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New York City Affordable Housing

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Abstract

Affordable housing in New York City has been on a declining trend for years. In 2021, the shortage of affordable housing in the city has reached a point of crisis, with almost every income group across the five boroughs facing negative effects of high rent-burden. This paper closely examines the history of the New York City Affordable Housing System and provides an in-depth analysis of the performance of the current Affordable Housing scheme through average family income and Area Median Income (AMI), Housing Availability, and Affordable Housing Application Density & Wait Times. Ultimately, this gives for a holistic study the efficiency of the Affordable Housing System while addressing its potential drawbacks.
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Categories: New York City, Housing
Key Words: Affordable Housing, New York City, Housing Availability

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The History of NYC's Affordable Housing System

As one of the most densely populated cities in the United States, New York City has had difficulty housing its population. Countless efforts, including one of the largest affordable housing projects in the country, have been made to overcome the challenge. Over the years, general consensus on the purpose of public housing has remained unclear. Some politicians believe it should focus on providing shelter to the poorest families, while others believe it should only provide shelter to working-class families in order to incentivize employment and create a financially stable middle class. Politicians have usually preferred the latter argument, as evidenced by the fact that welfare recipients have never formed the majority of affordable housing tenants in the city, due to the belief that hard working families should not need to rely on welfare (Sribnick, 2012).

According to a 2013 figure, 47% of public housing is occupied by working-class families (Paletta, 2016). As funding for affordable housing continues to decrease, it is increasingly difficult for homeless and impoverished people to access public housing projects. Thus, the issue of affordable housing remains a principal and pressing issue in New York City.

In New York, affordable housing is deemed affordable if the cost of it is approximately one-third of the owner's income (Paley, 2020). Renting costs, however, depend upon the Area Median Income (AMI) of the location. AMI is a statistic that is calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that affects the qualifications for a household to participate in affordable housing. The lottery system, in regard to the affordable housing situation in New York, is similar to winning the actual lottery. These programs assist families with lower socioeconomic status attain an affordable apartment that is at a lower price than other apartments in New York City. As this system continues to work, the match to receiving a house is highly competitive but with the increasing number of affordable houses being added to the system, the competitive nature of the lottery is decreasing. With Mayor De Blasio pledging to build upwards of 300,000 housing units, the lottery system has dramatically increased in the number of applicants (Paley, 2020).

In regard to recognizing the finances of a family, these financial records are used to categorize households into specific AMI brackets. Those with an AMI from 0-30% ("extremely low-income") are addressed as well as those who have an AMI of 125-160% ("middle income"), encouraging all those who qualify for housing to apply (Cook, 2018). The application process for receiving affordable housing is fairly straightforward; one simply goes to the NYC Housing Connect website and sets up an account. These accounts ask for household income, employment, and other areas that govern the socioeconomic status of a family. Any changes the family goes through that may affect their socioeconomic status (at any point in time) should be noted on their accounts as that may change their qualifications for certain homes. Once the account is set, families are able to access and send applications for the affordable housing lottery and wait to receive a home. These applicants are assigned random numbers, the lower the number, the better the odds.

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Picking future residents during the application process rests on several factors, with a few factors being detrimental to the system. Though the system is built upon the importance of fairness, developers begin with those with a lower log number as well as applicants who may be receiving preferential treatment (Cook, 2018). Some preferences could include if the person has any disabilities/handicaps, are a veteran or senior citizen, are an active part of the community board district, are a municipal employee, or individuals already living within the neighborhood. However, with the plethora of applicants already entering the lottery system, the likelihood of having inflated applications is likely for most of the affordable housing units. This is due to the fact that applicants file for several affordable home lottery applications without considering if their income falls within the range of the lottery qualifications, resulting in inflated application pools that reduce the probability of a properly qualified person being chosen. With these factors affecting the lottery, it creates the competitive atmosphere of the lottery system. With inflated numbers and preferential treatment, discerning the urgency and need for the housing is extremely complex and time consuming, causing the system to take longer to reach out to participants and inform them on their success or failure on achieving the unit. The success rate of receiving a house in the 2019 fiscal year was low, roughly 0.10%, partly because there were 5.9 million applications for 5,650 housing units (Paley, 2020). Over time, there will be an increase in the success rate as further units are built, however, with present factors above, the system does have its flaws, such as competition, long wait times and a neglect for welfare-dependent families, that need to be addressed.

