



Over-the-Rhine Community Housing

WHERE COMMUNITY COMES FIRST

Summer 2015 Newsletter

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Gentrification – It seems that nearly every week there is an article about it, from the Los Angeles Times writing about San Francisco’s Mission District to the Washington Post writing about the Petworth neighborhood of Washington D.C. In Cincinnati it’s been part of Over-the-Rhine talk for at least 25 years.

Every time I read one of these articles I’m amazed at the similarities to Over-the-Rhine. Article after article describes with near exact detail our lived experience in OTR. It all feels inevitable. Megan McArdle of Bloomberg calls gentrification an “irresistible force”. In many ways this is not surprising. The desire (creating a strong market) to restore architectural and neighborhood treasures is, for some, irresistible. This is not bad, but it is not all good.

Zak Cheney-Rice, writing on mic.com, said, “It’s [gentrification] a phenomenon that hides within it all the racial and class tensions that define American history. If only all people could share in its spoils...”. That resonates with me.

We at OTRCH believe that Over-the-Rhine can be an example of a diverse neighborhood that values and benefits all.

Our mission is two goals; building an inclusive community in Over-the-Rhine, and housing homeless individuals and families. From our 35 years of experience in OTR, we have found that the beginning point to accomplish our mission is affordable housing for those who need it. Having affordable housing available in OTR is a goal that it is not just ours. In 2002 it was adopted by the City of Cincinnati, and is reflected in the Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan.

This edition of our newsletter takes a look at that plan, and why we think it remains the right map for the inclusive community towards which we are working. The Plan’s goal, by 2020, is for 50% of OTR housing stock to be affordable. We think it critical to define what is affordable, and include an article defining what we consider to be affordable, answering the question “affordable for whom?”. Finally, we celebrate the opening of our most recent affordable housing project, Beasley Place.

Over-the-Rhine is truly a place of tensions and great opportunity. Thank you for your interest in this mission and your support in getting us there.

MARY BURKE RIVERS
Executive Director



WHAT IS THE RIGHT MIX OF HOUSING OPTIONS FOR OVER-THE-RHINE?

In June 2002 the Cincinnati City Council adopted the Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan (www.otrch.org/otr-community/otr-plan) for the future of Over-the-Rhine. The last sentence of the introductory paragraph of the Housing section says:

“The recommendations that follow are designed to create a neighborhood where people of all economic, racial, and ethnic groups have a significant place in the community.”

We at OTRCH agree.

The Plan also outlined goals, to be achieved by 2022, for four levels of affordability;

Market Rate	2007	2012	2017	2022
Unlimited	20%	20%	20%	25%
61 - 100% AMI ¹	20%	20%	30%	25%
Affordable				
31-60% AMI	20%	35%	25%	25%
<30% AMI	40%	25%	25%	25%

We at OTRCH agree with these goals. How are we as a community doing? We don't know.

We are 13 years into that plan and have no data to show how we as a community are performing in regard to the above outlined goals (at the time of the plan both the University of Cincinnati and Xavier University expressed an interest in providing that monitoring, but no agreement was made).

We have lots of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the percent of affordable housing is declining to a point below the goal, and the percent, especially in the “Unlimited” category, is gaining to a point above the goal. Is our vision of a mixed-income community in jeopardy?

To help answer that question, OTRCH is working with the Over-the-Rhine Community Council and the Community



145-147 Mulberry Before



145-147 Mulberry After

Building Institute of Xavier University to conduct an Over-the-Rhine Housing Inventory Study. Funders of the study are OTRCC, 3CDC, PNC Bank, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing. Results of the study should be available in 2016.

We at OTRCH have added 302 units; 87 new and 163 preserved/renovated affordable (using the Plan's definition), and 22 new market-rate, to the community since 2002. We have added new units in each of the four Plan's categories.

¹ Average Median Income (\$49,833 for a single person)



BEASLEY PLACE (1405-07 REPUBLIC STREET) IS OPEN!

