Spring 2026

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUNDAMENTALS

HOUS 6401/ URPL 6401



Dr. Jennifer Steffel Johnson
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Tuesdays 9:30am-12:15pm
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-1:30pm and by appointment (in-person, phone, or video)
Office: CAP 320P

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Housing is a vital element of the urban fabric. Where households live determines what they are connected to—and disconnected from. Without a diverse and widespread selection of affordable and appropriate housing, both households and communities are harmed. Due to a wide range of supply- and demand-side factors, there is simply not enough of the right housing that is attainable for American households across most of the income spectrum.

Through lectures, readings and discussion, as well as presentations from a range of housing experts and field trips to exemplary affordable housing developments, Affordable Housing Fundamentals will give you a clearer understanding of the current affordable housing crisis. Armed with the vocabulary of the field and awareness of the key factors involved, you'll start to learn—and think critically—about the range of tools being used to solve this complex puzzle.

In addition to in-class exercises and reflection writing, three projects will help you develop and apply that critical thinking: 1) researching and teaching the class about a recent Colorado housing law; 2) using a community's recent Housing Needs Assessment to propose a strategy or

action that will help solve their housing issue; 3) gaining an understanding of NIMBY (not in my back yard) objections to affordable housing and designing a communications strategy to address them in one community.

Affordable Housing Fundamentals forms the foundation of the new interdisciplinary Affordable Housing Certificate (although pursuing the certificate is not required). The course curriculum has been designed to dovetail with URPL 6405, Affordable Housing Workshop.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Recognize that housing is not merely shelter, but connects individuals to or separates them from essential systems of everyday life such as employment, health, education and transportation; recognize the implications of housing affordability for households' present and future security and opportunity.
2. Define key housing-related terms and concepts, and identify both the supply- and demand-side factors that affect housing affordability.
3. Discuss key historical and current national, state and local housing policies, programs and regulations; illustrate how government priorities shape the housing context.
4. Identify sustainable, supportive and cost-effective design and program innovations; critique ways that policy decisions impact design and development opportunities.
5. Examine the ways that the housing system contributes to and is impacted by wider problems in U.S. metropolitan and rural areas such as homelessness, gentrification, and racial and economic segregation.
6. Investigate what contributes to NIMBY attitudes and propose ways to challenge anti-affordable housing perspectives.
7. Appraise various strategies for addressing housing issues, and propose appropriate actions for different populations and communities.

COURSE VIRTUES:
- **Intellectual curiosity**. Be open to new ideas; ask questions; reflect on what you're learning; think about things in new ways.
- **Analytic thinking**. Look for hidden assumptions in readings; compare and contrast theoretical perspectives; check theoretical ideas against your own experience; look critically at the world around you; notice inconsistencies in arguments; entertain counter-arguments.
- **Professionalism**. Complete reading assignments before class; give careful thought to writing assignments; proofread writing before turning anything in; give yourself the time necessary to do each task well; meet assignment deadlines; be an excellent teammate; arrive on time to every class.
- **Collaborative learning**. Be respectful towards other students' ideas, especially when you disagree; actively participate in discussions and small group tasks; ask for clarification; address your comments and questions to each other as much as to the instructor; learn from each other.

COURSE PROJECTS AND GRADE COMPONENTS:
For each major assignment, I will provide you with a grading rubric that outlines my expectations for your work. Please review the rubric in advance of each assignment and ask questions if anything is unclear. Please work with me in a timely manner to resolve any problems you may encounter.

Active Class Participation and Regular Attendance (20% of course grade)
Class attendance and participation are essential for success in this course. Because this is a graduate seminar, you are expected to complete all the assigned readings on time and come to class prepared to make substantive contributions to the weekly class discussions and in-class activities. A significant portion of our class time will involve active participation in small-group work and discussion; the goal of this work is to deepen our understanding of the course topics and learn from each other.

Field Trip Reflections (10% of course grade)
After each of our two class field trips, you'll write a brief reflection essay in order to integrate what you learned from the experience into your thinking about the course topics.

Investigate and Teach about a Recent Colorado Housing Law (10% of course grade)
Each student will choose a recent Colorado housing-related law to research and teach your classmates about in a 10-minute presentation. Each presentation will include a summary of the law, important details (e.g., what are the key provisions, what/ who /where is affected, what is its implementation timeline), and a critique of the legislation, drawing from a variety of sources.