New York City Affordable Housing vs Other Cities

When comparing the New York City lottery system to that of many successful ones around the United States and the world, one prominent discrepancy is clear: the system is not effective in providing sufficient, affordable, and superior quality housing for its residents.
In 2016, the city government of Denver, Colorado made efforts to address the housing crisis within their city. First, they turned vacant apartments into affordable housing schemes, which allowed for an increase in available apartments to meet the demand of an increasing population. This was done through Mayor Michael Hancock's experimental "buy-down" program turning vacant high-end apartments into more affordable units for the public. This increased housing fund allowed for this program to cover the difference between market rate and affordable rent and add attainable units to the city's housing at a much faster rate (Sisson, 2017). This action was made possible due to the $10 million Revolving Affordable Housing Loan Fund, which aided in widening the capital pool (increasing the funds available) required for affordable housing projects. This fund was able to accomplish this through supporting the development of multi-family rental housing units for families that earn up to 60 percent of the region's Area Median Income increasing the number of individuals who will be able to pay for this housing. As a result of this executive action, the city has been able to bring in numerous new affordable housing projects and support efforts to build and preserve thousands of housing units (Martin & Raabe, 2015). This type of revolving loan fund could also be possible in New York City to benefit low-income households to receive more affordable loans and increase homeownership.
In combination with this increased capital pool, a new $500,000 property tax increase and new development impact fees will allow Denver to raise $156.4 million over the next decade to go towards affordable housing (Martin & Raabe, 2015). The New York City housing lottery system, however, lacks this capability as there is not a sufficient amount of funding and housing units

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available for its residents. Home ownership rates in New York City have consistently been low throughout the years. In a sample census of over 3.5 million NYC residents, the owner-occupied housing rate from 2015 to 2019 was approximately 32 percent. This indicates that the majority of NYC residents are unable to afford ownership of their housing units and are rather living as mere occupants due to the exorbitant price of housing (United States Census Bureau, 2019). This is also due to the high levels of competitiveness to obtain affordable housing with a surplus of applicants and not enough homes causing it to be more and more difficult for residents to gain housing.

Social housing refers to public, government-owned housing in Europe. The housing system in Vienna, Austria has been globally recognized for its unique social housing approach that has been known for its effectiveness in providing not only affordable housing for its residents, but also superior quality. It has been under notable interest for many of America's populous cities, including New York, to improve the efficiency of their systems. Austria's social housing plan makes up approximately 23% of the housing stock and in which although the low-income households are targeted, 80-90% of the population are eligible to obtain this housing, due to high levels of affordability (The URBED Trust & Shelter, 2018).

A discussion led by Pamela Lindstrom, the Montgomery County, Maryland commissioner of the Housing Opportunities Commission, in 2013, explained that "Vienna's city government owns and manages 220,000 housing units, which represent about 25 percent of the city's housing stock." Rent in Vienna is also regulated by the government to ensure that residents do not pay more than 20-25% of their annual income on housing, deeming it a much more affordable form of housing (Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.) than New York City's equivalent, where the number of households who pay 30% or more of their income for housing costs rose dramatically in the past decade (DiNapoli & Office of The New York State Comptroller, 2019). The role of nonprofits in the effectiveness of an affordable housing system is unique and can be conceptualized through the actions of Northeast Shores Development, a nonprofit in North Collinwood, Cleveland, that offered artists housing with the condition that they could earn bonus equity each month they paid rent over 10 years where they could earn up to $10,000 that could then be used as a down payment for their house (Sisson, 2017). This incentivized homeowners to pay their rent or mortgage in a manner that benefits them. This gives insight into the possibility of an improved housing system in the New York region, where nonprofits play an active role in the housing system and allow for an increase in affordability for numerous individuals, as they have a separate incentive that allows them to pay off their home faster. Encouraging nonprofits to actively participate in affordable housing schemes can effectively improve cities' housing capabilities in terms of affordability and availability. This study aims to further detail the areas of the current New York City affordable housing system that require improvement and identify factors that may aid in successfully addressing these flaws of lack of housing units and prolonged wait times that affect the availability of housing for different income brackets, particularly low-income households.

The Benefits of Affordable Housing

The importance of improving affordable housing in New York City is that the system directly benefits the nation as a whole. As urban affordability becomes increasingly more strenuous, the

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issues regarding the New York City affordable housing system emerge at a parallel rate, including the inability for residents to obtain housing quicker on top of the extensive wait

times. Even though these problems are concerning, there are numerous courses of action to address them; but the foremost solution to tackling these drawbacks is affordable housing. Not only do successful implementations of affordable housing prove to help resolve these issues, but they also demonstrate to have a multitude of prolonged benefits.

The economy is benefited greatly by affordable housing as it stimulates the economy through increased job creation, growth in GDP, increases in purchasing power, and new tax revenues. Essentially, economic growth is ensured through long-term employment from consumer demand. As 555,498 NYC residents received public housing by the NYCHA in 2020, low-income housing tax credit developments for families and seniors, likewise, continuously increase the number of local jobs (NYCHA, 2020). LIHTC, closely associated with Section 8, the Housing Act of 1937, was reported to create 235 jobs solely due indirectly and directly to the construction of a single 100-unit multifamily property (National Association of Home Builders, 2010). Essentially, the infrastructure that stems from affordable housing plans is modeled through the state of Utah, which can parallel other states in the nation as the $61.4 million spent for the landlords and housing providers in 2003 successively supported 1,100 jobs through the integration of $17.2 million spending in wages (Wood, 2004). Affordable housing generated $1.4 billion, direct and indirect, of induced economic activity and a resulting $62.5 million outcome in local and state tax revenue. This major stimulation in the economy was derived from a two-year time span between the years 2006 and 2008, where $260.1 million was invested into affordable housing amongst the nation (Wardrip, et. al., 2011).

