

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS:
NEW APPROACHES
TO AFFORDABLE
HOUSING IN HAWAI‘I



Hawai‘i Appleseed Center
for Law and Economic Justice
Policy Brief:

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*Alternative Approaches to Building
Affordable Housing Inventories and
Forced Relocation of Homeless Citizens*



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Cover: A homeless encampment on a public sidewalk on Iwilei Street in Downtown Honolulu awaits 24-hour police notification that personal belongings will be seized if not moved. Typically, camp residents will simply relocate to another public sidewalk or park when they receive a seizure notice.

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SHORT-TERM HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES: HAWAII HAS THE THIRD highest rate of homelessness of all the states in the nation. Almost half of those living on the streets or in shelters are life-long Hawai'i residents and more than 40 percent are children. About 52 percent of the families include one or more adults who are working full or part time yet don't earn enough to find permanent shelter.

There is a general acknowledgement that the lack of sufficient affordable housing is the reason for most homelessness. Current costs estimates by the state suggest that we spend approximately \$40,000 annually to support a homeless person's needs. Still, there are no plans being discussed that would dramatically increase the supply of suitable housing. Although the state and counties have developed long-term plans to reduce the level of homelessness, there have been proposed only limited suggestions or solutions that would have an immediate effect on our crisis. Merely clearing homeless encampments and seizing belongings left on sidewalks will not result in meaningful change. We can do better. Some available options include:

1. **There is no silver bullet** – We must find immediate, safe, short-term housing options to supplement shelters at the same time as we create permanent affordable housing. Given the diversity of Hawai'i's population and the complexity of homelessness, there is no single short-term solution. The crisis will not be resolved by attempts to force those who are unwilling or unable to live in the challenging environment of existing night-time shelters. We must explore a variety of new housing models and temporary solutions.
2. **Innovative models are available** – Hawai'i should take advantage of the creative designs developed elsewhere – labor and energy-saving designs using renewable materials – to expand its inventory of affordable housing. Answering a global need for ultra-affordable housing, architects have created innovative, sustainable, inexpensive housing that is easy and quick to build, sturdy and well-designed. Many use nontraditional materials, methods and designs, such as rammed earth or bamboo, to create inexpensive homes that can offer the amenities of a cottage or studio apartment. Shipping containers have been remodeled into dwellings that are suitable for permanent occupancy and are available, durable, transportable and attractive. If required, these structures can also be arranged to include communal facilities such as kitchens, bathrooms and showers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. **There are other short-term strategies** – Besides building new affordable housing, we can explore:
 - Community volunteer programs to renovate apartments
 - Volunteers, tenants and public housing authority employees teaming up to return empty public housing units to use
 - Microenterprise projects and greater tenant involvement to enrich old and new developments
4. **Moving from sidewalks to encampments** – There remains a need to increase the safety of unsheltered homeless individuals and the larger community. While far from ideal, temporary encampments have had some success on the mainland. They offer on-site infrastructure for security and sanitation and a place for agencies to deliver services. Residents can secure their belongings, access toilets and showers and get meals. While encampments do not replace permanent, affordable housing, they can end some of the immediate problems associated with homelessness.
5. **Rapid response** – Any new affordable housing intended to end and prevent homelessness must be implemented systemically. All of the rapid-response models explored in this policy brief can be integrated into a systematic approach and used to supplement existing plans to end homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

Hawai'i must adopt alternatives to clearing homeless campers from parks and sidewalks, only to see them return because they have no place to go.



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AWAI'I HAS THE THIRD HIGHEST HOMELESSNESS RATE AMONG THE states, a ranking that could worsen as the recession lingers. While government juggles the interests of stakeholders, social services agencies scramble to meet the short- and long-term needs of homeless individuals.

Most agree that building more affordable housing in Hawai'i is the only permanent solution to the problem of homelessness. Fortunately a variety of approaches and innovative solutions exist to manage that task. Providing affordable housing does not mean the state must dig deeper into its treasury to fund new housing projects – a significant amount of money is already being spent on makeshift solutions to combat homelessness while failing to address the core problem: no suitable temporary or long-term housing.

For example, the state has been spending \$200,000 every six months to clear homeless citizens' belongings just from under the H-1 freeway viaduct.¹ The state and county workers who do this work could instead be clearing lots for homes. As long as safety concerns necessitate these efforts, crews will continue to return to these sites. Instead of expending these funds indefinitely, the government could use more creative solutions, building affordable, permanent housing and ending these makeshift encampments.

There are plenty of other examples of expenditures for temporary solutions, such as paying for repeated hospitalizations, emergency shelters or incarceration, when placing a homeless individual in permanent supportive

¹ "Removing the homeless from H-1 viaduct," Dan Nakaso, Honolulu Star Advertiser, p. A-1, Oct. 5, 2011.

INTRODUCTION

housing costs tens of thousands of dollars less.² It also costs more to transport homeless children to their schools of origin than to house their families.³ Every dollar spent to regulate the homeless is diverted from lasting solutions.

While conducting outreach and offering services might currently be required, permanent housing is the only lasting solution for homelessness. Without suitable shelter joined with supportive services, the fundamental needs of the homeless will remain unmet and the frustrations in our communities will increase.

Temporary accommodations built by homeless people in public spaces are far from ideal solutions. If appropriate shelters and transitional or permanent housing are unavailable, constructing innovative, affordable housing or providing a temporary safe space to camp may be the most practical solutions.

Tent cities have worked well in some cities and failed in others. It is impossible to predict if they would succeed in Hawai'i, but given the lack of appropriate shelter space and permanent affordable housing, the state and counties should consider them.

Novel forms of creative housing and collaboration between government, homeless individuals and their advocates are the best approach to addressing the critical state of homelessness in Hawai'i today.

This brief proposes innovative, affordable housing solutions, ways to expand traditional affordable housing, and how to address homeless encampment.

² See "Cost of Homelessness," National Alliance to End Homelessness at http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/about_homelessness/cost_of_homelessness for empirical studies from around the country demonstrating the amount saved by permanent housing placements.

³ Beds, Not Buses: Housing vs. Transportation for Homeless Students. National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in collaboration with Columbia Legal Services, September 2011. Available at <http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/HousingvTransport.pdf>.

