Rehabilitation and Blight Remediation: An Analysis of Affordable Housing Policy and Development in New Orleans

E. Michelle Butcher
University of New Orleans

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Rehabilitation and Blight Remediation:  
An Analysis of Affordable Housing Policy and Development in New Orleans  

An Honors Thesis  

Presented to  

the Department of Planning & Urban Studies  

in the University of New Orleans  

In Partial Fulfillment  

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by  

E. Michelle Butcher  

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Abstract
The City of New Orleans (CNO) Office of Community Development approved funding to rehabilitate 81 properties (73 of which were actually used in the project) that were moved from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex to scattered sites city-wide. These homes, which were located in a proposed historic district, were chosen to be part of a blight remediation initiative monitored by the CNO Office of Performance and Accountability “BlightSTAT” meeting. This research examines the impact of this U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sponsored affordable housing program on the New Orleans blight remediation plan. The case study on the properties moved from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex provides a lens to examine the progress of the CNO Blight policy and analyze various pitfalls and/or successes. Although the affordable housing plan is in progress as of March, 2017, a total of 39 out of 81 properties have been renovated and 29 of those are now occupied. Focusing on the intersection of affordable housing development, historic preservation and blight remediation in this project creates a model for organizations looking to influence public policy through community development. This study examines if and how an integrated planning process, (using the intersection of affordable housing, blight remediation and historic preservation) reshapes public policy and economic development. The study further looks at the CNO BlightSTAT program and how public administration of city resources post Hurricane Katrina has contributed to economic development and neighborhood stabilization in New Orleans.

Keywords: Blight, Affordable Housing, Historic Preservation, VA/LSU Hospital, Community Development, Neighborhood Planning, Quality of Life, Urban development
Introduction

Affordable housing, blight and historic preservation are uniquely intersected through the *BlightSTAT* program which has influenced public policy and contributed to economic development and neighborhood stabilization in New Orleans. Affordable housing and blight are two prominent problems in the historic city of New Orleans, LA. Blight, in particular, has been an ongoing predicament for many neighborhoods citywide. “Dilapidated properties and overgrown lots, otherwise known as blight, have long been among New Orleans’ most vexing challenges. Concentrations of blighted properties reduce property values, harm quality of life, and threaten public safety” (Blight Reduction Report, 2014, pg. 4). The reduction of blight has become a major priority for the city of New Orleans. One way the City has attempted to alleviate this issue is through the implementation of the Office of Performance and Accountability’s *BlightSTAT* program. *BlightSTAT* oversees many affordable housing and blight remediation projects. One, in particular, provides an excellent lens through which to analyze blight and affordable housing in New Orleans.

The movement of properties from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex was an unprecedented plan and, as such, experienced many roadblocks before its completion. However, 81 houses in total were able to be moved to various sites citywide and over half have been renovated. This project provides a backdrop for the analysis of the effectiveness of the *BlightSTAT* program blight reduction process as it relates to the creation of affordable housing. By using the data collected during fieldwork and further content analysis, recommendations can be made for future development of affordable housing and blight remediation policy.
The purpose of this study will be to examine the juxtaposition of affordable housing, blight remediation and historic preservation with respect to the movement of 81 properties from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex. This study will also explore history, development and success measures in the role of programs such as BlightSTAT and the implementation of polices, such as blight remediation and historic preservation, and their impact on affordable housing development in New Orleans. The results of this study can serve as a model for neighborhood organizations who seek to understand how their participation in the building of community development programs can influence public policy. For New Orleans, an integrated strategic planning program that focuses on blight, supports historic preservation and encourages community engagement, can be used to improve and/or reshape existing affordable housing policy in New Orleans and beyond.

**Literature Review**

How do historic preservation, blight remediation and affordable housing intersect to impact neighborhood stabilization and economic development in New Orleans? This study seeks to explore this research question through a detailed case study about the movement of 81 properties from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex. Before this analysis can begin, however, a conceptual framework must be established in order to provide analytical context and present the problem as it relates to policy, power, and urban development.

To understand the implications of a project as large as the construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex and the movement of 81 properties from the site, one must understand the ideology behind its inception. James Scott, author of *Seeing Like a State,*
describes three elements that (when combined) contribute to the downfall of various state development projects. “The ideology of high modernism provides, as it were, the desire; the modern state provides the means of acting on that desire; and the incapacitated civil society provides the leveled terrain on which to build (dis)utopias” (Scott 1998: pg. 89). These three elements appear in the various stages of the VA/LSU Medical complex project.

Firstly, the ‘desire’ Scott is referring to is reflected in the proposal for a new medical complex as opposed to the renovation of Charity hospital1 which is located across Claiborne Avenue from the site. “According to the first post-storm plan, which won federal approval, the two new hospitals were to share thirty-seven acres close to the downtown business core… [however, the project] ballooned into two stand-alone, totally separate hospitals on sixty-seven acres (twenty-seven square blocks)” (Gratz 2011). The high-modernist desire to improve social life combined with the power of the modern state created a massive project that, ultimately, had no real input from residents who would be affected by the construction. “The replacement plan and site was exempted from the Master Plan process approved last year by the City Planning Commission and by the City Council, which was supposed to ensure community involvement in such matters” (Gratz 2011). This action created the ‘leveled terrain’ Scott deems necessary to build upon.

