

# Availability of Low-Income Housing in Relation to Need in Greenville County

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## Abstract

The poverty rate in the United States has been a rising problem, and Greenville County is not an exception. This project began with an investigation of the concentration of poverty and the availability of low-income housing in Greenville County. The areas of greatest need were established through census data. For comparison purpose, 1990 census data was used in order to see if there has been a trend in this demographics' movement. Real estate information was then collected to check the availability of houses that are able to be purchased by people who are, according to government standards, living in poverty. The results showed that there was a pocket of high levels of poverty located in the downtown Greenville area. However, this area also had the highest concentration of available low-income housing. The outer areas of Greenville County, especially in the north, had moderate instances of poverty but a lack of housing.

## Background Information

Much of my research was aided by the Greenville Area Interfaith Hospitality Network (GAIHN). GAIHN is a non-profit organization that helps homeless families. The final goal was to discover the areas which are in greatest need but are currently not being addressed. From there, I hope to work with GAIHN in order to decide the best areas to build new transitional housing units for temporary housing for the homeless.

## Data Collection

Real estate is a constantly changing market. Since much of the data used in this project is dependent on this shifting market, it soon becomes outdated. Analysis results from this project are applicable for housing condition as of November 11th, 2007. Below are the instructions for downloading the data if the need arises to repeat this research at a future date.

The main real estate data was downloaded from the website: <http://www.qgaronline.com>. On this website, select the first area and set the search for the price range \$0 - \$125,000. After the results come up, verify to make sure each listing was in Greenville County. Then, copy the address, city, zip code, and list price into an Excel spreadsheet. Follow this procedure for each search area in the county. After going through all of the areas and finding all of the houses that were for sale, go to <http://www.batchgeocode.com>. This website helps in Geocoding the addresses. Follow instructions on this website to obtain the latitude and longitude of each house. Add these two new columns to the Excel spreadsheet. Save this file in a .dbf format, and import the dbf file into ArcMap to display the locations.

## Methodology

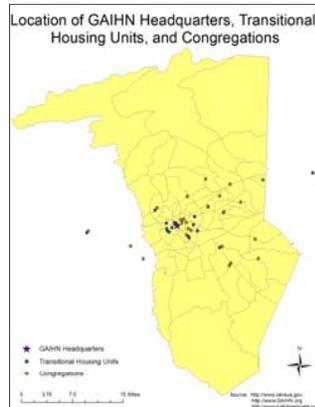
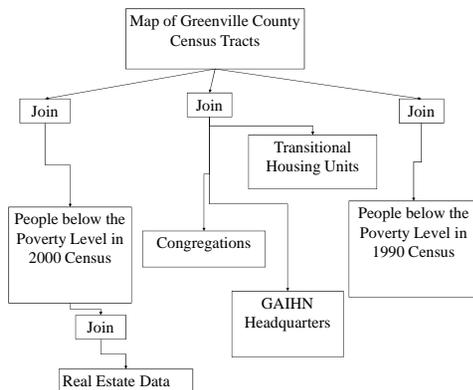


