Building Together.
Tiny House Villages for the Homeless:
A Comparative Case Study

By

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2015

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ABSTRACT

Tiny homes, no larger than a parallel parking spot, are an emerging trend in housing for those uninterested, unwilling or unable to participate in traditional housing markets. Five groups across the United States have harnessed this minimalist movement to provide free or extremely low-cost housing for those experiencing homelessness. This thesis is a comparative case study of two such tiny house villages: Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon, founded in 2004 and Occupy Madison Village in Madison, Wisconsin, founded in 2012. This work explores issues related to zoning, NIMBYism, financing, governance, sanitation and building quality and both celebrates the independence and ingenuity of tiny house villages and makes the case for greater municipal regulation of the structures.

Thesis Advisor: Professor Phillip Clay, PhD
Title: Head of Housing Community and Economic Development Group at MIT

Acknowledgements

I was inspired to examine alternate versions of homeless service provision my first summer in Cambridge. While the paved driveway to my rented, 3-unit apartment is large enough to fit a multifamily building, it is home to just one car, two bicycles and a lot of snow. There is such a severe shortage of affordable housing in the city that during the warmer months, the homeless unroll their mats and blankets and lay down to sleep on the Cambridge City Hall lawn. In an area of such high wealth, it is vital that private and municipal agencies and individuals work together to find housing solutions that provide dignity to the most vulnerable of populations.

Thank you to my advisor, Professor Phillip Clay, for his deep patience and understanding. I was set on finding a topic that would keep me engaged and invested until the very last word, which was a lengthy feat in its own right. Thank you, Professor Clay, for reading and responding to countless versions of countless documents on countless subjects and for encouraging me to be bold and fierce in my thoughts and conclusions.

Thank you to my reader, Professor Langley Keyes, for listening so deeply and engaging me in rigorous conversations about fulfilling our human responsibility to one another. Thank you, Professor Keyes, for your excitement, encouragement and confidence in my abilities and for pushing me to be daring and definitive.

Thank you to the organizers and residents of Occupy Madison for your generosity of time, ideas, and heat on those harsh winter days. Your willingness to share your stories lent powerful understanding to the developing framework of tiny house villages.

Thank you to officials from the City of Portland and Multnomah County for sharing data and documents vital to the development of the Portland case study, and for connecting me to relevant Portlanders.

Thank you to the developers and residents of Dignity Village and Opportunity Village for your insight, openness and honesty and for welcoming me into your (tiny) homes. Your stories lent tremendous power to my understanding of tiny house villages.

Thank you to my husband, Cole, for your support and for listening to me for hours and hours as I sorted through interviews and ideas trying to make meaning of it all. Thank you also, for taking over dish duty in our tiny (tiny) sink.

Thank you to Bubbie for raising me to ask questions, seek out answers and be plucky, stubborn, and kind.

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Introduction

I'm standing in a model house that is 22% smaller than a standard parking spot. The walls and roof are recycled corrugated metal and I can see every breath I take rise above me. Inside the house there is no bathroom, no kitchen, no closet. The nearest toilet is a 20 foot walk across an icy courtyard against a -36°C wind-chill. This metal box, raised above the snowy ground on a wood and metal trailer bed is the face of a radical new form of homeless service provision: The Tiny House Village.

Several North American cities have declared ambitious plans to end homelessness in the next 15 years. Cities such as Vancouver, BC, Boston and Chicago are attacking homelessness through the expansion of shelters and single room occupancies (SRO), increasing the number of available supportive housing units and further subsidizing rental housing.[1] These plans are challenging to enact and evaluate as rising urban land values, limited city budgets, and public opinion leave officials with constrained solutions as to where they can place homeless and unsheltered individuals and families. Currently, the use of dormitory style lodging or SRO hotel and motel rooms remain the primary means of sheltering.[2]

These housing solutions can create major barriers to an individual's success; shelter rules often require that residents leave early in the morning and not return until evening;[3] the location of emergency housing may make getting to school or work an impossible task; the lack of private space or facilities in which to cook can take a toll on the health of individuals and their families. Those without safe storage space must carry important personal possession with them at all times, or face the risk of their items' damage or destruction at the hands of other shelter residents, shelter staff, or public officials.[4] These stabilization spaces can quickly become anything but, as lack of privacy, permanence and purpose define the homeless experience.

Ultimately, these shelter beds are temporary, and while they do provide reprieve from the rain and snow, they do nothing to provide desperately needed permanent, affordable units. In a country where the average housing size is over 2,000ft^2, the American homeless struggle to carve out even the smallest niche for themselves.

The estimated 610,042[5] individuals experiencing homelessness in the U.S. come at a great expense to taxpayers. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has compiled a series of studies that compare the cost of housing chronically homeless individuals to providing no intervention. The conclusions indicate that housing the chronically homeless can save municipalities millions of dollars in health care costs, annually, by reducing emergency room visits and time spent in the hospital or respite centers. [6,7,8] Additionally, providing permanent housing to chronically homeless individuals reduces legal costs as they have fewer run-ins with the law for crimes such as trespassing, publically urinating, loitering, begging, and publically consuming alcohol.[9,10,11] Placing the homeless into permanent housing can also save lives; homeless adults have a mortality rate that is three times that of the general adult population.[12]

The barriers to housing homeless populations in permanent, affordable units are numerous. High development costs, urban growth control measures,[13] the high cost of private financing,[14,15] stringent building codes,[16] exclusionary zoning policies[17,18] and NIMBY-ism[19] make the creation of accessible, affordable units for low or no income people an expensive and logistically challenging task.

Finding space to build accessible low-income housing can be difficult due to zoning regulations, community opposition and lot size. Small vacant lots which lay abandoned, neglected or remain speculatively undeveloped[20] can blight a neighborhood; but in recent years, cities such as New York and Boston have transformed these small lots into community gardens and parks. [21,22] While certainly valuable as community green spaces, these underutilized urban properties may be the front-line for a creative approach to housing the urban homeless- tiny homes.

Tiny homes vary in their cost and complexity, but generally combine the amenities of a house, including sleeping, bathing, storage, and cooking quarters, in under 200sq ft. Tiny houses have gained a pop-culture identity in North America as means of rejecting the materialist culture associated with traditional forms of homeownership or renting.[23] By downsizing one's entire-home to 200sqft, residents are able to save a significant amount on building, energy and maintenance.[24]

Basic tiny houses start at around $3,000 for a bed, lofted storage space, composting toilet, propane-fueled stove, electric heater, and water tank; land is not included. Luxury tiny homes can be built in excess of $50,000 and contain complex modular furniture that can facilitate multiple uses in the same space. With some well-placed hinges and springs, a kitchenette can be transformed into a guest bed, and a bookshelf can hide a waterfall showerhead. While the national tiny house trend leans towards wealthy downsizers, the cost, size and simplicity of tiny homes opens up a spectrum of possibilities for their use for people of all incomes.

Wealthy communities in Vancouver, B.C. and Sonoma, CA[1] have made room for tiny houses as posh vacation homes, or an exercise in modest modern living for those unable to or uninterested in paying a premium for a full-sized space. The social and economic interest in tiny homes is real and growing.

Looking to build or upgrade your tiny house? Attend one of the many national and international conferences and trade shows targeted towards tiny living. Use Meetup.com, a digital social platform, to connect with "Tiny House Enthusiasts" in cities and towns across the country. In the most recent issue of Tiny House Newsletter, tiny house builders share stories of construction success, point amateurs to simple blueprints and post videos of the latest modular, multipurpose tiny house furniture. For a more hands-on guide to the social and technical aspects

1 The proposal for Sonoma's "Napoleon Complex," zones the tiny house village as an R.V. park. The social and regulatory structure is meant to fall somewhere between an R.V. park and a gated community.

of tiny living, there are any number of instruction manuals, do-it-yourself guides, downloadable blueprints, how-to videos, and internet forums dedicated to building a tiny home from scratch. Want to live the tiny life, but only for a few nights? Tiny hotels are popping up across the country; Caravan Tiny House Hotel in Portland, Oregon offers patrons a stay in 100-200 square foot tiny houses for $145 per night.

It's not just the luxury market, however that sings the gospel of the tiny house. Over the past ten years, political activists, religious groups and self-organized tent cities have begun to turn toward tiny homes as a means of providing permanent, independent and supportive housing for the chronically homeless. Municipal officials are responding to a wealth of literature that shows municipalities can save tens of thousands of dollars in emergency health and public safety costs per homeless person each year by providing permanent housing; tiny homes are an attractive solution due to their low construction cost and minimal space requirements. Cities such as Portland, OR, Austin, TX, Madison, WI, and Ithaca, NY have announced their intention to build or approve the private development of master-planned tiny house villages targeted towards low or no-income individuals, couples, and families.

This is not the first time tiny homes have been considered for those lacking shelter. In the late 1800's, rising numbers of homeless individuals, mostly single men, took to the railroads to travel and find odd jobs across the country. New England towns on the train line were concerned with the homeless who would walk the roads door-to-door to beg. "Tramp Houses," 200-250 square foot buildings, were built by towns to serve as temporary shelters and keep the homeless in a single, predictable place. Some villages insisted that the homeless chop wood, fetch water or do other odd jobs to earn a night's stay in the Tramp House. Others locked the drifters inside overnight, releasing them before the first train of the day. The basic structures traditionally included wooden boards and blankets, with the occasional stack of mattresses, and a small wood stove. The message was clear: stay, sleep, but don't get too comfortable. It's a message oft repeated by homeless service providers in the modern era, tiny house villages included.

This thesis is a comparative case study of two tiny villages used to house the homeless and unsheltered. While the thesis will draw upon several tiny home villages in constructing a narrative and analysis, the body will focus on Occupy Madison Village (OMV) in Madison, Wisconsin and Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon. OMV and Dignity Village use clusters of 10-40 tiny homes to provide self-governed, permanent and transitional housing for homeless individuals and couples. This study examines how the villages were formed, the response they received from local residents and municipal officials, the zoning and regulatory issues related to the villages' development, their operations, financing structure and livability. To this end I ask: "How did Dignity Village and OMV come to be? What challenges in their development were overcome

and, what lessons from their establishment, growth, and operation can planners and developers take as they consider building tiny villages?”

The Rise of the Tiny House

Before unpacking tiny houses for the homeless, it's important to understand the societal context that tiny homes have grown out of and what niche they are attempting to fill. The average dwelling size in the U.S. is 2,164 ft^2, nearly double the area of a 1970's home. If housing size has grown, costs have exploded, with the average home price today nearly 9 times higher then in 1970 when adjusted for inflation; real incomes, however, have hardly budged.

Small, self-built dwellings are in no way new to the housing scene with rural and suburban cabins and cottages long part of the socio-cultural history for families across the income spectrum. Over the past 5 years, however, a cultural disruption has begun to rumble across North American cities, moving miniature cabins out of the woods and into some of the nation's most vibrant and densely populated urban centers.

Tiny houses have developed a pop-culture identity among minimalists, environmentalists and those unable to afford standard size housing in the communities they love. Built to be mobile, and often plunked down on vacant properties or slipped into the side lots or backyards of home-owning friends and family, these miniature dwellings have set into motion a novel approach to modern urban and suburban living. Trade shows, neighborhood open houses, guidebooks, memoirs and enthusiasts' clubs have sprung up across the country, providing building services, construction tips and support around tiny house living.

The phrase "tiny home" generally refers to any dwelling that is under the minim allowable size for a unit within the municipality it is built. Tiny homes range from 90 ft^2—think a little smaller than a standard parallel parking spot— to as large as 300 ft^2 and may include lofted sleeping or storage spaces.

Tiny homes with concrete foundations are regulated as accessory dwelling units. To skirt building codes, developers can construct tiny homes on prefabricated trailer beds or raised, mobile platforms. As long as the dwellings do not directly touch the ground and weigh under a predetermined amount, they fall into a municipal grey area and are either unregulated or fall under the purview of the Department of Motor Vehicles[2].

Most market-rate tiny homes have private cooking facilities, usually a single or double burner powered by propane or solar electricity, as well as a small bathroom. Water from sinks and showers, either stored in tanks or brought in through a hose, may be released into the municipality's storm water system, while solid waste requires a more complex system of care. Rarely, tiny homes are hooked up to the sewer system- a costly option that reduces the mobility

2 Tiny homes regulated by the DMV are subject to rules and restrictions that are unique depending upon location and the municipality's desire to regulate. Several municipalities, such as Chesterfield, VA, are responding to the increase in tiny homes with regulations to limit the number of consecutive days individuals can reside in their tiny homes.

of the structure. Instead, composting toilets, waste collection tanks, or an agreement to use the facilities of a nearby traditional home are used.

From House to Village

Over the past 5 years, there has been in increase in market-rate tiny house villages. These intentional collections of tiny homes are built on private property that is either held by an individual, collectively maintained as part of a cooperative agreement or owned by a holding or development company. Formal villages are most commonly zoned as planned urban developments and require variances from the local zoning board. Organizational configurations of the villages can mirror the top down structure of a trailer or RV park or more closely match a co-op with a board and shared maintenance responsibilities.

At time of writing there are more than a dozen tiny house villages not specifically targeted towards the needs of homeless residents and several seeking approval from municipal boards. It is difficult to tell how long the current fascination with tiny living will last, and how, if at all, municipalities will seek to regulate their development.

Tiny homes built for low or no income individuals are capturing international attention through news articles, documentaries, Buzzfeed lists,[3] online videos, and T.V. news stories profiling the five established tiny house villages for the homeless. These villages are composed of between 10 and 40 tiny homes brought together on private or donated land as part of an intentional community. The typology of tiny houses for the homeless emphasize public interaction by minimizing private space—units tend to be smaller than 150 ft^2 —including front porches, and placing recreation and cooking facilities in a single, communal location.

While market-rate tiny homes have private sanitation facilities for bathing and waste disposal, tiny houses for the homeless rarely have such amenities and instead rely on shared, centralized bathrooms. This difference will be explored in greater detail within the case studies.

The five established and functioning American tiny house villages for the homeless are far from isomorphic in nature. In stark opposition to the monotonous, monolithic architecture and governance structure of many municipal housing projects for low-income residents, tiny house villagers pride themselves on how different their villages are from any other. During my interviews with tiny house villagers, I found residents and organizers alike quick criticize other villages for everything from their architectural palette to their high debt acquisition to their working relationships with municipal agencies. Because of this drive towards individuality, tiny house

3 Buzzfeed is a web-based publisher of news, arts and culture.

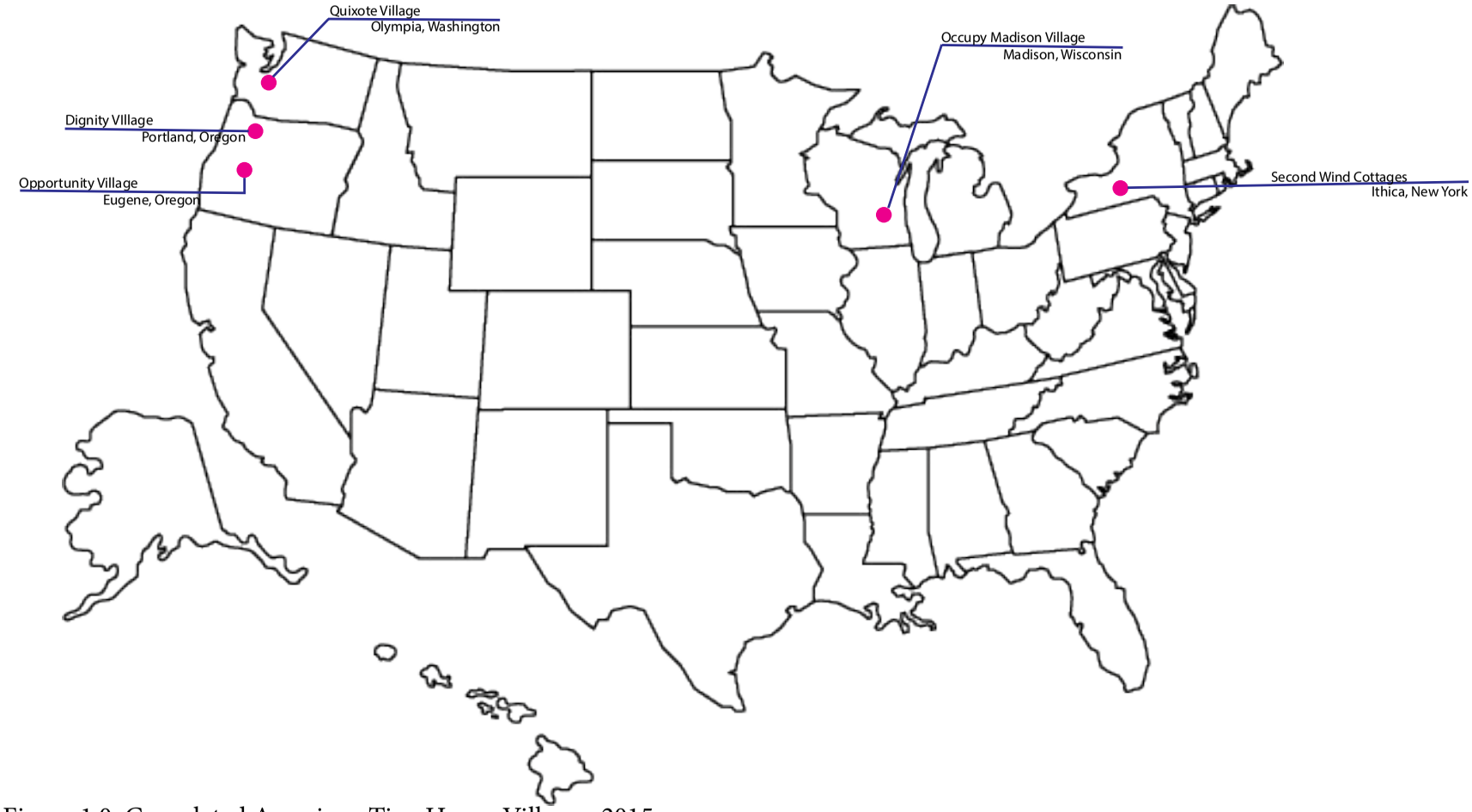


Figure 1.0: Completed American Tiny House Villages. 2015

villages for the homeless act as social incubators that fall along complex spectrums regarding resident involvement, housing quality, geographic distance to the city center and public financing.