On a sunny May 22 morning over 100 people joined us in the ribbon-cutting of Beasley Place. The event was opened by Ashleigh Finke, OTRCH's Director of Real Estate Development. Speakers included:

- David Mann - City of Cincinnati, Vice-Mayor
- Kevin Clark - Ohio Housing Finance Agency
- Paul Silva - First Financial Bank
- Mindy Hammer - Republic Street neighbor
- Ryan Messer - Over-the-Rhine Community Council, President
- Brandee Wright - Beasley Place Resident
- Bonnie Neumeier - OTRCH Board of Directors and Over-the-Rhine resident



Beasley Place Ribbon Cutting

also saw lots of new people. It was these changes, mixed with my experience of OTR years ago, that excited me.

I love the old buildings of Over-the-Rhine. I really enjoy seeing all the new people in the neighborhood, as well as beginning to meet some of the people who have lived here for many years. It's this diversity of people that really attracts me. I also really enjoy being able to walk to just about everything I need.

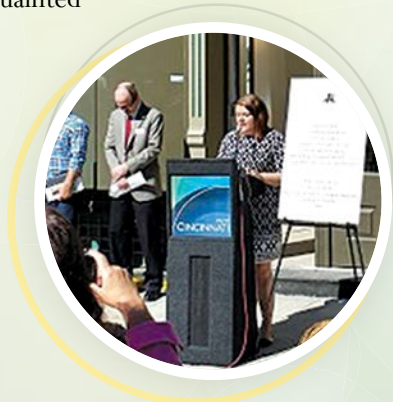
I don't like to be shut off from what is happening on and around our street [Republic]. That's why I keep my apartment windows open. After I get better settled into my new home at Beasley Place, I want to get more involved in the neighborhood, maybe the community council or something at the Peaslee Neighborhood Center."

Welcome back to Over-the-Rhine Harriet.

By June 15 residents in all 13 units had moved in. One of those residents, Harriet Richardson, is back in Over-the-Rhine after an absence of 50 years.

Harriet lived the first ten years of her life in the West End, and became familiar with Over-the-Rhine in going to Findlay Market. In the intervening years, before moving to Beasley Place, she has lived in Cincinnati, Bond Hill and Madisonville (the five years previous to OTR). She has three sons and five grandchildren and, in 2012, retired after 32 years with the Cincinnati Public Schools, the last few years were working security at the School for the Creative and Performing Arts. It was working in Over-the-Rhine, and the walks in the neighborhood, which reacquainted her with OTR and which excited her about living in the neighborhood.

"As I walked in the neighborhood I saw several differences from years before. Washington Park is much nicer, so are several of the buildings. I



Harriet, with her granddaughter, hosting Rep. Steve Chabot and OTRCH's Roger Auer, Mary Burke Rivers and Tanya Murphy

WHAT DOES AFFORDABLE HOUSING MEAN TO US?

A lot of individuals and organizations, including us at OTRCH, use the term affordable housing. At first, it would seem to be a helpful description of a good thing; housing that people can afford. However, we have come to realize that while it describes a good thing, it does not describe for whom. Our mission at OTRCH is to provide housing to low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine. With this article we want to be clear exactly what affordable means to us and how we are going about this portion of our mission.

An example of the problem of what affordable housing means was at a recent Over-the-Rhine Community Council meeting when a developer described a proposed project as providing “work force housing”. What does that mean? Many people in the housing market place are working, but their incomes vary widely. A starting point to bring meaning to affordability is the Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) standard that housing should not cost more than 30% of household income. This is true whether renting or buying. With this, affordable means housing cost should be no more than 30% of household income.

The next step is to be clear whose income is being considered. For us, that means a focus on low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine. Thankfully, there is a very clear definition of low (as well as very low and extra low)-income, as provided by HUD and reflected in the following chart:

	1 Person	2 Persons	3 Persons	4 Persons	5 Persons
Extra Low Income (30%)	\$14,950	\$17,100	\$20,090	\$24,250	\$28,410
Very Low Income (50%)	\$24,950	\$28,500	\$32,050	\$35,600	\$38,450
Low Income (80%)	\$39,900	\$45,600	\$51,300	\$56,950	\$61,550

These definitions use a percent of annual median income (AMI) for the Greater Cincinnati area. For example, one person at the extra low income level earns 30% of the AMI of \$49,833 for single persons.