Furthermore, job creation is ensured through the accessibility of opportunities for affordable housing residents. Exemplified through the struggle in opportunities for low-income families to increase their earnings, a shortage in affordable housing will essentially call for better coverage of the system in order to secure jobs and the nation's GDP, which is subject to increase at a faster rate when individuals maintain the opportunity to increase earnings (NLIHC, n.d.). It is estimated by researchers that for the duration of the years 1964 to 2009, there would have been a 13.5% growth in GDP if there was full coverage of affordable housing present amongst the nation (NLIHC, n.d.). From existing affordable housing circumstances, there was an approximate $0.93 USD of economic activity addition formed in the local market, which is effectuated alongside every dollar in public housing operating expenditures (Econsuit, 2007). In addition, adults' earnings grew roughly 31% when they traveled to high-income neighborhoods as a child, hence indicating the positive impact of stable affordable housing on families' financial status (Chetty, 2015). Overall, this ultimately highlights the significance of affordable housing on economic stimulation.

Moreover, for younger generations, it is without question that acquiring a quality education is vital to the development of young pupils. Due to the reduction in frequent moving and traveling derived from affordable housing, the convenience is ensured as children in non-assisted low-income families have an arduous time adjusting to the circumstances of poor housing quality. According to a study pertaining to the examination of poor housing conditions, it was revealed that the physical quality, home hazards, crowding, and clutter corresponded, in general, with poor

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psychological health for youth aged 9 to 15 years old (Rollings, 2019). This is indicative of the significance in mobility, as it is deleterious for younger generations to succumb to an unfixed, unstable environment; children who are constantly moving from one home to another perform below those who do not experience housing instabilities. Children who experience foreclosure are also likely to switch schools fairly often; evidence shows that the schools they transfer to usually have lower academic quality (measured by average test score) (Cunnigham and MacDonald, 2012). When studied, it was discovered that moving even once during a child's elementary school career negatively contributed to an achievement gap between children in unstable households and children in stable households. Students living in unstable housing in NYC score about 0.31 standard deviations below the citywide mean in math and 0.33 standard deviations below the citywide mean in reading (Cunnigham and MacDonald, 2012). But with access to affordable housing, children also gain access to better educational opportunities. With improved housing quality, children will generally be in safer and healthier environments, which reduces stress and leads to more regular school attendance and more focus in class. In addition, having a stable housing environment will avoid problems such as interruption in the school year due to a sudden need to move. Living in a better neighborhood location will give kids access to better-performing schools, which will lead to better academic performance overall.

Affordable housing not only improves children's academic and social lives, but the relationship between the lack of sterility and quality in unsound environments is also secure and unimpaired. The lack of affordable housing leads to more health complications for those who are subjected to terrible housing conditions because they cannot afford better. Low-income families usually live-in homes with lead-based paint hazards (other sources of lead are windowsill dust, soil, and paint), which puts them at risk of lead poisoning. Furthermore, poor-quality housing may be full of mold, dust mites, cockroaches, or rodents, which are all sources of allergens that cause asthma (Maqbool, et.al., 2015). A study in NYC showed that many parents who are residents of public housing reported their children having asthma or asthma-like symptoms. Between 1998 and 2002, it was shown that 1 in 3 homeless children suffered from asthma (Enterprise, 2014). Because housing expenses are such a large portion of household budgets, access to affordable housing would relieve the burden parents have from using the majority of their income to pay for housing. A 2012 analysis of household expenditures found that low-income families spent more than half their income on housing costs and spent less on food and health care compared to those who spend 30% or less of their income on housing (Maqbool, et. al., 2015). With affordable housing, these families can use that portion of their income that would be going towards housing for other necessary expenses: food, healthcare, and medical insurance. Studies have shown that families with affordable housing can devote over twice as much of their income to health care and are significantly less likely to surrender required doctor's visits and medications due to a lack of money (Enterprise, 2014). Furthermore, health is further impeded through exposure to violence and a high crime rate, which is prevalent amongst domestic violence victims. These victims tend to continue to live with their abusers due to the lack of housing arrangements available. A study has shown that the rate of women returning to their abusers increases when there are fewer housing options available (Maqbool, Viveiros, and Ault, 2015). Other research shows that this phenomenon is also partially due to some landlords being reluctant to rent to women who attempt to escape domestic violence, regardless of laws prohibiting this discrimination, because they don't trust the renter's ability to pay rent and fear the danger posed by the abusive partner (Maqbool, et. al., 2015). Affordable housing can aid these domestic violence survivors from their