INNOVATIVE OPTIONS FOR SEMI-PERMANENT AND PERMANENT affordable housing are rapidly emerging. Government is not bound to develop only traditional low-income housing and should also consider new designs that encourage safety and stability while fostering a sense of community.

Models of quickly buildable, affordable housing have advanced well beyond trailers or pre-fabricated homes. Architects and designers have focused on immediate solutions to housing problems and Hawai'i should take advantage of their creativity by re-imagining affordable housing possibilities.

Well-constructed designs can be used for any stage in the continuum of care for the homeless – emergency, transitional and permanent housing – or used to expand the state's stock of affordable housing.

The main considerations in constructing very low cost housing include: lowering the cost of materials; minimizing construction time; and involving the community. One architect working in South Africa summed up the fundamental issue: "We recognize that conventional building methods and materials are not going to achieve results and so alternative, more affordable building methods have been required."⁴

Despite preferences for traditional housing, Hawai'i can take inspiration from other countries' rapid building systems and extremely low-cost designs, many of which meet Hawai'i's needs for affordability, ease and speed of construction, safety and even attractiveness.

Hexayurts

The hexayurt, a simple structure that resembles a Mongolian yurt, has been used for temporary shelter, but its versatility would also make it an option for permanent or semi-permanent home.⁵

- **Cost and design:** The design and assembly instructions for hexayurts are in the public domain and available online, along with video tutorials. A basic, 166-square-foot yurt can be made out of plywood for as little as \$100. They are quickly constructed and easy to assemble.⁶

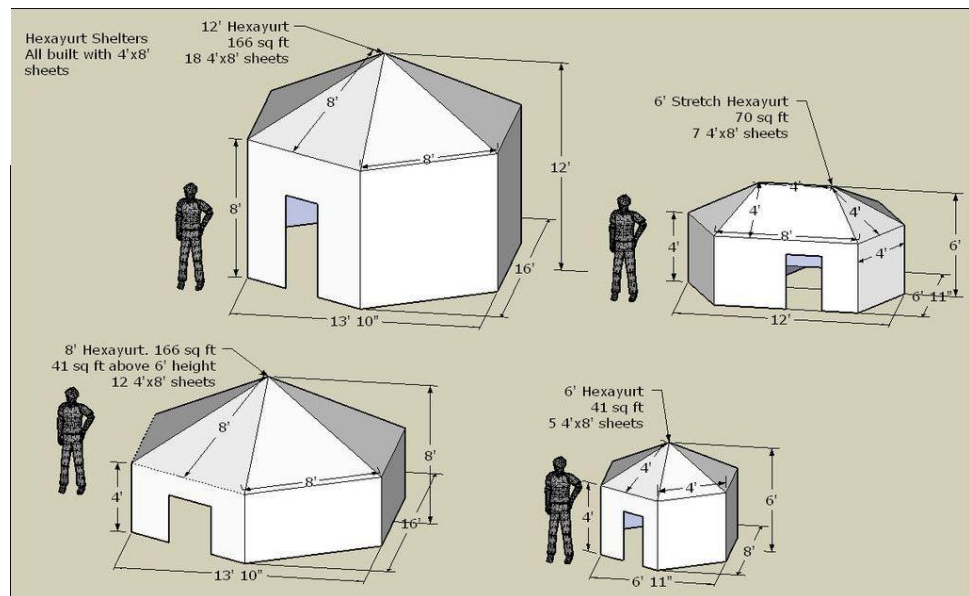
⁴ <http://designindaba10x10.blogspot.com/2009/02/luyanda-mpahlwa-on-mmas-design-process.html>.

⁵ Hexayurt Project: Free hardware shelter technology. <http://hexayurt.com/>. This site offers extensive information on hexayurts, including their designs, instructional videos, and use around the world.

⁶ *Id.*

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Designs for easy-to-build hexayurts can be found online at hexayurt.com.



- **Materials:** The hexayurt does not need specially manufactured components. Using 4'x8' sheets of plywood or OSB chip board, a yurt can range in size from a 41 square foot sleeping space to a 276-square-foot unit with an eight-foot overhead clearance.⁷
- **Uses:** With upgraded materials and design, a hexayurt can last for years. The open-source design is very flexible, lending itself to different sizes, materials and architectural features. A very basic model could be used in an encampment. Another more expensive, collapsible structure allows residents to keep their yurt, should they need to move.⁸
- **Habitability:** Hexayurts may be installed with utilities or a small stove, but they are not appropriate for full kitchens or bathrooms. Accordingly, communal kitchens, bathrooms and showers would be necessary.

Given Hawai'i's tropical climate, a well-constructed yurt would provide adequate shelter. Supported by appropriate infrastructure, this design offers a quick, extremely low cost and semi-permanent space for a homeless individual and his or her belongings. Traditional yurts with wood frames and canvas walls could also be used.

⁷ See <http://vinay.howtolivewiki.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/new-all-hexayurts-web-dimensions-incl-big-stretches-1.jpg> for examples of hexayurt designs and dimensions.

⁸ "The Hexayurt Project: In a Nutshell." Vinay Gupta. Available at <http://files.howtolivewiki.com/The%20Hexayurt%20Project%20-%20In%20A%20Nutshell%20-%20EWB%20Know%20How%20Now%20-%20handout.pdf>.

Shipping Container Housing

Shipping containers have been re-imagined as inexpensive yet decent homes similar to small apartments. Container housing has grown in popularity on the mainland and developers have constructed some on the neighbor islands.⁹

- **Materials, cost, and design:** Hawai'i's shipping industry could be a source of used, repurposed shipping containers in good condition, which can be used to create homes. Because they are modular, sharing common dimensions, they have proven to be incredibly versatile and can be joined together to create spacious multi-bedroom homes – even apartment and dormitory complexes.¹⁰ Costs would vary, depending on size, facilities and amenities.



Shipping containers can be fashioned into single-family homes or even apartment buildings



- **Uses:** The state could introduce container housing into its general inventory of traditional affordable housing options; many higher-income families have actually chosen shipping containers as a low-cost and green option.

