

CITY OF ALBANY ENGAGEMENT REPORTBACK



AUGUST 7, 2019

PROJECT OVERVIEW

About Cities RISE

Cities RISE is a program funded by the New York State Attorney General that provides municipalities with tools and support to make their Code Enforcement practices more strategic and equitable, so they can improve housing conditions, combat problem and vacant properties, and improve quality of life for all residents.

Engagement Snapshot to Date

12 Meetings/focus groups

57 Survey responses

4 Tabling and community sessions

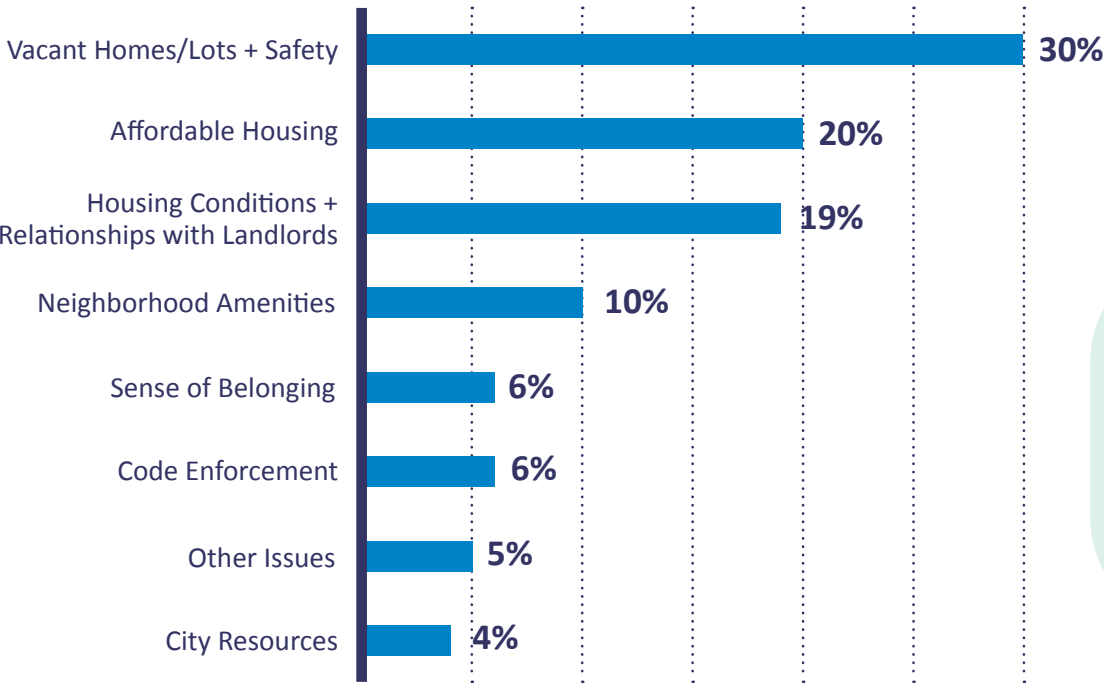
Populations: Low-income, communities of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+, landlords/renters, recently homeless, single-parents, seniors, young adults

Languages: Arabic, French, Pashto, Spanish, Swahili

Engagement Partners to Date

518SNUG
Albany Community Action Partnership
Albany Community Land Trust
Albany Housing Authority
Albany Public Library
Arbor Hill Development Corporation
AVillage, Inc.
In Our Own Voices
Refugee & Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus
Underground RR History Project
United Tenants of Albany
US Committee for Refugees & Immigrants

KEY ISSUES



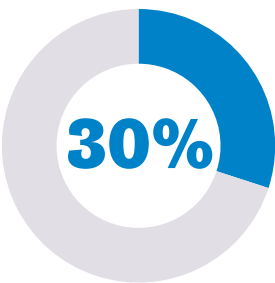
“Vacant buildings represent lost units, and all that can be done to turn them into housing should be done.”

- Focus Group Participant -

“Many residents want to be homeowners but do not have the ability or finances to be one, although their mortgage would be substantially less than what they are paying in rent.”