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mental and physical abuse. Though there are many health benefits that can come from access to affordable housing, there still remains a lack of accessible housing to low-income households. In recent years, unemployment rates have reached an all-time high, meaning that more families need affordable housing. In addition, from 2005 to 2012, the median gross rent has been increasing, while the median gross income has been declining. Along with this, the NYC population in 2010 was 8,242,624 compared to the population in 1980, which was around 7 million. The population of NYC has been increasing and is predicted to continue increasing throughout future decades. With the rise in rent and population, the demand for affordable housing becomes more prevalent. According to New York City's ten-year housing plan, there is a large imbalance between the supply and demand of housing for low-income families. There are around 424,949 units available, but around 979,142 families are in need of these units (NYC Housing, 2012). In 2020, NYCHA's public housing and Section 8 programs served 555,498 New Yorkers. Their public housing units occupy 11.6% of the city's rental apartments and house 6.6% of NYC's population. These residents have access to over 400 community, senior, healthcare, daycare, and educational centers. Though this is a lot, as of March 1, 2020, there are still 176,646 families on the waitlist for public housing and 138,253 families on the waitlist for Section 8 housing (NYCHA, 2020). With more availability of affordable housing, these households on the waiting list would be able to gain access to all the benefits that those currently in affordable housing have.

A Closer Look Into New York City's Affordable Housing

Average Family Income & Area Median Income

The average median income for all households across NYC stood at roughly $69,407 in 2019. However, the average incomes for each respective county in NYC ranged from $41,432 to $93,651, with the lowest pertaining to the Bronx and the highest to Manhattan. For each category, Manhattan has the highest earners, followed by Staten Island, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. For the most part, families that have no dependents usually have higher average median incomes than those that do, with exception of the average income in Staten Island. Collectively, all five boroughs have a median income of $69,407.

Median Income for Residents of NYC Boroughs in 2019 (USD)						
	Brooklyn	Queens	The Bronx	Staten Island	Manhattan	Total
All Households	$66,937	$73,696	$41,432	$89,821	$93,651	$69,407
Average Household Family	$74,422	$82,534	$50,835	$105,438	$126,690	$78,113

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Families with Children	$66,936	$75,501	$41,129	$104,641	$140,841	$69,028
Families Without Children	$79,400	$86,501	$61,248	$106,015	$121,669	$84,278

Source: Citizens' Committee for Children New York
https://data.cccnewyork.org/data/table/66/median-incomes#66/107/62/a/a

In order to be considered affordable housing, residents' housing accommodations must cost 30% or less of their annual income. The table below displays the maximum amount for each median income that is to be contributed to housing in order to consider the individuals' housing affordable. NYC residents living in Brooklyn must spend $20,081.10, those in Queens must spend $22,108.80, those in the Bronx must spend $12,429.60, and those in Staten Island must spend $26,946.30. This, of course, varies depending on the number of dependents and the household size, but generally reflects the average of each of the boroughs across New York City.

Maximum Portion of Income for Residents of NYC Boroughs in 2019 to be Affordable Housing (USD)						
	Brooklyn	Queens	The Bronx	Staten Island	Manhattan	Total
All Households	$20,081.10	$22,108.80	$12,429.60	$26,946.30	$28,095.30	$20,822.10
Average Household Size	$22,326.60	$24,760.20	$15,250.50	$31,631.40	$38,007	$23,433.90
Families with Children	$20,080.80	$22,650.30	$12,338.70	$31,392.30	$42,252.30	$20,708.40
Families Without Children	$23,820	$25,950.30	$18,374.40	$31,804.50	$36,500.70	$25,283.40

However, census data reveals that New York City renters spend 32.5% of their income on rent, which is above the threshold of what is considered Affordable Housing. In other words, on average, New Yorkers who rent are not in affordable housing conditions. The median gross rent in New York City equates to $1,483 per month, while the national median gross rent rests at $1,097 per month. Figure 1 (below) depicts the share of moderate and low-income renters whose gross rent made up at least 30 or 50 percent of their monthly pre-tax income. It must be noted that