Honolulu City Councilman Tom Berg also has suggested shipping container housing be part of a larger solution to homelessness. Berg's proposal would permit agricultural landowners to allow individuals to live in container housing on their property. In turn, residents would provide farm labor and/or function as a security presence to stop vandalism and illegal dumping.¹¹

⁹ For examples of container housing, see the New Projects section of Affordable Portable Housing, which has constructed container units on the Big Island, <http://affordableportablehousing.com/newproj.html>.

¹⁰ For an example of successful development, Amsterdam's Keetwonen student housing, the largest container city in the world, has been extremely popular. See <http://www.tempohousing.com/projects/keetwonen.html> for images and more information.

¹¹ "One Step Up Housing" flyer. Available at http://www.councilmanberg.com/pdfs/FLYER_Containers_for_Homeless2.pdf

The shipping container housing he suggests would cost \$10,000 to 13,000 and include utility hookups, bathrooms and kitchens. While some landowners have raised concerns that agricultural land may be taken over by affordable housing, others feel that it is a win-win solution that maximizes the utility of their property.¹² Landowners would use only a portion of their land for housing and would be compensated with a tax benefit.¹³

- **Habitability:** Appropriate container housing would include a bathroom with a shower, toilet and sink and a kitchenette and be connected to water, electricity and sewer. Containers are storm-resistant and energy-efficient, with little need for maintenance.¹⁴

By promoting novel forms of construction, container construction could also create jobs in the construction industry. Hawai'i could become a leader in green, affordable housing by harnessing local expertise and available resources.

Bamboo Housing

Another innovative housing option is prefabricated homes built of bamboo. Such housing is durable, quickly assembled and affordable. Even basic bamboo houses have withstood serious earthquakes, demonstrating the strength of the material.¹⁵

- **Cost:** A basic bamboo unit from one manufacturer can be assembled by four people in as little as a day at a cost of just \$6,000. A more costly design would be advisable for widespread construction.¹⁶ Bamboo is fast-growing and inexpensive with high tensile strength and a hard-shell exterior.¹⁷ As with container housing, special building code waivers would be necessary, and finding appropriate land remains an issue.

¹² "Councilman airs plan for affordable housing." Jim Mendoza, Hawai'i News Now, Oct. 10, 2011. Available at <http://www.hawaii.newsnow.com/story/15660951/councilman-airs-plan-for-affordable-housing>.

¹³ "Shipping containers could turn into homes," Riana Lum, Midweek, July 20, 2011. Available at http://www.midweek.com/content/zones/west_coverstory_article/shipping_containers_could_turn_into_homes/.

¹⁴ See "Strong Affordable Storm-Ready Housing Project" for an example of how used shipping containers can have a second life as inexpensive housing. Available at http://www.energyroofsandwalls.com/pdf/Container_Homes_Bob_Vila.pdf.

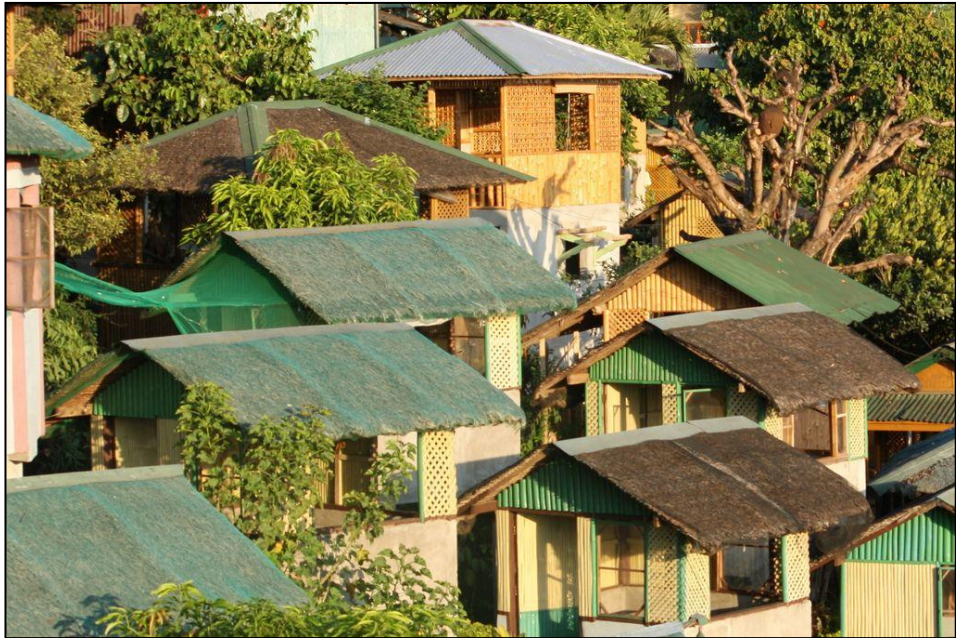
¹⁵ "Group sends bamboo homes to China's quake zone." Violet Law, Christian Science Monitor. Available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/Living-Green/2008/0529/group-sends-bamboo-homes-to-china-s-quake-zone>.

¹⁶ Interview by Jamie Young with Carrie Branovan, Marketing Director. Advanced Bamboo Products, Inc. Honolulu, Hawai'i, June 27, 2011.

¹⁷ *Id.*

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Simple bamboo homes, like these in the Philippines, are economical to build and sustainable.



- **Applications:** Sustainable bamboo houses are growing in popularity among individual homebuyers, attesting to their quality and widespread appeal. Around the world, bamboo housing is used to rapidly re-house individuals who have been displaced. For example, temporary bamboo shelters were used after an earthquake in China's Sichuan province.¹⁸ A long-term bamboo housing development was constructed in Port-au-Prince, Haiti after a similar disaster. Temporary, prefabricated bamboo houses can be made permanent by applying stucco.¹⁹

Rammed-Earth Housing

- **Materials:** Rammed earth is a sustainable and durable housing material that has been used since ancient times in a variety of climates around the world.²⁰ It is made by compressing a damp mixture of sand, gravel and clay stabilized with cement into a solid wall of earth, similar to adobe.

While mixing and transporting earth can be a demanding task, using earth in construction has virtually no side effects, since the material typically used is subsoil. Topsoil remains available for agriculture or other uses. The challenges associated with transportation are often

¹⁸ "Bamboo Houses to the Rescue". Elisabeth Best, Miller-McClune.com. July 6, 2010. Available at <http://www.miller-mccune.com/environment/bamboo-houses-to-the-rescue-16347/>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ "Programs: Rammed Earth Construction." University of Southern California School of Architecture. Available at <http://arch.usc.edu/Programs/Research/RammedEarthConstruction>.