Low-cost and self-sustaining, tiny house villages have captured the interest of municipalities, faith-based organizations, and community organizers across the country. These groups, working alone or in partnerships, are hatching ideas on new ways to use the small, inexpensive, mobile structures as part of a larger, supportive, housing-first, anti-homelessness strategy.

Limits to the Study

This work attempts to compile and analyze a thorough narrative of the social, financial and political history and future of two tiny house villages. While significant information was gathered from secondary sources, the richest material emerged from interviews with those involved in the villages' development, construction and operations. It should be recognized that in conversations, interviewees had their own goals and motivations and while they were forthcoming with information, some of their perceptions conflicted with other interviews or with data collected by secondary sources. Those conflicts are explored in this work. As for the homeless population, those interviewed for this thesis represent a small sampling of each city's homeless community and it is important to note that the lifetime joys and frustrations of the tiny house villages' current residents may not apply to all experiencing homelessness for several reasons.

First, individuals who live in the villages are those suffering from chronic homelessness. They represent a segment unable or unwilling to double up with friends and family or effectively utilize community support systems such as faith-based and municipal institutions. This in and of itself may skew the sample along cultural, racial and religious lines.

Second, residents of the sampled villages are forbidden from using drugs on the property; two out of the three forbid the use of alcohol. This excludes those who are unwilling or unable to abide by rules regarding substance use or who are unable to effectively hide their violation of said rules.

Third, many villages have a vetting process carried out by current residents; new villagers are admitted under a probationary period. A resident-run character-assessment committee uses an arbitrary set of criteria to determine if the new resident is a good cultural fit for the community. Potential villagers who are disruptive or have conditions or personality traits that are seen as grossly incompatible with village life are not admitted, further narrowing the pool of interviewees.

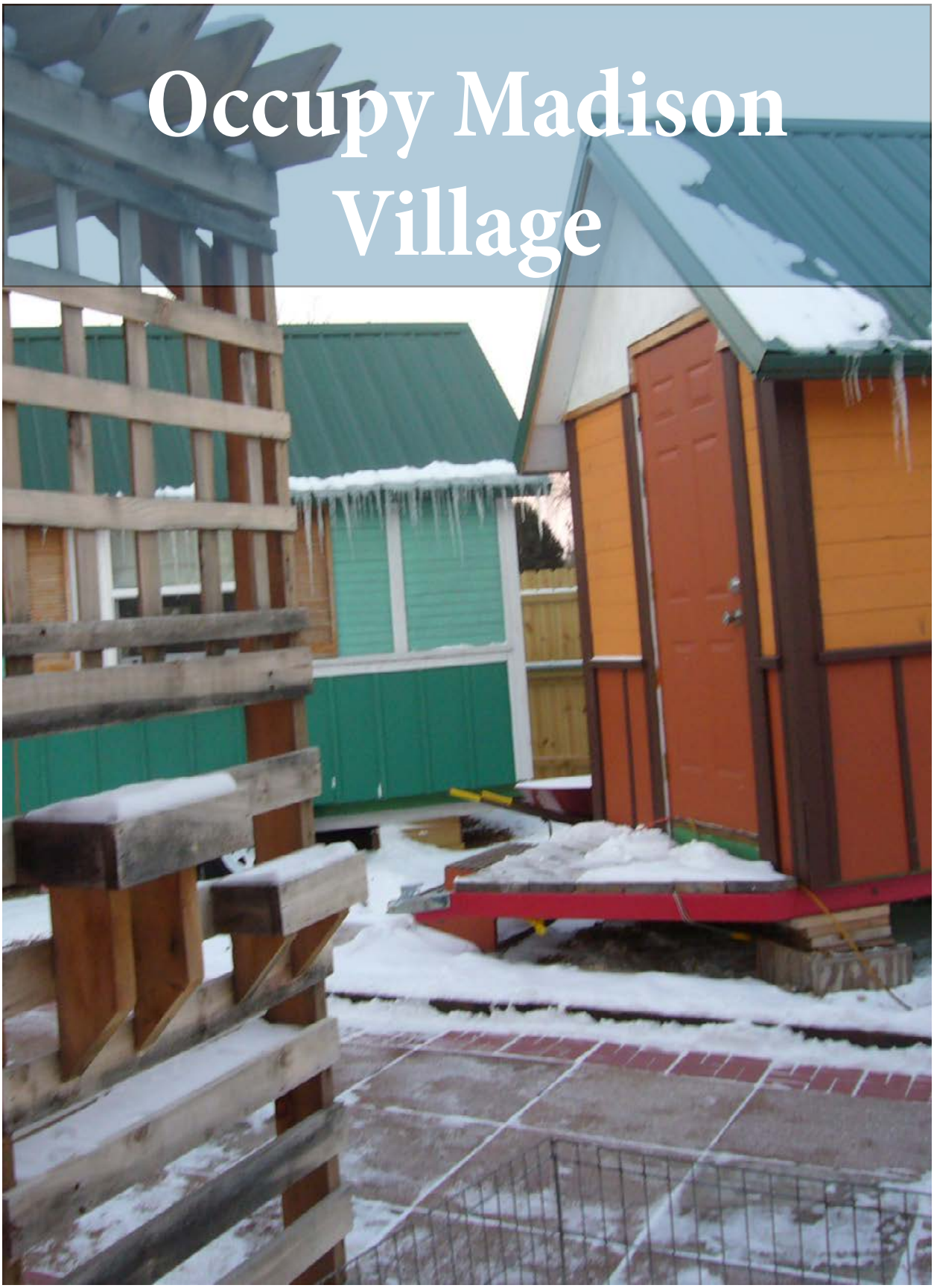
Fourth, the villages only accommodates single, independent adults and couples[4], excluding those with severe disabilities or those in custody of children. Families with children make up 6% of Portland's homeless population and 42% of Madison's.

Fifth, not all approached villagers were willing to speak on record, which may skew the sample to those of a certain personality type, political persuasion or with a certain opinion or perception of interaction with interviewers. Some were concerned about their privacy and the potential consequences of speaking on record. Several others expressed an explicit distaste for speaking with a person of color. All resident names have been changed to protect their privacy.

4 The villages also allow a limited number of pets which is a departure from standard shelter procedures

Finally, issues surrounding homelessness are sensitive and straddle the line between the political and the deeply personal. As an outsider with no prior connections to the villages, I have not established the long-term trust and legitimacy within the local homeless communities needed to intimately and fully engage villagers and may have missed subtle social cues, or had information withheld from me. Nevertheless, the stories told by those involved with the Tiny Village Movement paint a vivid portrait of what it's like to live small in a culture that loves to live large.

Occupy Madison Village



Occupy Madison Village
304 N Third St, Madison, WI 53704

Google Street View image of OM Village and the surrounding residential neighborhood. Across the street from the village is a bus shelter- the frequent service route brings passengers downtown in less than 15 minutes.

It's 11am and with the wind-chill, -36°C on this harsh day in early January. Within minutes, my upper eyelashes have frozen to my lower lids. For the 15-minute waddle across the icy isthmus to Occupy Madison's (OM) Tiny Village, I've put on more than half the clothes in my suitcase. The snow falls in fat flakes, the wind is sharp and when the sun peeks through the clouds it reflects in blinding flashes off mounds of snow. These conditions are extreme, but far from abnormal for a city whose average winter temperatures hover around -4°C (24°F)[25]. To be one of the city's 3,400[26,5] recorded[6] individuals experiencing homeless in Madison, the winter is a five-month, dusk to dawn, struggle against the cold. The city's nine public and private shelters offer 331 beds each night on a first-come-first-serve basis. The shelter system permits residents a total stay of 30-days, which can be extended by 60 days when the weather dips below -6.6°C (20°F).[7]

With a vacancy rate of less than 2% and a rash of new luxury condos being built to accommodate the city's growing "eds and meds" sector, finding affordable housing can seem a Sisyphean task for low-income Madisonians. "Housing vouchers have been unavailable since 2007," says Brenda Konkle, executive director of Madison's Tennant Resource Center, "they opened the list for a month, recently…people could apply to be placed on the waiting list, which is currently a 15-year [wait]!"

Those who do make use of the city's shelter system face a mode of service provision that is often impersonal and inconsistent. Bruce Wallbaum, co-founder and treasurer of OM Village, drove me to the base of Wisconsin's capitol building, which sits perched upon a small hill. "See that planter over there?" he asked pointing to concrete container at the end of the capitol's

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5 Madison's population is 243,344 according to a 2013 U.S. Census Bureau report. More than 1.4% of the city's population is homeless.

6 Madison conducts homeless counts by tallying those who seek shelter or motel vouchers at registered homeless service sites.

7 According to the National Weather Service, Madison, WI experiences an average of 150 nights where the evening temperatures drop below 0°C (32°F).

driveway. “Across the street, about 300 yards down, is Porchlight,[8] it’s first come, first serve for the beds, so men gather here and when it’s time to let the men in, someone from Porchlight waves and there’s a rush to get a bed. You see old men, men with disabilities, struggling to get a spot. You don’t get to the door in time? You find somewhere else to sleep.”

Madison’s Annual Report on Homeless Served in Dane County notes that in 2012, 1,654 individuals were turned away from the County shelter system due to lack of space or funds, which while still significant, is a notable drop from the 10,746 turned away in 2000.

Shelter residents must be out early in the morning. With no official day centers available for homeless Madisonians to get out of the cold,[9] churches, libraries, supermarkets and coffee shops become de facto warming centers for as long as staff can tolerate. Finding a moment of privacy is a challenge, finding a toilet even more so.

For many Madisonians the plight of the homeless remains a relative secret; the cashiers, baristas, librarians, students, bartenders, musicians and software engineers I spoke with during my time in Wisconsin were all shocked to hear that more than 1.4% of they city’s population lacks housing. “We’re a really progressive city- I didn’t think we had homelessness here,” said Teddy a part-time handyman and musician playing at a bar called The Alchemist. He and others in his band pointed to the Occupy Madison movement as proof of Madison’s reformist majority.

There’s no denying that Madison has a liberal vein running through it. The city’s residents made international headlines in 2011 for their tens-of-thousands- strong protest against conservative governor Scott Walker’s anti-collective bargaining policies.[10] However, despite Madison’s leftist, college-town reputation, there is resistance among residents and municipal officials regarding where, and by whom, homeless services should be provided.

Brenda Konkle, former alder (councilwoman), and co-founder of Occupy Madison’s Tiny Village, found herself on the receiving end of a court injunction and threats of hundreds of dollars in municipal fines for allowing the homeless to use her front porch as a space to sleep. In addition to space, she provided on-site lockers for the homeless to store their possessions and extension cords so that they could charge their cellphones. The city was unable, unwilling or uninterested in finding the resources to meet the needs of the homeless Madisonian’s stationed on Konkle’s porch, but the city was able to find the time, funding, and manpower to initiate a legal battle over how she could use her property. It is illegal to sleep outdoors on property that you do not own or rent in the city of Madison. Konkle’s argument that the men and women on her porch

8 A religious-based, drop-in men’s homeless shelter. Porchlight has 110 beds and receives government funding for their services.

9 Dane County municipal officials are interested in purchasing a property to act as a day center, but expenses, equity concerns and political battles of will have slowed the project’s progression.

10 The Scott Walker protest brought together over 30,000 protesters in February of 2011 to protest anti-collective bargaining legislation directed at public school teachers. This protest would birth the group Occupy Madison.

were there as guests, was met with protest and a very public battle with the city. Ultimately, faced with mounting fines, Konkle removed the lockers and extension cords from her porch.

With an anemic response to homelessness from the public sector and gross restrictions against private involvement, homeless Madisonians face innumerable challenges to finding stability, and at the very least, a place to call home.

At 304 N Third St, stands Occupy Madison's Tiny House Village; a three unit, 17,492ft^2 parcel of land in Madison's Emerson East neighborhood, a primarily white community filled with yellow and powder blue, two-story, single-family homes. The village site once housed a gas station and then an auto repair shop that fell into disrepair. The paint-chipped building has been retrofitted into a bright red office space and woodshop with floor-to-ceiling windows, three full bathrooms and a makeshift kitchen stocked with a crockpot, toaster oven and electric kettle.

Outside, brick walkways have been carefully laid to lead to the village's three completed, electrically heated and occupied 98 ft^2 tiny houses. Collaboratively built by residents and volunteers out of reused materials, the tiny homes mirror the pitched roofs and shuttered windows of their full-sized neighborhood-counterparts. Across the street are the numbers 05 and 27 buses, which for $2.00 take riders to the city center in fewer than 15 minutes.

Perched on trailer beds to circumvent unit-size regulations,[11] the homes face the main office, creating a small courtyard filled with raised flower-beds; behind the houses stands a tall, decorated wooden fence, adorned with cut wooden figures of fleeing prisoners and classic cartoon characters. Only the upper third of the bright homes are visible from the street, lending privacy and piquing the interest of passers-by.

This intentional community is certainly an aesthetic improvement from the rusting cars and paint-chipped concrete that once defined the property. Occupy Madison Village, a nonprofit started by a collaborative group of homeless and sheltered individuals, purchased the parcel in 2012 for $110,000.[12] To add to their $531 per month mortgage and $200 in monthly utility expenses, they made a total of $160,000 worth of renovations to comply with zoning regulations, building codes and ADA standards.

Built on an un-remediated brownfield, the village is nestled between a light industrial district and a neighborhood of single-family homes where the median household income ranges from $40,000- $50,000.[27] These miniature reflections of the larger homes across the street are an endearing curiosity - they're diminutive, few in number, brightly colored and nonthreatening;

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11 The city of Madison, WI dictates that minimum inhabitable unit size be no less than 150 sq. feet, less the kitchen, bathroom, and all closets. At 98 sq. feet, the tiny homes are built on raised beds and classified as trailers, for which there is no minimum size. Wheels on the bottom of the trailer beds also facilitate unit mobility.

12 Founding members invested their own money to provide a 30% down payment. Their hope is to receive that money back, with interest, within the next 4 years. The bank, a local credit union, provides the mortgage at 5% interest.

Occupy Madison plans to build ten tiny homes on the property. Currently three residents share the two completed homes. Toilets and showers are across the icy courtyard, inside the main office.

their deliberately normative architecture is greatly divorced from the common visions of authoritative, monolithic housing that traditionally serves the poor.

Volunteers and visitors to the village soar to the hundreds in the spring and summer months and the neighborhood association is applying with the village for a community development grant. There have been no episodes of conflict or violence between OM Village and the surrounding community and the villagers believe that their last major opponent, the owner of a two story home across the street from the Village's entrance, has either moved or begun renting out her home.

This is not to say that the village faced no opposition in its design and construction. A strong NIMBY[13] current ran through neighbors and the local police force; government officials were neutral at best. Traditional lenders were want to approve a $100,000 mortgage or a line of credit for a government protest group attempting to provide free, permanent housing for anyone willing to put 532 hours of labor into the property over a lifetime. Neighbors swamped communi-

13 "Not in My Back Yard"

ty-planning meetings with concerns of plummeting property values[14] and thinly veiled apprehensions about the unsavory behavior of the chronically homeless.

The ultimate goal of Occupy Madison is to create safe, stable housing to those who need it most and to bridge the social gaps that isolate those experiencing homelessness from the resources and support of the broader community. Given the financial, social and political barriers facing Occupy Madison, how was Occupy Madison Village built, how well is it achieving its goals 2-years after breaking ground? What lessons can individuals, groups or municipal agencies hoping to build their own Tiny House Villages take from OM's experiences?

Between November of 2014 and March of 2015 I conducted 12 interviews, in person and by phone, with 10 of OM Village's founders, board members, residents and neighbors. Because many of the founders are still actively engaged in the development and day-to-day operations of the village, I was able to collect a first-hand perspective of the village's creation. OM Village has three homeless residents, all of whom declined to sit down to a formal interview citing "media fatigue". They were, however, willing to share their personal experiences with me as we sat in the shop or walked around the property- those conversations and observations are included in this narrative. Further study was completed through the analysis of secondary sources, such as city council meeting minutes, newspaper articles, municipal reports, and documents posted to the OM Village website.