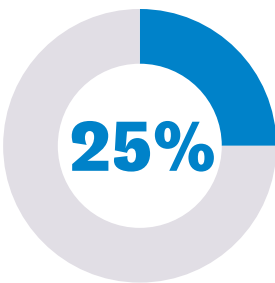
- Community Partner -

Vacancy + Safety



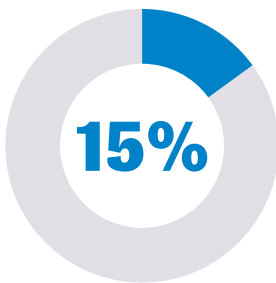
30% agree that vacant properties and safety are the most important issues

Tenant’s Rights



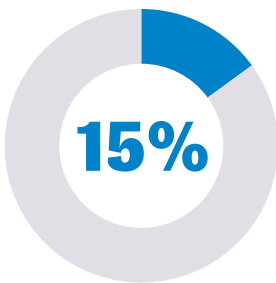
25% would like more education on tenant’s rights

Lease Process



15% would like more information on lease-signing processes

Social Services



15% would like more information on available social services

WHAT WE HEARD

Resident-Identified Issues		Resident-Identified Opportunities
<div>Vacant Homes/ Lots and Safety</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">High concentration of vacant properties result in unsafe communities and decreasing property valuesVacant buildings are hot spots for squatters and drug dealers, and lead to issues with poor maintenance, pests and illegal dumpingVacant buildings represent lost units that could be added to existing housing stockVacant buildings become unsafe spaces for children to explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pair vacant building rehabilitations with apprenticeship and workforce training programsLeverage existing funding to provide more flexible grants for vacant building renovationsSystematically review all vacant properties and act decisively to maintain, demolish or renovate themShare data and information about ongoing work at each vacant propertyEncourage people to care for vacant propertiesEnsure property owners walk through vacant properties and check for squattersLeverage vacant buildings to help people in need and increase homeownership access for low-income residentsWork with Artists to create murals on vacant buildings
<div>Affordable Housing</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Credit and financing are hindrances to homeownership even for residents who's current rental costs exceed projected mortgage costsLack of affordable housing, high rents and taxes result in high cost of livingRising housing costs make homeownership unattainableHigh rental costs for unsafe/uninhabitable housing and neighborhood conditionsResidents are working multiple jobs, but have insufficient income to purchase a homeThere is a long waiting period for units provided by the Albany Housing AuthorityLack of housing that accepts residents with criminal backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Create an Affordable Housing Cooperation to build and maintain affordable housingImplement a “Rent-to-Own” program to create more homeownership opportunities for low-income residentsTurn vacant properties into low-income affordable unitsImplement systems to ensure tenants are not paying to live in substandard housing conditionsImplement more inclusive rent to ensure housing costs remain affordable for low-income residentsReform existing zoning and economic development incentives that the city providesImplement programs that support community use of sweat-equity to purchase or rehab vacant properties
<div>Housing and Relationships with Landlords</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lack of willingness among landlords to address repairs and health concerns in their apartmentsLack of systems in place for tenants to hold landlords accountablePoor housing conditions lead to a lower quality of lifeTenants are wrongfully evicted or face rent increases after filing complaints with Code EnforcementHigh maintenance costs and limited licensed contractors make it difficult for property owners to conduct repairsLGBTQ+ people of color face concerns around privacy and confidentiality as tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide home maintenance and repair classes for property ownersImplement regular inspections of rental properties and fine property owners for repeat violationsProvide new landlords with Code Violation training when purchasing propertiesImplement protections for tenants who file Code Enforcement ComplaintsProvide assistance for seniors with home maintenance, repairs snow removal, lawn care, etc.
<div>Neighborhood Amenities</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Food insecurity and lack of access to fresh fruit + vegetables in low-income communitiesLimited financial support for Community CentersLack of interest from youth in available youth programs, services and activitiesNeed for more Community Center staff to work with kids and support their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Improve quality of corner grocery storesPartner with the Albany County Land Bank to Identify properties that could be used for Community CentersExplore grant opportunities to help fund community centers and programs they provideEncourage existing organizations to work together and promote each others activities
<div>Code Enforcement</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Code Enforcement (CE) forms/paperwork are hard to understand, making it difficult to apply for programsLack of awareness of how CE works and what actual code violations areResidents do not contact CE due to previous negative experiences or fear of evictionResidents are unaware of their rights as tenants and do not report issues to CE due to fear of retaliation from landlordsDeteriorating neighborhood conditions due to vacant buildings and run down properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Train neighborhood ambassadors or community advisors on CE forms/paperworkReview and simplify CE forms/paperworkProvide diversity and inclusionary training for city staff and police officersDistribute a “Renter’s Bill of rights” to every tenant through City HallImprove coordination among various agencies in the county and increase CE in areas with high vacancyInclude code violation information within tenant lease packets in subsidized government properties
<div>Additional Key Issues</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lack of communication between parents, children, and the communityNeed for mental health support and trauma counseling programs for youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Support opportunities to put young people in positions of power and provide positive reinforcementCreate intergenerational programs for parents + kids to interact with each otherProvide a City Concierge or Public Advocate to support residents dealing with housing issuesAdvertise existing grants and resources on-line and in-person to encourage residents to take advantage of them