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overcome by harvesting earth from the construction site itself, further reducing costs.²¹

- **Design:** While rammed-earth design is usually simple, these buildings require careful attention to detail. Inner reinforcement is essential, but inexpensive bamboo can serve this function.²²
- **Construction:** Rammed-earth is simple to construct and individuals without construction or architecture backgrounds have been able to participate in building their own homes.

A family in Maui pioneered rammed earth's use on the islands. They built a housing compound of rammed earth and shipping containers, which has expanded over the years to include multiple bedrooms, outbuildings, a bathroom, kitchen and guest cottage.²³ The family used local earth to construct their home sustainably and affordably.

They said: “[It is] the ideal material for island building. It replaces imported materials with native, is non-toxic, eliminates wall cavities where insects and rodents congregate, it holds up to the salt air, wind, and rain and it doesn't need painting.”

Similarly, Gila laborers in Arizona, trained to construct rammed-earth

Rammed-earth buildings can be coated with stucco or left bare.



²¹ “Programs: Rammed Earth Construction.” University of Southern California School of Architecture. Available at <http://arch.usc.edu/Programs/Research/RammedEarthConstruction>.

²² *Id.*

²³ “Shipwreck – Building Rammed Earth on an Island” blog post. Rammed Earth Makes Landfall on Maui. Dec. 16, 2010. <http://shipwreck-rammedearthworks.blogspot.com/2010/12/blog-post.html>.

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houses, helped to construct their own homes, which were designed by University of Arizona faculty and students to be built on the Gila Indian Reservation.²⁴

- **Applications:** Rammed earth can be used to create just about any style of building and with any kind of roof. The walls can be covered in stucco or plaster, or simply left bare. They can adopt local architectural styles and be aesthetically pleasing to the general public.
- **Benefits:** While rammed earth requires time to dry, once it has completely cured, it is strong and able to resist wind, fire, rain and termites.²⁵ Rammed-earth structures have lasted centuries; significant parts of the Great Wall of China and Grenada's Alhambra were constructed out of rammed earth.²⁶ In addition, earthen walls moderate room temperature and humidity²⁷ and are highly soundproof.²⁸

Research is needed to determine where rammed-earth housing would be suitable, but homes have already been built successfully on the islands.²⁹ Hawai'i can capitalize on its local knowledge and resources to increase its stock of affordable housing while creating new jobs. All construction occurs on-site and earth can be collected locally, not shipped to the islands.

Other Low-Cost Materials

- **Sandbags**, a readily available product, have been used as part of the Ecobeam system, developed by a South African firm to construct 10x10 meter homes in a housing project. The Ecobeam is a structural timber frame with a sandbag fill in the walls. Like many other low-cost methods, its temperature-regulation and sound-reduction qualities are excellent.³⁰
- **Compressed-earth blocks**, like rammed-earth housing, are sustainable, inexpensive and strong, with the added benefit of being uniform in size.³¹
- **Straw-bale housing** is another simple, sustainable option that lends itself to community and volunteer participation. Houses are constructed

²⁴ "Gila River Indian Community Residence." Design Matters: Best Practices in Affordable Housing. Available at http://wall.aa.uic.edu:62730/ahc/catalog/idc_htx_files/project_page.idc?projectID=40.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ "1207 Columbia." Design Matters: Best Practices in Affordable Housing.

http://wall.aa.uic.edu:62730/ahc/catalog/idc_htx_files/project_page.idc?projectID=54.

²⁹ For an example of luxury rammed-earth beach house on Maui, see

<http://www.olsonkundigarchitects.com/Projects/847/Slaughterhouse-Beach-House>.

³⁰ Luyanda Mpahlwa on MMA's design process for their Design Indaba 10x10 low-cost house

<http://designindaba10x10.blogspot.com/2009/02/luyanda-mpahlwa-on-mmads-design-process.html>.

³¹ Compressed Earth Blocks. Wayne Nelson. Natural Building Colloquium—Southwest.

<http://www.networkearth.org/naturalbuilding/ceb.html>.

of a wet core with an insulating straw bale envelope. Straw, a readily available agricultural byproduct, is nontoxic and moderates the structure's room temperature.³²

Microenterprise and Affordable Housing

Affordable housing can be combined with micro-enterprise and job training, helping to enrich the local economy as well as the lives of residents.

Miami-Dade County included a 22-acre organic farm in its latest permanent supportive housing project, Verde Gardens, a 145-unit townhouse community. Residents will pay 30 percent of their income in rent and be able to live there permanently.³³ The farm will produce fruit, vegetables and plants to be sold at area stores, including an on-site farmer's market. By their micro-enterprise, cultivating the land and selling produce, residents can earn income and develop job skills. Profits from the market are re-invested in the farm.³⁴

Given Hawai'i's climate and enthusiasm for locally grown produce, an affordable housing and farming development could address the needs of the entire community and instill civic pride.

Other potential mixed-use, micro-enterprise models:

- **Food services**, such as a café
- **A shop**, for woodworking, auto repair or similar service
- **Online or bricks-and-mortar store**, such as an Internet vendor on Amazon or eBay
- **Shopping center**. An Oakland, Calif. housing development includes a market hall for 50 vendors and outdoor niches for street vendors.³⁵

In Hawai'i, such a system could develop into a handicrafts market selling to tourists. Building such economic opportunities into supportive housing would both enrich the lives of residents and help the larger community develop a greater understanding of the homeless population.

³² "Navajo Elder Straw Bale Housing." Architecture for Humanity. <http://architectureforhumanity.org/node/1169>.

³³ "Miami-Dade County, Florida Homeless Trust," Center for Community Change. Available at <http://www.communitychange.org/uploads/files/homeless1.pdf>.

³⁴ "Innovative Housing Community Opened for Homeless in South Dade." CBS Miami. Sept. 7, 2011. Available at <http://miami.cbslocal.com/2011/09/07/innovative-housing-community-for-homeless-in-south-dade/>.

