Research Projects

The Center for Urban Research advances applied scholarship on housing, neighborhoods, and local policy. Some of our faculty-led projects examine how public decisions, market forces, and institutional actors shape affordability, equity, and community well-being across urban and regional contexts. Together, this work supports more informed policy design and stronger partnerships between researchers, governments, and communities. Here, we introduce snapshots of the Co-Director Dr. Brian An's housing and urban research programs.

Natural Disaster and Housing Recovery

How disasters and recovery policy shape rental affordability.

This research examines how natural disasters affect rental housing markets and how recovery policy can either deepen or reduce housing insecurity. Across communities in California and Florida, the work shows that disasters can produce immediate and lasting rent increases, especially after hurricanes and wildfires, with pressures often compounding after repeated events. Related research on Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery programs finds that recovery strategies with explicit rental housing requirements can help slow post-disaster rent growth and support multifamily rebuilding. Taken together, these projects show that equitable recovery depends not only on rebuilding housing, but also on protecting renters and preserving affordability over the long term.

LIHTC and Neighborhood Housing Markets

Measuring how affordable housing investments affect nearby rents and home values.

This project examines how affordable housing developed through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit influences surrounding housing markets in major Florida metropolitan areas. Using property transaction records and rental market data, the research finds that LIHTC developments are associated with higher nearby home values alongside modest reductions in surrounding market-rate rents. These findings challenge the common perception that affordable housing harms neighborhood conditions and instead suggest that LIHTC investment can expand housing opportunity while generating broader community benefits.

Institutional Investors, Ownership, and Housing Preservation

Tracing how ownership patterns influence wealth, housing quality, and long-term affordability.

This area of research explores how ownership structure shapes housing opportunity across urban and rural markets. In Atlanta and beyond, the work shows that large institutional investors can reduce homeownership opportunities, especially for Black households, while neighborhood-level analyses document how corporate single-family rental activity extracts wealth from communities over time. Related research also finds that larger and more opaque landlord ownership structures are linked to higher rates of housing code violations, highlighting the importance of understanding who owns rental housing and at what scale. Extending this lens to rural America, preservation-focused work shows that ownership type, management capacity, and subsidy history strongly influence whether affordable properties remain protected or exit into the private market. Together, these projects demonstrate that ownership matters deeply for affordability, equity, neighborhood stability, and the preservation of affordable housing.

Economic Development and Housing

Understanding the housing costs of growth-driven development strategies.

This project examines the housing consequences of economic development strategies centered on attracting major employers. Using original firm-level data and census tract-level affordability measures in Georgia, the research finds that high-profile firm entries can increase housing cost burdens for renters, particularly moderate-income households that often fall outside traditional housing assistance programs. The project highlights an important but often overlooked tradeoff of place-based growth strategies and points to the need for closer coordination between economic development policy and affordable housing planning.

Property Valuation and Tax Equity
Improving the accuracy and fairness of commercial property assessment.
This applied research project examines commercial property valuation and tax equity in metro Atlanta in partnership with the City of Atlanta. Drawing on commercial tax digest records, appeals data, and property sales transactions in Fulton and DeKalb Counties, the project evaluates how appraised values compare with observed market values, how the appeals process may shape valuation outcomes, and how a broader set of sales data can strengthen the evidence base for assessment analysis. By improving understanding of valuation accuracy and appeal-related distortions, this work supports more informed fiscal planning and a fairer local property tax system.