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low-income renters hold the highest rent burden, as nearly half of them spend over 50% of their income on gross rent across all five boroughs -- this is over five times as much as the percentage of moderate-income renters that spend over 50% of their income on gross rent. Clearly, the unequal burden on lower-income households is due to lack of affordable housing in the city, as they are more severely impacted by unaffordable rent rates. With increased access to affordable housing, low-income families will not have to spend nearly as much on their gross rent, thus lessening their rent burden. However, though these families qualify for affordable housing, usually, they are not able to obtain it. Because so many low-income households apply for the affordable housing lottery, chances are that it may take months or even years to finally receive affordable housing. So, the lack of adequate affordable housing perpetuates the cycle of low-income families having to pay rent that they cannot afford by sacrificing large portions of their income. And since so much income is put towards rent, they usually neglect other vital necessities.
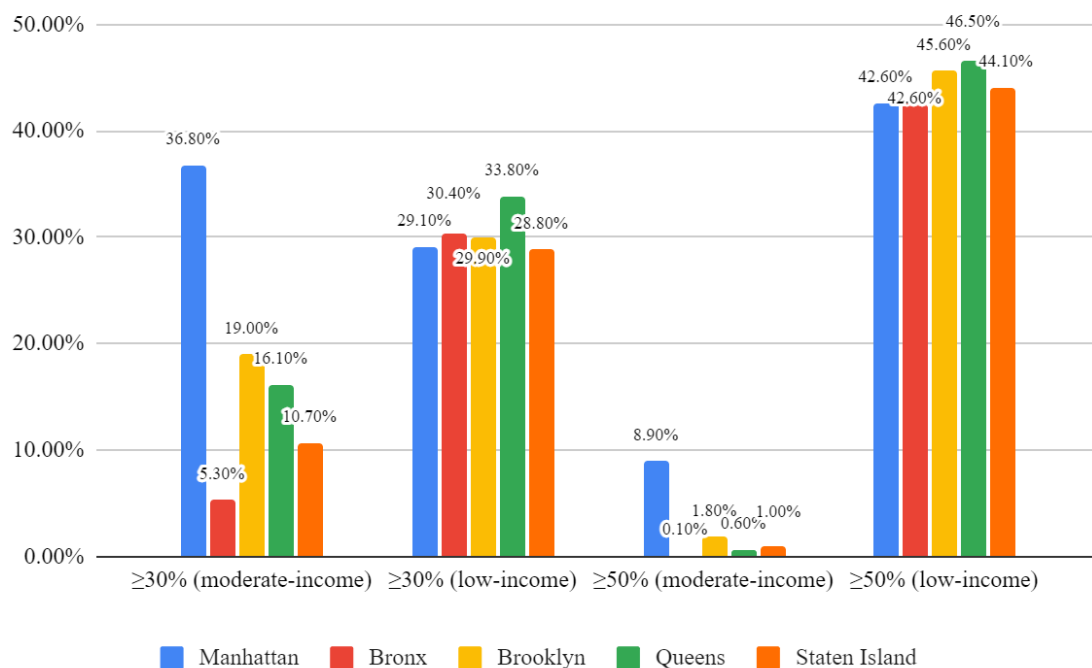

Figure 1: The share of moderate and low-income renter households whose gross rent made up at least 30 or 50 percent of their monthly pre-tax income (Furman Center, 2020).

Area Median Income (AMI) is the midpoint of a region's income distribution, a statistic determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which helps determine the residents' eligibility for affordable housing. Housing in this region is considered affordable if the cost is one-third or less than their AMI income of that region. If one makes over or under the AMI in annual income, they may not be qualified for affordable housing in that

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particular region as they do not meet the threshold to afford the housing or they do not require it. For instance, for a family of four residing in New York City in 2021, the Area Median Income is $119,300. This indicates that in order for a family of four to receive affordable housing in New York, their housing costs must be either one-third or less than their AMI income of $119,300. In approximation, the total possible cost of the house must come around $39,766.67 to be qualified as affordable housing and for people to sustain an actual living. Figure 2 depicts the average median income in New York City according to the various AMI bands that exist. 0-30% AMI are Extremely Low-Income; 31-50% are Very Low Income; 51-80% are Low-Income; 81-120% are Moderate-Income; and 121-165% are Middle-Income. Naturally, as the AMI percentage increases and the number of members of the household/family increase, the amount of income that qualifies as a certain AMI band increases as well.
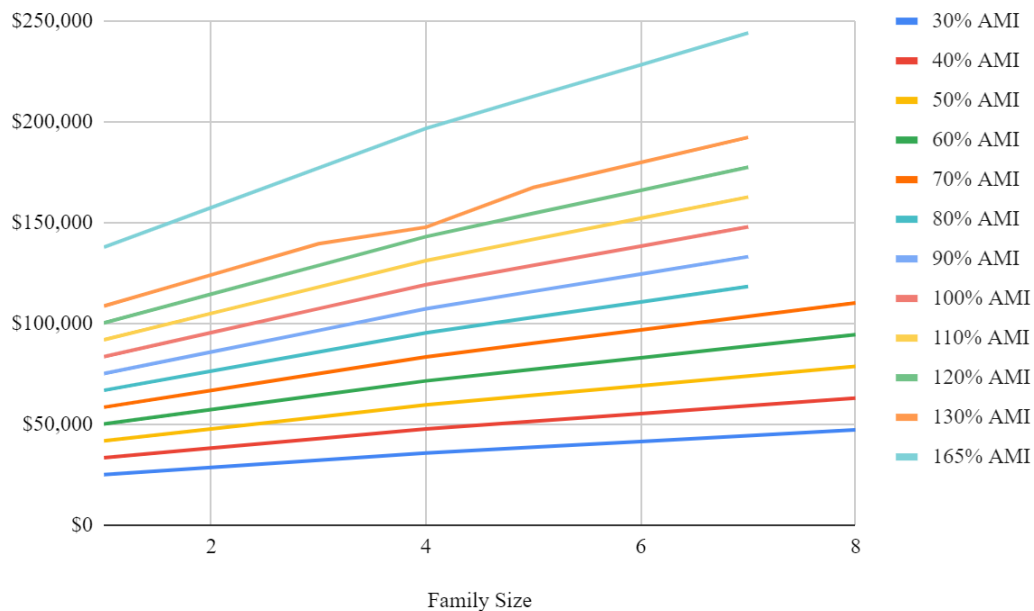

