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Assessing the Untapped Housing Capacity in Los Angeles County's Existing Residential Neighborhoods

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Issue

California state and local governments have passed legislation encouraging housing production with hopes to address the ongoing housing crisis. In recent years, numerous pieces of legislation have specifically aimed to streamline the construction and use of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) — secondary housing units located on existing residences. ADUs can be a source of affordable housing since they do not require costly land acquisition.

Neighborhood opposition to new housing is one of the key enablers of California's current housing problem (Monkkonen and Livesley-O'Neill, 2017). One of the most powerful types of neighborhood-based groups is the homeowner association (HOA). HOAs establish private land use laws through contracts with homeowners. As many as 60%-80% of newly constructed units in California are within HOA jurisdiction and approximately 25% of existing housing (Clarke and Freedman, 2019). Although state Assembly Bill 670 prevents HOAs from

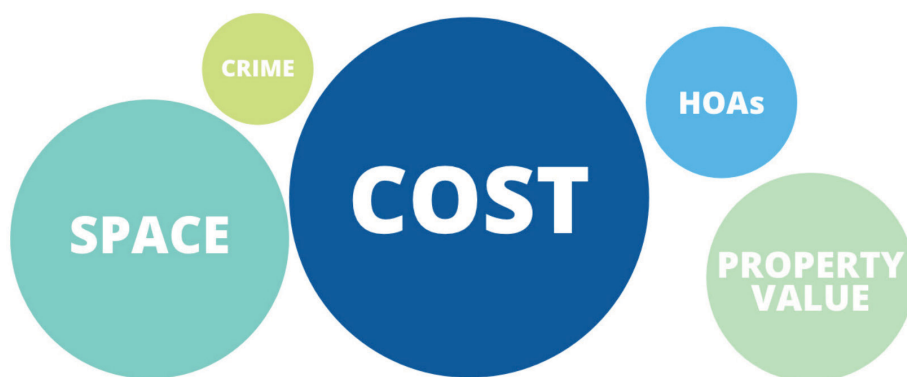
outright banning the construction of ADUs in single-family zoning districts, HOAs may still effectively prohibit the use and construction of ADUs in single-family zoning districts through "reasonable" restrictions.

Study Approach

This research aimed to analyze the perceptions of Los Angeles County homeowners in order to gain insight on homeowners' likelihood of, barriers to, and facilitators in adopting ADUs on their property. Data were collected through surveys, which was then analyzed through STATA statistical software along with Microsoft Excel and One Note to determine findings. The target population for the survey was Los Angeles County homeowners (18 years and older). The survey was open to all, however, screening questions were included to view answers from Los Angeles County homeowners easily. The research targeted a random sample of homeowners for the survey in hopes of gaining as many responses as possible.

Figure 1.

Visual representation of the largest barriers for ADU adoption among Los Angeles County respondents.



"At this time, I do not want to spend the time or money, do not want the noise of construction, and I am not sure if I would want another person living there indefinitely. I have always wanted a pool, and need my garage space for storage at this time." - Survey Respondent

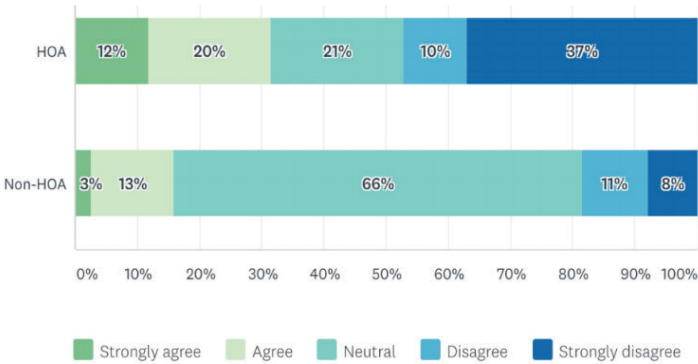


Figure 2.
A graph showing the difference between HOA homeowners that believe their HOA board members and neighbors would disapprove of an ADU compared to non-HOA homeowners.

Research Findings

- » Barriers identified by homeowners were cost, space, property value, HOAs, and crime — in descending order of importance (**Figure 1**).
- » Los Angeles County homeowners listed cost as the biggest barrier preventing them from constructing and using ADUs on their lots. Removing the financial costs associated with building ADUs would facilitate the adoption of ADUs among homeowners. LA County homeowners are also more willing to add an ADU if incentives, like financial assistance, are offered.
- » Respondents noted that they believed their lots were too small to add another unit or were otherwise located on a hillside and did not believe their land could accommodate another building. Respondents also noted they did not want to cede space on their land to build an ADU, land that could otherwise be used as a garage, yard, or space for a pool. Others enjoyed their space and felt like adding an ADU would add “clutter.”
- » Respondents expressed concern that an ADU would decrease the value of their property and that of their neighbor’s. They were also worried that they would be unable to evict a disruptive or delinquent tenant, which would do more harm than good for their property value.
- » There is also a strong set of Los Angeles County respondents who vehemently oppose the addition of ADUs on their lots and in their neighborhoods, and note that there are no factors, including financial incentives, that can possibly sway their decision.
- » Although HOA homeowners are more willing than non-HOA homeowners to adopt the usage of ADUs, significantly more of them felt like their HOA board of directors and neighbors would disapprove (**Figure 2**).

Recommendations

- » Los Angeles County should consider creating educational programs around the costs and benefits of adopting an ADU, ADU financing, new state and local legislation related to ADUs, especially those that come into effect the present year.
- » Los Angeles County should invest in research on the following four areas:
 - HOA jurisdictions and ADU potential sites.
 - Language in HOA Code, Covenants, and Restrictions (CC&Rs) documents to identify restrictive language that may be effectively restricting ADU development.
 - ADUs’ impacts on property values and neighborhood quality.
 - How government can provide financial assistance to homeowners and incentivize ADU construction.
- » Los Angeles County should establish a public database of all HOAs and their publicly available documents. An accessible database of HOA names, locations, and documents would allow for a better understanding of power and relationships among ADUs, HOAs, and homeowners.

For more information

Brizuela, Y. (2020). Assessing the untapped housing capacity in Los Angeles County’s existing residential neighborhoods (Master’s capstone, UCLA). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5gp1023w>

Monkkonen, P., & Livesley-O’Neill, W. (2017). Overcoming opposition to new housing. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/opposition-to-new-housing/>

Clarke, W., & Freedman, M. (2019). The rise and effects of homeowners associations. Journal of Urban Economics, 111: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2019.05.001>