Civic Tech and Data Collaborative Demonstration Cities: District of Columbia

Decision-making to Preserve Affordable Housing

The [Civic Tech and Data Collaborative (CTDC)](https://www.livingcities.org/work/civic-tech-and-data-collaborative) is a joint initiative of Living Cities, Code for America and the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership, supported by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

## Project Overview

The DC Civic Tech and Data Collaborative aims to help policymakers and community practitioners carry out data-driven affordable housing preservation by developing an online decision-support tool. The Collaborative is a partnership of the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED), NeighborhoodInfo DC (housed at the Urban Institute), Code for DC, and DC’s Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

DC’s recent growth has put tremendous pressure on the housing market, increasing costs for low-income residents and making affordable housing harder to find. DC faces a gap of over 20,000 rental units affordable for the lowest-income households,[[1]](#footnote-1) a shortfall that is likely to grow without robust intervention. Recognizing the seriousness of the problem, Mayor Muriel Bowser recently convened a DC Housing Preservation Strike Force,[[2]](#footnote-2) chaired by the director of DHCD and charged with developing an action plan to preserve DC’s existing affordable housing covenants set to expire by 2020.

For the past eight years, the DC Preservation Network, led by CNHED and NeighborhoodInfo DC, has convened local government officials and community practitioners monthly to monitor existing affordable housing that may be at risk of loss due to expiring subsidies and market pressures. The Network utilizes its comprehensive database of assisted housing (the DC Preservation Catalog) as well as reports from HUD, city agencies, and on-the ground affordable housing advocates to devise creative solutions to preserve affordability through debt refinancing, ownership transfers, tenant purchase, and other means.

The Collaborative will leverage the DC Preservation Catalog and other data to develop an online decision-support tool to help city officials better plan for affordable housing preservation interventions. The tool will build upon work done by the Network[[3]](#footnote-3) and the Mayor’s Strike Force to establish priorities for preservation actions and provide a data-driven platform to inform those choices. The tool will be available online to the public to facilitate community engagement in the process and increased transparency of preservation decisions.

## What’s happening now?

The Collaborative has partnered with key stakeholders within DC government and is starting the discovery phase for designing the decision-support tool. NeighborhoodInfo DC and CNHED will lead the investigation of potential new data sources and indicators that will feed into the tool. A new project manager will be the Collaborative’s liaison to the civic tech community in DC and will direct the project’s progress toward completing the decision-support tool next summer. DHCD is participating in the discovery phase by facilitating information-gathering conversations between researchers at NeighborhoodInfo DC and District staff. Insights from these conversations will shape the tool’s content and user interface and experience.

## Tech and Data Milestones

**What technology improvements have been identified for this project?**

* Use open-source and agile methods to develop an online platform to support affordable housing preservation decision making.
* Provide interactive tools for prioritizing potential preservation projects based on property and neighborhood characteristics.
* Align with DC Preservation Catalog for data linking across the two websites.

**What data improvements have been identified for this project?**

* Enhance DC Preservation Catalog data to include more locally-funded projects.
* Align DC Preservation Catalog with other data sources on local investments, economic activity, and demographic changes.

## About the Partners and Roles

* *Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED) :* CNHED is managing the project and co-leads the DC Preservation Network’s monthly meetings.
* *NeighborhoodInfo DC:* NeighborhoodInfo DC co-leads the DC Preservation Network’s monthly meetings and manages affordable housing data.
* *Code for DC*: DC’s Code for America brigade will bring civic technologists together to develop the technology for the affordable housing preservation tool.
* *Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)*: DHCD is connecting the DC Preservation Network and the Collaborative to stakeholders within District government and assisting with the decision-support framework.
1. <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/housing-security-washington-region> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://dhcd.dc.gov/service/dc-housing-preservation-strike-force> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/dcpreservationcatalog/Preservation%20Strategy%20Dec2014.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)