The founders of Occupy Madison are a mixture of homeless and housed individuals whose backgrounds range from skilled tradesmen and women, to government officials, to educators and artists. During the 2011 Scott Walker protests, Madisonians interested in political and social issues gathered together and found themselves intertwined in a complex and transformative space. "I've never been the 'activist type,' but a friend involved in the Occupy Madison group bugged me to come down. Some folks got together and started an Occupy Madison group encampment," recalls OMV treasurer Bruce Wallbaum. "The group applied for a permit from the city and… [the municipality] gave us a permit to form a tent city on an empty lot a mile and half from the square. That started attracting homeless people. There was social support there and there was food and there were other people and tents- it grew from there," continued village co-founder Allen Barkoff. For many of the founders, this was their first intimate experience, living, eating and holding meetings with those experiencing homelessness.

Throughout the winter of 2011-2012, a particularly harsh one, protesters continued to camp together on public property, facing dispersal orders every few days or weeks. In a final show of frustration, the protesters camped out on the lawn of the City's Health and Human Services office.

14 Data sourced from Zillow.com reveals an average increase in property values of 5% in the 53704 zip code shared with OM Village since 2013.

"Then [the protesters] went back to East Washington Avenue and set up for a multi-day encampment. There was no legal place to camp for the homeless. [The group] thought they'd move the encampment to the grounds of the Dane County Social Services building. They thought they'd publicize their cause right there on the front lawn. The County sheriff physically came out, closed the encampment down and moved all of the homeless people's tents and belongings out to a different county park about 2 miles outside of town [7 miles from the nearest bus stop]. It felt like a narcotics raid and was very militaristic on the part of Dane County. Core supporters brought the campers food, they brought electric heaters and there they spent a miserable winter in the park. It flooded and froze and flooded and froze."

-Allen Barkoff, OM Village Co-President

The city threatened fines of $300 per day to a local man who offered his property to the protesters after their final dispersal. When OM then moved to a public campground, they city council imposed a series of new laws, passed at a dizzying pace, to prevent the protesters from occupying public land.

"When we got back to the campground in April, there were new rules in place that weren't publicized. I checked the rules every few weeks. Unilaterally [the city council] made rules that [there could be] only 1 tent per site at $17 per site. We tried to get around the rules but new rules kept popping up."

-Brenda Konkle

In May, the group dispersed, giving up on their attempts to skirt the city's regulations and started construction on their first tiny house. While no one can point to the one individual who brought up the idea of the tiny home village, it was quickly accepted as a powerful, alternative to the original consideration of group housing built out of an old office space. The thought behind the Tiny House was to constantly move the structures in accordance with parking laws and use it as a protest piece to drag in front of the capital building, generate conversation, publicize their cause and provide shelter.

"I found out you could build a trailer under 3,000 pounds that you could put on the street and it didn't have to be registered. So we designed around that criteria- we reorganized and got people involved. We thought that we'd build a bunch of those and constantly move them around town."

– Bruce Wallbaum, OM Village Treasurer

The transition from a vision of traditional group housing to the tiny house village model has public and political implications. While a repurposed office or industrial space, as originally considered, may provide the shelter necessary to house vulnerable individuals and couples, its existence remains static and secretive. The mobility of a house built on a trailer fulfills multiple purposes- it's an educational tool that shows an entire home can fit into a standard parking spot. It is small and cheap enough to be modified to mimic a traditional craftsman house or to be a wild show of artistic expression. Its ability to appear in places where homes are not traditionally found, such as in front of the capital building or nestled in between fruit vendors at a farmers' market, allows something so normal, a white house with red shuttered windows and a pitch roof, to become an object of public curiosity, a conversation starter, a deep symbol of political protest against a civil society unwilling to help the poorest of the poor.

After months of searching, OM found an old auto-repair shop at 304 North Third St up for sale. In order to build their tiny village on the site, OM had to seek approval from the city's alders, in order to do that, they'd have to seek the surrounding public's approval through a series of community meetings. One of the founders of OMV, Brenda Konkle, was a former alder in the Emerson East neighborhood who had sat on the planning commission for three years, helping to usher development projects in that same neighborhood through the planning process. Her years of experience as an affordable housing advocate, lawyer, alder, planning commissioner and executive director of the city's tenant resource center allowed the group to plan strategically against challenges that would arise.

"When we became the developer of the project, I knew how to handle a neighborhood. I've been through the process, so I knew that I needed to talk to the alder…as a colleague… and have lots of neighborhood meetings. I also knew that the first meeting is a disaster because everyone who is scared shows up. I tried to get Occupy [Madison Village] to answer as many questions as possible and put it on the web. A lot of the time developers don't share information. I knew where developers went wrong."

– Brenda Konkle

In addition to Konkle's development expertise, the group benefitted from the interests and experience of other co-founders who came at the process through the lenses of sales, construction, consensus building and community engagement. "We met with the neighborhood [and] asked them, 'what would you like to see?' There are things about the village that are very much suggestions from the city and the neighbors and it was put together in a cooperative way," recalls Wallbaum.

The original site-plan for the THV looked like a used car lot, with as many homes as possible crammed into every square foot of the property. Through reviewing site-plans with concerned community residents, the village layout was modified to have a verdant front entrance filled with raised flowerbeds and for the homes to wrap in a gentle curve around the inner lip of the property. OM transformed their vision of the village from "how many homes can we fit on this lot?" to "how can we make this place beautiful?" The homes themselves saw little resistance from Madisonians regarding their design:

"The house itself was designed way before the community was involved- we designed it so that liberal, middle-class people would like them…we realized that to make this project go forward- it was more about the people looking at the house than the people living in the house, if [the houses] are beautiful, [the neighborhood] will forget about homelessness."

- Bruce Wallbaum

An element working in favor of OMV was that a neat and tidy village of miniature homes is much more visually appealing than the dirty and deteriorating lot it intended to replace. Through community engagement and flexibility in the site-planning process, OM was able to come to a mutually agreeable, stronger solution to village construction. Their next hurdle was to push back against social opposition from neighbors and the Madison police force, which was convinced local crime would increase in the presence of the chronically homeless.

Until the chief of police presented at a community meeting, OM "had a positive, congenial relationship with the police," recalls Konkle, "it was really frustrating because the headlines of the paper made a big deal over the police being against the village…[the police] tried to associate homelessness with criminal activity... [the chief] was trying to use his bully pulpit to destroy the project." Here, the neutral involvement of the local alder flipped. A majority of community members came out in favor of the project after an aggressive question and answer campaign led by OM. Frequent meet-and-greets with OMV residents, who were able to share their experiences in an empathetic manner, made the development of the village more personal. It was no longer housing for the homeless, it became housing for Louise, housing for Jimmy, housing for

Andy and his dog- housing for those who had fallen on hard times. “Once they got to know us and saw that we didn’t have horns coming out of our heads, they became more sympathetic to what we were doing,” says Barkoff. Louise,[15] a resident, shared hard truths about homeless living that made community members and alders uncomfortable, but eventually more sympathetic, “I want you to imagine having to take a shit, but having no where to take a shit- how could you have dignity in that situation?” she once asked a panel of alders at a public meeting.

Ultimately, the district’s alder, now in open support of the project, made the choice to “not invite [the police chief] to another meeting; [the chief] sent officers [but] they weren’t called on,” recalls Konkle. Without knowledge of the political side to the development process, a longstanding personal and professional relationship with the sitting alder, and a carefully considered strategy on appealing to the local demographic, OM would have faced a much more difficult battle against NIMBY-ist opponents. While celebrating their success, OM faced another hurdle; how to finance the transformation of the property from auto-repair shop to self-sustaining housing that would be free, in perpetuity, to residents.

15 This is not the resident’s real name. Names of all homeless or formerly homeless residents have been changed to protect their privacy.

Perception and Fundraising

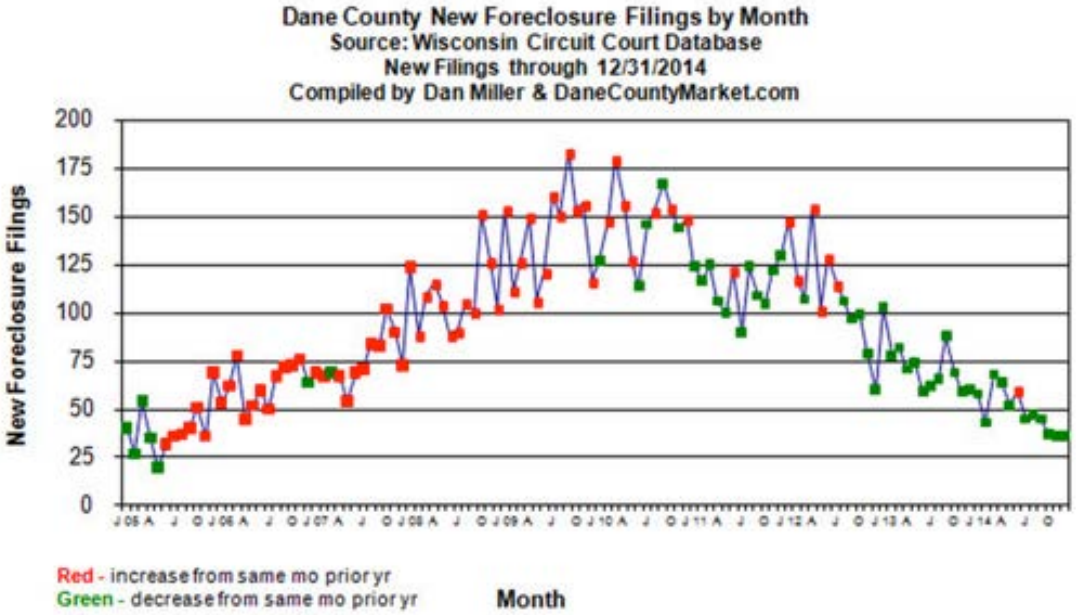
While OM members came from diverse backgrounds with interests ranging from consensus building to affordable housing, none were deeply aware of the challenges facing homeless residents in Madison until they experienced firsthand how difficult it was to find, form and finance an intentional community for those experiencing homelessness. Across interviews, those involved with OM Village expressed their view that Madison's homeless services are neither keeping up with increasing demand nor a changing socioeconomic context.

"A lot of the nonprofits got comfortable doing things they way they always did, and as the housing crisis and vacancy rate got worse, the [homeless] population grew and the issues came to the forefront in ways that they haven't before. In 2008 and 2009 the [homeless] population started to grow. Agencies didn't grow with the crisis. Their thinking about homelessness is stuck in the 1980s. 'We want to make our shelters so that no one wants to be here.' [Shelters] got stuck in service delivery mode…the county says [homelessness services are] not a mandated service, so they don't care. There isn't anyone invested in pushing the system, it worked for 20 or 30 years like this, no one has an incentive to change. All of these new ideas we push, [the government] thinks that we're just angry activists, in their minds, who are being unreasonable."

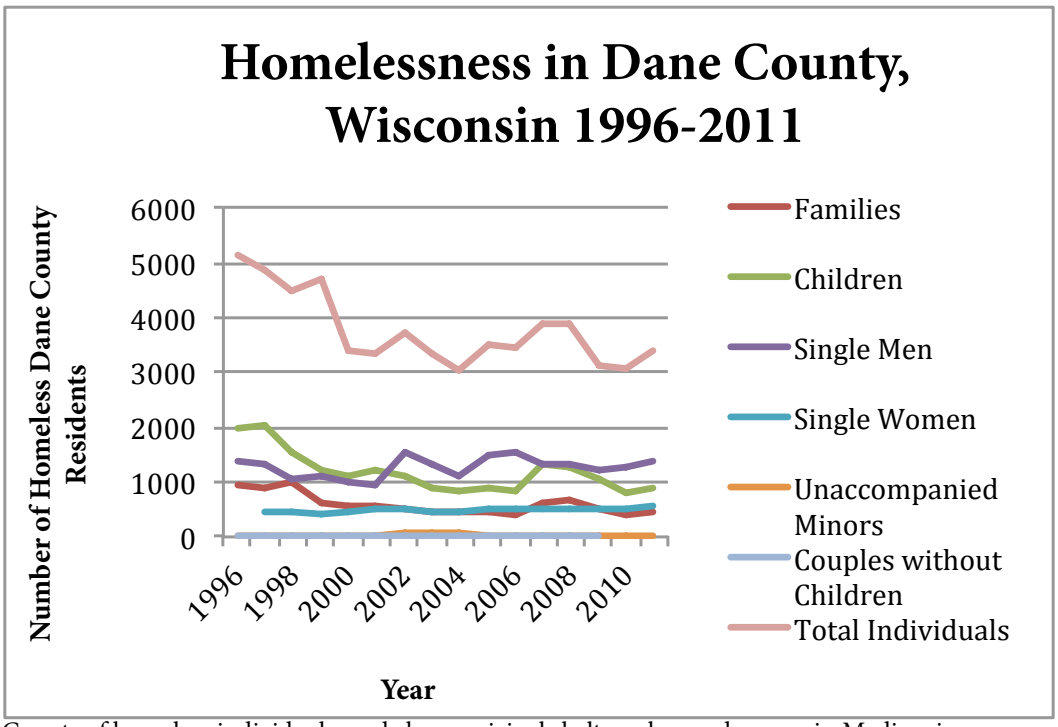
-Brenda Konkle

The perception among residents, service providers and OM Village participants is that during the financial crisis, the number of people experiencing homeless increased. Unemployment and home foreclosure data for Dane County spiked during the Great Recession of 2008-2010, which lends credibility to this claim. However, county collected data on those accessing homeless services through requests for shelter or motel placement, shows that between 2008 and 2010, when foreclosures and unemployment (see figures 1.0 and 2.0) were at their highest, homeless service requests decreased nearly 20%. People were evicted from their homes, money was tight, but the there was no increase in Madisonians seeking shelter.

There are several explanations for this discrepancy between perceptions and data that may have influenced the development of OM Village. First, the views of those interviewed may be skewed by their relatively recent awareness of the number of homeless in Madison. Second, those in need may have heard through the media or social connections, that due to the economic downturn, homelessness was high and shelters had no space for them. As a result many may have not bothered to request services. Finally, with media outlets frequently report-



Forclosure filings in Madison, Wisconsin peaked between 2008 and 2010



Counts of homeless individuals made by municipal shelters show a decrease in Madisonians accessing shelter or voucher resources between 2008 and 2010. SOURCE: Annual Report on Homeless Served in Dane County: An Analysis of Population Served by Dane County Shelter, Transitional and Supportive Permanent Housing and Service Agencies.

ing on increased foreclosures and unemployment, individuals with secure housing may have been more likely to allow friends and family to double up with them, recognizing that hard times were hitting all. Regardless of where the homeless were housed, the perception of a marked increase speaks loudly to the urgency some may have felt in developing the project. What does this perception say about OM's ability to mobilize a hundreds-strong volunteer force and solicit donations of money, materials and airtime from the international community?

OMV got its financial start through $75,000 in loans made by board members as a down payment towards the purchase of the property; the intention is to repay board members for their seed funding at 5% interest. When traditional lenders refused to mortgage the property, Bruce Wallbaum took the proposal to a credit union, "[getting a mortgage] was a simple business transaction, they didn't do it out of the goodness of their hearts, they looked at what the land was valued" without the building "and gave us the loan." Because OMV, a registered nonprofit, owns the land and all buildings, there is no property tax to pay, but costs are still rising fast. The mortgage of $77,000 paired with over $160,000 in installations and repairs and a $200 per month utility bill leaves OMV greatly dependent upon donations.

Their microenterprise project, OMGoods, has residents produce furniture, arts and crafts out of recycled materials; the items are then sold out of the village's main office. The hope is that eventually OMGoods will fully sustain the costs of the property. Residents can use time in the shop towards their 10-hour per week "sweat equity mortgage" payment, but all proceeds from the sale of the goods go to into paying down the village's debt. To date, OMGoods has sold $2,000 worth of crafts, buttons, t-shirts and bumper stickers. That represents 0.83% of the $239,400 in principal owed on the project, which houses three individuals, and aims to house a total of 11. To date, OM's grant proposals to private and public agencies have yet to produce an award- the village is fully funded through donations and debt.

With $239,400 in principal owed to the bank, board members, and general contractors, OMV has looked to creative ways to pay their bills. Part of that is taking advantage of public perceptions- and misperceptions- about homelessness, effectively using social media, identifying alternative sources of fundraising and capitalizing on the uniqueness of the project. The social and aesthetic intrigue of OM Village, paired with congenial residents and echoes of the faded Occupy Movement provide multiple hooks for media attention.

Louise and Jimmy, two of Occupy Madison Village's co-founders and the first tenants, serve as the faces of the "deserving poor." They're a middle-aged couple, down on their luck, working hard to build their own home from the ground up. Shy and unassuming, neatly dressed in a black, slim-fit knit sweater and thick-rimmed glasses, Jimmy is hardly ever seen, in person or in photographs, without tools in his hands. When I approached him for an interview he was staining a hip-high, salvaged-wood bookcase; Jimmy declined to speak with me, exhausted by

Occupy Madison's main office is filled with the wooden goods created by village residents. The trees were a popular item around Christmas.

the fishbowl effect that has put him, his partner, Louise, and their private tiny home on display. He is, however, quick to tell me to look for his name in the Moscow Times and in a weekend video feature by Al Jazeera.

