

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

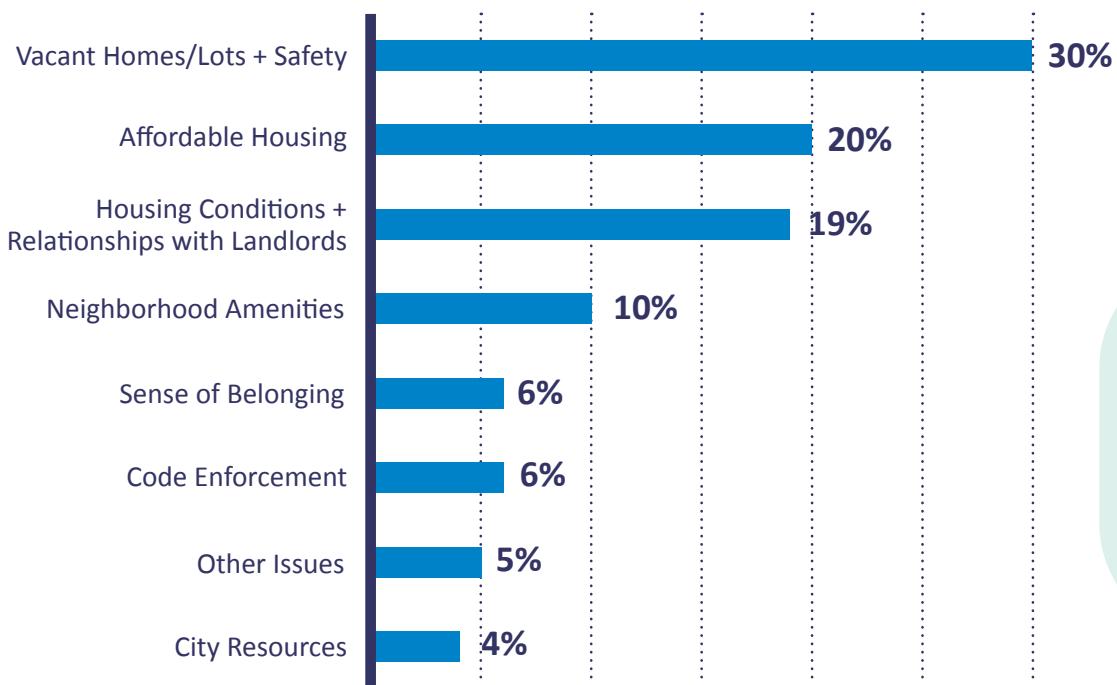
Refugee & Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus

Underground RR History Project

United Tenants of Albany

US Committee for Refugees & Immigrants

KEY ISSUES



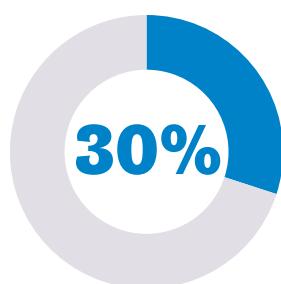
“Vacant buildings represent lost units, and all that can be done to turn them into housing should be done.”

- 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.”

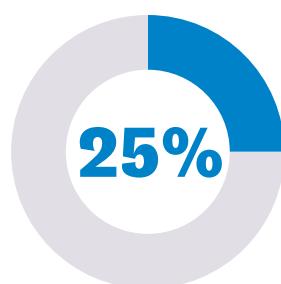
- Community Partner -

Vacancy + Safety



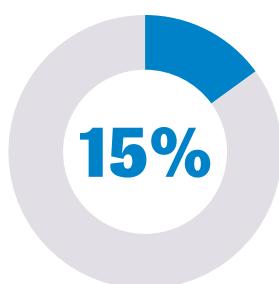
30% agree that vacant properties and safety are the most important issues