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1 Charity hospital opened in 1939 as a “technical, medical and architectural wonder” and served the poor communities of New Orleans for decades. “The Art Deco building, which now sits dormant on Tulane Avenue as a new facility rises in Mid-City, was the sixth Charity structure since the institution opened in 1736 as L’Hospital des Pauvres de la Charite. Over two centuries, what began as a modest operation on the corner of Chartres and Bienville streets had grown into a million square feet with almost 3,000 beds, the second largest hospital in the United States at the time” (Barrow, 2012).
Overall, the way in which the plan to build the VA/LSU Medical complex was completed contains the three elements outlined by James Scott. However, the movement of 81 properties from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex depicts another perspective on the use of state power for social improvement. By placing the properties on scattered sites citywide (with the intention to redevelop and sell), City officials were attempting to redevelop neighborhoods. However, these officials could not create communities. “The working-class neighborhood known as Lower Mid-City, which had sustained a solid racially diverse population for years, with some homes handed down within families for generations, has been steamrolled” (Gratz 2011). Communities like the one in Lower Mid-City take generations to develop. Although the City was able to salvage 81 properties, they could not replace or replicate this kind of authenticity and culture.

Sharon Zukin, author of *Naked City*, discusses the concept of authenticity as it functions within cities. Zukin states “a city is authentic if it can create the experience of origins” (Zukin 2010: pg. 3). By redeveloping the 81 properties in various neighborhoods, the City is attempting to create these same experiences and use authenticity as a “tool of power” (Zukin 2010: pg. 3). Unfortunately, the lack of communication between the City and the residents (and the delays in renovations) does not create the sense of cohesiveness that is vital for authenticity to exist. Zukin states “we already use the streets and buildings to create a physical fiction of our common origins… [and] authenticity refers to the look and feel of a place as well as the social connectedness that place inspires. But the sense that a neighborhood is true to its origins and allows a real community to form reflects more about us and our sensibilities than about any city
What Zukin is calling attention to is the way residents shape the meaning of a neighborhood and create this authenticity. It isn’t the buildings that make a neighborhood authentic. While the City was able to salvage the 81 properties, they were unable to save the sense of community inspired by the original neighborhood and asserted the “state’s” right to the city over the residents.

Zukin argues that “authenticity must be used to reshape the rights of ownership” (2010 pg. 244). As made clear by the lack of opportunities for resident input, the movement of 81 properties from the VA/LSU Medical complex signaled a claim, by the City, for the right to reshape the city. Zukin argues that residents deserve “a right to put down roots and remain in place. This would strike a balance between a city’s origins and its new beginnings; this would restore a city’s soul” (2010 pg. 246). Although the creation of affordable housing could aid in the development of community roots, the redevelopment of the 81 properties (as of November, 2016) has contributed to community growth in a limited way. “If the social life of the streets is truly important, the state should make sure that all the men and women who use the streets have affordable rents so they can continue to live in their neighborhood” (Zukin 2010, pg. 246). Although the rehabilitation of the 81 properties is ongoing, several that have been completed have sold for nearly $400,000 which raises concerns about the impact on surrounding property values. Only time will tell whether these particular properties contributed to the phenomenon of gentrification occurring in some New Orleans neighborhoods².

² With a changing population and a shift in investment, long-time residents are getting priced out of their neighborhoods. “For a long time, inner-city communities had no investment at all, leading to concentrated poverty. Even well-meaning policies can have the unintended consequence of discouraging investment in such neighborhoods if they aren't well thought out” (McClendon, 2015).
Gentrification, as defined by Ruth Glass, is “a complex urban process that included the rehabilitation of hold housing stock, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, property price increases, and the displacement of work-class residents by the incoming middle classes” (Lees et al. 2008, pg. 5). The construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex, as well as the movement of the 81 properties from its site, contributed in various ways to each of the processes outlined by Glass. The City’s attempt at developing communities through the rehabilitation and sale of the 81 properties must be examined to see if the price after rehabilitation is not considered affordable and this price point may trigger a different market reaction. The scattered site nature of the houses may decrease the potential for this adverse impact. The influence cannot be determined until all the houses have been sold and if the price is substantially higher than those in the housing market. The issue of housing that is affordable vs. affordable housing is a political issue that remains unresolved in New Orleans. “The politics of urban property markets have altered the terrain for opposition and resistance. Gentrification now receives more explicit governmental support, through both subsidies to large corporate developers and targeted policies designed to attract individual gentrifiers” (Lees et al. 2008, pg. 81).

Although creation of affordable housing can be positive for existing residents, it also allows for the movement of new residents into neighborhoods which contribute to social and economic mixing.