Whether they like it or not, Jimmy and Louise represent OMV. Careful use of their photos and quotes in print and visual media have added a face to connect to the thousands of dollars in donations that pour in after their exposure in traditional or online media. Louise and Jimmy represent self-sufficiency and hard work in the face of adversity. The tiny homes clustered together around a central courtyard represent a radical form of co-housing and romantically mimic a time gone-by, one of collaborative, (full-size) village living.

The Tiny House Village is an intentional and thought-provoking response to limited affordable housing; the means of development dips its fingers into so many schools of thought that people across the sociopolitical continuum can impose their own values onto the project. It is simultaneously a libertarian response to ineffective governance; a socialist effort at collaboratively alleviating suffering; a public problem solved by the invisible hand of the private, capitalist

market; an in-your-face, communist response to a civic society failing to care for its poor. At the center of OMV's being is its ability to resonate with a broad spectrum of supporters, and a large part of its resonance is its ability to connect to potential donors through social media.

Members of the board attribute some of their success within the media to their decision to keep the Occupy movement alive and part of their name. While some were afraid that the controversial nature of the group that protested the status quo from California to New York would scare off donors and volunteers, the group ultimately decided to stay true to their origin story.

"We made a decision that [the Occupy Movement] was key to our roots and we needed to stick with it… [we stuck to the] principles and values of Occupy, we wouldn't do the standard board where we would fill it with corporate members, we needed people from the streets to guide us."

-Bruce Wallbaum

When Stark-Trek superstar, actor George Takei, posted a photo of OMV's ribbon cutting on his Facebook[16] page, the picture got over 36,678 likes and was shared over 6,000 times. 8 million people were exposed to the image and as a result, OMV raised more than $16,000 in a single week. Wallbaum, who manages much of OMV's social media and web-based communication, is careful and thoughtful in how he exposes the village. He is careful not to post too many times per week or ask for money too frequently, but is generous with sharing OMV's successes online or in print and radio interviews with interested media outlets.

The attention gained from positive media exposure not only financially supports the village, but also mobilizes a powerful volunteer force. With each new article or radio story, e-mails pour in to Wallbaum and Konkle from individuals across the globe wanting to build Tiny House Villages in their own neighborhood or to help support OMV. This rapid form of outreach makes it easier for OMV to connect with those possessing abilities not met by board members or residents, such as the skilled trades.

Clever use of the media has financed and supported OMV since its conception, however, it has simultaneously caused a rift between resident and non-resident members of OM. Residents are exhausted by the constant pressure to invite reporters, school children and gaggles of tourists into their 98 ft^2, private dwellings. Like it or not, the residents of the village have become internationally recognized public figures; photos of their bedspreads and window decorations are plastered across Buzzfeed, Facebook, and a dozen local and international newspapers and magazines. After decades of struggling to survive in the public sphere, their one modest shot

16 An online, social-media platform

at privacy has been made public. Without the fishbowl-like relationship between residents and visitors, however, it is difficult to imagine that the village would even exist. They may not pay a monetized rent, but they do pay with their time, their faces and their words. This is a price that only the residents can pay. Donors are interested in knowing exactly where their money is going and while the housed co-founders can speak any number of words about the project's intent and success, those clips are worth far less than an image of bootstrap determinism in action: the weathered hands of the formerly homeless striking a nail into the roof of their self-built home.

For Louise, the price is too high. She apologizes profusely to me that I can't see the inside of her home, but she reminds me, she has to stand her ground somewhere. She's tired of her only private space being exposed to the world. When she pads away into the workspace to refill her coffee, Jimmy whispers that if I come back tomorrow, he can give me a quick peek into their unit.

Among non-resident members, feelings are mixed as to the severity of this fishbowl effect. Some seem fairly oblivious to the challenges levied by constant international exposure, some seem peripherally aware of the stress it puts on relationships within the organization. Ultimately, the board came to a compromise where, until the village is at capacity, a model home would be used to tour visitors allowing Louise and Jimmy to close their doors to permanent donors.

Challenges to OMV's Sustainability and Scalability

OMV's tenant system works on a model of "sweat equity;" future residents, or "stewards," must put 32 hours of work into the property through physical or clerical labor in order to move in. Once settled into a house, they have "mortgage payments" of 10-hours per week of similar labor, adding up to 500 total hours. Once residents have "paid-off" their homes, in a little under a full year, they must still contribute 10-hours per week to the maintenance of the village. Louise and Jimmy have shared with countless news reporters their excitement over "owning" their own homes. However, the language surrounding stewards' equity and ownership is misleading. When tenants move out, there is no tangible or monetized equity that they can take with them; the tiny house remains on the property, available to the next tenant on the wait list, and no money changes hands.

In traditional forms of homeownership there is an expectation that property taxes are paid and there is maintenance of human-inhabited structures. In return, there is the promise of stored equity- the ability to mortgage your home to pay for expenses, the ability to sell the home and recover your financial investment or to live in the home, once it is paid off, with minimal monthly contributions. Homeownership in the U.S. also means the ability to sell, destroy and modify your space within municipal regulations. None of these consequences of homeownership, positive or negative, are available to the tiny house village residents. There is no monetization of the homes to residents; sweat equity hours are not formally equated to the amount of money used to maintain the facility.

This false sense of ownership is problematic because there is nothing that stewards can take with them when they leave. They have a right to stay on the property for as long as OM is willing or able to agree to tenant terms, but residents have no legal right to the land or physical structures. Terms of finance and responsibility are introduced into the village structure to offer representational markers of achievement. The idea of offering free housing is radical in the United States, but the empty language used by village organizers to indicate participation in a faux economic-system suggests the same paternalistic attitudes found in traditional homeless service provision. While having a home in which to reside is tremendously valuable, is the language used to frame residents' relationship to their mini-homes ultimately helpful or harmful to residents?

We are left to wonder if these hollowed out terms- ownership, equity- are necessary to invest adults in accessing and maintaining stable housing. Artificial terminology meant to model longstanding means of private market participation to an adult who has already experienced a fair bit of the real world seem condescending at best. Louise and Jimmy's pride in owning their own tiny home is just as real as the pride in having built the physical and social elements of the

village from the ground up. One must ask, however, what are the consequences when these or future residents, willing or forced to leave the THV, confront the reality that they hold no long-term or monetized stake in the facility once their tenure has expired? Unlike a rental property or owned home, there is no deposit refund or sales profit to use to resettle. What does the use of those terms tell us about the relationship between resident and non-resident board members? Conversations with residents over their financial relationship to the village reveals some frustration.

Louise and Jimmy have lived in the Village for over a year; neither of them has full time employment. They consistently dedicate hundreds of hours per month to the village through building maintenance, board meeting attendance and craft making for OMGoods, which, the board of directors hopes, will eventually support the village.[17]

Much of the work that residents do for the village, particularly in the OMGoods division, is also quiet and therapeutic; miniature landscapes of dewy meadows are painted on scraps of pine and life-size Christmas trees hammered together out of reclaimed wood are produced on a micro-scale in the village's wood shop which is attached to the main office. While production of these goods may provide a peaceful and solitary time and place in which to reflect and rejuvenate, without an online presence or larger distributer, the work itself does little to pay down OM's sizeable debt.

While it is too early to dismiss these crafting efforts as fiscally ineffectual, it is worth noting that the production of even the most basic product relies on a very generous supply chain of loaned and donated tools and raw materials. The recall of a band-saw or souring of a donation relationship would greatly impact production. Regardless, the money earned from OMGoods goes into the village, and villagers are left to finance their personal needs independently or rely on the generosity of others.

While residents' shelter is met through the village, there are other expenses to consider such as food, clothing, toiletries, sanitary products and medications. Several villagers have histories with substance abuse; in addition to financing their medications and toiletries they also must find the money to sustain their dependence, often through the collection and return of bottles and cans. In a late-afternoon conversation with Louise in the chilled woodshop, she expressed her frustration with the struggle to cover basic expenses. "I put a lot of work into this place, but I don't get paid for it. None of the money I earn in the shop comes back to us. And I still have things I need to buy. How am I supposed to pay for my Kotex?"

It is important to reiterate that residents do not pay money towards their units, leaving them free to save and invest what money they can earn from outside sources. Additionally, local

17 To date, OMGoods has brought in around $2,000, a small fraction of the amount needed to sustain the village.

charities and faith-based organizations such as Bubbles Laundromat and James Reeb Unitarian Universalist church provide a place for residents to wash their clothing for free, receive donated winter coats and participate in social events such as book clubs and potlucks.

OM Village's board of directors, is compiled of volunteers with diverse professional backgrounds vital to the village's success. Non-resident board members take on the brunt of financial management, volunteer organization, fundraising, municipal compliance and facilitating relationships within the board and larger community. A lack of direct services at the site allows villagers to spend their time making basic structural and common-space improvements but does little to encourage or provide direct job training or off-site employment.

The unpaid domestic and structural labor contributed by the villagers should not be underestimated in its value, but one should also consider the limits to so fully throwing oneself into a single project. While residents have an important role in the village and sit on the board of directors, they lack direct involvement in vital pieces of the village's organization and management, be it by ability, by interest, by exclusion or by choice. Villagers have a voice, but are not as intimately familiar with the financial and legal details of the village as other members may be. Overall, the social relationships between many of the board members and residents are strong and mutual, however, nonresident board members are not always aware of or willing to explore the differences in power they hold due to their wealth, their employment, their experience and the choices they have in ther participation in OM Village.

The village participants I interviewed spoke frequently of empowering residents. A large part of empowerment is encouraging and facilitating independence. To the best of one's ability, an empowered individual should be able to identify, understand and seek control of the world in which they are functioning. Here the village faces a dilemma. Should they hold villagers to extremely high expectations in regards to technical participation in an attempt at equity and empowerment? If so, what are the risks of endowing them with complex responsibility while they attempt to stabilize? If direct involvement in the village's more complex affairs is too difficult or overwhelming for residents, how can village members ensure residents maintain a basic awareness of the policies and procedures that have built and sustained their home?

Government agencies have maintained a strict distance from OMV's development, but the regulations that have been put in place (i.e., ADA regulations in absence of the disabled, the installation of communal sanitation facilities instead of individual composting toilets) by the municipality have increased the cost of the project significantly, saddling the village with sizeable debt. Recently, OM Village completed construction on an ADA accessible bathroom to add to the two others already on site. The Village will ultimately house a maximum of 11 residents, but for now only three share the three on-site bathrooms. Attempts to sway the municipality

towards allowing composting toilets[18] in each of the homes, a popular and much-used option for wealthy, minimalist tiny homeowners with limited sewage access, failed over health and maintenance concerns. By standing firm on their ban on composting toilets, the municipality inserted the paternalistic mistrust common among many homelessness service providers into a privately managed project with goals of resident autonomy.

The debt is held by the Village's non-profit entity, but backed with private financing from the nonresident board members who are also responsible for the bulk of fundraising. When asked about seeking government funding, several OM board members were adamant that they intentionally keep their distance from the government to avoid having to follow stringent regulations that may force the village to stray from their vision of a permanent, intentional community constructed on the cheap. While OMV has made a few failed attempts at securing government grants, they are insistent that they will not strike up a more formal partnership with the city, feeling that their independence is key to maintaining the dignity and empowerment that arises from a self-governing community.

The idea behind self-governance is to empower homeless residents to make their own decisions, and gain back strength and confidence through helping themselves and each other. The day-to-day operations of the village are attended to by whichever resident is interested in or feels the need to clean or shovel or repair, which while this system generally works well, it does lead to an unequal distribution of labor. Mirroring the reality of most American households, the tasks of cleaning, tidying and maintaining shared facilities fall disproportionately on Louise, currently the only female resident in the village. More complex tasks, such as paying the mortgage, collecting donations and ensuring compliance with city code, are handled by non-resident board members.

The board of directors is composed of 13 volunteers[19] including two of OMV's residents.[20] Decision-making is modeled on a consensus building approach; the group's feeling is that in a voting scenario, if 1/3 of the board is unhappy, the "winning" side may have a majority, but they also have a problem. While consensus building may produce wiser, stronger and more stable results, seeking full consent from all 13 members on issues ranging from shoveling the front walk to debt acquisition does slow down the pace of decision-making and allows for personal conflicts to stall progress for the greater group.

The mix of residents and nonresidents on the board of directors is powerful; residents

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18 Tiny-house composting toilets are most often buckets or boxes layered with sawdust that are turned after every use.

19 Volunteers have come to the village in a variety of ways, some have been invited by current members, others hear about the village through the news or social media and choose to volunteer their time completing physical or clerical tasks.

20 Four of the 2015 board members are women, including OMV's sole female resident.

may meaningfully participate without the overwhelming pressure to handle circumstances and responsibilities outside of their capacity or experience level. A mixed board allows for increased accountability: embezzlement is much easier if your neighbor minds the coffers and much harder if there are outside entities double-checking the books.[21] Additionally, the integration of skills into the board from a well-established, local, professional class provides unique and diverse capacity, allowing the village to take on a range of complicated projects from legal battles to Indegogo[22] campaigns. Non-resident board members also provide an important social function that Bruce Wallbaum is eager to develop through casual evening activities: "we try to resolve conflict through community potlucks on Sundays, movie nights- get the tension out of everyday life." Nonresident members of OM Village are able to provide emotional support, a feeling of community and stability. Some board members even allow residents to store some of their more sensitive belongings in their homes, or pass on information about employment opportunities.

Board members feel strongly that OMV is, ideally, a space where people can live, free of financial charge until they die. However, the aging population is cause for concern. The 98 ft^2 units have several large steps to climb to get into the trailer bed, and reaching the bathroom requires an often-icy walk across the courtyard to the main building. Sickness, dementia, or physical impairments are not compatible with independent, self-governed, tiny living. With all three residents above the age of 50 and with histories of substance abuse, scenarios in which tiny house stewards can no longer care for themselves or their homes are a real and rapidly approaching possibility. The organizers of Occupy Madison Village are not blind to this reality, they just haven't planned for it yet. While they want the housing to be there for those who need it, they also realize the constraints to living in 98 ft^2, and hope that if the space no longer works for the resident, that they'll be motivated to find a different permanent solution that does. Because Occupy Madison does not charge rent, this provides an opportunity for residents to save what money they can earn towards a regular-sized home.

While residents of OM Village can privately manage their spaces and have rooms in which to keep their possessions, living quarters are so tight that conflict and poor behavior become public issues. The courtyard, common space and homes are all so close together that it is impossible to ignore visitors or pretend not to hear arguments. OMV's board decides the consequences of clashing personalities, harassment and improper behavior. An argument with your neighbor can quickly escalate from an irritating clash of personalities to a public meeting

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21 This is not to say that a mixed board prevents all issues of theft and embezzlement. In several conversations with residents and non-resident members of OMV, accusations of theft from OMGoods revenue were brought up with residents eager to defend themselves and non-residents eager to move on.

22 Indegogo is one of many online crowd-funding platforms that allows individuals or groups to digitally raise money for a project from strangers, acquaintances, friends and family

framed by a developing understanding of restorative justice.[23] The ultimate goal of OM Village's board in regards to day to day operations, is to resolve conflict, promote understanding and create a safe, healthy space for residents. Conflicts are considered on a case-by-case basis. In the worst-case scenario, if a resident's behavior causes severe or irreparable harm to another resident or visitor, that resident may be asked to leave.

The consequences of conflict can be severe. In a true rental or ownership situation, if your neighbor verbally or sexually harasses you, you can cash in on your home or ask for the refund of your security deposit and use that money to find a new space. In the Tiny Village, you put up with it, hope the accused chooses to or is forced to leave, or you re-enter Madison's streets. Correspondingly, a complaint against your neighbor can result, for better or for worse, in kicking another villager, someone who has poured hundreds of "sweat equity hours" into the community, out onto the street with nowhere to go. The decision to bring up an accusation of improper behavior, or to improperly behave has severe consequences and is weighed against the severity of the infraction and the personalities and leniency of the current governing body. This puts tremendous pressure on village organizers to consider and evaluate the barriers to justice that villagers may face when seeking help, including the fact that speaking up may put residents or their neighbors at risk of re-experiencing homelessness.

At the most basic level, OM Village's purpose is to provide housing; it is the housing first model without the option of on-site medical care or counseling. OM Village does not have social service provision as part of its model or its budget. However, if this reductionist goal, to provide housing, were truly the limit of OMV's perceptions and intentions, then the system would be nonfunctional. To build and offer housing at all is founded on a series of ideal and methods. OMV has a series of competing visions and frameworks, which impact everything from their financing to their conflict resolution strategies.[24] The individuality of each board member paired with the village's consensus building model means lots of face time and lots of conversation and occasionally, that more complex topics are put off until the group has the time and emotional bandwidth to find a solution.

Attention given to the values and ideals of the village is completely dependent upon the interests of the board. While OMV recognizes that homelessness disproportionately impacts individuals of color—80% of homeless individuals in Madison self-identify as non-white[25,28] — OMV's board of directors, resident community and surrounding neighbors are almost entirely

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23 All three villages visited for this thesis use their board or council, be they resident only or mixed, to solve conflicts that arise in the village.

