

Journal of the American Planning Association >

Volume 76, 2009 - [Issue 1](#)

949 | 24

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Overcoming Barriers to Placing Manufactured Housing in Metropolitan Communities

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Pages 73-88 | Published online: 09 Dec 2009

🗨️ Cite this article 🔗 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360903401052>

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Abstract

Problem: Manufactured housing is an option that is relatively little used in metropolitan communities although it appears to provide a quality-cost advantage over site-built housing.

Purpose: This article examines barriers to placing manufactured housing in metropolitan areas that planners might influence, focusing particularly on land use and design regulations.

Methods: We paired data from a nationwide survey of planners in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)-eligible metropolitan communities with information on those communities' characteristics to estimate several regression models explaining

two measures of manufactured housing supply using both supply- and demand-side variables.

Results and conclusions: A variety of regulatory restrictions, including the lack of by-right zoning, as well as permits, snow load standards, fire codes, zoning codes, subdivision regulations, and architectural design standards impede the placement of manufactured housing in metropolitan communities. In general, such regulations determine whether or not jurisdictions have any manufactured housing at all; if they do, market conditions have the primary influence on the number of such units in a community.

Takeaway for practice: Planners play an important role in determining whether manufactured housing is a feasible housing alternative when they assess the demand for manufactured housing and recommend policies that will influence whether units are placed in their communities. We suggest that planners emphasize manufactured housing as an affordable housing option and we offer suggestions for accomplishing this.

Research support: This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Keywords:

manufactured housing land use regulations zoning HUD code regulatory barriers

Notes

Sources:

- a. Provided by Institute of Building Technology and Safety.
- b. This variable was recoded from our survey data.
- c. [U.S. Census Bureau \(2000a\)](#).
- d. [U.S. Census Bureau \(2004\)](#).
- e. [U.S. Census Bureau \(2000b\)](#), defined as mobile homes.

f. This variable is from our survey data.

$\Psi p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

$\Psi p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Note:

a. The original ordered logit models are shown in [Table 3](#). The original OLS model is shown in [Table 4](#).

$\Psi p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$.

1. One anonymous reviewer pointed out that manufactured homes may be perceived to be of quality comparable to site-built homes in part because manufactured homes are, on average, newer than existing site-built homes. The most recent American Housing Survey (HUD, 2008), for example, reports that the median manufactured housing unit was built in 1989, while the median owner-occupied housing unit was built in 1975, and the median rental housing unit was built in 1971.

2. Despite the dismal state of manufactured housing finance, there are promising signs that point to a possible recovery when the market for single-family homes rebounds, including the reentry of Fannie Mae into the manufactured home lending market, interest in the manufactured housing sector among large investors such as Warren Buffet, and Energy Star improvements that are increasingly being incorporated into new manufactured homes ([Power, 2004](#)).

3. We used the term by right rather than as of right in our survey, and continue to use it here.

4. Over the time period under investigation, manufactured housing's market share declined precipitously as the market for manufactured home loans collapsed. While our analysis covers a rather unique period of weak demand in the manufactured housing sector, if anything, this bolsters our findings. Regulatory constraints are typically most constraining during periods of strong demand. Thus our finding that several regulatory restrictions constrain demand even during periods of weak demand suggests that such barriers are important during all stages of the market cycle.

5. We initially asked survey respondents to use the following categories: 0, 1-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-99, and 100 or more. After seeing the responses, we combined some of these categories to estimate the regression model described in the next section, so that each category would have a sufficient number of responses to estimate the relevant regression coefficients. The final category ranges, after combining categories with low response rates, were the following: 0, 1-20, 21-50, and 50 or more.

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