Understand—and Help Solve—the Housing Problem in One Community (40% of course grade)
Each student will be assigned a Colorado community that has completed an approved Housing Needs Assessment (HNA). The sections of the HNA align with the larger topics that comprise our class curriculum. Each week, you'll review the relevant piece of your community's HNA and write a brief summary of the key data provided. Drawing from the week's assigned and optional readings, you'll write a brief discussion of some of the housing implications of the data you reviewed.

Later in the semester, you will propose a strategy or action for your assigned community that will help address their unique housing challenges.

Create a Campaign to Push Back Against NIMBY (20% of course grade)
In this project, you will design a campaign to support an affordable housing proposal. This will require understanding the key triggers for NIMBY reactions toward affordable housing in general, as well as in the specific community in which your project is sited. As a class, we will decide a) whether this should be individual or team work; b) the community(ies) for which we will design this campaign. The campaign materials and the supporting research will be compiled into a written report, and will be presented to the class on May 12.

COURSE SCHEDULE:
This is a ***tentative schedule*** of course topics and assignments. Please monitor updates on Canvas and as announced in class. **All readings will be made available on Canvas.**

CLASS TOPIC **LOCATION**

1) January 20: Course Overview and the Concept of Home **CAP**

2) January 27: Housing (Un)Affordability **CAP**

Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2025). *The State of the Nation's Housing 2025*. Harvard Kennedy School. (ASSIGNED: Executive Summary; review the rest)

3) February 3: Individual and Community Housing Needs **CHFA**

Ashaye, Adelaja (2024). "The Impact of Affordable Housing on Community Development and Economic Growth." *IOSR-JMCE 21*(6), 31-40.

National Low-Income Housing Coalition (2025). *Out of Reach 2025*. (Review pp. 8-34 and Colorado section)

4) February 10: The Housing Spectrum **CHFA**

Schill, M. (2005). "Regulations and Housing Development: What We Know." *Cityscape.*

Gray, M. N. (2022). "Cancel Zoning." *The Atlantic*, June.

DUE: HNA summary- Demographic Trends & Economic Trends sections

5) February 17: U.S. Federal Policy and Programs- History and Political Ideologies **CAP**

Bipartisan Policy Center. "Explainer: (House Version) Housing for the 21st Century Act."

Bipartisan Policy Center. "Explainer: (Senate Version) ROAD to Housing Act 2025."

Bipartisan Policy Center. "Comparison: ROAD Act to Housing for the 21st Century Act."

DUE: HNA summary- Housing Inventory & Housing Market sections

[Feb 19: optional—Laura Brudzynski lunchtime lecture]

6) February 24: Support for Affordable Housing by the State of Colorado and City of Denver

Guest Speaker: Robin Kneich, former at-Large Denver City Councilmember **CAP**

Kneich, Robin. "Land Use Reform vs. Local Control Continues, Renter Protections Evolve."

DUE: Student presentations on recent Colorado legislation

7) March 3: Systemic Racism in Housing **CHFA**

Menendian, S., Gambhir, S., & Gailes, A. (2021). "Twenty-First Century Racial Residential Segregation in the United States." The Roots of Structural Racism Project. Othering and Belonging Institute. UC Berkeley.

8) March 10: Homelessness and the Human Right to Housing **CHFA**

Guest Speaker: Johnna Flood, CEO, Elevate Denver

Elevated Denver [podcast]. Season 2, Episode 15: The System

DUE: HNA summary- Housing Problems section

9) March 17: Field Trip: Renaissance Veterans Apartments at Fitzsimons | Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (led by MURP alum Max Lubarsky, CCH's Director of Housing Development)

10) March 24: No class- Spring Break

11) March 31: Rural Housing Issues | Gentrification **CAP**

Guest Speaker: Robin Wolff, Senior Director- Rural Communities, Enterprise Community Partners

Gould Ellen, Ingrid (2018). "Can Gentrification Be Inclusive?" *A Shared Future*. Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies, chapter 20.

Rigolon, Alessandro & Jeremy Németh (2019). "Toward a Socioecological Model of Gentrification: How People, Place, and Policy Shape Neighborhood Change." *Journal of Urban Affairs 41*(7), 887-905.

DUE: Field Trip Reflection

12) April 7: Intro to NIMBY | LIHTC 101 **CHFA**

Guest Speaker: Lisa Williams, Tax Credit Officer, Colorado Housing Finance Authority

Axel-Lute, Miriam (2023). "LIHTC: How It Started, How It's Going." *Shelterforce*.

Scally, C. P. (2014). NIMBY: Shelterforce series parts 1-4.