24 Recently, the conflict-resolution/restorative justice working group, charged with crafting OMV's restorative justice policies, disintegrated after a bout of conflict.

25 This includes 74% of families and 48% of single males self-identifying as African American

white[26] and there are no plans, as of writing, to intentionally address racial disparities within the Village. How different would the larger picture of homeless service provision look if governing bodies were composed of a population that more closely reflects the race, gender and personal identity of those in need of services? How would the strategy differ if the board were beholden to careful self-reflection and corresponding action in regards to service equity?

While the structure of the board and its priorities raises a number of questions, a large part of Occupy Madison Village's success is the strength of its board. The political and organizational contributions of a former alder and contractor are immeasurable. Without an insider's knowledge of zoning, planning and construction or the deep social relationships with those in the community, it is unlikely that the village would have been built in such a prime location, if at all. Additionally, the board's decision to use clean, high-quality, normative architecture was key in gaining support. Arguments from those in opposition to the village centered around building standards. If the homes avoided building code and zoning regulations, community members argued, the city council was opening the door to the construction of a shantytown. Letters to the local paper penned by opponents to the village claimed to put the interest of the homeless first by protesting what would surely be substandard housing. As compared to villages such as Opportunity Village in Eugene and Dignity Village in Portland, Occupy Madison's housing stock was carefully and homogenously designed to be safe, visually appealing and well constructed.

The homes are by no means, perfect; when the cold wind blows a draft sweeps under the front door and the lack of toilets and showers within the units raise concerns about dignity, privacy, and trust. However, the board is actively aware of the units' challenges and within their power, is working to correct them. When I met Bruce Wallbaum for the first time, he quickly shook my hand and then was immediately off to check in on residents. The weather that week was dramatically cold and he wanted to make sure Louise, Jimmy and Andy were warm enough. After listening to resident concerns, he scribbled down a list of items to pick up from the hardware store and said he'd be back that afternoon to make repairs. He'd also be back again that week for a potluck-movie night that he'd organized.

These intimate relationships that straddle the line between caregiver and peer are vital to Occupy Madison's success but also present complex challenges. The founders reject the notion of bootstrap determinism and center their community philosophy on the idea that the residents need strong connections to the world outside of traditional homeless service provision if they are to stabilize. Interviewees emphasized that "people from the streets" involved in this type of intentional community need to be listened to, involved in meaningful work and have a voice equal to that of non-residents. One is left to wonder, however, what the goals are for residents

26 The census tract that houses OM Village is 87.95% white, according to the 2010 ACS.

beyond stabilization. Residents may live in the village, rent-free in perpetuity. The village can be a forever home, which in itself is not problematic; concerns arise, however, when one realizes that this forever home may be residents' only option for a home.

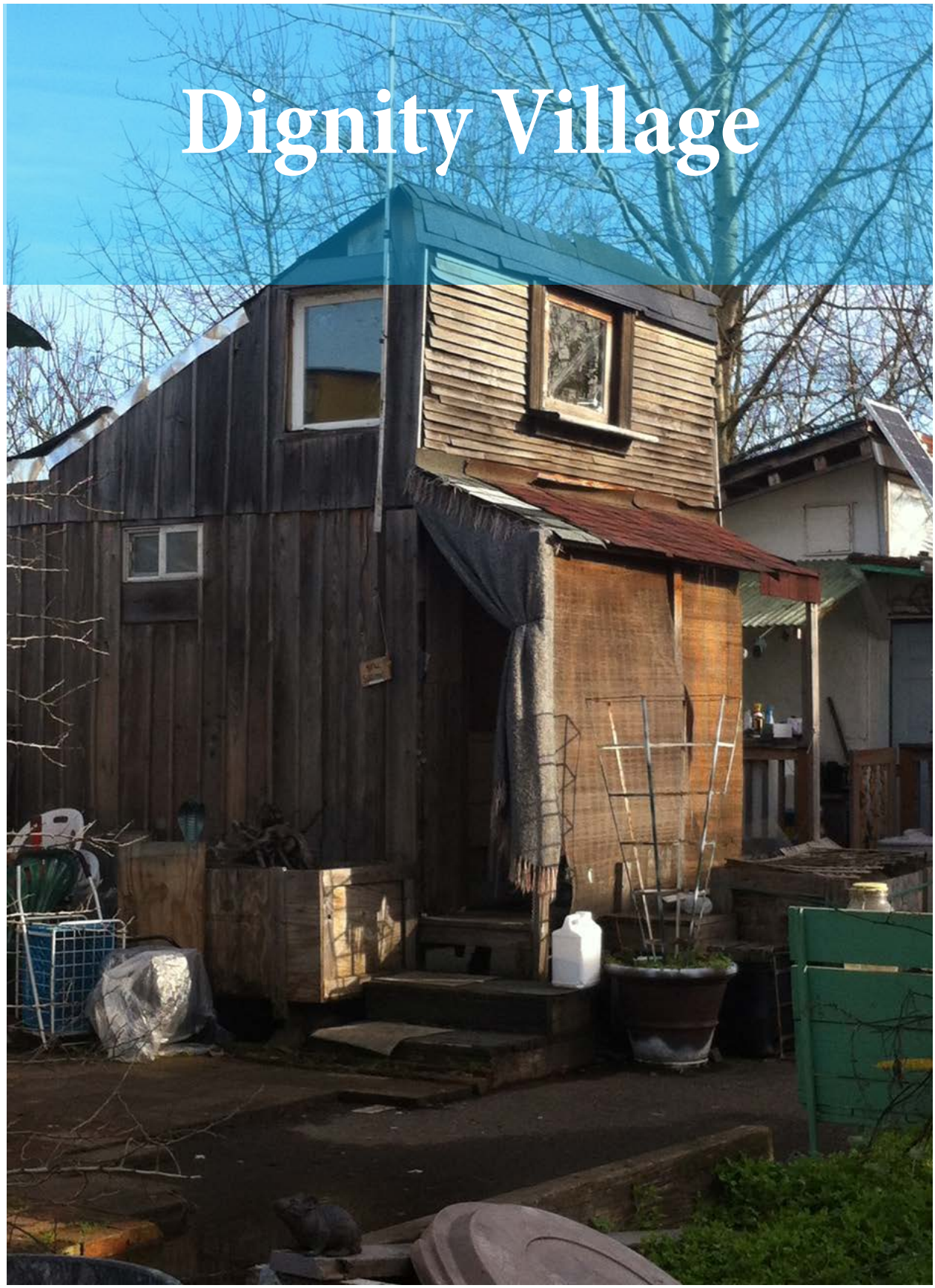
The lack of on-site services or explicit planning for residents' futures provides no impetus for movement beyond the village. Board members would raise the question "well, why would they move when they can stay?" There are a variety of reasons, some that are just bubbling to the surface, and some that remain unforeseen. Conflict, old age, and substance abuse issues are just a few situations that may necessitate a villager's departure. Without the opportunity for meaningful, well-paying employment, residents are dependent upon the village in a way that robs them of their autonomy and limits them to a single choice. Pouring dozens of hours per week into the development and maintenance of the property may give residents marketable skills and local notoriety, but it seems just as likely to give them tunnel vision until the 10 houses are completed or a situation, such as conflict or default on the property, startles them out of their routine. OM Village may choose to not offer social services as part of their package, but they must realize residents who are chronically homeless and currently unemployed are in need of such services if they are to stabilize. For now it is up to private and public entities outside of the village to fulfill that need.

Occupy Madison Village stands as a pronounced example of a private entity providing a public service with private funding. Co-founder Barkoff hopes that once OM Village is completely built and running off of the profits from OMGoods that they'll be able to break ground on another village and then another, until as many homeless Madisonians as possible are housed. As it stands, OM Goods is not profitable enough to support the village's monthly expenses, let alone a reserve for future repairs or development. Board members, through personal financing, have provided the fiscal foundation, but it's up to private supporters to keep the Village going.

The Villages' financial dependence upon donors makes development of the project challenging and raises a number of questions regarding sustainability and scalability: how long will the national fascination with tiny homes continue? How deep are donors' pockets and will they ever ask OM Village to prove their effectiveness? How efficient is it, in the long and short term, for private entities to independently grind towards a solution to a civic issue?

The case of Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon, a 10-year old transitional Tiny House Village for those experiencing homelessness, gives some important insight to this issue and amplifies the challenges and opportunities facing villages, such as Occupy Madison Village, that are new to the scene.

Dignity Village



Dignity Village

NE 33rd and Sunderland, Portland, OR 97211

Google Street View image of Dignity Village's parcel. The village has been built on the northeastern edge of the city of Portland's greenbelt, wedged in between a correctional facility and an active composting plant. It takes two bus transfers and nearly an hour of travel time into the downtown area's social service hub.

It's late January and, as expected, it is cold and rainy in the city of roses. I'm standing at the number 17 bus stop in NW Portland, steps from the majority of the city's homeless services. $2.50, 85 minutes and two busses take me to the city's urban growth boundary where Dignity Village was placed in 2005. Standing at the Village's gate, which is framed by dumpsters, I notice an acrid smell of sour milk and decay from the municipal leaf composting plant next-door. The odor tightens my lungs and irritates my throat. Every four to six minutes a jet flies overhead, rumbling the walls of my chest and drawing my attention upwards. There's a beautiful view of Mt. Hood.

I check in with the villager at the security desk, a big man with deeply calloused hands, a wind-burned face and a thick, white mustache that's yellowed at the edges. He's quiet and shy and shares his sunny spot in the window with two obese black cats that are sleeping on the job.

When Dignity Village's Program Support Specialist[27] takes me on a tour of the village I'm shocked. The Village, composed of 43 raised homes of varying shapes and styles is no longer as bright, clean and colorful as it appears in online videos and pictures. Although the clouds have cleared and the sun is now shining, everything feels heavy and wet and grey. The paint has long chipped away from the recycled wood, the gutters are rusted, duct tape holds up a door frame and on a few of the houses, insulation pokes through the roofs, clearly consumed by the slow creep of black mold. The property is paved and its poor drainage causes large pools of water to form, which the Village's many cats gingerly avoid on their commute from shaded to sunny front porch. There are neatly organized piles of firewood and donated sinks. There are also shopping carts overflowing with cans and, inexplicably, an outdoor coffee table supporting a frozen turkey still wrapped in plastic mesh.

Dignity Village is an intentional Tiny House community established over 10 years ago

27 JOIN, a nonprofit homeless services organization pays the salary of the Village's Program Support Specialist.

Dignity Village is located on a municipal composting site. When the compost is turned, an acrid smell fills the air.

One of Dignity Village's many animals. The Village's rules allow residents to keep their companion animals.

through collaboration with a homeless tent city and the municipality of Portland. This city of 609,456[29] people has a homeless population of nearly 16,000. 74 public and private shelters support the homeless in the Portland-Vancouver metro region, but on any given night over 4,000 Portlanders sleep in the streets, many in the downtown area on the city's west side.

Portland is on its third volley at a 10-year plan to end homelessness. The last attempt, carefully considered and developed, saw stupendous success in its early days; in the first year of the Home Again plan, nearly 700 chronically homeless individuals and 407 families with children were housed.[30] The city and county poured millions of dollars into supportive housing, rent assistance and case management- all part of a bold, housing-first strategy. Then the recession hit and the city shifted into crisis mode, refocusing funding and staff into homelessness prevention. "To the average person," says Sally Erickson, manager of the City of Portland Housing Access and Stabilization department, "there doesn't look like there has been much of a change" or reduction in the homeless population, "but wage stagnation, foreclosures and rising housing prices have been tough for [the city] to combat."

Though they have shelter, occasionally heat, and a community to belong to, the residents of Dignity Village feel the consequences of the recession, deeply. Under their contract with the city manager, which allows Dignity Village to occupy half of the city's leaf composting plant, residents must move out of the village in two years or less unless they hold a key administrative position within the village or are on a list for affordable housing. With a regional unemployment rate higher than the national average[28] and a luxury housing market composing a significant chunk of new housing starts, village residents are resentful and afraid of the con-

28 According to the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Portland-Vancouver metro region has an unemployment rate of 6.1%, at time of writing national unemployment was at 5% as reported by the same source.

sequences to the city's intervention. At a minimum wage of $9.25—around $1,480 per month—and an average rent of $1,160, it is extremely unlikely that most Dignity Village residents, more than 60% of whom are chronically unemployed, will be able to make enough money to scrounge together first month's rent, last month's rent and a security deposit let alone pay for monthly rent, utilities, transportation, and more. In reality few do, 70% of villagers who left the village between 2008 and 2009 returned to homelessness, 34% of which were asked to leave due to rule violations.[31] While the number who return to homeless may seem, and in fact is, startling, 70% is far from the only sum that defines the success of or challenges to the village. Conversations with founders, residents, municipal officials and assisting nonprofits reveal a complicated and nuanced look into the 60 residents and 43 tiny buildings that make up Dignity Village.

Between November of 2014 and March of 2015 I conducted 12 interviews, in person and by phone, with 11 Village residents, caseworkers, religious institution representatives, and municipal officials. Due to Dignity Village's long and complex history, it was difficult to find people who were directly involved in the founding and development of the village. With the exception of two interviewees who were involved from the Village's founding as a tent city, most interviews took place with individuals who had become involved over the past 2-6 years. Several early stakeholders have sour relationships with the Village or municipality and were unwilling to speak on record. Current Dignity Village residents, however, were eager to speak with me and show me the positive and negative aspects of their community. Many spoke of feeling ignored by the city and the greater Portland community and were happy to speak with an outside party. After a rash of media attention in the early years of it's founding, Dignity Village has all but dropped off of the internet. Their website is down, their Facebook presence is stagnant and few news stories appear in traditional or online media after 2010. Beyond interviews, further study was completed through the analysis of secondary sources, such as city council meeting minutes, municipal reports, and documents produced by Dignity Village to meet city compliance regulations.

Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon is the oldest tiny village in the country. It emerged as a transient tent city in December of 2000 on a parcel of vacant city land underneath a downtown bridge. In 2004 Dignity Village was designated by the City of Portland as a self-governing transitional housing community. When it came time to site the village, the city began to search for public and privately owned locations that would be accessible, secluded and palatable to neighbors skeptical of living so close to the chronically homeless. Eventually the village was allowed to erect tents and temporary, moveable structures on a paved section of the city's municipal leaf composting plant and to connect the village's single shower and trough-sink to the city's water and sewage systems.

The site, which rests along Portland's northeastern growth boundary, is 9 miles away from the majority of food banks, social services and homeless support networks available in the

Visitors check into the main office at Dignity Village

city. Dignity Village's physical distance from resources exposes a complex problem; the village isn't as close to social services as it needs to be, and Portland's social services aren't as mobile as they need to be. With nearly 16,000 homeless individuals without a space to call their own living in the Portland-Vancouver metro area, the expectation that a single, centralized location for service provision will reach all who need it is unattainable[29]. The city realizes this and looking to integrate innovative models of social service provision into traditional municipal roles. Shannon Singleton, the city's new contract manager with Dignity Village, is also a social worker with over 14 years of direct service experience in homeless services and street outreach. Instead of taking on a role as solely a municipal authority, Singleton splits her time between partnership and advocacy, supporting village members, sharing resources with the group and engaging board members in systems-level conversations. She embodies "planner as activist," and sees her role as facilitating a space for stabilization and a grassroots effort to change the status quo of homelessness in Portland. Through this role, she not only helps to manage Dignity Village's compliance to their municipal contract, but also has actively begun encouraging villagers to participate in the social and political process as Portland makes another pass at ending homelessness. She is attempting to sew the seeds of self-advocacy that were shaken loose during

29 The highest concentration of social service providers is in NW Portland, which abuts some of the highest-priced real estate in the city. While the neighborhood is very well serviced by public transportation, the $5.00 round trip transit fees and city sprawl provide a notable barrier to access.

the Great Recession.

The villagers, initially skeptical of their new contract manager's style, are warming to the idea of self-advocacy and are beginning to see themselves, ever so slowly, as participants in a city that has left them behind once the media attention died down. How is it that a group loud and well-organized enough as to found the first Tiny House Village in the United States, has stagnated and allowed their buildings to decay? How is it that three years after achieving municipal approval to install toilets, overflowing port-a-potties and constant flooding define their sanitation experience? After a successful launch, what, 10 years later, has the village done well, where has the village gone wrong and where do they go from here?

"The People Aquarium." Diginity Village's only indoor common space. Inside there is a hotplate, several couches and a bigscreen T.V.

Who Comes? Who Stays? Who Goes?

It's 11am on a Wednesday when I walk into the "People Aquarium," Dignity Village's common space. Spike Lee's Do the Right Thing is quietly playing on the big-screen T.V., and the villagers are starting to stir- making coffee on the electric hotplates and eating cereal dry, straight out of the bag. In the corner is Duke,[30] bundled against the Pacific Northwest's humid cold in a bright red jacket and a black and white knit cap. His dark, curly beard is patchy and unkempt and he wears a red eye patch covered in packaging tape. He's playing an online computer game on a laptop onto which he's duct taped a full size keyboard. He's the first to agree to an interview and also the only African American person I would see or speak to during my visits. Portland's population is only 6% African American, but they make up 18% of the city's homeless population.[32] Only 1% of Dignity Villagers are African American.

