estate professionals, community leaders, and local residents.

While steady job growth has made Austin a desirable migration destination, the resulting population growth has put a strain on housing availability and affordability. According to a report from the Austin Board of Realtors², the city has 2.1 months of inventory for all homes. This number represents an increase from last year, but is still relatively low^a. However, homes priced at \$250,000 and under have an even lower inventory at less than 1 month. In comparison, both Dallas and San Antonio have 2.8 months of housing inventory³.

^a Housing inventory indicates the amount of time current for sale inventory would last if no additional new houses were built.

According to Austin’s Strategic Housing Blueprint⁴, the city needs to construct 135,000 new housing units to keep pace with population growth over the next 10 years. Finally, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis⁵, current yearly employment and population gains in Austin are expected to support demand for 36,950 new homes, while only 27,700 new and existing homes are entering the market.

Homeowners are not the only ones feeling the pinch. Renters in Austin are also affected by the housing shortage. There is a demand for 26,850 new market-rate rental units with only 14,000 units currently under construction⁵.

As a result of the limited housing supply, the median home sales price has increased to \$322,000 in 2017 from \$300,000 the previous year⁶. Apartment rents average \$995, \$1,249, and \$1,587 for a one, two, and three bedroom unit, respectively. This represents an approximately 7% increase over the previous year⁵. Income restricted units average \$727, \$870, and \$978 for a one, two, and three bedroom unit, respectively, but only account for about 9% of the apartment inventory. According to the City’s Analysis of Impediments⁷, there are as many as 60,000 renter households earning less than \$25,000 per year, and just 19,000 affordable units to serve them. More than 40,000 renter households are paying more than 30% of their monthly income towards rent and utilities.

With housing becoming more unaffordable, community organizations and city leaders have turned their

attention to mobile home parks as a way to provide low-income households with an affordable living opportunity within the city limits. Mobile home parks are the last bastion for affordability in Austin. As of 2015, the median rent for a mobile home was \$550 and the average rent was \$673 nationwide — both rents lower than that for income-restricted apartments⁹. According to the U.S. Census, there were 5,491 mobile homes in Austin in 2015. However, within the past year alone, several mobile home parks have been rezoned and redeveloped and their residents displaced in the process.

THE STUDY

Using census block data from 2010, we find that Latinos^b may be disproportionately housed in mobile home parks. Latinos comprised about 60% of the mobile home park population but only 35% of the Austin population during the same time (Figure 1). Latino households may seek these more affordable living options because

their median incomes are lower than the general population (\$41,276 and \$57,689, respectively)¹⁰.

In an effort to help with the affordability issue, the Latino Research Initiative has conducted an analysis that identifies mobile home parks within the City of Austin (proper) and identifies whether the properties are at risk of redevelopment.

To accomplish this, we utilized the City of Austin’s land use and future land use shapefile data. The City’s land use data contains information on a property’s current use (single-family use, commercial use, etc.). The future land use data contains information on the City’s preferred future direction for a property according to the adopted comprehensive plan. We identified all properties within the Austin city limits that have mobile home land use. This research netted a total of 1,133 mobile home properties which include all properties such as mobile home parks and individually owned lots with a mobile home.