13) April 14: Affordable Housing Development Process

Field Trip: CREW National Affordable Housing Council: Anatomy of a Deal

14) April 21: Housing Innovations **CHFA**

Guest Speaker: Randy Rhodes, Director of Affordable Housing, Cushing Terrell and Laura Dougherty, Denver Studio Director/ Project Manager, Cushing Terrell

DUE: Proposed Housing Strategy or Action in Your HNA Community

McBride, A. (2025). "What Will It Take to Get Teacher Housing Built in Oakland?" *The Oaklandside*, August 7.

Cochran, C. (2026). "A Statewide, Build-Ready Catalog for Missing-Middle Housing." *Public Square*, March 5.

Horowitz, A., & T. Kansal (2024). "Co-Living Could Unlock Office-to-Residential Conversions." Pew Charitable Trust.

15) April 28: Inclusive Housing: Universal Design, Dignified Design, and Older Adults **CAP**

Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2023). *Housing America's Older Adults*.

16) May 5: Field Trip: VOA Theodora Family Shelter (4885 W. Colfax Ave.) and Shopworks Architecture (301 W. 45th Ave.)

Shopworks Architecture- Dignified Design Research (https://shopworksarc.com/dignified/) [review anything you find interesting!]

17) May 12: Finals Week: In-class NIMBY exercise **CHFA**

DUE: Field Trip Reflection

CANVAS AND COURSE COMMUNICATIONS:
All assigned readings, as well as optional readings, team project information, and important announcements will be provided through Canvas. Make sure you know how the materials for this course are organized and that you can access everything. I generally send emails to students through Canvas, so it is essential that you check your school email regularly (or have it forwarded to another email address that you typically use.) You are responsible for being aware of any messages, assignment updates, or schedule changes I send you via email or post on Canvas.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THIS COURSE:
In my classroom, I seek to create a learning environment in which each person feels safe and respected, and in which a diversity of perspectives and experiences is treated as an asset and an opportunity to learn from each other. Like many people, I am continually learning about diverse perspectives and identities and seeking to address my implicit biases. While we will seek to maintain an environment of mutual respect, if something is said in class (by anyone) that makes you feel uncomfortable, please raise the issue or talk to me about it.

Class rosters are provided to me by the university with your legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronouns. Simply let me know.

I recognize that many academic and professional publications have been written from the perspective of a small subset of historically privileged voices. While I have worked to assign readings from a diverse group of authors that represent a range of viewpoints, I acknowledge that overt and implicit biases in the material, and in my selection process, likely remain. I welcome your suggestions for improving the quality and inclusivity of the course materials.

UNIVERSITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES:
The Student and Community Counseling Center is available to every CU Denver student. Located in the Tivoli Student Union, room 454, it provides cost-free and confidential mental health services to help students manage personal challenges that impact emotional or academic well-being. Learn more here: https://www.ucdenver.edu/counseling-center or call 303-315-7270.

On weekends, holidays, or after hours, you can contact the 24/7 Mental Health Crisis and Victim Assistance Line at 303-615-9999 or text Talk to 38255.

If you have immediate concern about the behavior or safety of a CU Denver student, help by making a referral to the Campus Assessment, Response & Evaluation (CARE) Team. If you or a classmate need help, please submit your concern to http://www.ucdenver.edu/care or call 303-315-7306.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES:
Academic Honesty: Students are expected to know, understand, and comply with the ethical standards of the university, including rules against plagiarism, cheating, fabrication and falsification, multiple submissions, misuse of academic materials, and complicity in academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas without crediting that person. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and may lead to failure on an assignment, in the class, and dismissal from the University.

Accommodation: CU Denver is committed to ensuring that all students can fully participate in its programs, including students with disabilities. If you need accommodations to succeed in this course, as soon as possible please contact Disability Resources and Services at disabilityresources@ucdenver.edu or call 303-315-3510. After their documentation process is complete, they will send me an official letter documenting the necessary accommodation. (Often that official letter is impersonal, so please communicate with me directly as well so we can make sure you have what you need.)

Religious Observances: I will make every effort to reasonably and fairly accommodate all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled classes, assignments, or required activities. If this applies to you, please contact me as soon as possible at the beginning of the term so that we can make arrangements.

Non-Discrimination Policy: The University of Colorado Denver is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment. University policy and Title IX prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, pregnancy, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation, or political philosophy in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. All students shall have the same fundamental rights to equal respect, due process, and judgment of them based solely on factors demonstrably related to performance and expectations as students.