Social mixing is inevitable in large urban areas such as New Orleans. However, disrupting existing communities with the abrupt addition of a few renovated properties and new, unfamiliar neighbors can create social tension. “Creating social mix, however, invariably involves the movement of the middle class into working-class areas, not vice
versa, working on the assumption that a socially mixed community will be a socially ‘balanced’ one, characterized by positive interaction between the classes” (Lees et al. 2008, pg. 207). Given that New Orleans consists of a network of various neighborhoods (many of which are historic and prominent African American neighborhoods), the tension created by this kind of social mixing can contribute very negatively to the development of the area as a whole; especially where displacement occurs. However, “displacement doesn’t have to occur for affordable housing to be permanently removed by gentrification” (Lees et al. 2008, pg. 274). Although displacement occurred due to the construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex due to eminent domain, there has yet to be a study on any displacement that may have occurred or might occur due to the movement of the 81 properties into scattered neighborhoods. However, either by dispossession or displacement, the residents of New Orleans will be affected.

_Urban transformation_, in high-modernist ideology, is looked at as a way to contribute to the greater good of the City as a whole, using the power of an authoritative state at the expense of the masses with little resources. Urbanization “nearly always has a class dimension, since it is usually the poor, the underprivileged, and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this process” (Harvey 2012: pg. 16). The implications of the construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex and the movement of 81 properties from the site (especially given the lack of community input) are that the City has the right of reshaping its neighborhoods; not the residents. The redevelopment of the properties appeared to be a forced attempt by the City at creating authentic communities and the desirability of the properties to new residents only serve to further a narrative of gentrification. However, “by the time the truth is clear, the
destruction will have occurred, and New Orleans, like too many cities today, will be forced to spend endless funds and decades rebuilding its urban fabric” (Gratz 2011).

**History: Blight and Affordable Housing in New Orleans**

To understand this research, it is important to first learn about how blight and affordable housing have developed in New Orleans. Although there are many definitions of blight, the New Orleans City Municipal Code defines blight as “any dwelling, structure, premise, or vacant lot in such a state of deterioration that it creates a substantial adverse impact on neighboring properties, including but not limited to depreciating property values; substantial and unreasonable interference with the lawful use and enjoyment of other space within the neighborhood; or an increase in criminal activity stemming from illegal activities taking place on the Unoccupied Property” (Chapter 28, Article III, Section 28-38 City Municipal Code). Blight is experienced nationwide in various ways but it had become more prevalent in New Orleans, particularly following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. “It’s easy to believe that this is Katrina’s fault. But this particular problem existed long before the storm, and the raging waters that followed, swept through the city. And the storm certainly made things worse—leaving behind water that submerged entire homes in some places, and covering hundreds of thousands
of structures—with rot and mold—making them uninhabitable” (White 2015). In 2017, the city is still recovering from the damage and many homes remain waiting to be renovated or demolished. Other factors such as population decline, lack of owner responsibility and an imbalance of supply and demand can contribute to blight as well. New Orleans has suffered from each of these factors significantly. However, a lack of affordable housing has long been a concern for New Orleans as well.

Living in New Orleans is challenging, especially for lower income residents who are “…earning less than twice the federal poverty line” (PRB 2013). As seen in Table 1, New Orleans surpasses the U.S. national average for rent burdened households. That means over 50 percent of renters in New Orleans are paying 35 percent or more of their income on housing. According to the Affordable Housing Impact Statement Study published in August 2016, New Orleans is most certainly experiencing an affordable housing crisis. “In the past 10 plus years, housing costs for New Orleans renters and owners have steadily increased along with the rest of the country. New Orleans’ housing

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3 “When the levees protecting New Orleans failed in August 2005, approximately 80 percent of the city was flooded” (Plyer 2016).

Table 1 Percentage of rent burdened households. (Resilient New Orleans Strategy, 2015)
affordability struggle has been due to the economic recession felt nationwide compounded by the effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005” (CNOAHIS 2016: pg. 3). This study also found that 70 percent of New Orleans residents pay more than 30 percent towards their housing costs which puts the city in the midst of a housing crisis (CNOAHIS 2016). Luckily, there are measures being taken to alleviate some of these issues.

**Background**

The new VA/LSU hospital was proposed in November of 2008. The plan was originally proposed in 2004 when Louisiana State University and the State of Louisiana commissioned a master plan to replace existing hospitals with a single facility. This plan was detained due to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (NBBJ.com 2017). The site is bounded by Claiborne Avenue, South Rocheblave Street, Tulane Avenue and Canal Street (South Galvez Street serving as a divider between the VA and the LSU campus) in Mid-City. When completed, the complex would cover 70 acres of the Mid City historic district in New Orleans. The Mid City historic
district was approved on February 23, 2017 and took effect on March 1, 2017 (Rainey, Richard February 23, 2017 nola.com). The yellow area in Figure 2 shows the boundaries of the Mid-City historic district. The VA/LSU hospital footprint can be seen at the bottom-left of the yellow area. The demolition of the historic properties within the district caused much concern in the community. “Residents who pulled together to rebuild [after Hurricane Katrina in 2005] -- meeting on the neutral ground when there were no habitable buildings -- now stand to lose both their houses and their newfound sense of solidarity” (Moran 2008). However, the VA/LSU plan had been in place since 2004 and, it was finally able to begin which left residents with no other options. Fortunately, a compromise was reached and “Mayor Mitch Landrieu stood on the future site of the Veterans Affairs medical complex in Mid-City and announced an unprecedented plan; the city, with the help of the national nonprofit Builders of Hope, would move up to 100 historic houses in the hospital’s footprint to lots around the city, where they would be rehabbed and sold.” (Webster, 2012). This plan would seek to address the grievances felt by historic preservationists (Moran 2012) and also add to the affordable housing stock in New Orleans.