Tenant's Rights



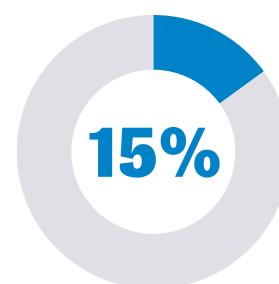
25% would like more education on tenant's rights

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
Vacant Homes/ Lots and Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High concentration of vacant properties result in unsafe communities and decreasing property values Vacant buildings are hot spots for squatters and drug dealers, and lead to issues with poor maintenance, pests and illegal dumping Vacant buildings represent lost units that could be added to existing housing stock Vacant buildings become unsafe spaces for children to explore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pair vacant building rehabilitations with apprenticeship and workforce training programs Leverage existing funding to provide more flexible grants for vacant building renovations Systematically review all vacant properties and act decisively to maintain, demolish or renovate them Share data and information about ongoing work at each vacant property Encourage people to care for vacant properties Ensure property owners walk through vacant properties and check for squatters Leverage vacant buildings to help people in need and increase homeownership access for low-income residents Work with Artists to create murals on vacant buildings
Affordable Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credit and financing are hindrances to homeownership even for residents who's current rental costs exceed projected mortgage costs Lack of affordable housing, high rents and taxes result in high cost of living Rising housing costs make homeownership unattainable High rental costs for unsafe/uninhabitable housing and neighborhood conditions Residents are working multiple jobs, but have insufficient income to purchase a home There is a long waiting period for units provided by the Albany Housing Authority Lack of housing that accepts residents with criminal backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an Affordable Housing Cooperation to build and maintain affordable housing Implement a "Rent-to-Own" program to create more homeownership opportunities for low-income residents Turn vacant properties into low-income affordable units Implement systems to ensure tenants are not paying to live in substandard housing conditions Implement more inclusive rent to ensure housing costs remain affordable for low-income residents Reform existing zoning and economic development incentives that the city provides Implement programs that support community use of sweat-equity to purchase or rehab vacant properties
Housing and Relationships with Landlords 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of willingness among landlords to address repairs and health concerns in their apartments Lack of systems in place for tenants to hold landlords accountable Poor housing conditions lead to a lower quality of life Tenants are wrongfully evicted or face rent increases after filing complaints with Code Enforcement High maintenance costs and limited licensed contractors make it difficult for property owners to conduct repairs LGBTQ+ 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 owners Implement regular inspections of rental properties and fine property owners for repeat violations Provide new landlords with Code Violation training when purchasing properties Implement protections for tenants who file Code Enforcement Complaints Provide assistance for seniors with home maintenance, repairs snow removal, lawn care, etc.
Neighborhood Amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food insecurity and lack of access to fresh fruit + vegetables in low-income communities Limited financial support for Community Centers Lack of interest from youth in available youth programs, services and activities Need for more Community Center staff to work with kids and support their development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve quality of corner grocery stores Partner with the Albany County Land Bank to Identify properties that could be used for Community Centers Explore grant opportunities to help fund community centers and programs they provide Encourage existing organizations to work together and promote each others activities
Code Enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Code Enforcement (CE) forms/paperwork are hard to understand, making it difficult to apply for programs Lack of awareness of how CE works and what actual code violations are Residents do not contact CE due to previous negative experiences or fear of eviction Residents are unaware of their rights as tenants and do not report issues to CE due to fear of retaliation from landlords Deteriorating 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/paperwork Review and simplify CE forms/paperwork Provide diversity and inclusionary training for city staff and police officers Distribute a "Renter's Bill of rights" to every tenant through City Hall Improve coordination among various agencies in the county and increase CE in areas with high vacancy Include code violation information within tenant lease packets in subsidized government properties
Additional Key Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of communication between parents, children, and the community Need 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 reinforcement Create intergenerational programs for parents + kids to interact with each other Provide a City Concierge or Public Advocate to support residents dealing with housing issues Advertise existing grants and resources on-line and in-person to encourage residents to take advantage of them