Figure 1

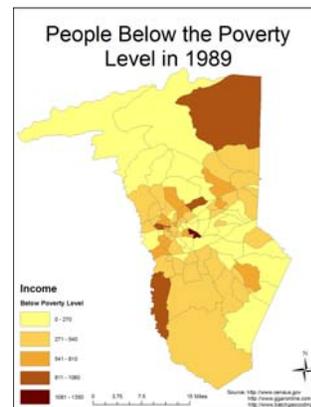


Figure 2

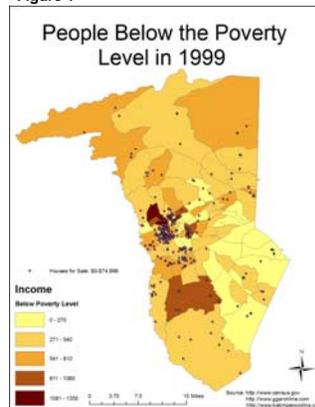


Figure 3

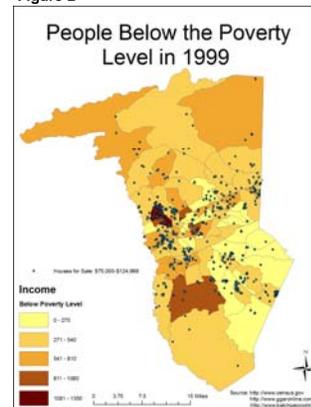


Figure 4

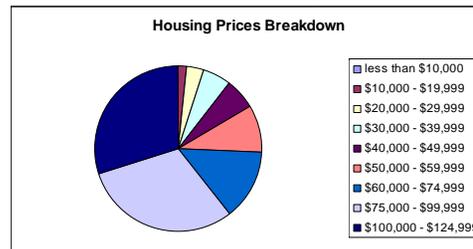


Figure 5

## Metadata

The map of Greenville County, census tract boundaries, and census data was downloaded from <http://www.census.gov>. The census tracts were imported into ArcMap using the Greenville\_Tracts.shp file. The census data is from the Detailed Tables found in Summary File 3 format from American FactFinder. The projection for the XY data is the North American 1927 datum.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the employees of GAIHN, especially Reverend Tony McDade, for their ideas and suggestions in determining the areas of focus for this project. Also, I would like to thank Professor Ken Peterson of the Economics Department for his help generating the final maps. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Suresh Muthukrishnan for all of his input to produce the final project as well as all of his help in EES24 this semester.

## Results

As of November 11th, 2007, there was a disproportionate spread of low-income housing available in Greenville County. Houses that had a list price of \$0-\$74,999 were more highly concentrated in the downtown areas, especially the city of Greenville (Figure 3). While there is still a large concentration of houses for sale with a list price of \$75,000-\$124,999 in the downtown Greenville area, their locations are more dispersed (Figure 4). The "band" of houses that stretches across the width in the middle of the county is located near the majority of the cities in Greenville County. Greenville, Taylors, and Greer are just a few that are located in that area. Overall, there is a lack of low-income houses for sale in the outer edges of the county. This can be attributed to the fact that these areas are mainly suburbs. Also, the houses that are located in these regions are most likely larger in nature than those found in the downtown area causing them to have higher list prices. My prediction of the existence of larger houses in these areas is due to the fact that these regions are in rural areas and are not close to a city. Both of these factors decrease land prices to offset the opportunity cost of travel. With cheaper land prices, a person/contractor can afford to buy more land and build a bigger house.

It is interesting to note the proportions of houses within each price range as can be seen in Figure 5. When looking at the total number of houses for sale in Greenville County, the majority are priced \$75,000 or higher. While I included them in my search for available housing, these prices are reaching the limit of qualifying as low-income housing. Thus, many people living below the poverty line would be priced out of these houses.

In comparing the 1990 and 2000 census data (Figures 2, 3, and 4), it is obvious that the overall map from 2000 is darker than that from 1990. This means that there has been an increase in total poverty levels in Greenville County. There are a few key areas of exception though. In 1989, the top right corner of the county had a high poverty level. This decreased by the 2000 census; however, it seems that the impoverished population moved west because the entire top half of the county increased in total number of people below the poverty level. Another incident of migration occurred, but this time it was in the southern portion of the region. In this case, the increase in the concentration of poverty moved east.

With the expansion and development of cities in Greenville County, there is a possibility that the concentration of poverty could move out of the actual city limits into the nearby area. This would happen because the poor would be priced out of the market in a developing city going through urban renewal. Being located near a city increases land prices which increases housing costs because of the close proximity to amenities that cities provide. There are beginnings to this trend that can be seen in Figures 2, 3, and 4 as the direct center of downtown Greenville does not have the highest rate of poverty, but the census tracts directly outside the city limits do.

## Conclusion

There are many areas in Greenville County that are inhabited by people below the federal poverty level and do not have sufficient access to low-income housing. Many of the areas not being addressed are in the more rural areas. The downtown Greenville area has the greatest concentration of low-income housing. From an economic perspective, this does not reflect well on the city of Greenville. Having a high concentration of low-income housing is not in conjunction with economic ideals because a city would rather these low-income houses be spread out, creating more of a mixed income environment. However, the existence of a high concentration is positive for the impoverished population especially since cities have a history of having high poverty rates. This means that people living below the poverty level would not have to relocate very far in order to find housing within their range of purchase.

Currently, GAIHN is addressing the areas of need that exist in the downtown Greenville area. This can largely be contributed to the fact that the GAIHN headquarters in the majority of the congregations in its network are located in the downtown Greenville area (Figure 1). There is a definite need for GAIHN to begin focusing on the outer edges of the county, especially in the north. Since much of their success comes from the financial support and volunteering of congregation members, GAIHN should look into expanding their network to include congregations that are located in the areas of higher poverty. By having a local connection, GAIHN increases its chance of having a positive and successful impact on the region in greatest need.