By January 2011, the $3.2 million project was nearing completion (Barrow 2011). Unfortunately, the non-profit developer, Builders of Hope, began experiencing project management issues, which included Tim Clark Construction, with whom they were working on this project. “The group mismanaged its finances and fell so far behind that it couldn't pay sub-contractors to complete vital work in a timely fashion such as restoring the roofs and securing the houses from the elements” (Webster, 2012). In November 2011, both organizations dropped out of the project leaving the program in disarray and it
remained so a year later. “Of the 81 houses that were moved, just 28 have been fixed up. Another 21 have been demolished or are awaiting demolition after collapsing, being stripped to the studs or sitting years without roofs. The fate of the remaining properties, which are in various stages of disrepair is uncertain.” (Webster, 2012). As it stood, VA/LSU project had not yet reached its goal of moving 100 properties. However, the construction of the VA/LSU hospital was already underway which signaled the end of the movement of properties.

The VA/LSU hospital was finally completed in November 2016 and a total of 81 residential properties had been moved. A total of 73 dwellings were moved to vacant sites throughout the city. The remaining 8 properties were temporarily moved from the VA/LSU site to the Lafitte Greenway until they could be moved to their final locations. This intermediate step allowed for weathering and vandalism to occur which resulted in their demolition (Tidmore 2012). However, not all of the properties suffered the same fate. In fact, over half (39 out of 73) were able to renovated and even more are in the design or development construction phase as of November 2016. The project, as a whole, is being monitored closely by BlightSTAT.

City of New Orleans Office of Performance and Accountability: BlightSTAT

BlightSTAT is a unique program in that it integrates blight and affordable housing policy, which do not normally interact. The Department of Code Enforcement, Office of Performance and Accountability, Office of Information Technology and Innovation, CNO Law Department and the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority work together through BlightSTAT in order to decrease blight and increase affordable housing in New
Overall, the program has created a network of offices that work together to influence blight and affordable housing policies. BlightSTAT has also allowed for the integration of data (which is publicly available) that can aid in the analysis of future policies or projects.

BlightSTAT also plays a pivotal role in the VA/LSU project as well as various blight remediation programs across New Orleans. “Launched in November 2010, BlightSTAT is a management program where city leaders review performance results related to Mayor Landrieu’s blight reduction strategy.” (Blight Report, 2014). The processed used in this program is described below in Figure 4.

![Overview of the Blight Reduction Process](image)

*Figure 4 Flowchart of process utilized by BlightSTAT (CNO Office of Performance & Accountability, 2017)*

The first step involves the *Intake and Input* of reports from residents or other community members about potentially blighted properties in their area. Then the Office of Code Enforcement sends out *inspectors* to the property to assess the validity of the
report. Afterwards, there is intensive research on the property to determine whether there have been liens, code enforcement violations or health and safety reports assigned to that property. The fourth step concerns sending out notices to those properties found to be in violation of city codes. These notices detail what work may need to be done on the property to bring it up to code. Once those notices are given, the owners must either comply by the set court date or they must go through a hearing process at trial. In the event the owner does not come in compliance by the court date, the judge decides whether the property should be demolished, put into the sheriff sale or mowed (if the property is a lot with no building structure) to appropriate city standards.

Project Timeline

See below for a condensed timeline concerning the VA/LSU Medical Complex and the movement of historic properties before its construction. This timeline covers the time between the proposal of the VA/LSU complex and its grand opening.

- November 2008
  - VA/LSU Medical Complex Proposed (projected opening date in 2013)
- January 2011
  - $3.2 million project to move and rehabilitate properties
  - 69 properties moved
- March 2011
  - 73 properties moved
- November 2011
• Final 8 properties moved to Lafitte Greenway temporarily (total 81)

• November 2011
  • Builders of Hope backed out of the project due to financial conflict with Tim Clark Construction

• November 2012
  • Program still uncertain. Final 8 properties on the Lafitte Greenway demolished after rampant vandalism and weather damage

• May 2013
  • VA Construction behind schedule

• November 2016
  • New Orleans VA Hospital opens

• March 2017
  • Redevelopment project is still ongoing

**Methodology**

Outlined below is a summary of the qualitative methods employed throughout this research.

1. Identified the research intersection between affordable housing policy and blight remediation initiatives by examining the VA/LSU project.

2. Identified CNO blight policy using public sources such as the *Affordable Housing Impact Statement Study* and the *Housing for a Resilient New Orleans* plan.

3. Attended *BlightSTAT* meetings (participant observation)
a. Attended 7 of the monthly meetings held at City Hall and learned about the process used (Figure 4) and received updates on the progress of the program.

4. Identified Case Study (VA/LSU Historic Properties)
   a. This case study highlights the intersection of neighborhood planning, economic development and historic preservation.
   b. Fieldwork on Affordable Housing evaluation survey
      1. An on the ground survey of the sites where the VA/LSU Historic Properties had been moved was conducted between 9/24/16 and 11/5/16.
      2. The property status survey and photo capture are summarized below.