Duke's immediate complaint, echoed by every villager I would speak with, is the location of the village. If you catch your transfers, it's a weekday, and the busses are running on schedule, your best time to downtown is about 55 minutes.[31] Deviate from the schedule or dare

30 This resident's name has been changes to protect his privacy.

31 During my stay in Portland I made four trips to and from Dignity Village by public transportation. The

to travel on a weekend and you're stuck walking or cycling, without sidewalks or bike lanes, through light industry, nine miles towards the city.

"It is not a good idea to be so far from the city center. It takes forever to get places and get back to Portland. This bus here… it shuts down early on Saturdays and Sundays and on Sundays it doesn't start until 10[am]. So if you have to get out there for help or your job, you can't get out until 10[am]. For those who have work it really sucks."

-Duke, Dignity Village Resident

While some residents reported a sense of peace and calm in being located so far from the chaos, commotion and temptation of the city, others spoke less favorably. A woman, Linda,[32] was quick to remind me of the poor weather in Portland and the boredom that can arise when one is stuck in under 100 ft^2 or a small common area stuffed with musty, aging couches and dozens of other people. She attributes that boredom to some of the substance relapses that her neighbors have suffered. Drugs such as marijuana and meth, although against the rules, still, occasionally, find their way into the community.

Beyond the boredom that may come from being so far removed from the city, what does it say when a population who is traditionally forgotten[33] is literally cast to the edges of the city where the cold winds howl, noise and air pollution from the city's airport rain down and smells from the bi-weekly turning of municipal compost seep through plywood walls? "People just overlook us out here," reflected Duke, "when they hear and you talk about Dignity Village, they think we're lazy, but that's not the reason we're in this situation. Make sure people know that."

After my interview with Duke I wandered over to the village's office, it's a tiny, wooden trailer, home to two computers and the workspace of Evelyn, the Village treasurer. In addition to $35 per month in rent, villagers must also give 10 hours of their time each week to maintaining the village. This time can be spent cleaning the common areas, manning the security desk, serving on the resident-elected board, participating in one of the Village's micro businesses such as firewood collection or hot dog carts or managing the village's operations. "Timecards" are submitted on scraps of paper to another village resident called "the bean counter" who tallies and records work hours. Evelyn,[34] an overweight woman in her late 50's with short blonde hair and green eyes, handles the finances for Dignity Village as part of her time contribution.

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longest trip was 103 minutes, the shortest 57.

32 This resident's name has been changes to protect her privacy.

33 A 2006 study by Harris and Fiske, "Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low" found that when showed images of people who appeared to be homeless, participant's medial prefrontal cortexes remained inactivated, a similar response to viewing pieces of furniture.

34 This resident's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

She worked at the same firm for over 10 years doing the books in a department of three. When the recession hit, Evelyn recalled, "we started losing contracts, they had to cut a person in each department. I was the old unhealthy one. I had seniority over everyone and I thought I was going to retire from there! I lost my unemployment, lost my unemployment extensions and then I couldn't pay my rent…I moved into my car. I used up all of my retirement. I applied to over 1,000 jobs in the past 3 years. Jobs would call me and say 'your resume is great!' and when I'd go in for an interview, they'd see me and I'd never hear from them again."

Sitting faithfully by Evelyn's side is a beautiful speckled dog with a red bandana around her neck and a deep grey settling into her aging snout. "When I was living in my car," Evelyn recounted, "I always had one eye open, even with my dog by my side." In a traditional shelter, Evelyn would have to give up her companion. Dignity Village's policy allows residents to keep their pets as long as they are well behaved and neutered or spayed,[35] recognizing the importance of nontraditional families and the support that animals can give to their humans.

Dignity Village also provides a flexible space for individuals or adult families that may not fall neatly into the categories defined by traditional shelters. Shelters are heavily gendered spaces and the ways in which they categorize and record information about those that they help, often fall along a strict age and gender binary. Those receiving services are recorded as single men, single women or families with children. As such, childless homosexual, heterosexual and polyamorous couples are frequently separated or placed in challenging positions where one partner is allowed a shelter spot and the other is not. Additionally, if a person's identity defies the traditional gender binary, they face further challenges to receiving help. For example, a transgendered or queer individual may identify and present as a particular gender but their sex-at-birth may ultimately dominate which services they receive and where they can sleep, eat, bathe and use the toilet.

Because the tiny homes in Dignity Village are private, they can accommodate all types of individuals and families regardless of their level of filial or gender conformity. In this way, the tiny house village provides a high level of dignity and support; when at their most vulnerable, villagers are able to skip the sensitive and sometimes dangerous step of explaining or defending their personal identity.

35 A local animal shelter provides free neutering and spaying to the villages many owned and stray animals. A resident is in charge of managing the village's pet population.

Village Life and Operations

Many of my Dignity Village interviews took place in the village's on-site administrative trailer. As villagers streamed in and out, some with official business, others looking to observe or join in on the rapidly swelling group crammed into the 250 ft^2, there was a deafening roar overhead that tightened the muscles of my chest and reduced the room to silence. Every 6 minutes between the hours of 12pm and 2pm the entire village stopped talking- the jets overhead were too loud. While I was shaken and startled by the noise, residents used the pause to absent-mindedly wipe down dusty surfaces with their sleeve or retie loose shoelaces. At the edge of the city's growth boundary, Dignity Village is less than one mile, as the crow flies, from Portland International Airport.

Rushing around the tiny perimeter of the office is Jack, a strong-jawed shale gas worker from the Dakotas who has lived in the village since the previous summer. His clean grey shirt is tucked into crisp jeans and when he talks he does so quietly but firmly, hiding his dark eyes with

These three port-a-poties provide the only human waste collection at dignity village. The units cost $900 per month to empty and are often dirty.

The donation center collects, among other items, supplies that can be used by residents to make repairs to their homes.

the brim of a faded baseball cap. He's in his late 30's but moves his body with the shyness of a boy half his age. He's obviously a fixer, finding an innovative way to repair a broken desk drawer with a can of compressed air and a rubber band, and is very concerned about the office's clutter.

Jack works part time as a pipe layer in Portland. He came to Dignity Village after hearing about it from his brother, an alcoholic who is also homeless. Until his name came up on the Village's housing waitlist, Jack camped out in a nearby national forest. He moved to Oregon in search of better health care - he has a disease or illness that he won't readily disclose, but it requires a treatment that will knock out his immune system. Because of that, doctors refuse to give him his treatment until he has a stable and sanitary place to live. The three port-a-potties outside that constitute the Village's only toilets concern his doctors, and until he moves, he'll remain sick: "I'm on housing lists. Because I'm sick, I've been moved up the list, but it's still gonna be two years. I gotta find a place to live on my own- if I have to wait for two years to get the treatment, I won't be here to receive it."

The most pressing environmental health issues for all residents are the village's proximity to the composting facility, the use of three port-a-potties for anywhere between 30 and 60 residents and visitors, and the constant flooding and subsequent mold caused by poor storm

Dignity Village's sole shower sits pertched upon a platform. More than 60 people at a time rely on the propane heated shower.

water management.

Because the composting facility, and the city, eventually expect the land back, Dignity Villagers are limited in the type and degree of modifications they can make to the property. The entire village is paved with an impermeable blacktop that causes flooding during Portland's 154 annual days of rain. Generally, black mold is cause for concern for all Oregonians. During the four years I lived there in the early 2000's, any wet, poorly ventilated space would quickly see black mold spread across bathroom grout, door jambs and any exposed sheetrock. These homes, built by residents and volunteers are at no less of a risk than any house in the city of Portland and rely on the vigilance of a constantly rotating roster of residents to keep their homes healthy.

One challenge is that residents, regardless of their ability, must complete any repairs or improvements to the tiny homes themselves, although they may ask for help from others. The Village collects donated materials, but sometimes they're insufficient or unusable. "My house is very cold. There was a little bit of insulation in the donation center, so I thought I could insu-

Stacks of firewood near the Village office. Firewood collection is one of many microenterprises run by residents.

late my house, but [the insulation] was rat infested, so I couldn't use it. My house doesn't have sheetrock, so I need to buy that, but I haven't been able to afford it," shrugged Evelyn. Jack chimed in, incredulously: "Oh! I was able to find sheetrock on Craigslist for 38 bucks!" Some houses are extremely well maintained, neat and tightly closed off to the elements; it is easy to see, as you walk around the property, which tiny homes house residents who are comfortable with a hammer and which ones see a lot of novice turnover.

All of the residents I spoke with complained of the mildew in their units, "part of that is the propane," explained Henry, a member of the resident council "the infrared catalyst propane burners that we use to heat the units, the product is water. It's clean, fume free, but the byproduct is that it creates a lot of water in a sealed environment." Not all of the units have propane heaters, and not all residents can afford to refill the tanks, which at a use of two to four hours per day can run around $50 per month for heating. Because of the Pacific Northwest's humid cold, without consistent heating, cloth and paper tend to become damp and quickly mildew, a smell that is subtly constant across the village.

The port-a-potties were at the top of all interviewed residents' complaints about the village's infrastructure. While Portland's winters rarely approach freezing, the air is perpetually saturated with water, and that humid cold is relentless in how it sneaks under the thickest sweat-

ers and gloves, provoking a deep and bitter chill. Each time residents need to use the facilities, they must travel across the village, past other residents' homes and through flooded swaths of pavement. Occasionally the port-a-potties are overflowing, or there's urine or feces present on the seat, floor and plastic lock. Evelyn smiles and shakes a large can of Lysol at me, "I never go in *there* without *this*!"

Bathing is also a public affair. Suspended on a 4 foot high platform in the back center of the lot is the village's single, propane-heated shower, which draws water from a giant, suspended plastic tank. "About 60 people here are all using the same shower," says Duke, "you have to wait until someone finishes and then after that person goes, you go in and then you have to wait. If its open, you get in there, otherwise you don't shower." There is no sign-in system or codified limit to showering times, so your wait, in the rain, is somewhat unpredictable.

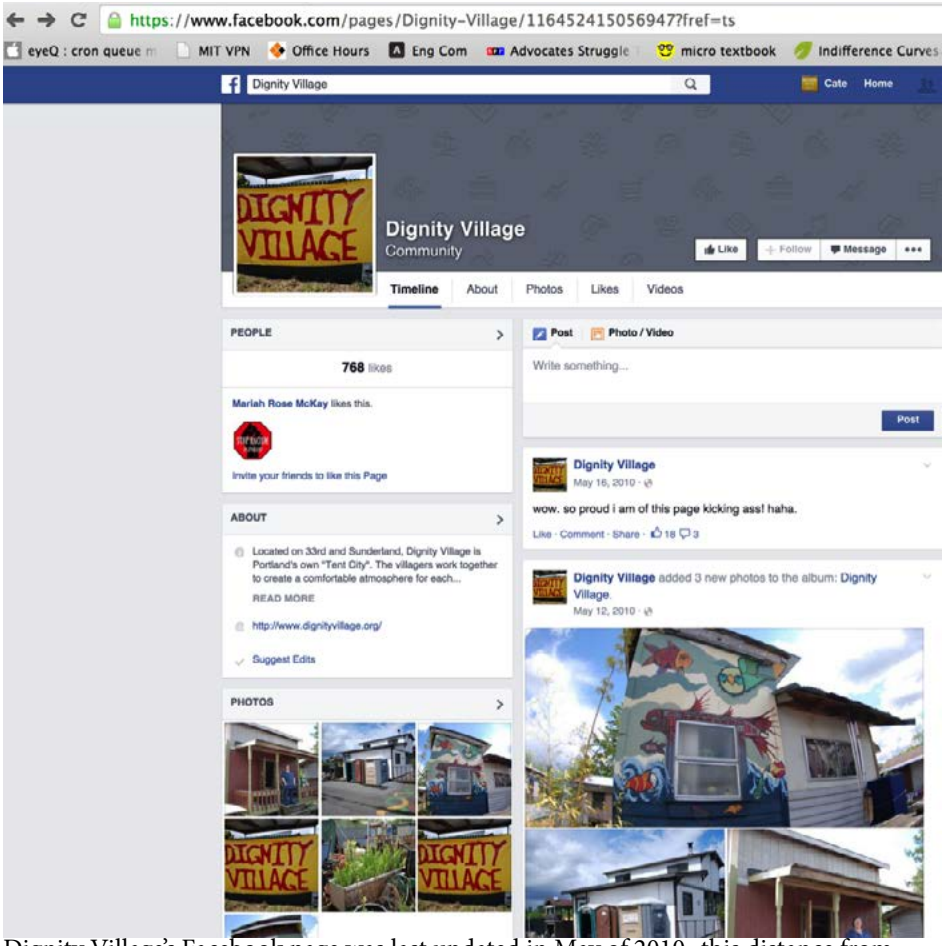
The city, long ago, approved a building permit for Dignity Village to connect to the city's sanitation system. For over three years the city has urged Dignity Village to move forward on the project, but high turnover, a recent problem with embezzlement by a community elected official and mercurial attitudes towards the city's involvement have stalled the project. The resident-led council manages all major and minor decisions within the village from fundraising to volunteer coordination to handling incident reports[36]. A lack of accountability and expertise has impacted the ability of the village to grow and develop with its population.

Henry,[37] a disabled former ship worker who currently serves as head of the Village's resident council, is a huge and intimidating, man. With his broad shoulders, aloof disposition and giant, white and yellow beard, he reminds me of a bear. He growls out jokes, orders, and questions in identical cadence to whomever he pleases and exudes the type of authority that can only come from 15 years of involvement with Dignity Village. He's the first to critique the village and the first to defend it. "We need outsiders on the board," Henry explains to me. Currently, the board keeps with its founding as an intentional community, self-governed by homeless residents. "More than one time," Henry continues, " money has been [long pause] mishandled. We need someone to collect the money, take it out of the village and pay the bills with it. But [the city] told us this would need to be paid position with a monthly wage and stuff. We don't have the money for that."

Aside from the land, Dignity Village is almost entirely self-sustaining. The Village collects $35 in rent per person per month and uses a variety of microenterprises such as food carts and firewood collection to pay common utility fees such as electricity, liability insurance and Internet. Two major costs for the village are their storm water and sanitation fees. The portable toilets

36 If a resident has a complaint against another resident, they fill out an incident report which is read by the board. The board then rules on the veracity of the complaint and, if necessary, doles out a punishment. Punishments range from extra hours to a night out on the street.

37 This resident's name has been changed to protect his privacy.



Dignity Village's Facebook page was last updated in May of 2010- this distance from social networking sites limits Dignity Village's mobilization and fundraising opportunities.

cost over $900 per month, and because Portland charges storm water drainage fees per cubic foot of impermeable surface, the village pays an average of $668 per month on sewage and storm water fees. The Village is working to install water catchment systems across the property, but progress is slow and the blacktop is vast.

The installation of a shower and toilet connected to Portland's sewage system would improve sanitation conditions and lower the Village's long-term sanitation costs, but requires a tremendous up-front investment of $15,000. The city, in its most recent evaluation of the village, expressed a willingness to front the village the money for sanitation facilities and use the $900 per month in portable toilet rental fees to pay off the cost over time.

Dignity Village is extremely cost-effective for the city of Portland. The city provides a parcel of land at a cost of next to nothing, in return, the Village shelters 60 residents, and occasionally more when weather is severe, at a cost per bed per night that is 1/3 the cost of Portland's cheapest shelter option.

The Village also provides a strong sense of community that would not be possible in a traditional shelter. Because there is no limit to the hours that villagers can spend on-site, strong and supportive relationships form via time and proximity. These friendships can help people struggling with depression, anxiety and addiction. Several villagers told of a recent evening where a resident came back from downtown high on a stimulant, yelling and screaming and attempting to trash the front area. Residents came out of their homes to make sure that person was alright and took voluntary shifts caring for that person and keeping them safe until they had come down off of their high. Villagers will check in on ill residents, bringing them food, medicine and toiletries. They will cover for each other's shifts in the Village and will wake neighbors up if they have a job interview or other important appointments.

About 75% of Village residents have some kind of monthly income from either work or benefits; about 31% have part or full time jobs. Residents' care for one another doesn't stop with their time, but extends to their money. Those with incomes frequently cover the rent and electronic charging fees, $1 per device, for those without. While the microenterprises started by villagers provide income to the Village, workers may not receive a salary or stipend from these side businesses. In their work selling firewood and hotdogs, organizing drop-off schedules and combing through municipal regulations, residents gain valuable experience in service, sales, management and organization. However, they lack the much-needed income to be able to stabilize and find their own apartments before their two-year stay is up.

Connecting to the world outside of Dignity Village is a major barrier. If an individual or organization wanted to donate money, materials or time, they would be unable to do so unless they personally knew the villagers or scoured the internet for hints. There is no posted address—online sources direct visitors to N 33rd and Sunderland— and the village is in such an isolated location that you'd never see it on a drive into or around the city. While there is a telephone, wireless Internet and several public and privately owned computers in the Village, the community is isolated from the wider Internet. Their website is down, their last Facebook post was on May 16, 2010, and there is no active attempt to utilize social media or crowd funding to financially, socially or politically support the village.

