

Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning for Public Housing in Salt Lake County, Utah

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PREPAREDNESS



Salt Lake City after the earthquake on March 18, 2020. Credit: Trent Nelson, The Salt Lake Tribune

Public Housing:

- While research on post-disaster recovery policy has grown in recent years, less focus has been paid to pre-disaster planning in at-risk communities.
- Even less attention has been paid to pre-disaster planning for post-disaster public housing recovery.
 - Public Housing recovery is a function of local disaster housing plans and policies.
 - Policies decide where these residents may go in the event of a disaster, when they can return, and to where exactly.

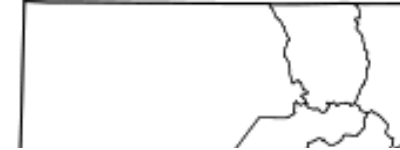
Are areas at risk of disaster but inexperienced in recovery, prepare for public housing recovery?

What are the challenges and opportunities to do pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery?

Research Questions

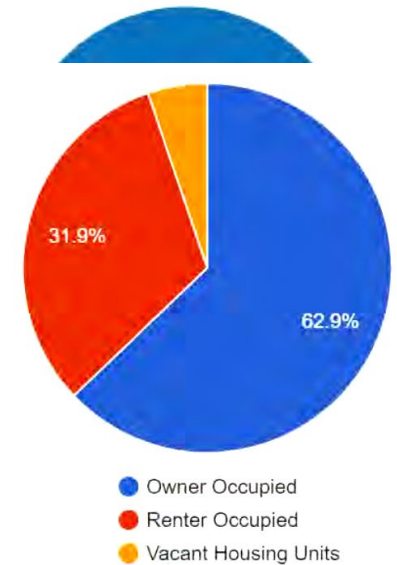
Case Study Background

- According to latest Census reports, Salt Lake County is one of the fastest growing regions in the country.
- The population will increase 55% in next 50 years. The households will increase about 82%.
- 45.92% of households who rent are rent-burdened in Salt Lake County.
- Affordable housing is a critical issue for the region and its overall economic prosperity.



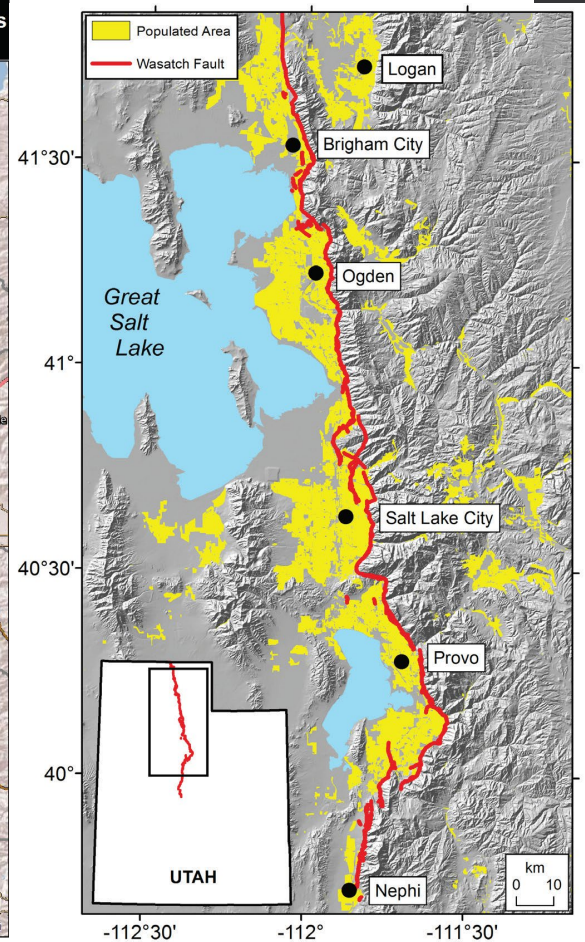
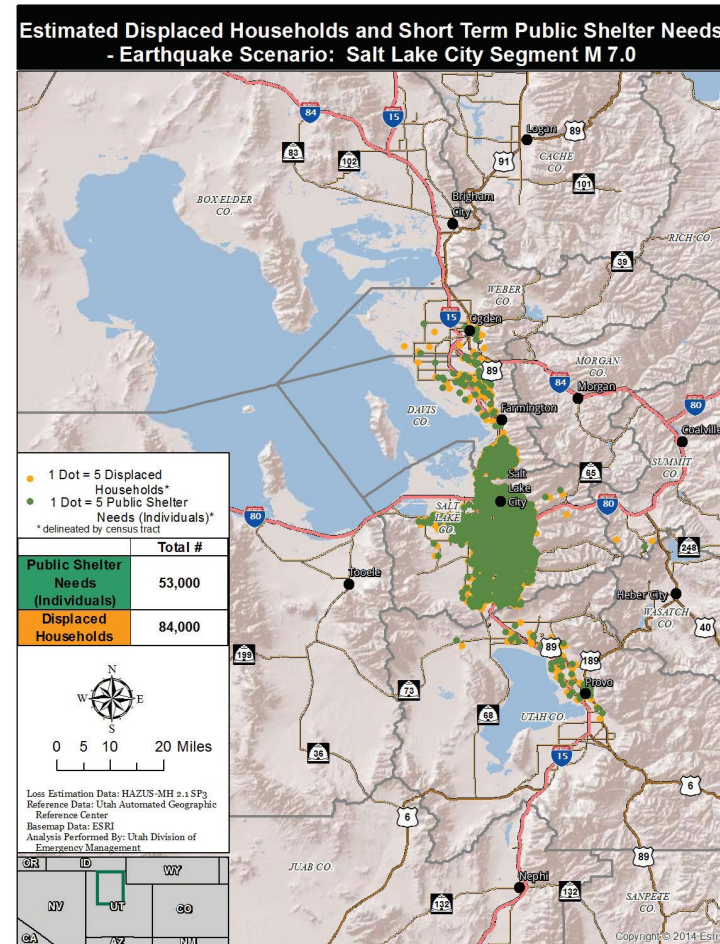
Race	Population	Percentage
White	887,004	80.15%