5. To complement the public information databases (such as data.nola.gov, nolassesor.com and BlightSTATus.nola.gov) a site inventory database was developed using WhoData Property Record Card analytics and summarized using the combined public information and project survey data.
   a. A spatial analysis was done to reflect the new locations of the VA/LSU Historic Properties.

Case Study

Following the methodology described above, the case study evaluated was completed over a period of approximately 3 months between September and November. The focus of the study were the 73 properties that had been moved from the footprint of the VA/LSU Medical complex to scattered sites. Based upon a competitive selection process, the City Office of Community Development (OCD) and the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA) determined which community housing development organization (CHDO) or designee organization would be provided the funding to develop the affordable housing. Figure 5 shows a map of where the 73 properties moved to. (A larger copy of this map is located in Appendix B).

Property Status Survey and Photo Capture Process

The purpose of evaluating the individual housing sites was to confirm their development status based on the OCD’s progress report, compare the field data to the municipal record information and to create a unique dataset for the project that could be
used for spatial analysis. The methods used when taking these photographs were adapted slightly after each field excursion as the process was improved or the neighborhood circumstances required modification of the process. In any community analysis, there may be risks due to road conditions, potential crime and other unknown factors. The results of the field inspection were compiled in a WhoData record card which provides a profile and photograph of each site and improvement status for each property examined on either 9/24/16, 10/1/16, 10/23/16 or 11/5/16.

The first excursion on 9/24/16 was with Dr. Michelle Thompson which included training on the WhoData protocols for field data collection, safety and site analysis. Dr. Thompson outlined the process of obtaining photographs and conducting property research. A list of 20 properties that were in close proximity to each other (Bienville and Rocheblave properties) were compiled and mapped in advance of the site visit and then we drove to each location. Typically, we would park the car (across the street if possible) to take notes on each property and write down any pertinent information such as the condition of the house, surrounding properties, placement on the block and other characteristics. Once thorough notes had been gathered, pictures were taken of the properties. Since access to the dwellings and on-site inspection were not permitted, images of the dwelling included a minimum of 3 perspectives; one photo facing straight at the property, one with the right side of the property and the last with the left side in view. At times, the process of image inventory was a difficult aspect
of the fieldwork because it often involved human elements. There were many people sitting on their porches or relaxing in their yards. In some cases, we spoke with residents and informed them of the research being done. Wearing University of New Orleans apparel helped to dispel any apprehensive feelings. Luckily, most residents were very understanding. These intermittent discussions added on to the duration of the field visit. In later image inventories, the day and time of the inspection was modified.

The excursions after the initial outing followed a similar pattern as the first. For the last 3 days the research team consisted of the author and a friend. No longer under the guidance of Dr. Thompson, the trip had to be organized carefully so as to maximize the number of properties photographed over the shortest amount of time. On 10/1/16, a hand-drawn map of the properties on the list for that day was used. However, the last two days (10/23/16 and 11/5/16) an online map made on Google was used which showed the remaining addresses left to visit. The pre-trip planning and confidence in the data collection process increased with each field trip. This, in turn, decreased the overall duration of remaining site studies.

Upon arrival at a property, the address and quick field notes were taken. After, photographs were taken from the three angles described. Sometimes, it would be difficult to find certain properties (either demolished, mislabeled or the GPS was not completely accurate). Other times there would be certain outside forces that made it difficult to take photos (i.e. severe road construction, angry neighbors etc.).

On 9/24/16, 20 properties were surveyed over a 3-hour period and this process was repeated on 10/1/16. 10/23/16 was a surprisingly quick excursion (many properties were demolished) and 23 properties were surveyed over a 2 ½ hour period. On
11/5/2016, the remaining 10 properties were surveyed over a 2-hour period. This took longer only because of a lunch break in the middle of the survey.

Site Inventory Database Development

Following the fieldwork, a property record card was completed for each property using its address. The ability to document the progress and status of each property and have a unique dataset for the affordable housing project was also a goal of this research. Each property record card features the address of the property, its geopin (used for mapping), assessed land and building value, owner information, sale prices and dates, blight report information and field notes taken when photographing the properties. An example can be seen in Figure 7 and a larger copy can be found in Appendix A. This data was obtained using various governmental websites such as nolaassessor.com, property.nola.gov, BlightSTAT.us.nola.gov, and the Bureau of the Treasury website. Once the property record cards were complete, the data was
compiled into an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix C) in order to map various characteristics (see Figure 4). All data was obtained between July and November 2016.

**Spatial Analysis**

Using the spreadsheet of integrated data, a spatial analysis (using ArcGIS 10.2) was created depicting where each of the properties had been moved within the city. The spreadsheet was joined with an existing data table downloaded from ArcGIS online to ensure the accuracy of the location of each property. The points were laid over aerial imagery of the city of New Orleans to show exactly where each property was moved. Please refer to Appendix Figure 4 or Appendix B for the completed map.