³⁵ Hismen Hin-Nu Terrace. Design Matters: Best Practices in Affordable Housing. http://wall.aa.uic.edu:62730/ahc/catalog/idc_htx_files/project_page.idc?projectID=198.

HAWAII ALSO SHOULD CAPITALIZE ON OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND traditional affordable housing. The state should maximize its use of all pre-existing housing stock. Moreover, it should change local and state policies to mandate or encourage the creation of low-income housing. These actions can be undertaken at a low cost to the state. Creating low-income housing is critical to preventing homelessness for at-risk households.

Renovate Existing Housing: Volunteers Instilling Pride

Today in Hawai'i , about 400 housing units are vacant because disrepair renders them unusable. Renovating these units would quickly return them to Hawai'i Public Housing Authority's inventory of affordable housing at a low cost to the state. A grassroots volunteer initiative, Volunteers Instilling Pride, already addresses this opportunity by bringing volunteers together for renovation workdays.

VIP has already made more than 200 units available on Oahu.³⁶ From Aug. 6 to 15, 2011, VIP renovated 14 public housing units, resulting in new homes for some 60 people.³⁷ These renovations have returned about \$50 million worth of affordable housing back to the market.³⁸ Families generally move in within two or three weeks of a VIP workday, greatly expediting their entry into affordable housing.³⁹

VIP's impressive record could be applied elsewhere if municipal and state governments increased service opportunities to renovate existing housing. HPHA employees supervise the volunteers and tackle the more technical or high-risk work with the help of contracted labor.⁴⁰ Because no experience is necessary to participate in VIP, there are many labor pools available for the state and counties to use.

In addition to volunteers from the community, the state could:

³⁶ VIP Program, Affordable Housing and Homeless Alliance, <http://www.hawaiihomeless.org/VIP.html>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ This is assuming that each unit costs \$250,000 to construct. *See* <http://www.hawaiihomeless.org/VIP.html>.

³⁹ "VIP Program." Affordable Housing and Homeless Alliance, <http://www.hawaiihomeless.org/VIP.html>.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

EXPAND TRADITIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Have offenders and prisoners sentenced to community service do public housing renovation. Instead of having prisoners clear homeless encampments, they could supplement volunteers' renovation efforts. Using prisoners would also help them develop job skills in conjunction with reentry planning.
- Welfare-to-work programs could be another source of labor and teach renovation and construction job skills.
- Service learning is another option; for example, including architecture students in renovation projects would give them a better sense of the structural needs of public housing and how to improve design.

Having more participants would both increase public housing availability and provide an enriching experience that would increase awareness of affordable housing issues.

Inclusionary Housing

The most immediate way to create new affordable housing is for the state to mandate that every new development includes units set aside for moderate-to-low-income residents. Hawai'i's limited buildable land and restrictions on development make inclusionary housing particularly important.

Low-income people who are currently working and housed are increasingly priced out of the market and, for those in precarious financial situations, homelessness may be the end result.

Households paying market rates effectively subsidize lower income housing and exert significant pressure on building managers to maintain real estate. Moreover, they help provide the community with the stability that comes with higher incomes.⁴¹

The benefit of mandating mixed-income housing is that all developments will be on equal footing, since the market for new units will consistently involve mixed income housing and therefore level prices.

If mandating mixed income housing is not feasible at this time, offering tax abatements for developers may prove a more acceptable alternative.

The state, municipalities, and developers must tread very carefully in this area. Any developers who have been given grants or tax abatements by the state must be held to their commitments to mixed-income housing; otherwise, these developments may squeeze out low-income tenants and revert to market prices.

⁴¹ This section is based on discussion by Jenny Lee with Doran Porter, executive director of Affordable Housing and Homeless Alliance, Oct. 5, 2011.

TEMPORARY ENCAMPMENTS

A board made up of Dignity Village residents manages the Portland, Ore. encampment.



TO END HOMELESSNESS, LONG-TERM PLANS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING are essential. However, until permanent or effective transitional housing is available, homeless people will continue to live on Hawai'i's streets and beaches. The cycle will continue: Residents will complain, government will take action and the homeless population will resettle in its original location or a new one. The state needs a pragmatic plan that respects the rights and autonomy of homeless individuals and the rest of the community.

Any temporary solutions, such as tent cities, must be exactly that – temporary. Encampments or “safe zones” must be created with the requirement that they exist only until supportive and permanent affordable housing becomes available. Even then, some individuals may not choose to live in permanent housing or may not be ready to do so.

Hawai'i already has informal homeless encampments that lack the safety and stability of shelters or residences. A better alternative is a tent city where homeless individuals are permitted to camp on public or private property and supplied with basic amenities, such as toilets and garbage pickup. However, finding property for even a temporary encampment has proved challenging.

A sanctioned, temporary tent city is an improvement on the scattered, unplanned encampments that are periodically cleared, forcing homeless people to relocate to yet another public space. At the very least, the concentration of homeless individuals would give social service organizations more direct access to the local homeless population.

We offer three examples of well-established encampments. The first, Dignity Village, pictured above, is run entirely by its residents through a nonprofit that has a contract with the city of Portland to manage the encampment. The second, Seattle's tent cities, are largely managed by social service organizations and hosted by communities of faith, with the permission of municipal government. The third is administered entirely by a faith community, with financial support from local government. Another

TEMPORARY ENCAMPMENTS

possibility is establishing a campground on public land with more active support from the government, providing utilities, infrastructure and security.

Infrastructure requirements

Basic Facilities are necessary for the health and safety of any encampment or affordable housing development. Tents, yurts and many other basic shelters cannot accommodate sinks, bathrooms or showers. Instead, cottage and tent housing may include shared bathrooms and showers. In Hawai'i tent camps, portable toilets and camp showers in a private area would suffice, thanks to the mild climate. More permanent facilities can be installed in cottage developments or long-term encampments, as they have been at Pinellas Hope.⁴²

Communal kitchens give residents a place to prepare food and store perishables. On-site food preparation spares volunteers the effort of transporting prepared meals. Access to kitchens can teach residents self-sufficiency or give them the opportunity to contribute to the community and even develop job skills – for example, residents could help prepare a communal meal.