In the analog world, a major critique that comes from residents and municipal officials alike is that Dignity Village, as an entity, has done little to build or maintain relationships with charities, social service providers and volunteers. Generally, the homeless already have weak ties to sources of capital, education, job training and social support. Occupy Madison in Wisconsin, and Opportunity Village in Eugene recognize this- a keystone of their model is to connect villagers with housed residents in the larger community to encourage connectivity and support outside the traditional homeless services circuit. The vision is to spread out the burden of need beyond the individuals that are already deeply involved in service provision and to form con-

Dignity Village homes.

nections within the local community. When those connections are formed, a stronger current of information about apartments, job openings and myriad opportunities can flow between those with means and those without. Dignity Village's completely self-governing model limits their interactions to the government and a handful of local service providers missing out on opportunities to plug into the city's private spheres. Dignity Village could benefit from the connections intentionally forged in Occupy Madison and Opportunity Village, but with a completely self-run community, how are villagers to reach out to those in Portland? What is a strategy for building and maintaining connections with such a high turnover rate?

The city blames Dignity Village's lack of connectivity on inconsistent communication and the absence of a larger, village-wide strategy. Residents blame their disconnectedness on the city's mandate that the Village remain a transitional community. How can donor relationships and institutional knowledge be maintained, they ask, if people are forced to move on after two years? How can relationships with the greater Portland area form if village residents are cast to the outskirts of the city and are still struggling to meet their most basic needs?

The time limit for residents [38] creates a challenge to the Village's growth and sustainability that should not be underestimated. Residents begin their tenure at the Village with the knowl-

38 Villagers may stay for longer than two years if they are already on housing wait lists or if they hold administrative positions within the village that are proven to be vital to the village's functioning.

edge that they will shortly be forced to return to a city with low vacancy, a mediocre public transit network, and a stagnant market for low-skill labor. They have two years to stabilize themselves and then they have to go. Without the ability to envision a *future* within the village, how can residents create a *vision* for the village? The frequent turnover creates a freedom to reinvent the community and root out dysfunction, but also provides regular opportunities for positive projects and traditions to be derailed or overturned.

The city argues that the quality of life and housing in the village is not high enough that Portlanders should envision a long-term future for themselves at the site. The ultimate goal, multiple officials expressed, is to get Villagers stabilized, healthy and integrated into high quality housing. For their part, Dignity Villagers have done little to develop strict or codified systems of organization or development since the Village's founding. During weekly community meetings, villagers rely heavily on oral tradition to frame their understanding of village culture and to settle disputes between residents. While this oral tradition is powerful, it does complicate efforts to understand and build off of the Village's history by imbuing a few individuals with a heightened responsibility and authority.

To help the Village formalize its processes and provide more traditional forms of stabilization support, several part-time workers help Villagers record their knowledge and receive services. A partnership between the city of Portland and JOIN, a non-profit that supports those transitioning out of homelessness, has provided the village with an on-site Program Support Specialist. The position primarily provides organizational support, helping to ensure that the village accurately collects and submits demographic reports to the city. Additionally it connects villagers with disability entitlements, Oregon health insurance, food stamps, unemployment, and

Dignity Village is sited between a correctional institution and a composting facility.

A tiny home in Dignity Village. Duct tape holds up the door frame.

helps them to explore their options in regards to joining housing lists.

Governance

The resident council, which can be up to 25 elected members, but currently is at 7, is composed of a chair, vice chair, treasurer, secretary and supporting councilors. When a potential resident's name comes up on the wait list, the Village Intake Committee evaluates that person in an effort to determine if they're a good fit for the community.

New residents are guided and mentored by personally assigned committee members. "I was breaking the rules all the time when I first came, its kind of hard at first," reflected Wendy[39], a resident of four months, "but the [intake] committee helped me and now I know what to do." If residents continue to make mistakes or cause trouble beyond their probationary period in the Village, the resident council collects witness statements, holds court and doles out consequences. While one resident expressed that the council is quite fair in dealing with serious incidents—keeping in mind individual's personalities and situations before making a ruling—both residents and non-resident officials involved with the Village cite the dispute resolution proceedings as prone to frivolity and retaliation: " I've been brought to the council over forgetting to return a pen!" recalled one resident of six months, "I was brought to council over forgetting to return the same pen he forgot to return to the same women" recalled a resident of nine months.

If a resident perceives that a neighbor has done something wrong, or an argument breaks out, the council addresses it through the incident report system. In the name of equity, all incident reports are investigated and addressed, which causes some low-level or frivolous accusations to draw on the Village's resources. Some Villagers and non-resident officials have witnessed the incident report system being used as a retaliatory tool for personal grudges.

Like Occupy Madison, Dignity Village's conflicts are quickly made public and the consequences can range from returning stolen possessions to being expelled from the village. Unlike Occupy Madison, all conflicts are resolved entirely by residents with no oversight by a group or individual not involved in the day-to-day tensions that come with tiny village living. By comparison, in Madison's OM Village, I witnessed one resident bring up a fairly serious complaint against their neighbor to a non-resident board member; through a quick series of questions and a few minutes spent working with the resident to see the conflict through another perspective, the need for the board to intervene was eliminated. Within Dignity Village there are few opportunities to find true objectivity or solve conflict outside of the council. Biases during decision-making processes can cause rifts and factions to form, undermining the goals of collective living.

Drugs are another challenge. While Dignity Village has a zero-tolerance drug policy to comply with their contract with the city, conversations with some residents revealed that the main concern is that those using drugs "handle their high." Individuals quickly understand that

39 This resident's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

the rules are occasionally treated as guidelines and that if they minimize the harm they do to others, they can count on the empathy of the group.

"Despite the best intentions, there can be people that bring in drugs that sort of look the other way. I guess on a foundational level, the village makes exceptions to all of its rules. Their reasoning for doing so is 'I cant do that to you because that seems mean'. 'You've been here three nights, we need to kick you out but it is cold out so you can stay.' They don't stick to what they've said. The flip side and barrier to change is that people think 'we've always done it this way, so lets continue'."

-Katie Mays, Program Support Specialist.

While there is no data to evaluate how this attitude towards drug use and rule enforcement has impacted the village, one can reflect upon the results of the zero-tolerance national War on Drugs and understand that perhaps empathy and flexibility around substance addiction may not cause the Village to crumble to the ground.

Turnover is another stumbling block for the council. While detailed minutes are taken at every meeting, little in the way of a searchable history exists surrounding Dignity Village's policies and procedures. Many of the council's decisions are made by consulting with older members of the Village and asking how they remember a certain type of conflict being handled in the past. As residents transition out of the Village they take that knowledge with them, further concentrating resident impact by length of tenure.

Dignity Village's location is responsible for a lack of a NIMBY battle; during placement, the municipality intentionally avoided spaces where the village would have neighbors. A self-governed tiny house village for the homeless was an unprecedented idea for both the city and for the country and the municipality was compelled to set the site aside, at least until it proved itself safe and competent. Because of its distance from much of city life, there are few active adversaries. All interviewees, however, pointed a finger at one major opponent to the Village: internal apathy. Across interviews, residents and non-residents alike pointed to apathy to explain everything from lax enforcement of the anti-drug and alcohol use policy, to why the homes are in such poor condition. This characterization of apathy is unfair. In all of the conversations I had with residents, they were eager to show the ways in which they contribute to their community and were delighted to paint a verbal portrait of how they would change the Village if given dictatorial reign.

Because villagers must handle everything from rule enforcement, to finances, to maintenance and repairs to community building entirely on their own, their collective plates are full. Most individuals seeking to stabilize in traditional facilities must only consider themselves and

their immediate social networks; they must focus on finding work, applying for social services, healing from mental or physical health issues or traumas, navigating their next steps, repairing relationships with friends and family and so much more. Dignity Villagers must do all of that and consider the complicated web of interpersonal relationships that spring up an in intentional co-living arrangement. Additionally, they must engage in types of physical or mental labor, such as home repairs, industrial cleaning, security, bookkeeping and rule forming which may be unfamiliar or difficult for them. Cooperative boards composed of middle-class, educated tenants are also known to occasionally struggle with rules, finances, relationships and long-term planning; when crippling poverty is added to the equation, the task of staying afloat, let alone thriving, is made that much more difficult.

Several Dignity Village residents expressed frustration with people in the village who "want everything handed to them" and as a result, move into their homes and never make improvements or repairs. One must consider, however, are those individuals financially and physically able to make those repairs? Are they overwhelmed by other factors in their life that may keep them from reaching out for help? And ultimately, from the perspective of a villager, does it make sense to pour limited personal resources into upgrading a building that you must leave in two years? My perception is that it is less apathy than it is a sense of being overwhelmed.

Dignity Village can celebrate some major successes. The social support provided to villagers by villagers in a safe and stable environment is invaluable and difficult to find across most types of traditional housing or service provision. More than 1 in 4 Americans suffer from chronic loneliness, and the homeless, culturally isolated from countless institutions and opportunities for community engagement are also likely to feel alone. Participating in meaningful work to develop and maintain a village forces individuals to interact with others who are facing the same challenges; these interactions create positive social networks and opportunities for support. Additionally, while most traditional homeless shelters have strict rules regarding the hours that residents can spend on the property, the freedom and flexibility of Dignity Village's policies ensure that residents are respected as adults to make their own decisions and organize their own schedules. If someone is sick, they can stay home and rest in bed. If they must work the night shift or naturally keep irregular hours, they're trusted to do what is right for them. This is a huge step away from the paternalistic and infantilizing structure of traditional service provision that demands residents either adhere to a predetermined and inflexible schedule or forfeit their right to a bed.

A large contributor to the village's ability to maintain a robust independence is the low cost of maintaining the village. The average new affordable studio or one-bedroom housing start costs around $250,000 and requires a long and complex development and underwriting process. Tiny houses can be built starting at $3,000 for a basic structure. Additionally the low cost

and mobility of the structures allows developers to temporarily take advantage of underutilized spaces. At the end of the land's tenure— in DV's case, when the composting facility requests its land back—the city and the village can explore other placement options using the same structures.

Dignity Village's housing quality does leave something to be desired, but other communities— such as Quixote Village, which built 30 high quality tiny cottages using government contractors for around $18,000 per home— show that high quality housing can be built on a budget. Comparing this to the tens of thousands of dollars spent annually to provide legal and medical services to the chronically homeless, tiny house villages are an extremely cost effective means of stabilizing the homeless and reducing municipal costs.

Despite all of its successes, it is important to recognize the challenge to the sustainability and scalability of Dignity Village. There are huge, under-considered physical and mental health consequences to the location of the village, which is more than an hour from the majority of Portland's jobs and social services. The constant noise and air pollution from the nearby airport, exposure to fumes from the adjoining composting site, flooding and subsequent molding from poor storm water management and exposure to pathogens and human waste from an inadequate and public sanitation system echo a centuries long tradition of shunting the poor into the most dangerous and least desirable spaces on earth. Allowing humans to live on the periphery of the city, in such close proximity to pollutants and then juxtaposing their placement as an improvement to sleeping on the streets is unfair and unethical. The village undoubtedly provides greater dignity, safety and autonomy than sleeping on the streets, but it simultaneously reinforces society's message that the poor are less than and deserving of exclusion.

While the city chose the initial site, villagers do have some responsibility for protesting their current placement. However, due to their already marginalized status, an intersectional collaboration between the homeless and other individuals or groups is vital to fighting for better living conditions. Dignity Village's lack of interaction with groups and individuals outside of the traditional homeless services sector limits the ability of residents to organize and seek help to fill their gaps in capacity. Their poor connectivity to traditional and social media effectively silences them in a world that can't stop talking.

Dignity Village's raised vegetable beds. Villagers grow organic vegetables for sale in Portland.

Conclusion

The data is clear that housing the homeless can save municipalities tens of thousands of dollars per person per year in medical, legal, and social service expenses. Instead of engaging municipalities in the construction of tiny house villages or organizing for radical and substantial adjustments to a grossly unfair housing system, well-meaning Tiny House groups have tried to exploit loopholes in restrictive zoning regulations and harness social momentum around a modern novelty. This is all in hopes of moving the deeply poor into housing conditions that were outlawed on the tail end of tenement reform.

Tiny House Villages appear radical because of the ironclad methods of zoning and land-ownership that restrict our urban environments and encourage the building of expensive units and the maximization of space. While homelessness is primarily a civic concern, tiny house villages currently, for better or for worse, shift the issue onto the hands of private citizens.

There are innumerable reasons to support or oppose the construction of tiny house villages for the homeless, but if executed correctly, tiny homes can be part of a strong and progressive strategy to shelter and stabilize. The gaping chasm between the demand for affordable housing and what the private and public sectors are willing to provide generates the space for creative intervention. If a tiny house village's siting plans, financing, sanitation, building codes and governance are wisely developed with an ear towards equity, tiny house villages can be folded into mainstream service provision as part of a larger anti-homelessness strategy.

Understanding the Benefits and Drawbacks to Tiny Homes

Choosing to house the homeless in tiny villages approaches the issue of homeless service provision using the most minimal support and infrastructure possible. Sharing port-a-potties and living in volunteer-built homes that would violate building codes were they to ever touch the ground sends the message that the community is willing to offer only the most basic of services to those in need. Living in a home the size of a parking spot provides greater safety and dignity than sleeping in a park, doorway, or standard shelter, but the larger message to those experiencing homelessness is that they have no place within the normative structure of our society and no choice in how and where to live. They are entitled to the crumbs, only if and when they show enough initiative and fortitude to peak the interest of donors.

Tiny house villages for the homeless have numerous faults in their current incarnation that make them inappropriate for long-term habitation. They do, however, have several strengths that are difficult to achieve in traditional forms of housing and that are well suited to transitional housing.

The villages provide a supportive place for those experiencing homelessness to congregate, build relationships, and solidify their support networks. In traditional shelters, residents must adhere to strict rules, are unable to stay on the property during the day and lack a safe space to store their possessions. Standard apartment buildings often have an absence of attractive social spaces in which to gather and residents may remain isolated from one another.

Additionally, tiny house villages provide an attractive and transparent means of charity and volunteerism for those interested in getting involved with issues of homelessness. Unlike financial donations to traditional service providers, where it is not always clear exactly where one's money is going, the tiny house village allows volunteers to pound nails, buy insulation and directly contribute to the wellbeing of another individual with little ambiguity as to their immediate impact.

Tiny House Villages shift a civic responsibility, for better or for worse, into the hands of the private sector and into the hands of the homeless, themselves. While the homeless may be capable of solving this civic issue through hard work, determination and a hammer, it is important to question the societal conditions that encourage the poverty, drug abuse, mental illness and isolation that lead to homelessness. It is also vital to question the restrictive systems that keep the homeless from climbing out of poverty. Tiny house villages provide shelter for the poor, but they also provide a conduit for discussion and political action and should be used as such.

Dignity Village homes.

Financing

The largest threat to the long-term sustainability of these homes, once established, is financing. 80% of tiny house villages for the homeless are built on public land and 60% finance their construction and operations solely through donations. While the private market for tiny homes is strong and growing, with cities across the nation approving the development of micro-units, it is unclear how long the cultural fascination with tiny homes will last. If this is, indeed, a cultural fad, the petite cottages may one day fail to inspire the generosity of donors any more than standard homeless service providers. Additionally, tiny house villages benefit from their novelty. If micro-units swing to the other side of the spectrum, and become mainstream, how will this change impact donorship? Tiny house villages must establish flexible and consistent methods for raising capital either through municipal partnerships, rents or grants, to supplement their crowdfunding.

Currently, the tiny house villages who seek donations have been quite successful. The low cost to build and immediate effects, charm donors across the world. A unique feature of the tiny house village is its ability to act as a Rorschach test for individuals' own systems of political belief and thus reach out to a wider spectrum of donors. Tiny house villages for the homeless captivate thousands because of what the villages represent. Some may see the project as an obvious libertarian response to an ineffective government, others see the clusters of tiny homes as successful examples of communist co-housing- everyone and no one is correct. Even within the village, organizers harbor diametrically opposed philosophies about the space they have collaboratively built. While some board members of Occupy Madison are quick to dismiss the vision of tiny house villages as socialist utopias, others find it impossible to envision the villages as anything but. Like an M.C. Escher print, the viewer can enter from any perspective and be correct.

The power of the Tiny House Village has much to do with its ability to provide the social conditions needed for recovery and stabilization: freedom, meaningful work, friendship and a feeling of belonging- terms and ideas that usually remain un-politicized. This grants villages tremendous power in their fundraising because their structure appeals to anyone who believes in the power of the individual to create positive change. While donations pour in from across the globe, lenders are responding to something that is tightly woven into American's perception of their own national identity- the ability of the poor to come together, and with a little bit of guidance and ingenuity, work hard to help themselves.

There is, however, a subtler element to the villages' donation success: the size of the units. These one-room, enlarged dollhouses are so novel that they capture the attention of a

world used to seeing housing size increase. Additionally, because the units are so cheap and simple to build, an individual's small donation can have a large impact on the lives of others. Moreover, the homes, which range from 98 ft^2 to 250 ft^2 in no way impinge upon or threaten the success of the donor. Best highlighted in political battles over how welfare and food assistance recipients can spend their benefits, American culture is viscerally against the poor having items equal to or superior than anyone else aside from the very poor. One must ask, would donors be as supportive of and enthusiastic about tiny houses if the units were two or three times the size?[40]

The diminutive nature of tiny houses sings notes from the old songbook of homeless service provision. Make units comfortable enough to survive but uncomfortable enough so that people move on or are not seen to have too much. Donors may be interested in facilitating a do-it-yourself style of bootstrap-determinism, but they are also conscious of the threats to their own sociopolitical status that accompany assistance to the poor.