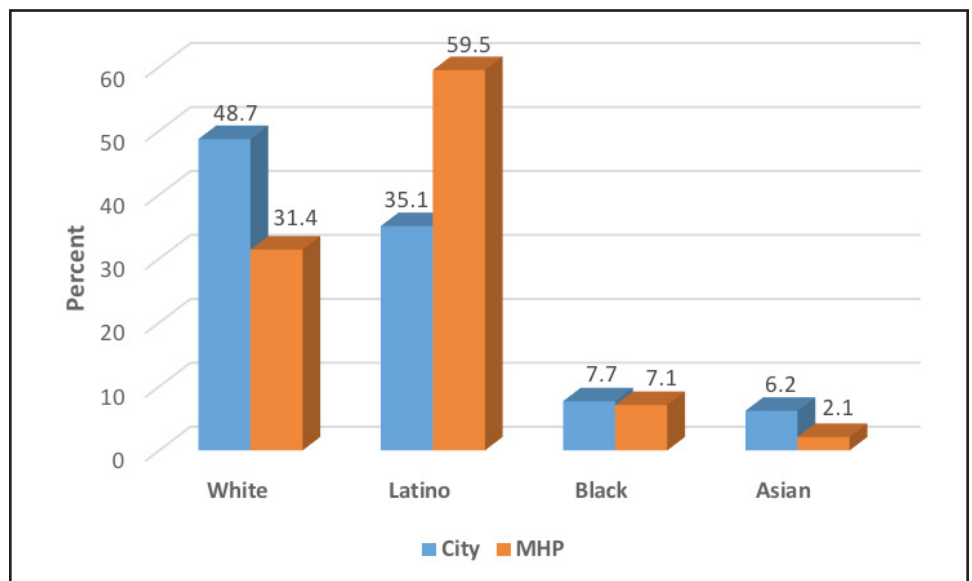


Figure 1. Mobile Home Park Population Demographics, Austin, 2010

^b The data used in this study came from the U.S. Census which identifies the population as Hispanic or Latino. For consistency, we use Latino to refer to the Hispanic or Latino population.

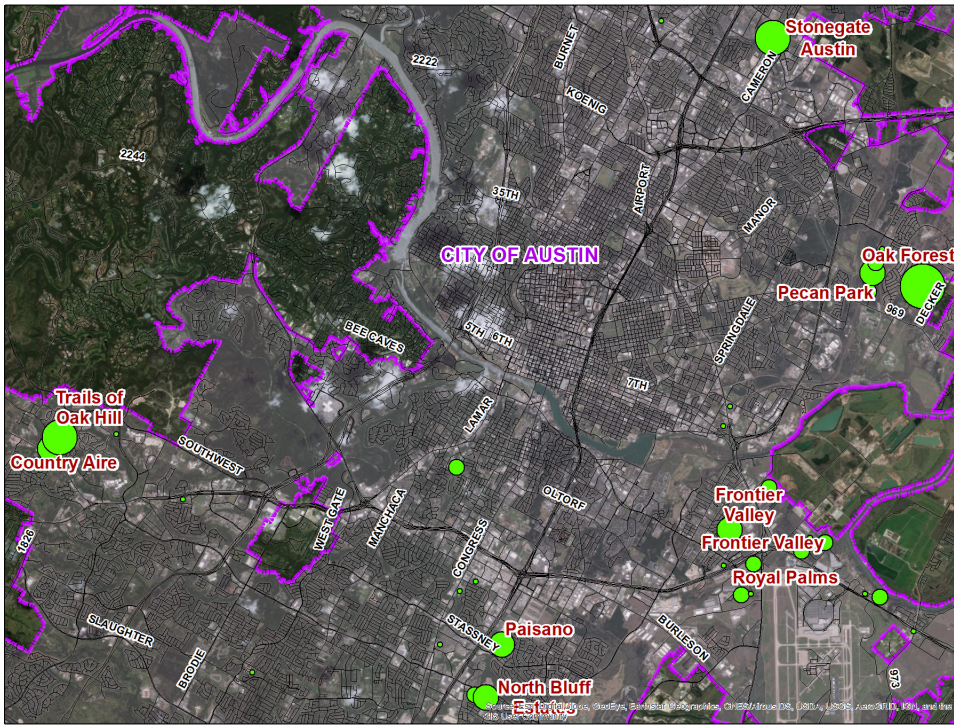


Figure 2. Mobile Home Park Locations within the city of Austin

We classify an at-risk property as a mobile home park where occupants rent a space for their mobile homes, rather than owning the lot. In an effort to focus on mobile home parks with the potential to displace a large number of residents, we excluded lots that were less than 5 acres in size in order to exclude individually owned lots. The 5 acre minimum was also selected as a threshold as many smaller lots have a single mobile home on the property. Several of these smaller properties also included commercial businesses with a mobile home or two situated on the property.

RESULTS

With these exclusions in place, we netted a total of 41 lots greater than 5 acres that are zoned for mobile home use. Figure 2 maps the location of these mobile home parks within the

city limits. Most of the mobile home parks are on the eastern side of Austin both north and south of the Colorado River. Oak Forest RV Park, located

southwest of Walter E. Long Lake, measures about 264 acres in size, but a large portion of the land is leased for industrial and commercial purposes. In all, about 164 acres of Oak Forest is dedicated to mobile home sites with Loma Vista Manufactured Communities and Austin’s Original Tiny Home also leasing some of its spaces.

The mobile home parks at risk of re-development are those situated within the City of Austin’s Future Land Use plans with designations other than mobile home use (Table 1). The at-risk designation may change when the City adopts CodeNext — the City’s update to the existing 30-year-old Land Development Code — but at first glance, many of the areas classified in the City’s future land use plan remain the same classification in CodeNext.