Cottage housing developments or long-term encampments can include a traditional permanent kitchen, while temporary tent encampments could include propane stoves, portable sinks and generators to power microwaves or hot plates. The recent Occupy political movements have quickly established facilities and amenities for their camps, including kitchens, offices, libraries, meeting areas, Internet access and clinics, all out of tents.⁴³ Occupy Portland prepared about 1,000 meals per day, largely from scratch, using a creative kitchen tent.

Dignity Village, Portland, Ore.

One model tent city, Dignity Village, has achieved significant success, providing shelter in a safe and habitable encampment. The village began as “Camp Dignity” ten years ago as a tent campground on public property near downtown Portland that later incorporated as a nonprofit.⁴⁴

⁴² “Pinellas Hope.” David DeCamp and Stephen Nohlgren. Available at <http://www.tampabay.com/specials/2010/reports/pinellas-hope-tent-city/>. “Our History.” <http://www.pinellashope.org/>.

⁴³ “Marla’s Food Tent at Occupy Portland.” John O. Anderson, Portland Occupier: News from the Occupation. Nov. 20, 2011. Available at <http://www.portlandoccupier.org/2011/11/20/marlas-food-tent-at-occupy-portland/>.

⁴⁴ An Evaluation of Dignity Village. Prepared by Kristina Smock Consulting for the Portland Housing Bureau, February 2011 at 5. Available at http://media.oregonlive.com/portland_impact/other/Dignity%20Village%20Evaluation%20Report%20Final%2003-22-10.pdf.

Occupy Portland's kitchen produced as many as 1,000 meals a day.



- **Physical structure:** Dignity Village has transitioned into an encampment with wooden, semi-permanent residential structures. The village also has “a common building that provides a central gathering and meeting space with electricity and heat from a woodstove,” although the camp continues to rely on temporary showers and portable toilets.⁴⁵ A small office and computer room provide residents with access to telephones, computer and the Internet.⁴⁶ Residents are allowed to work in container gardens, which provide fresh produce and the potential for future microenterprise.⁴⁷
- **Operations:** Dignity Village is particularly unique in that it is run completely by its residents, which creates a sense of community and autonomy. The village’s management is overseen by the nonprofit’s board of directors, which is currently elected for one-year terms.⁴⁸ All residents must volunteer ten hours per week to work for the village, including taking regular volunteer shifts on security detail.⁴⁹ Residents are also required to contribute \$20 per month towards the village’s operating expenses.⁵⁰
- **Resident Response:** Most of the village’s residents and supporters agree that for many homeless individuals and couples it is a better than living in emergency shelters or on the streets. The village provides:⁵¹
 - A supportive community

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 6.

⁴⁷ Interview by Jamie Young with John Marc, executive director, JOIN: Connecting the Street to a Home, Honolulu, Hawai‘i . (July 25, 2011).

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 7.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 6.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

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- A place where couples can stay together
- A place for people with pets
- Privacy and personal space
- A place to keep belongings
- Relief from constantly having to wait in lines
- The reassurance of having a bed each night and not being moved along
- Independence from caseworkers and the demands of formal programs

As one resident explained, “Here you don’t feel homeless. You feel part of a community and feel safe. People know they can come home every night to their home, and they don’t have to leave in the morning.”⁵² Village residents value their autonomy, particularly their self-management structure, which empowers and enables them to develop leadership skills. They also value their self-sufficiency, in particular their ability to provide 24-hour on-site security with minimal police intervention.

- **Cost:** The average cost per bed per night at Dignity Village is \$4.82, the lowest of any program in Portland. By comparison, a bed in an emergency shelter costs \$12.59 per night, while transitional housing runs \$66.52 per night.⁵³ Peer support and some social services are offered in partnership with other organizations.⁵⁴
- **Role in Portland’s Homelessness Plan:** Despite its formal designation, Dignity Village is not a traditional transitional housing program and has no on-site housing placement or benefits screening services.⁵⁵ Of those leaving the village in 2008 and 2009, 70 percent returned to homelessness. Expulsions of residents who violated rules may have contributed to this rate.⁵⁶ In addition, some individuals realize that they are ill-suited for Dignity Village’s structure and leave quickly.⁵⁷

The village’s lack of social services arises from several factors. Social service organizations are strapped for funds and already have heavy caseloads. Furthermore, Dignity Village’s distance from social service organizations and frequent village leadership turnover means relationships with service providers may not be maintained or pursued.⁵⁸

While some residents actually value the dearth of caseworkers and programs, the village as a whole lacks sufficient access to social services. Even a recent evaluation of Dignity Village presented to the City Council

⁵² An Evaluation of Dignity Village, *supra* at 7.

⁵³ *Id.* at 24.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 19.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 14.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 13-14, 22-10.

⁵⁷ Interview with Lisa Larson, Dignity Village Treasurer. Dec. 1, 2011.

⁵⁸ Interview with Scott Larson, Dignity Village Outreach Coordinator, Dec. 1, 2011.

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does not list on-site social services as a high priority.⁵⁹ A compromise solution could be to increase access for those who desire services, but making participation optional.⁶⁰

There is a danger that a successful “temporary” encampment, such as Dignity Village, may eventually come to be accepted as permanent, thus diverting attention from creating affordable permanent housing.

While Dignity Village should increase access to social services, some residents wish to live neither in permanent nor transitional housing and likely will return to homelessness. Therefore, having a Dignity Village may be necessary always, since it allows individuals to decide where they would like to live and is better than living on the street.

- **Community Response:** Dignity Village no longer faces the community opposition it once did and there has been little friction between the village and its neighbors. The number of calls resulting in dispatching police is lower than the city-wide average and there have been no major complaints against the village.⁶¹

However, the strictly internal management of the community, with no outside paid staff, has resulted in challenges related to financial stability, infrastructure development, adherence to fire and safety codes and reports to the city.⁶² A recent evaluation recommended that nonprofits and the city of Portland become more involved in supporting the village’s self-governance. The village also has had difficulty meeting its financial obligations. For it to remain solvent, the city will likely need to assist in covering infrastructure costs.⁶³

Should Hawai‘i adopt a permanent encampment, careful consideration must be given to how it fits into the larger plan of housing for the homeless, especially since Dignity Village itself has not functioned as transitional housing. The village, for all of its strengths, has lacked sufficient social service support to move individuals into formal transitional or permanent housing. While its residents may consider this independence to be an asset, it is not an effective solution to homelessness.