Since donations and debt sustain nearly all of the functioning tiny house villages for the homeless in the United States, it is important for new developers to consider the changing nature of donation fads. Dependence upon crowdsourcing and donations as the main source of funding provides an unpredictable future. While tiny house villages may currently have the eye of philanthropists large and small, there is no guarantee that the current platforms, methods and structures of fundraising will remain consistent and lucrative over time. Once the novelty of the tiny home wears off, donors may be harder to come by, and without significant reserves set aside, the physical infrastructure of the villages is at risk of succumbing to natural disasters or the weathering hand of time.

How long will public interest in tiny homes continue and how can tiny villages for the homeless protect themselves from souring relationships, dwindling donations or unexpected expenses? Considering how cost effective this private form of homeless service provision is for the cities in which the villages are built, tiny house developers should explore a financial partnership with the municipality. There may be the opportunity to receive steady funding without sacrificing the core values of their village model. There is substantial peer reviewed research that shows the money municipalities can save by housing the homeless. Municipalities should divert savings from reduced expenditures on health and rehabilitation services into the tiny house villages that are successfully keeping people off of the streets.

Additionally, Tiny house villages should determine a monthly rent amount large enough to keep residents invested in the project and assure stable reserves but small enough to avoid becoming a burden. Continued development of the cooperative maintenance structure is key to keeping costs low and creating a feeling of belonging, but it is unrealistic to expect significant

40 Which would still be smaller than the legal housing minimum in many cities

investment in the upkeep of the property without the availability of training and resources for residents.

Governance Structure

While the there is high-level concern with addressing civic issues at the private level, the tiny house village movement is growing. Multnomah county in Oregon, for example, is embarking on a pilot project to provide one-time funding to faith based organization interested in building permanent tiny houses for the homeless in their parking lots and backyards. An important goal of the faith-based pilot program is to build deep social connections between residents and the congregation, and thus reduce the isolation of the homeless. This offers an opportunity for connection between the housed and homeless in a deeply social space but also begs for guidance on ways to create a governance structure that is both respectful and empowering and provides opportunity for resident mobility.

Those interested in developing a tiny house village must take note of the tremendous value in having a collaborative, intersectional working group. A key element of Occupy Madison's success has been through its ability to keep both the homeless and those with comparative social, political and financial privilege involved in the development of the village. The mixed composition of the Occupy Madison board— upon which sit residents and non-residents— imbues the village not only with the technical capacity of their members, but also with a power and legitimacy to the outside world that the homeless alone cannot establish. Without relationships or expertise in construction, community organizing and local politics, Occupy Madison would have faced much greater opposition. Additionally, board members' distance from the day-to-day of the village lends them a much more objective eye towards the relationships, conflicts and structures that define the village's existence.

Some of Dignity Village's deepest struggles emerge from its isolation and failure to incorporate non-residents into their operations and activism. While residents may bring technical skills in accounting, organizing or construction, they must cycle out of the village in two years and there is no guaranteed way to replace them with residents who have similar abilities, leaving the village with sensitive gaps. Additionally, the chronically homeless are those who are unable to tap into the full range of social and political networks in their communities. Incorporating non-residents, who run outside of the traditional homeless service networks, into the village provides access to diverse social, cultural, financial and political benefits and must be a key element of any tiny house village.

Siting the Village:

Residents of tiny house villages share food, money, time and emotional energy with each other and provide an important mode of support. While the connections between those experiencing homelessness are important, they are not enough if the community is isolated from the social service providers, jobs, broad social networks and public transit lines that make physical and financial mobility possible.

When building a tiny house village, it is vital that the community is placed within a quarter mile of a form of transportation that will meet the needs of those who may work irregular schedules. Dignity Village, which is located alongside Portland's growth boundary, is placed within a few hundred feet of a bus, but the limited schedule of the Portland public transit system makes getting to the major employment centers a challenge. If a resident must start a shift in the early morning, end in the late evening or work on the weekends, they are substantially limited by their lack of access to transportation. The location of the village, 9 miles away from the outer edge of Portland's downtown, is prohibitively far for residents.

Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington and Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon are both placed on the outer edges of their respective cities, bordering light industry, with limited access to the downtown area by bus. This physical isolation segregates the homeless and sends a message that they are cast aside, poorly integrated and not welcome in the heart of the city until they have more money. This is little different from the droves of poor Americans who are being pushed into the suburbs, except that the homeless are far less likely to have social resources that can help them to stay afloat at even the most basic of levels. Because of the deep poverty of residents, siting tiny house villages for the homeless in rural or suburban communities is not recommended. While many men, women and children experiencing homelessness may shelter themselves in their car, their limited finances put them at great risk of becoming stranded if their cars were to require expensive repairs.

Municipalities, through their citing of tiny house villages as planned urban developments, can use the zoning process to ensure that villages are built close to public transit, or within walking and safe cycling distance of the downtown area. Over the past 10 years, municipal agencies have been fearful of the backlash they would receive by placing a community for the homeless close to higher-income areas. Police chiefs and protesters alike have warned of increases in crime and disruption if the homeless are allowed to move into quiet and well-managed neighborhoods. Municipalities can now arm themselves with the data that of the five populated tiny house villages in the United States, none have caused disturbances in their communities. Across the board, reported crime and calls for police, fire and ambulance services have been far lower in the tiny house villages than in their respective cities as a whole. Occupy Madison

Village, which faced tremendous opposition from community members, now has a harmonious relationship with their middle-class neighbors and has transformed a blighted property into an attractive and progressive space for social good.

The attractive construction and architecture of the tiny house village not only provides an endearing structural centerpiece, but also the potential to intentionally integrate the wider community. The construction of community gardens in the villages' courtyards, the use of common facilities for neighborhood meetings and the organization of social events on the village property all offer the opportunity to bring higher income residents into positive contact with those who have experienced homelessness. This gives the neighborhood the inside access needed to become comfortable with the presence of the village and build empathy towards the villagers while still preserving resident privacy. Residents and non-residents may interact and form the social bonds and networks that are key to moving out of deep poverty.

Furthermore, municipalities and private entities alike have access to plots of land that are currently underutilized. The rolling lawns of churches and public housing developments, parking lots and even municipal parallel parking spaces can provide enough land for tiny homes to be developed. While purchasing a lot to build a traditional house may cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in land-poor cities such as Boston, tiny houses are small enough to fit into parking spots, which can be purchased for far less than traditional plots. Alleyways, public easements and abandoned lots all provide the opportunity to build high quality, inexpensive, mobile housing for the homeless. If the public process is well organized, and the architecture is aesthetically pleasing, the public is more likely to accept the construction of a tiny house in their community. Participating in issues of social justice and anti-homelessness are made easier and more fashionable when centered around beautifully designed tiny houses.

Building Quality

Of great concern in the development of tiny house villages is the quality of the construction. Tiny homes can skirt most building codes if they weigh less than one ton and fit entirely on the bed of a trailer. Most tiny home villages for the homeless are built by residents and volunteers who lack formal construction experience. As it was explained by Andrew Heben, Urban Planner and founder of Eugene's Opportunity Village, "we pretty much just see what [materials] we have and build our homes that way. If we have a spare window, we'll cut a hole [in a house] and stick it in." While this free form construction and development process provides the opportunity for creativity, individuality, and the thoughtful use of recycled materials, if not carefully considered, the final units can have major health and safety implications. Take, for example, the mold and mildew present in Dignity Village's structures or the biting humid cold that rolls through Opportunity's Conestoga wagon style units.

My visits to Dignity and Opportunity instantly brought to life flickering images of creaking, decaying dust bowl homes and the dark and tilted tenements of the early 20th century. While the structures are a step above sleeping in the streets, and the community preferable to communal shelters, the quality of construction and lack of private sanitation are cause for concern. There are certain basic cultural components to housing structures that are central to the American identity. A private toilet, access to running water and the knowledge that the cold wind won't blow through the walls are the most basic components of that housing identity.

During interviews, residents and tiny house village organizers expressed their concerns that regulations would substantially increase the cost of the units. Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington, for example, underwent a strict regulatory process by the municipality and spent over $18,000 per unit to bring the buildings up to code. A far cry from the $3,000-$8,000 needed to build a basic tiny house, and far less environmentally friendly. Occupy Madison, however, was able, through the construction expertise of their board members, to build high quality homes out of a mix of resources. An intentional and preplanned use of recycled, donated and purchased materials kept costs at around $3,000 per unit without sacrificing aesthetics, safety or warmth. It may make construction a slower process, but the higher quality units are less likely to suffer the effects of mold and mildew, and are more likely to survive the harsh winter. While this will keep more of the homeless in the streets for longer, when they do arrive home, they enter a safer and healthier space.

Municipalities that choose to regulate tiny homes must realize that the structures cannot conform to standard building codes; instead they require their own regulations to ensure the structures can be built both cheaply and safely.

Additionally, the needs of a tiny home built in Wisconsin or New York, with their wicked

A well-maintained home in Dignity Village. Portland, Oregon.

Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon. These conestoga-inspired tiny homes are made from a metal frame and plastic sheeting.

Dignity Village's shower. The cinderblocks hide the outdoor trough sinks that residents use to collect water, wash dishes and clean their hands.

winter ice storms and sweltering summers will be much different than the needs of a home in Portland or Olympia where the months of light rain that define the colder season give way to a mild summer sun. The isomorphic construction of tiny house villages will be insufficient to meet the needs of villagers across the country. Building codes for tiny homes is a task that will require collaboration from engineers, planners, activists and those experiencing homelessness on a regional level.

Luckily, those responsible for devising regulations are not starting the process blind. There are thousands of blueprints and resources available in books and online regarding the construction of tiny homes. There are private architecture firms solely dedicated to the design and production of tiny homes for middle and upper class consumers. These groups provide a valuable technical resource for municipalities regarding the unique needs of a healthy and safe tiny home and should not be ignored.

Sanitation

Finally, sanitation is a tremendous issue for tiny house villages. While organizers and municipalities are right to be concerned about the cost and consequences of on-site sanitation systems, the fact that individuals must share what equates to outhouses is tremendously out of step with the housing-first models that seek to put the homeless in secure housing before addressing any other issues. Without private facilities, the entire village is aware of the sanitary schedules of their community members and individuals lack the privacy to deal with culturally sensitive issues like menstruation and bowel movements. Middle and upper class homeowners are able to use composting toilets to provide private sanitation for themselves at a cost of between $25 and $900 depending upon the complexity of the unit. At such a low cost, there must be a way to preserve the privacy of sanitation facilities while ensuring proper maintenance. Dignity Village has a service that empties their port-a-potties on a predetermined schedule, could something similar not be devised to empty the composting toilets, which require attention between once every four to twelve months depending upon the structure of the unit? If those experiencing homelessness are able to relieve themselves privately, that event goes a long way towards establishing the unit as a real home. When residents are in spaces that feel like real homes, they are able to settle, stabilize and receive the message that they are worthy, that they are integrated into the fabric of American society.

Opportunity Village's single shower (left door) has a signup sheet nailed next to the door.

The Future of Tiny House Villages

Tiny houses have the potential to be a long-term tool with short-term flexibility. The structures can be used and reused as part of a larger anti-homelessness strategy for as long as there are underutilized lots that measure 9'x4' and the political and social will to build.

The power of even the simplest of housing is undeniable. Privacy, access to safe storage and a place to call home are just some of the benefits that can help a person experiencing homelessness to stabilize and regain their physical and emotional strength. Clustering these homes in villages reaps another benefit: the ability to share household tasks, the opportunity to bond with those from similar backgrounds and the strength to challenge their marginalized statuses through collective action.

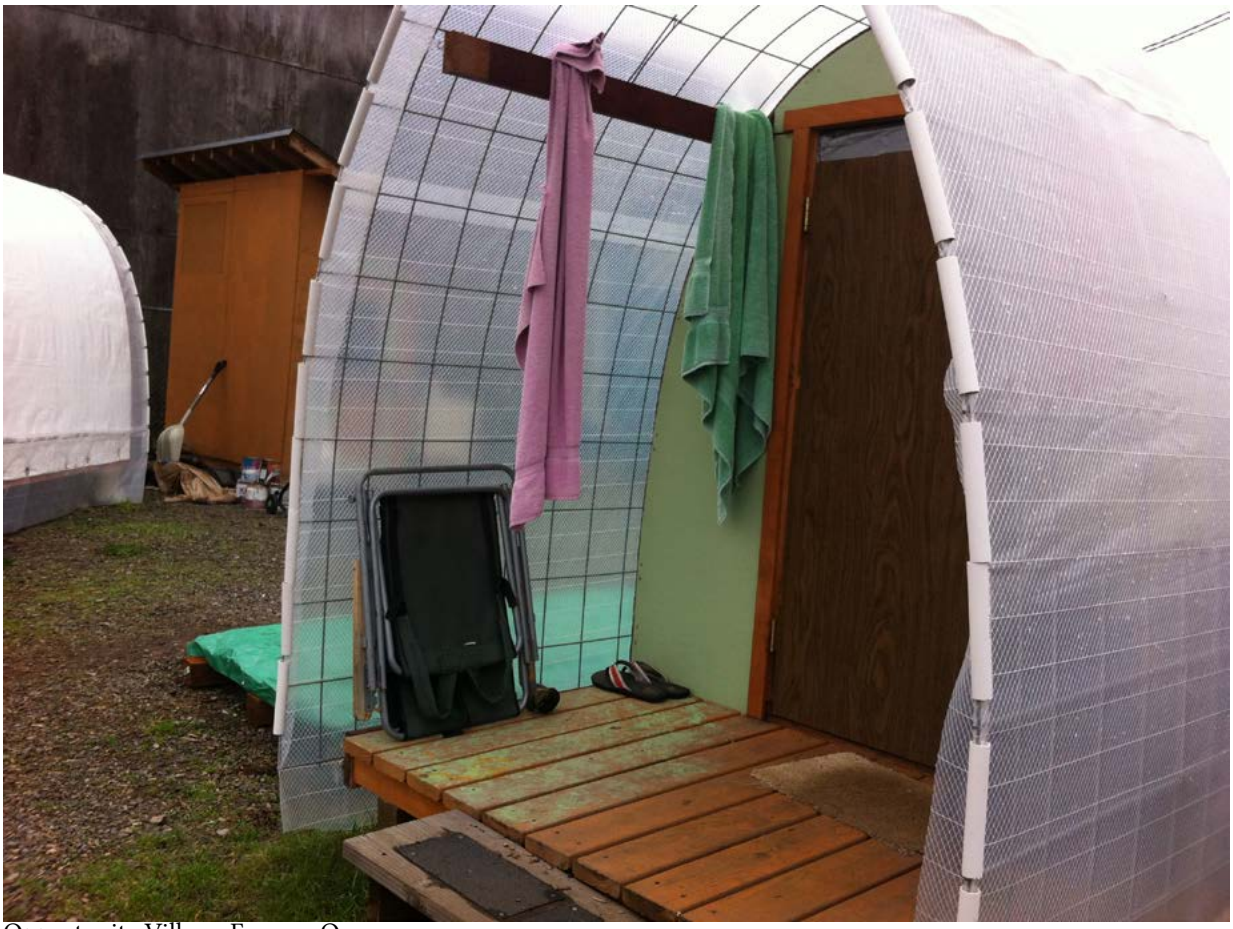
The social and governance structures of the villages provide a much-needed space for autonomy, respect for filial diversity and an opportunity to form vital support networks. Tiny house villages broadly provide villagers the ability to make their own decisions, control their own schedules and reduce the time they spend infantilized by a traditional homeless service system that presumes the homeless are unable to make decisions that enhance their wellbeing without the guidance of strict rules and regulations. The physical proximity of residents to each other paired with the requirement that they put weekly work hours into maintaining the village creates a unique and supportive community of individuals who understand the struggle of homelessness. The collection of tiny homes into a village provides an opportunity for more targeted service provision. Additionally, the low-cost, flexible nature of the villages provides the opportunity to make temporary or permanent use of underutilized urban spaces.

However, like the tramp houses of the 1800's, tiny houses for homeless the offer space for independent living under the yolk of social opinion. The meaning behind the average village's placement and lack of access to private sanitation facilities is clear: the poor are entitled to basic accommodations, but should not expect to live in anywhere near the same quality of housing of those with greater means. You can have a roof but no water, walls but limited insulation. You're trusted to maintain a basic box, but not so to maintain a simple composting toilet within your home. You can stay, but not for too long.

With these concerns in mind, ultimately, the tiny house village provides a level of safety and security that can be helpful for those looking to stabilize. The more than 600,000 Americans sleeping on the streets shouldn't have to wait for the toppling of the current system of expensive housing to receive basic care.

It is too early to tell if tiny homes are an effective tool in stabilizing those experiencing homelessness, but as data emerges, it is vital that tiny village organizers take the time to reflect upon their practice and share their results, honestly, with others in the tiny house village com-

munity. While tiny house villages are not radical disrupters to the standard housing system, they provide a point of political and social interest that can be harnessed to facilitate conversation and a new vision of how we care for and treat our homeless.



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