OTRCH aims to serve households at the very low and extra low income level. In some cases, such as the Jimmy Heath House which serves long-term chronically homeless men, we are able to serve households below the extra low income level.

Regretfully, as many as 24,000 Cincinnati households, can not afford to rent suitable housing in the traditional market place. That is where different types of subsidy programs help. The most commonly known housing subsidy is governmental, Section 8 certificates. Less known is organizations like OTRCH which develop housing units so that rent without public subsidy is within reach of very and extra low income households.



1300 Vine (buddy’s place) before and after

To use our most recently-completed project, Beasley Place, as an example, rents are affordable (using our definition) because we were able to finance that project so that there is very little debt that the rents have to support. However, there are still households that can't afford to live there without a rental subsidy.

At Beasley Place, rent for three of the one-bedroom units is \$263, requiring a monthly income of \$883. This allows an extra low-income person to rent the apartment, but not a person whose income is Supplemental Social Security (\$733), unless they had a Section 8 housing voucher. The other Beasley Place rents range from \$462 for the other one-bedroom units to \$720 for the three-bedroom units. The subsidy that OTRCH provides via our creative financing, allows for many, but not all, very and extra low-income households to live at Beasley Place.

At Beasley Place, 6 (46%) of the households have a housing voucher, which provides the additional, needed subsidy. Across our inventory of 410 units, 217 (53%) have some type of rental subsidy in addition to our low rents. What is



clear is that a public/private partnership is needed to provide housing to residents with the least income. We are proud to have developed the expertise to provide much of the needed subsidy, are glad that public assistance is available, and are saddened that the need for the affordable housing that we provide is much greater than we, and other affordable housing providers, can make available.

While the need for affordable housing has always been greater than the supply, this is particularly true now. The key reason is that with the housing downturn since 2008, many former home owners now live in rental properties, and the support for first-time home buyers and those wishing to re-enter home ownership does not meet the need of those wishing to move from rental to owned homes. This results in fewer rental units available and higher rents.

In the face of the great need, we are alarmed that the proposed FY16 budget bill, coming out of the U.S. Senate, includes cuts to Public Housing capital funds (Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority would be significantly affected by such cuts) and reducing the primary source for affordable housing development funds, HOME (administered in Cincinnati by the City of Cincinnati) from \$900 million to \$66 million for the entire country, a 93% reduction.





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HOW TO SUPPORT OVER-THE-RHINE COMMUNITY HOUSING

There are many ways to support OTRCH and our work on behalf of low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine.

Donate!

All of the following information and “hot” links are available on the OTRCH website, www.otrch.org. Click the Support Us! tab on the homepage.

- Make a one-time, or monthly, gift online via the secure form.
- Make a gift by check: Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, 114 W. 14th Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202
- Make a gift, online or by mail, to memorialize a person or to honor a person(s) at special times (holidays, birthdays, weddings).
- Have fun and be a fundraiser for us! Call me, I'll give you some ideas and then use Crowdrise to create your own fundraising page and campaign. You can also use Crowdrise for alternative giving at special times.
- Remember OTRCH when you begin the Required Minimum Distribution from retirement accounts.
- Make a gift of stock, or wire funds from a cash account
- Remember OTRCH when naming beneficiaries in your life insurance, annuity, and estate documents.

Use Community Resources to Help OTRCH!

- Make OTRCH the beneficiary of your Kroger Rewards card. You can either get a Kroger Rewards card or change the beneficiary to OTRCH on your existing card.
- Make your Amazon purchases by using AmazonSmile. 0.5% of your purchase price will be donated to OTRCH.
- Use Goodsearch as your search engine. For every internet search you do, Goodsearch gives a penny to OTRCH. Check out other ways that Goodsearch provides to support OTRCH.



Be Informed!

- Receive email updates.
- Like us on Facebook

Be Engaged!

Invite a church, school, business, or friends group to join you in a volunteer project in Over-the-Rhine. Contact Jake Merritt (jmerritt@otrch.org) for information. If you don't have a group, Jake can help you find one.