Dignity Village represents a confluence of strong advocacy for the homeless with the right conditions. By contrast, in Eugene, two hours away from Portland, there was insufficient community support or security and all parties deemed the encampment as an experiment not worth replicating.⁶⁴ Municipalities and their homeless populations need more trust and cooperation. Dignity Village ultimately had the support of the Portland City

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 14.

⁶⁰ For an example of a successful model of formal transitional housing, *see* Bishop Francis Quinn Cottages, Cottage Housing, Incorporated, <http://www.cottagehousing.org/quinn-cottages/>.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 26-27.

⁶² *Id.* at 12-22.

⁶³ *Id.* at 18.

⁶⁴ Interview by Jamie Young with John Van Landingham, Lane County Legal Aid & Advocacy Center, Honolulu, Hawai‘i . (June 24, 2011).

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Council and developed positive relationships with the Portland police; Hawai'i's cities will need similar backing. These challenges are not insurmountable and Dignity Village remains an example of an organic encampment created by ingenious and dedicated homeless residents.

King County Tent City: Seattle, Wash.

Tent cities in the Seattle area follow a more traditional model of external management by a nonprofit and a community-based coalition with significant involvement from communities of faith. A key to their success was that organizers worked with municipalities to receive permits for their encampments.

Without adequate housing, many people will need to camp. Some will choose to camp even if they do have access to services or shelters. It appears inevitable that some form of encampment will exist in areas with high homeless populations and municipalities should manage them, rather than attempt to enforce or create restrictions.

- **Management:** While residents are involved in running the communities, these encampments are managed and sponsored by an external nonprofit, the Seattle Housing and Resource Efforts/Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League. Religious organizations host the encampments, which move every 90 days.
- **Municipal involvement:** The King County municipal governments issue conditional use permits for tent cities but otherwise take a hands-off role.⁶⁵ Seattle-King County Public Health provides support services to camp managers.⁶⁶ In addition, the local police departments conduct background checks for outstanding warrants and sex-offender status.⁶⁷ Recently, the Seattle City Council unanimously voted for an ordinance that makes homeless encampments a legal accessory to a religious facility, permitting religious organizations to provide temporary shelter on their property. The encampments must follow basic health and safety codes and may not exceed 100 residents. However, religious

organizations can permanently host the encampments and do not need to notify their neighbors of them.⁶⁸ Advocates call for this policy to include secular landowners as well.⁶⁹

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⁶⁵ Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington. Available at <http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/housing/tentcity/tentcity.aspx>.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ "Tent City 4 Frequently Asked Questions." St. Jude Parish. Available at <http://www.stjude-redmond.org/TentCity4/FAQ.htm>.

⁶⁸ City eases tent-city rule for churches. Lynn Thompson, The Seattle Times. Oct. 3, 2011.

Available at http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2016396646_homeless04m.html.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

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Pinellas Hope tent city is run by Catholic Charities.



- **Structure:** Tent City 3, the first encampment SHARE/WHEEL established, is located mainly in Seattle.⁷⁰ The group launched another encampment, Tent City 4, in the spring of 2004 after reaching an agreement with King County.⁷¹ The tent city in King County is a “temporary encampment of up to 100 homeless persons who live in a group of tents on the property of a host for approximately 90 days.”⁷²

Although Tent City 3 is still planning 90-day stays, a new ordinance gives it the option to remain at the same site. Moving a tent city requires significant effort but, should SHARE/WHEEL continue to move the camp, it would spread out the burden of hosting a homeless encampment. It may also reduce NIMBY-ism, since no single community would feel targeted or have to host the encampment long-term. Changing zoning laws so that a license is not required lowered the administrative costs for opening a campground, which may encourage more landowners to permit camping.

Pinellas Hope: Clearwater, Fla.

Founded by Catholic Charities in 2007, Pinellas Hope is a tent city occupying 20 acres in an isolated, industrial area of Clearwater, Fla.⁷³ operated by a faith-based organization and receiving significant public funding. Most of the 200 to 300 clients live in 10-by-10-foot Coleman tents, with about 20 wooden sheds providing additional housing.⁷⁴ Pinellas serves as emergency

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² See Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington. Available at <http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/housing/tentcity/tentcity.aspx> (last visited July 26, 2011).

⁷³ “Pinellas Hope.” David DeCamp and Stephen Nohlgren. Available at <http://www.tampabay.com/specials/2010/reports/pinellas-hope-tent-city/>. “Our History.” <http://www.pinellashope.org/>.

⁷⁴ Pinellas Hope stopped building these sheds because they became too hot inside.

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shelter for 250 homeless men and women and annually serves about 800 people.

- **Management:** Pinellas Hope is managed by Catholic Charities with significant volunteer support. Originally, the camp was expected to remain open for only five months, but it is now a permanent shelter.⁷⁵ To be admitted, residents are required to take urine and Breathalyzer tests for drugs and alcohol. To exclude sex offenders and those convicted of violent crimes, Pinellas Hope runs criminal background checks. No families are allowed, although couples are.⁷⁶
- **Municipal involvement:** The program receives more than \$1 million annually from state and local government, with Pinellas County providing more than \$500,000 from its homeless services fund.⁷⁷
- **Structure:** In 2010, the camp grew to include “Pinellas Hope II,” 80 studio apartments that function as permanent affordable housing. Half of these units will be funded by the local housing authority; the others will require residents to pay some rent. It also has added a community center with a dining room, office and bathrooms at a cost of \$4.2 million. The apartments will be eligible for federal housing vouchers.
- **Social services and facilities:** Pinellas Hope’s social services include assistance to create an independent living plan, GED classes and Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. There are also laundry facilities, computers, bathrooms, showers and meals. Case managers meet regularly with residents to develop their self-sufficiency and help with job and housing placements. Case managers continue to follow up with clients for six months after residents leave the shelter.

Other Encampment Possibilities

- **Government-funded encampments:** In addition to privately organized camps, government also can contract directly with service providers to create encampments on public land or government-leased private land. Even if government is not primarily responsible for the camps, assistance in the form of insurance, security, waste disposal, water, toilets and other infrastructure would remove barriers to creating campgrounds, allowing landowners to permit camping with less liability risk.
- **Car Camping:** Large parking lots, such as those at Aloha Stadium, could be used for temporary car camping sites, as could smaller lots, such as

⁷⁵ “Our History.” <http://www.pinellashope.org/>.