Figure 3 maps the spatial location of the at-risk mobile home parks listed in Table 1. There are 16 mobile home

Table 1. At-Risk Mobile Home Parks in Austin w/Minimum 5 acres

Name	Acreage	Future Land Use	# of Spaces
4811 S Congress Ave	5.78	Mixed Use	--
Cactus Rose	6.59	Commercial	--
7801-8099 Lee Hill Drive	7.27	Commercial	--
Comfort Park	7.64	Specific Regulating District	--
Holiday Mobile Home Park	8.18	Neighborhood Mixed Use	--
Empty Lot	8.46	Mixed Use	--
Palm Harbor Homes	8.82	Commercial	--
Empty Lot	8.82	Mixed Use/Office	--
4505 Lucksinger Ln.	9.35	Mixed Use	--
Midtown RV Park	11.21	Mixed Use	150
Pecan Park - Hoeke Ln.	16.57	Warehouse/Limited Office	101
Royal Palms	26.47	Commercial	196
Country Aire	29.01	Mixed Residential	154
Frontier Valley	30.69	Single Family	155
Stonegate Austin	67.01	High Density Single Family	358
Trails of Oak Hill	69.68	Mixed Residential	185

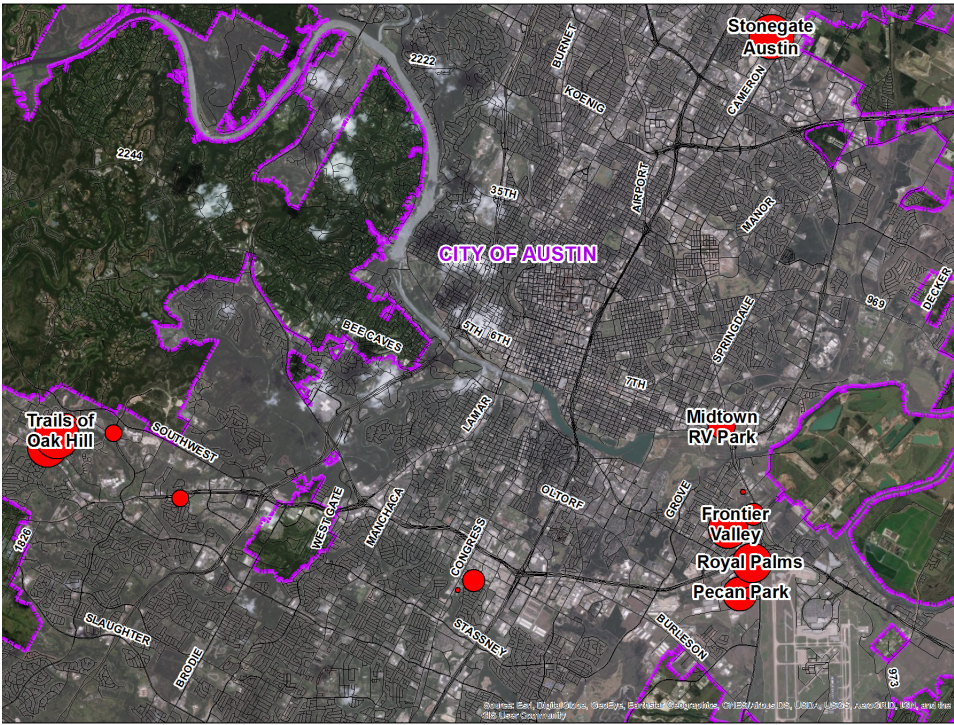


Figure 3. At-Risk Mobile Home Park Locations in the city of Austin

parcs of at least five acres within the city limits that are at risk of redevelopment. One of these parks, Cactus Rose, is already redeveloping. Based on the number of spaces that we know of, there are at least 1,299 low-income mobile home households that may be displaced in the coming years due to redevelopment. Two of the lots listed in Table 1 are underutilized and empty.

We compared the potential demographic characteristics of the mobile home parks in Austin with those of the at-risk mobile home parks (Figure 4). The Latino and non-Hispanic black populations have a larger presence in at-risk mobile home parks. There are 3,801 non-Hispanic whites at risk of relocating. This equates to 44.8% of this population in mobile home parks. In contrast, Latinos and non-Hispanic blacks at-risk of

relocating equates to 54% and 64%, respectively, of their population in mobile home parks.

IMPLICATIONS

The City has initiated steps to address housing affordability within the city limits, most recently by adopting the Tenant Notification and Relocation Assistance Ordinance. These steps, including the ordinance, do not prevent the redevelopment of the most affordable pieces of property in the City; mobile home parks. As we have found there are a number of mobile home parks that are at risk of redevelopment.