Housing Occupancy	Number	Percent	National Avg
Total Housing Units			
Occupied Housing Units	366,239	94.8%	87.6
Owner Occupied	242,933	66.3%	63.1
Renter Occupied	123,306	33.7%	36.9
Vacant Housing Units	20,195	5.2%	12.4
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	1	0.0%	0.0
Rental Vacancy Rate	5	0.0%	0.0
Average household size of owner-occupied unit	3.2	0.0%	2.7
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	2.7	0.0%	2.5



Case Study Background

- Earthquakes are a major natural threat to the people of Utah.
- The Wasatch region, including Salt Lake County currently has **57% chance** of being hit by **6 magnitude** and larger, and **93% chance** of being hit by **5 magnitude** and larger within the next 50 years.
- Based on a 7.0 magnitude earthquake scenario created in 2015 for the Salt Lake region, **nearly 263,300 individuals are expected to be displaced** across the region after the event.
- About **53,000 individuals will need shelter immediately**, including public housing residents.



Public Housing in Salt Lake County

- Established in 1970
- A large size Housing Authority compared nationally: Serves 3000 households/8000 individuals
- 94 Rental Assistance Demonstration program (RAD) units
- 2,408 Section 8 Vouchers
- 626 Public Housing Units- As of research date 430 units
- 72% of the residents are extremely low-income and the average annual income of the residents is \$12,794.



Methodology

Archival Research:

- **Total of 21 Documents:** 7 plans of public housing, 8 hazards mitigation, 2 disaster preparedness plans, and 4 disaster response plans adopted by Salt Lake County and its 16 constituent cities.

Key informant interviews:

- **Conducting 10 interviews:** (30-45 minutes)
 - **State, County, and City level:** Emergency managers, housing authority officials, housing development planners, recovery planners, and community development planners.
- ⑩ **Themes:** The motivations, challenges and opportunities of pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery.

Plans for public housing recovery

- There is no stand-alone plan for housing recovery!
- Temporary shelters are discussed as a part of other plans like emergency management operation plans or emergency management plan
- Housing authority have thought how/where displaced people could go but not aware the numbers of total displaced public housing residents in the earthquake

“It's not a broad plan for rehousing tenants or what we would do to rebuild, but it is a small plan that would help us during the time of crisis to help get people situated and know who's living where, and who we would call for emergency utility service or anything like that.”

Plans for public housing recovery

- There is no planned shelter needs assessments for public housing residents in the post-disaster recovery moment.
- There is a lack of coordination between housing authorities and other agencies

“My suggestions would be that the public housing agencies, which are the public housing authorities, and the county's or the cities, whoever they have a relationship with actually develop a joint plan. Because you bring up some good points. That there is nothing there that we could rely on in any type of formal agreement. Because public housing residents are very vulnerable it would be good to see what is in their emergency plan.”

- Pandemic has increased the motivation to plan for socially vulnerable groups

“What we’ve learned through this pandemic is that the vulnerable populations were not addressed as readily as they should’ve been. That’s where the spread of COVID is primarily coming from right now in the low-income communities.”

Barriers for pre-disaster planning

- There is no awareness of the greater impact of disasters on public housing residents
- Lack of motivated leaders to take on pre-disaster planning

“I mean I think most communities would help us rebuild, but I can think of one or two that would push really hard to show us the door. In a major catastrophe or disaster, what does that look like? How does that play out?”

- Have not had big disaster experience although the Magna earthquake may change that.
- Limited resources or fund for pre-disaster planning

“For the housing authority, one of the resources we can use to develop a plan are the same grants that come to fix up buildings. You are allowed to use some of those, it's called capital fund, a specific HUD program. You are allowed to use some of that for what they call management improvements which are really soft costs, not replacing generators. So that would be one potential resource to develop the plan and to get organized. And another, we just kind of, we look to HUD to try to help us fund things like that, or to even have requirements like that.”

Opportunities for pre-disaster planning

- Small-scale local plans: Planning for keeping communications and power for senior occupied apartments.
- Learning from the current experience of pandemic and recent earthquake
 - Increase awareness of vulnerability of public housing residents
 - Flexibility in regulations during emergencies

Discussion:

- Salt Lake County as an at-risk community is generally not prepared to provide housing to public housing residents after disasters
- Not being prepared → high number of displaced families and staying displaced in the event of disasters.
- Our findings act as a call for action in at-risk communities to conduct pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery:
 - Promote pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery by preparing joint plans
 - Engaging diverse communities into planning processes
 - Dedicating funding for such activities
 - Educating the public about mitigation savings
 - Using all available opportunities to review existing response and recovery protocols
 - Actions to highlight the importance of public housing recovery to the community

Future Studies:

- Focus on other communities that face risk to explore their preparedness level in emergencies and hazards
 - Outlining the potential gaps in such communities.
 - More information about barriers to pre-disaster planning for such communities
- Focus on collecting and analyzing post-disaster public housing recovery cases around the United States:
 - Could help educate housing authorities about the costs and benefits of pre-disaster planning



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THANK YOU!


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