⁷⁶ “Pinellas Hope.” David DeCamp and Stephen Nohlgren. Available at <http://www.tampabay.com/specials/2010/reports/pinellas-hope-tent-city/>. “Our History.” <http://www.pinellashope.org/>.

⁷⁷ “What’s next for Pinellas Hope?” David DeCamp and Stephen Nohlgren. July 25, 2010. St. Petersburg Times. Available at <http://www.tampabay.com/news/humaninterest/article1110670.ece>.

those at churches. To facilitate private participation, zoning could be amended to permit private landowners to allow camping on their properties in cars, tents or other temporary structures. Government could provide some amenities, such as portable toilets or security, or the sites could be managed by a nonprofit. Since vehicles can be moved, there is more flexibility in which sites to use for car camping – when the parking lot is needed for events, the cars can relocate temporarily.

Rules like those at tent encampments can be instituted, too. For example, camps could require individuals to register with the owner or manager. This can screen out those with criminal backgrounds and enable managers and case workers to identify who is residing in the camp. Permits could also be issued for camping in parking lots that allow camping in a few spaces. Rules on substance use and behavior, similar to those in other encampments, would also be important for safety.

- **RV Camping:** Recreational vehicle camping is similar to car camping but is potentially more permanent and comfortable. Unlike tents, RV double as vehicles. One nonprofit working to empower the homeless provided a donated RV to a single mother and her disabled son as a secure temporary home.⁷⁸ An RV can park on a small landowner’s property, allowing homeless people to live close to supportive family members or friends. Renovating used RVs and donating them to people in need promotes sustainability: As people move into permanent housing, their RVs can be returned and donated to others in need.

Safe Ground: Sacramento, Calif.

Made up of homeless service organizations, other nonprofits, local individuals and businesses, Safe Ground is an organization seeking a permanent site for the homeless to use as a long-term campground. It envisions secure “safe grounds,” formally recognized by the city and run by residents. Some form of tent city has existed in Sacramento since 1989, but the homeless and their advocates have yet to achieve their vision.⁷⁹ This is what they plan:

- **Structure:** Members sign a contract that they will not bring drugs or alcohol into the camp and agree that there will be no violence.⁸⁰ Safe Ground told the news media that homelessness is an expected outcome of the recession and that our friends and neighbors are using the camp

⁷⁸ Nonprofit takes wheel of RV donations to homeless. Paul Sisolak, VC Reporter. Jan. 28, 2010. Available at http://www.vcreporter.com/cms/story/detail/nonprofit_takes_wheel_of_rv_donations_to_homeless/7603/.

⁷⁹ Tales of Tent City, Ben Ehrenreich. The Nation, June 22, 2009. Available at <http://www.thenation.com/article/tales-tent-city>

⁸⁰ Interview by Jamie Young with William Kennedy, Legal Services of Northern California, in Honolulu, Hawai‘i . (June 28, 2011).

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as a springboard to better times.⁸¹ The camp allows its residents to self-regulate and leave their belongings behind, including personal papers and cooking gear, as they search for jobs, services or benefits.⁸²

- **Goals:** Unlike Dignity Village, Safe Ground includes access to services as part of its mission⁸³ and does not claim camping should be permanent. Rather, it is a stepping stone to housing and jobs. This approach won broad community support.⁸⁴
- **Challenges:** Despite being a well-organized coalition of homeless individuals and advocates, Safe Ground has failed to secure a site for legal camping.⁸⁵ The city continues to enforce its ordinance against sleeping in undesignated locations for more than 24 hours and maintains that no appropriate sites have been found. While the homeless continue to camp in the city, they are often swept from one site to another and lack the amenities needed for a clean and comfortable camp. Sacramento's refusal to designate a site is disturbing, as the city has no funding for a seasonal shelter program either.⁸⁶

The Safe Ground effort illustrates the importance of collaboration among the various stakeholders. While it has not yet succeeded due to municipal barriers and delays, the effort has been coalition-based, combining the autonomy of a resident-run encampment with the guidance and support of nonprofits and creating a space that helps residents transition to permanent housing or, at least, access essential services.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ "More About the Issue." Safe Ground Sacramento. <http://www.safegroundsac.org/more-about-the-issue.php>.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ "Sacramento homeless still await campground," Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee, Sept. 15, 2011. Available at <http://www.sacbee.com/2011/09/15/3911664/sacramento-homeless-still-await.html>.

⁸⁶ "Sacramento homeless still await campground." Cynthia Hubert. The Sacramento Bee, Sept. 15, 2011. Available at <http://www.sacbee.com/2011/09/15/3911664/sacramento-homeless-still-await.html>.

CONCLUSION

SAFE, DECENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS POSSIBLE IN HAWAI'I. WITH stalwart commitment, ingenuity and a willingness to learn from alternative successful models tried in other cities and states, we can tackle the problem of homelessness caused by the critical need for affordable housing for our low-income households. The state and counties must invest more in affordable housing. We currently spend millions of dollars removing encampments, policing neighborhoods, funding shelters and funding never-ending intensive social services that cannot solve the root causes of homelessness.

Frustrations on both sides continue to grow. Neighborhood residents feel unable to use public spaces and homeless individuals have grown disillusioned with the shelter system but still have nowhere to go. This money can be redirected and spent on long-term, sustainable solutions.

One of the most serious barriers to affordable housing, NIMBY-ism, can be combated by bringing affordable housing up to the standards communities expect in their neighborhoods: safe, clean, well-maintained, attractive housing. When individuals are living in makeshift and unsafe conditions, filling the sidewalks, it is easier for their neighbors to dehumanize these individuals. Yet, even those living next to Portland's Dignity Village have reported few issues.⁸⁷

When Hawai'i expands its stock of affordable housing and creates more income-diverse neighborhoods, it will strengthen our communities. A renewed commitment to affordable housing and openness to new ideas are indispensable if we are to prevent and, we hope, end homelessness throughout our state. ☐

⁸⁷ *Id.* at 26.

NEW APPROACHES TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN HAWAI'I



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