With buildable spaces near the center of Austin in high demand, many of these redevelopment projects aim to construct apartment complexes which, some argue, are needed to address population growth and are better suited for the land use. Displaced residents find little comfort in the development of these apartments, as the rents in many of these new complexes are out of reach.

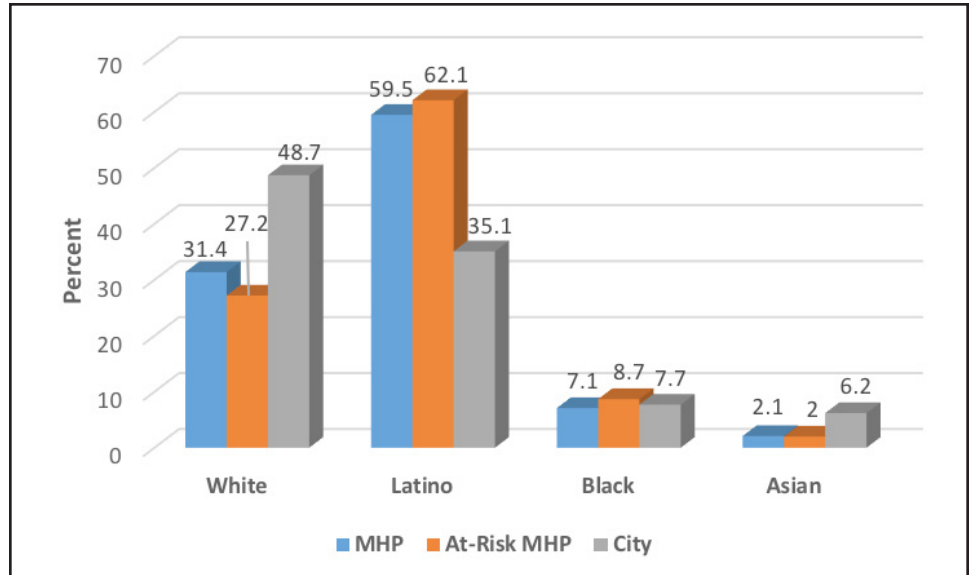


Figure 4. Mobile Home Park Population Characteristics & At-Risk Characteristics, 2010

STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVING AFFORDABILITY

The City of Austin has expressed a dedication to providing affordable housing to low-income households, but has yet to address changes in land use which result in the loss of its most

affordable housing option. The City can take the initiative to protect these properties by restricting the land use to mobile home use or by utilizing its Community Land Trust (CLT) option offered by the Department of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development. A CLT is a program

in which the City would purchase the land and lease the property to low-income households. Together, The City of Austin and local communities can work to secure affordable living options for low-income households by addressing the various mechanisms through which affordability is lost.

WORKS CITED

1. Kerr, Beverly. Central Texas Economy in Perspective—Job Growth and Unemployment. Austin Chamber of Commerce. 2017. Available at: <https://www.austinchamber.com/blog/06-20-2017-job-growth-unemployment>. Accessed July 5, 2017.
2. May 2017 Central Texas Housing Market Report. Austin Board of Realtors. 2017. Available at: <http://www.abor.com/statsmay17/>. Accessed July 17, 2017.
3. Housing Activity and Affordability. Texas A&M University Real Estate Center. 2017. Available at: <https://www.recenter.tamu.edu/data/housing-activity/>. Accessed July 17, 2017.
4. Strategic Housing Blueprint. City of Austin. 2017. http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/StrategicHousing-Blueprint_Final62617.pdf. Accessed July 17, 2017.
5. Austin-Round Rock, Texas Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis-2016. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research. 2016.
6. Austin Real Estate Market Statistics. Realty Austin. 2017. Available at: https://www.realtyaustin.com/austin-market-statistics.php?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=client-newsletter-2017-6-14. Accessed July 14, 2017.
7. Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice 2015. City of Austin Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department. 2015.
8. Planning and Zoning Demographics. City of Austin. 2017. Available at: <http://www.austintexas.gov/demographics>. Accessed July 17, 2017.
9. United States Census Bureau. 2015 American Housing Survey Public Use File (PUF) v1.2. July 2017. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs/data/2015/ahs-2015-public-use-file--puf-.html>.
10. United States Census Bureau. 2015 American Community Survey 5-year. July 2017. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.

Copyright 2017 by the Latino Research Initiative