**Findings**

**Development Status**

Of the 81 initial properties moved, 73 remained part of the CNO OCD/NORA rehabilitation and affordable housing development project. According to the data provided by the Office of Community Development and the field survey, as of November 2016, 39 of those properties had been fully renovated and a total of 29 have been sold and are now occupied. The remaining properties were either in various stages of construction or awaiting demolition. Ultimately, “the consensus among the nonprofits that accepted the VA houses is that the project, while well-intentioned, was rushed and ill-conceived, with the majority of the blame lying with Builders of Hope” (Webster 2012). However, the project has been continuing as of March, 2017 and is slowly making progress towards renovating all remaining properties.
Blight Impact

Based upon field observations some of the renovated and/or occupied properties were located across from buildings in various stages of disrepair and empty lots, some of which contained garbage like tires. Although the remediated properties served as a symbol of reinvestment in the community, the surrounding environment distracted from the message. The properties that remain unrenovated contribute to a landscape of potential blight in the area. They may also contribute to advancing other adverse conditions because “vacant and abandoned properties are widely considered to attract crime because of the “broken windows theory” — that one sign of abandonment or disorder (a broken window) will encourage further disorder” (PD&R 2014). The longer the unrenovated properties remain untouched, the more likely it is they will become vandalized or blighted.

Housing Affordability

Many of the properties remained affordable and were occupied but others were sold at a much higher cost. Average sale price was calculated using information on the property record cards and spreadsheet created by the author between August and November 2016. Sale prices
ranged from $90,000 - $180,000 on average but others were renovated by third party developers and are now on the market for upwards of $400,000, despite their location in lower income neighborhoods. For example, 2536 Palmyra Street was sold by the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority to a private developer for $90,000. That developer renovated the property and sold it for $364,900 (see figure 8). Instances like this did not contribute to affordable housing stock.

Although this particular instance, is troubling, the project itself is continuing and further analysis is required on the sale prices of all properties after rehabilitation and sale. After which, a fair assessment can be made on the success of the movement of the 81 VA/LSU properties in relation to the creation of affordable housing. While the sale of 2536 Palmyra does not contribute to the goals of the project as a whole, many of the properties completed were sold at considerably lower prices. Only time will tell if the project, as a whole, was completely successful in terms of the goals set by BlightSTAT and those outlined in the Resilient New Orleans plan.

Site Analysis, Image Inventory

When comparing the current photographs to those taken before the properties were moved, it was apparent that the properties had suffered damage which could have come from the move itself, unfinished construction, weathering or vandalism. To this author, the properties appeared to look better before they were moved from the VA/LSU site. Hoffman Triangle, for example, “is where nearly 20 VA houses were dumped two years ago. Instead of bringing opportunity and homeownership, these eyesores have collected garbage, squatters and discarded drug paraphernalia” (Webster 2012). A
poster featuring the before and after photos from 2010 to 2016 of the 19 Hoffman Triangle affordable housing sites can be found in Appendix D.

Based on field observations, many of the properties are still in various stages of construction and some appear to be abandoned, as construction/demolition has not yet begun. This contributes to a landscape of blight in neighborhoods and does not serve to create the cohesiveness required for the building of communities. However, as the project is continuing, there is still hope that the properties remaining untouched as of November, 2016 will be redeveloped and begin to positively contribute to the growth of neighborhoods in New Orleans.
Policy Evaluation

The following is a list of current 2016/2017 goals, plans and programs for the city of New Orleans. Efforts to improve neighborhood conditions examines future initiatives as they relate to the problems of affordable housing and blight through community development.

This section also contains a number of policy recommendations from the author which were determined after the analysis of the VA/LSU project as a whole. These recommendations may offer some insight (from an individual with on-the-ground experience) to any person or organization that may want to use this research in any way to shape future policy.

• Original VA/LSU Project Goals
  o Build a tier 1 hospital complex
    ▪ Opened in 2016
  o Save 100 historic homes
    ▪ Total moved: 81
  o Increase affordable housing
    ▪ Total kept in CNO OCD/NORA affordable housing project: 73
    ▪ Total renovated: 39
      • 29 of these are occupied

• 2016-2017 City Goals
  o Mayor Landrieu has stated his intention to increase the number of affordable housing units in New Orleans in his State of the City address in June 2016. “In addition to adding 7,500 affordable units, the mayor
wants to extend housing assistance to 6,125 more families by 2021” (LaRose 2016).

- Report titled *Housing for a Resilient New Orleans* outlines the Mayor’s housing strategy going forward. The major points are the support of affordable housing development, the preservation and improvement of current affordable housing, and the expansion of access to affordable opportunities, particularly for vulnerable populations in the city (CNO Mayor’s Office 2016).

  o Smart Housing Mix Ordinance Study

    - In December 2016, the New Orleans City Planning Commission conducted a hearing to determine whether there should be a study on the possible implementation of a *Smart Housing Mix*. With little opposition, the motion passed. The study was completed in February 2017 and offers several recommendations to the city (CNO Planning Commission 2017: pg. 2). The following recommendations are taken directly from the study.

    - The *Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance* should be amended to create a new article, Article 28 Inclusionary Housing, to implement the Smart Housing Mix policy.

    - Inclusionary housing shall be mandatory within the defined target area and voluntary outside of it.

    - The Smart Housing Mix policy should establish an affordable housing set-aside requirement of 12% of the
housing units in a new development, adaptive reuse project, or substantial renovations within mandatory inclusionary zone.

- The Smart Housing Mix policy shall require onsite affordable housing for development projects with 10 or more multi-family housing units, and development projects with 5 to 9 units shall provide a modest in-lieu fee payment.