Figure 2: Average Median Income in New York City in 2021 in relation to family size and the income size based on the AMI. (New York City Department of Housing Preservation and and Development, 2021)

The Area Median Income additionally signifies the range of rent that is considered affordable for a family in a distinct AMI bracket. For a two-bedroom apartment, the 100% AMI for monthly rent is $2,592 deeming that an affordable rent for those with a 100% Area Median Income of $119,300 must be around this figure (New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, 2021). Figure 4 depicts the maximum monthly rent deemed affordable for studio-three bedroom housing for each of the AMI brackets in New York City. As
with the income level, the amount of rent considered affordable will increase as the AMI and/or the household size increases.
The ratio of Affordable Housing applicants that are lower-income to applicants that are higher income when it comes to applications per household is 650 applications to 123 applications,

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creating a large disparity between different AMI brackets within locations to receive an affordable home (Smith et al., 2020). More and more individuals end up being unable to procure an affordable housing unit for their families, rendering them with a significant burden in the long-term financially. Many houses fail to meet the AMI criteria and are considered unaffordable for these particularly low-income ranges. This, in conjunction with the evidence of the highest rent-burden belonging to lower-income households discussed prior, emphasizes the impending necessity for more affordable housing for lower-income brackets as more housing allows for reduced rent-burden and availability due to increase in supply to meet the demand of housing.

Figure 4: New York City Affordable Monthly Rents per AMI Bracket (2021)

Housing Availability

Under the current affordable housing system, there are significantly more housing applications than affordable units. When reviewing 18 million applications to the NYC Housing Connect System between January 2014 and March 2019, for every apartment in Mayor Bill de Blasio's Housing New York Plan, 314 applications were filed. For households that qualify as extremely low-income, 650 applications were filed for a single apartment as fewer apartments were available for families with an income below $30,720. However, for applications with income between $122,880 and $168,960, there were 123 applicants per apartment (Smith, et al., 2020). This is indicative of the fact that although low-income families make up the majority of affordable housing applications, they have the smallest chance of receiving a housing unit. The success rate of receiving a house in the 2019 fiscal year was low, coming in at 0.10% due to 5.9 million applications that were applied for 5,650 housing units (Paley, 2020). Nonetheless, an increase in the success rate can occur over time if more units are built.

According to New York City's ten-year housing plan, there is the largest imbalance between the supply and demand of housing for low-income families. As mentioned previously, low-income level households are the most severely rent-burdened in the current affordable housing crisis. Figure 5 (below) demonstrates the number of housing units that were required in 2019 to meet the needs of different household income levels. With just a quick glance, it is very apparent that demand is highest for extremely low-income households; roughly 3 times higher than the second-highest value on the graph, the demand for very low-income households.
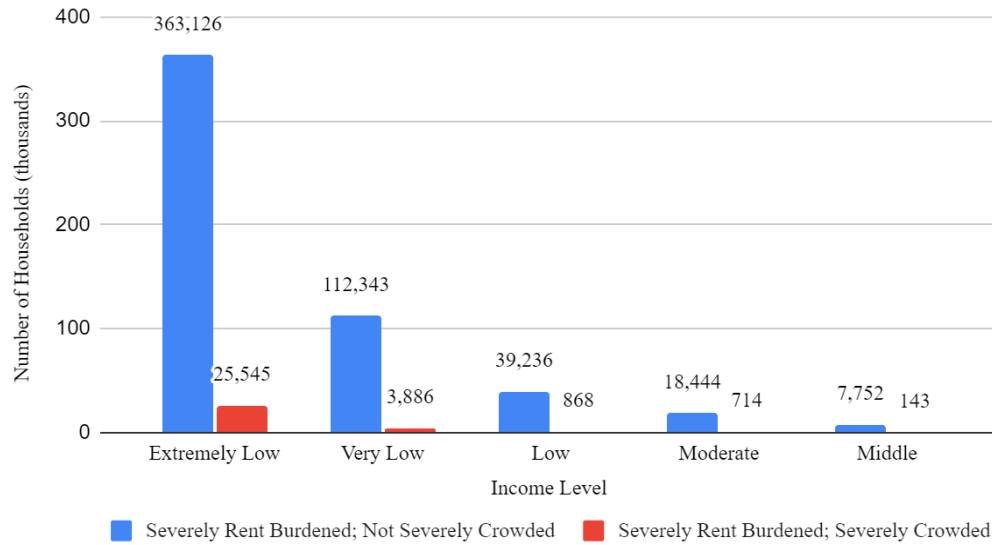
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Figure 5: Number of housing units necessary in relation to household income level
(Comptroller's Office, 2019).

Unfortunately, these high demands were met deficiently, with the mean percentage of available rental units across all five boroughs combined fulfilling only 31.3% of the demand for the 30% AMI bracket. This is significantly less than the amount of demand met for higher-income households (80% of AMI and 120% AMI), as can be seen in Figure 6 below.

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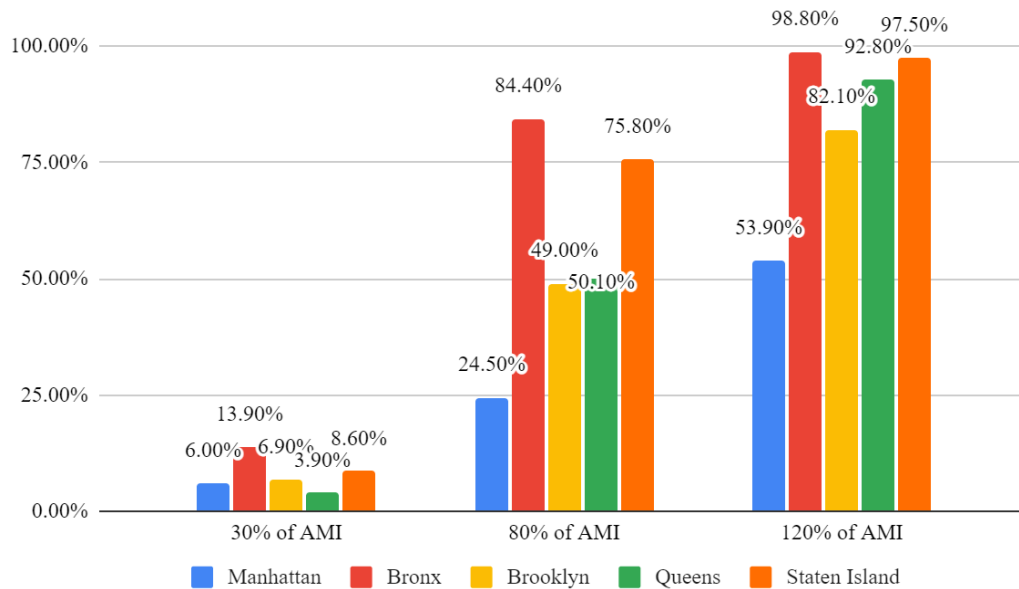Socioeconomics
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Figure 6: The mean percentage of occupied, recently available rental units from 2014 to 2019 that are affordable to appropriately sized households with incomes at different percentages of the Area Median Income (Furman Center, 2020)

Since then, the city has seen an increase in the number of housing units necessary to satisfy residents' housing needs. Specifically, an estimated 20,000 new units of housing would be needed each year in order to keep up with the projected job growth in the following years (REBNY, 2020).

Affordable Housing Application Density & Wait Times

An often-overlooked problem with the affordable housing system lies within the online application, NYC Housing Connect, itself. Although the new system is designed to streamline the application process and match recipients' household size and income to appropriate units, the odds of matching to an apartment remain unchanged.

In this system, applicants file for several affordable home lottery applications without considering if their income falls within the range of the lottery qualifications, resulting in an inflated number of applications being calculated, where some applicants may not be qualified for the particular application they applied for, prolonging wait times even further because it impedes developers from being able to get back to legitimate applicants sooner, rendering the system largely inefficient.

There are two types of housing to which individuals apply: Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher program. Public housing is built, owned, and operated by a public agency such

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as the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). For people who are accepted into the public housing program, their options are limited to the community in which they applied. Average waiting times for a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) unit stretch to 7.5 years. In addition to that, there may exist an approximate wait time of 2 to 10 months to hear back from developers even after being approved for a new home, to know whether or not an applicant has received the keys to it (Cook, 2018). The Housing Choice Voucher Program, otherwise known as Section 8, allows qualified participants (very low-income families, the disabled, and the elderly) to select and afford any housing in the private market that fits the program's requirements. Options are not limited to units within subsidized housing projects. The median Housing Choice Voucher waiting list length is 1.5 years, though the largest waiting lists have wait times longer than 7 years. In the report, Housing Spotlight: The Long Wait for a Home, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC, 2020) found that over half of all waiting lists were closed to new applicants and do not plan to reopen soon under current funding levels and policies.