- The rental units shall be affordable to families earning 60% of AMI or below and the for-sale units shall be affordable to families earning 80% of AMI or below.

- The affordability term should be between 50 and 99 years.

- Standards require affordable units that are comparable to market rate and not clustered.

- The Smart Housing Mix policy provides residential density, parking reductions, and tax abatement incentives to help defray the cost of providing affordable units.
Author Recommendations

- **Moving toward Community Development**
  
  - “The field of community development has grown immeasurably since the dark days of top-down policies such as urban renewal. In urban and rural areas, local and regional nonprofit organizations are developing real estate and delivering a range of services to once forgotten communities” (Hoffman 2012: pg. 53).
  
  - The VA/LSU Property Relocation project is an example of New Orleans’ application of a place-based development strategy which combines economic and housing development in tandem with a blight remediation policy. While the obstacles to success have been numerous with this project, city officials can continue to learn from the complexity of applied practice of policy and implementation known as ‘praxis’.
    
    - For example, if this research of the housing project were to be replicated, the author would highly suggest that the city look to its local nonprofits for guidance on where the housing is needed most. Before any properties are moved, the city should consult with these organizations and create a detailed plan covering every aspect of the project from the movement of the properties to their rehabilitation. Although some input was gathered at community meetings, the suggestions were not integrated.
  
  - Although the city published a Master Plan in 2010, which covers all goals concerning redevelopment, the creation of comprehensive Neighborhood Plans for each neighborhood in New Orleans would greatly aid with
community development as a whole. The steps for creating a neighborhood plan are outlined in the *Super Neighborhood Plan Workbook* (City of Abeline 2004: pg. 6).

- Organize the Neighborhood Planning Team
- Determine the neighborhood plan’s goals
- Conduct a survey
- Develop objectives and action items
- Hold a community workshop
- Conduct the neighborhood plan ballot
- Plan development (document development)
- Review of the plan by City departments
- Present the plan to boards, commissions and City Council
- Adoption of the plan by City Council

**Quality of Life planning**

- The issues of blight and affordable housing are just facets of the overarching concept of quality of life. It is this intersection that has become the focus of CNO public policy which is being addressed through *Quality of Life Stat*. “Improving the quality of life in cities is no longer a simple matter of bricks and mortar, but the human satisfaction with different urban attributes such as transportation, quality of public spaces, recreational opportunities, land use patterns, population and building densities, and ease of access for all to basic goods, services and public amenities” (El Din et al 2013: pg. 88). Keeping these various factors in
mind, officials can better understand how to tackle affordable housing in concert with overall quality of life issues.

- Some questions to consider: Are affordable homes the only thing needed to improve that area? How can lower rents contribute to the economic stability of the neighborhood? How can affordability be incorporated with economic development?

- **Post-Katrina and Post-Recovery**
  - New Orleans has been recovering from the 2005 Hurricane Katrina for almost 12 years. Jeffrey Thomas posits that “recovery strategies for New Orleans must include as a priority of first-order the stabilization of the city's neighborhoods through programs that stimulate housing reinvestment, eradicate existing and future incidences of blight, and strategically redevelop property in a manner that ensures sustainable neighborhood patterns” (Thomas 2007: pg. 842). Although a plan such as this would have played an integral role in the revitalization of the city following Katrina, efforts such as these have only recently begun making an impact on communities. This is, in part, due to the “recovery” mindset developed by many New Orleanians.
    - There could be a number of contributing factors to this “life after Katrina” mindset. Such as, lack of support from governmental organizations initially, length of time spent “coming back” and many others. However, residents must realize the “new” New Orleans will not resemble the city that existed before Katrina. The
shape of New Orleans is changing and new residents and new
developments are creating the “new” New Orleans. “In some
neighborhoods, like the Lower Ninth Ward, many residents never
returned. Others, like the French Quarter, have seen many
newcomers and now have more households than they did in 2005”
(Allen 2015).

- The time for recovery has long passed but City officials may still be using
  this mindset instead of focusing on renewal. City officials must look
towards the future and create a comprehensive plan that focuses, not on
recovery, but building upon the communities that developed after the fact.
However, the problems experienced with affordable housing and blight are
ongoing and are, by no means, solely due to Katrina.

**Limiting Conditions and Constraints**

Outlined below is a summary of key issues which contributed to the limitations and/or
constraints of this research.

There were incomplete records of where properties were located before the move
and where they were moved to. This was due, in part, to the lack of adequate records and
limited access to project information held by the Builders of Hope.

This data insufficiency precludes a comparison between 2012 and 2016 in terms
of values. The ability to conduct longitudinal residential housing valuation studies is
limited by the lack of access to CNO Assessor records.
There was also a lack of supplemental residential surveys regarding the opinion of the neighborhoods and the perceived effectiveness of the VA/LSU Property Relocation project. These surveys would have provided crucial insight into the impact of the affordable housing project on the community.

Various environmental challenges also made data collection difficult or skewed the data. This includes road construction, hazardous weather, vandalism and human elements.

Information fluctuates as development occurs throughout the research process in general. Due to the number of organizations and departments working together on this project, the information is constantly updated. BlightSTAT has monthly meetings to update on work completed. Also, the OCD reports monthly on the project development. This information was not available on the same frequency to the author.