For either type of housing, those in the Very Low-Income AMI Bracket applicants tend to experience immensely longer wait times than those in higher-income AMI Brackets. Figure 7 and 8 (below) depict the mean percentages of applicants on the waiting list that belong to different AMI levels: ELI (Extremely Low-Income, 0-30%), VLI (Very Low-Income, 31-50%), and LI (Low-Income, 51-80%). Figure 7 reflects the make-up of waiting lists pertaining to all Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), which consist of an average of 67% ELI, and only 19% and 21% of VLI and LI, respectively. The disparity between ELI and VLI/LI applicants on waiting lists remains glaringly large, and even slightly increases, as housing authorities handle more units. A very similar trend is visible in figure 8, which reflects the make-up of waiting lists pertaining to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) with Voucher housing. For these institutions, an average of 74% of waitlisted applicants were ELI, with 18% VLI and 6% LI.
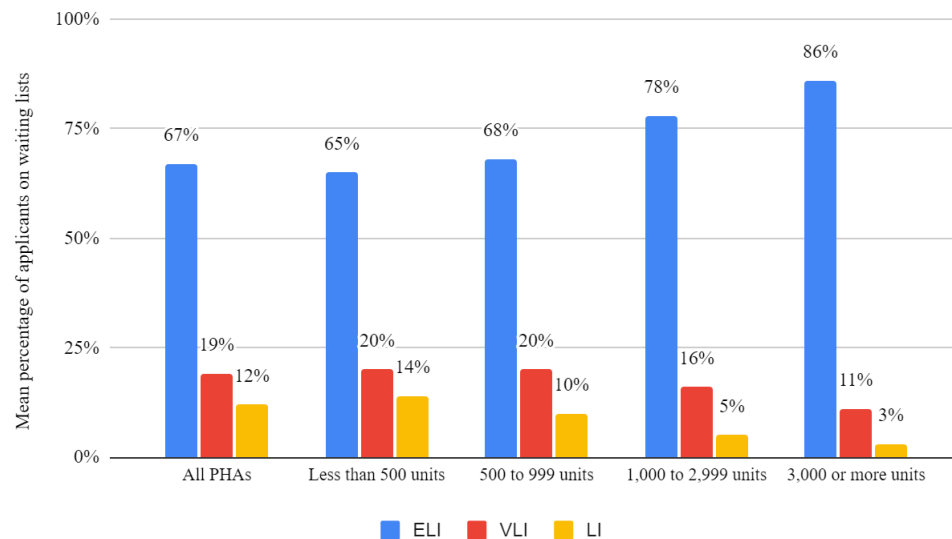

Figure 7: Mean percentage of applicants on waitlists per Public Housing Authorities (relative to size) per AMI levels (NLIHC, 2020).
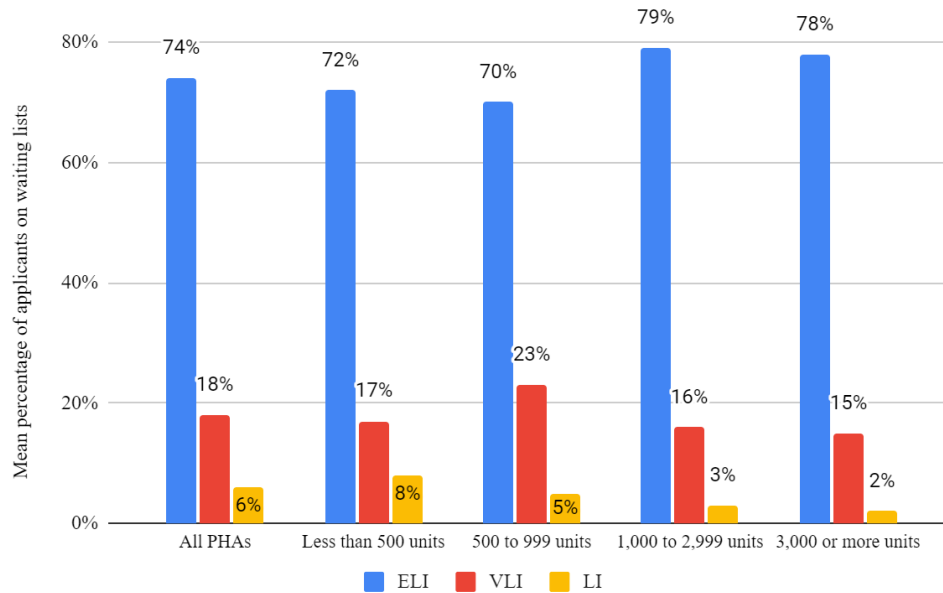
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Figure 8: Mean percent of applicants on waiting list per Voucher Housing Authorities (relative to size) per AMI levels (NLIHC, 2020).

Conclusion:

The inequality and ineffectiveness of the New York City Affordable Housing system clearly lies within the fact that there are not enough affordable housing units to successfully aid the neediest individuals of the city. As of March 1st, 2020, there are still 176,646 families on the waitlist for public housing and 138,253 families on the waitlist for Housing Choice Voucher, Section 8, housing (NYCHA, 2020). With wait times being prolonged as such due to the unavailability of housing units and inflated application numbers, these 314,899 families will continue to endure rent burdens for what may be months or years. Until more housing units are created specifically for Extremely Low-Income and Very Low-Income Area Median Income Levels, the New York City Affordable Housing Crisis will continue (NYC Housing, n.d.).

As earlier discussed, Affordable Housing can have significant influence over the economy, education, and health of an entire population. Therefore, creating a successful system that provides sufficient housing for New York City can go beyond just decreasing the rate of homelessness and improving the financial circumstances of the individuals that will obtain a roof over their head; the overall city's economy may be boosted, criminal rates may decrease, etc. Subsequent studies can be conducted to examine these positive implications of sufficient affordable housing much more thoroughly in New York City, revealing how invaluable an increase in units may prove to be for the city.

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