**Future Study**

If this research were to be continued, the author would recommend the addition of the following details to supplement the current research.

- Inclusion of interviews with current residents of the completed and occupied properties as well as interviews with residents in the neighborhoods where these properties were relocated.
  - If possible, it would also be important to include interviews with residents who lived in the VA/LSU footprint as their perspective on the project could offer some much-needed insight into the project’s progress.
• Additional interviews should be conducted with the individuals involved in the planning process, or those involved with the organizations that participated in the project.
  o For example, interviewing the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority would offer a wealth of insight into the overarching process of redevelopment and rehabilitation as a whole.

• Inclusion of additional maps featuring particular characteristics would offer a better visualization of certain phenomenon observed through fieldwork and data collection.
  o For instance, a map depicting the level of blight observed around each property would aid in the analysis of blight levels and what has been eradicated through Mayor Landrieu’s blight remediation policy and programs.
Conclusion

The construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex and the movement of 81 properties from the site to scattered sites citywide represents a unique intersection of affordable housing, historic preservation and blight policy and has impacted neighborhood stabilization and economic development in New Orleans in very particular ways. The construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex, itself, was an example of the state seizing land from the incapacitated citizens (who were deprived of a voice) and the subsequent displacement of the residents and their culture. However, the ongoing project of rehabilitating the 81 properties moved offers hope of neighborhood stabilization through the development of affordable housing. The case study, which covers the status of the 81 properties up until November, 2016, offers a deeper analysis of the project and whether it has met the goals outlined by the BlightSTAT program and Mayor Landrieu in the Resilient New Orleans plan.

Overall, 39 of the 81 properties moved from the site of the VA/LSU Medical complex have been rehabilitated and 29 of those are occupied. Out of all the properties sold, most remained within a range of $90,000 - $140,000. However, a few sold for upwards of $400,000. Until the project is complete, there is no way to determine whether the remaining properties will be sold in an affordable range or if those that were sold for a higher price will affect affordability in their neighborhoods. Based on the data, the project has been successful in contributing to the reduction of blight (outlined in the 2014 Blight Report), and has contributed positively to the availability of affordable housing stock. Due to the damage sustained by most properties during the move, much of the original architecture of the buildings, themselves, was renovated. Therefore, historic
preservation goals were only met in the sense that 81 of the houses from the Mid-City neighborhood were able to be spared total destruction before the construction of the VA/LSU Medical complex. However, the intersection of affordable housing, blight remediation and historic preservation through BlightSTAT and the VA/LSU project still offer many lessons for organizations seeking to tackle similar problems.

This research serves as a model for any organizations that may want to replicate an integrated strategic planning program such as BlightSTAT. Using this research, organizations can emphasize their crucial role in building community development programs, and they can more effectively influence public policy. This research also contributes to anthropology and urban planning literature as it offers an analysis of a unique situation. Affordable housing, blight remediation and historic preservation are very important issues for many cities nationwide and the intersection of these policies in New Orleans shines a particular light on the importance of community engagement (or lack thereof) in the development of public policy.
References


Appendix A

Sample Property Record Card

3332 First St.

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<th>Parcel Information:</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner: Lisa Mullen</td>
<td>Tax Bill: 412402522</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mailing Address: 1012 Poydras St. Ste. 1100 New Orleans, LA 70112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geopid: 41039456 Source: CoN Property Viewer property.nola.gov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: CoN Assessor's Office nolaassessor.com Value Information: (All values represented in dollars)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Area: 2,048 sq. ft. Building Area: 32 x 64 sq. ft. Year: 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square: 452 B 5 Line: 3 Lot: A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Value: 10,200 Building Value: 0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal District: 4 Property Class: Residential</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Value: 10,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source: CoN Assessor's Office nolaassessor.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Sale Information:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Sale Price: $10,500 Last Owner: New Orleans Redevelopment Authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: CoN Assessor's Office nolaassessor.com</td>
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<td>Tax Information:</td>
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<td>Source: CoN Bureau of the Treasury Homestead Exemption: n/a Taxable Assessment: $1,020 (2013)</td>
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<td>Source: CoN Blight Status blightstatus.nola.gov</td>
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<td>Additional Reports: 1 #14-07411-MPM</td>
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<td>Site Visit Observations:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Description: -Single shotgun -Paintings as boards for windows</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding Area: -Vacant right (mowed) -Occupied left -Blight all around</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Status: Pending Disposition Source: CoN Office of Community Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Completed by: E. Michelle Boucher Data Reviewed On: 11/35/16</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Appendix B

Map of locations of all 73 properties moved from the site of the VA/LSU Medical Complex. Although 81 properties were moved, the final 8 moved had to be demolished before being moved to their new sites due to damage sustained after the move.
Appendix C

Sample of Excel datasheet created.

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<th>PropertyId</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Photo collage of all 19 properties located within Hoffman Triangle; featuring photos taken before the move and photos taken between September and November 2016.

Created by:
E. Michelle Butcher
Innovate UNO
2/17/17

VA/LSU Historic Homes: Hoffman Triangle
Central City – New Orleans, LA
List of Figures


List of Tables