

Humboldt Housing Project: A Portrait of Place

James Adam Taylor
HCAOG / REAP Grant

Humboldt Housing Project

A Portrait of a Place

Photos interviews, writings and materials
by James Adam Taylor

Funded through the generous support of
Humboldt County Association of Governments
and the REAP Grant.

Introduction

Through the course of this project I set out to build a picture of our community through photos, interviews and interactions. Housing is a complex topic. At the outset it was apparent that the needs are great, and solutions are slow moving, but moving nonetheless. My goal through this is to help shed light on the situation our community must tackle.

There are many pieces, humanizing rather than othering, examining the complexities of planning, zoning, the public process, and working to help community members to understand the pros and cons of the various outcomes of what is brought into shape, starting today, for tomorrow.

In the process, I experienced housing insecurity myself. In January 2023 I was served a 60 day notice that my rental contract had been terminated and I

would have to vacate my affordable-to-me home of nearly a decade. Seeing first hand, how much housing insecurity makes every other aspect of life more difficult gave me additional perspective in my conversations with other community members. It personally brought to light just how much stress so many of our neighbors are living with day to day.

To date, elements of this project have been shown publicly in venues that encouraged additional community interaction. Twice at my personal studio space, at a showcase event at Synapsis, as well as at the Jefferson Community Center all here in Eureka. This is a selection of photos, and interviews collected through the process. More will continue to be available on various social media and web outlets, as well as a multimedia exhibition at College of the Redwoods in Fall of 2024

**Humboldt
Housing
Project**

“The entire time I lived in Humboldt I never once lived in a place that didn’t have some code violations or unsafe elements. I was mostly broke. I couldn’t afford a lawyer, I didn’t know who to call. Any effort on my part to fight back could cause me to homeless once again. Landlords had no problem retaliating because they had the money to fight and we didn’t.”

**CALL OR TEXT 707-273-1319 LEARN MORE AT HUMBOLDTHOUSINGPROJECT.COM
E-MAIL THOUGHTS AND STORIES TO HUMHOUSINGPROJECT@GMAIL.COM**

By James Adam Taylor, made possible through the support of HCAOG and the REAP Grant



What makes a
"good"
landlord?

What makes a
"good"
tenant?

What makes
building in
California so
expensive?

Why has rent in
Humboldt
increased so
much?

Can you still
afford to live
here? What will
you do if you
can't?

What is Cal Poly
Humboldt's level of
responsibility for our
housing crisis?
How can they be
accountable for their
part?

What are the
challenges of
living in your
car?

What would
you do if you
lost your job
and couldn't
afford rent?

Does your
organization
help people
stay in homes
they can
afford? How?

How can we
make new
rental units
affordable for
average
community
members?

Where would
you like to live?

What keeps you
in Humboldt
County?

Would you
move if you
could?

Why did you
move to
Humboldt
County?

What keeps you
here?

What are your
hopes for the
future of our
region?

What worries
you?

Where do you
stay when you
are between
homes?

What is that
like?

Where could
more housing fit
in your
community?

PAGE 2. HHP SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS PAPER SUBMISSION FORM
ONLINE CONTACT FORM, E-MAIL, TEXT MESSAGE AND
RECORDING LINE WERE ALSO OPTIONS.

PAGE 3. HHP COMMUNITY SUBMISSION

PAGE 4. SELECTION OF HHP COMMUNITY INPUT PROMPTS

PAGE 5. SELECTION OF COMMUNITY SUBMISSIONS FROM THE VARIOUS
SUBMISSION OPTIONS

“People Deserve to Make a Living, Not a Killing.”

Dan Close (Right)

“I was homeless when I moved here as a student in 1987, I have been housed an unhoued since then. Now I've got one class and an incomplete left to graduate... No place to stay I've been couch surfing and staying with friends, traveling long distances and sleeping in my car.

I got a temporary housing grant from the city of Arcata, but it's hard to find a place that fits the parameters, because the rents go up faster than the cost of living allowance, they have for that...

I've been staying in the community center parking lot, a friend of mine gave me a health sport membership, I've been staying at various friends houses, I know a few good porches at businesses that are closed, I know when they are closed

and when is a good night to stay there. I've scoped out a bunch of camping spots...

It [Arcata] needs rent control, it needs rollbacks, it needs regulation. It's capitalism run amok and the people that are getting wealthy aren't down with it. They're the ones with the power and they're not willing to give up rents that double, triple and quadruple in years and less than decades. So their costs don't go up, their profit goes up and people suffer.

A lot of people spend way more than the 30% of the income they're supposed to on housing and common to see 50% and more for housing. People deserve to make a living, not a killing. And that's the problem we've got here.”







“I don’t want to burden anybody.”

Page 8. Mikael,

“We need more housing and housing should be more affordable... Live work spaces, I think would be really nice for people, due to the affordability of trying to have an art space and live-in space... More cooperative housing with shared bathrooms and kitchens...If we were living together, it would be cheaper”

Page 9. Kyle, “This is the most permanent housing that I have actually had in for three or four years...[before] I was living out of a Volkswagen van... Prior to living in the van, I was actually homeless. That stint, was brief, but it was a real situation...”

Displacement or instability over a long period of time; it wears on you and so that was one of the major reasons that I knew I wanted to change my situation. Out of unique timing, I found myself here... I live in my art studio ...It is just this very modest, almost square room that I converted.

Kind of like a minor loft kind of living space and I left the main part of it open for, an inspirational studio space. I have a wall, I commit to my paintings, and I'm now able to collect records for the first time in my life, and all my books are out. I get to see all my books every day. I feel like a rich man some days.”

Right:

Jamie Little,

“I really think they should have more shelters. You know, I'm [here] from high mountains for a job. I'm looking for job opportunities out here.

I am a tribal member of the Hoopa Valley... Look at our family tree... There ain't no sense of us being homeless. We live in a beautiful place, and there should be shelters. Look at all these empty buildings. How come they're not putting nothing to use? You know, we need more housing here. You know, we're all struggling.

This is my concern. I come out to town, and I got nowhere to go...I'm feeling like a bum, even though how much money I get paid. That money is like water. You look at the bus, even though I'm an elder, I still got to pay \$3, \$6 wherever I go.

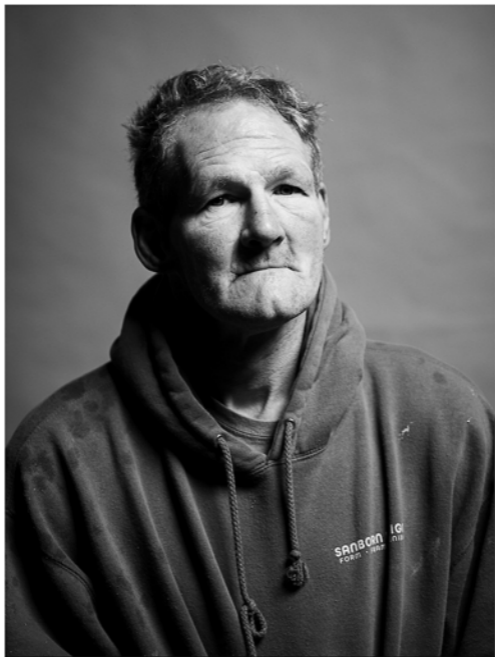
It hurts my heart to see people on the street, you know, and begging for money. You know, I don't want to burden anybody with my problems of having nowhere to go. I'm going to be 60, you know? So I'm like, I don't have nowhere to go. But if I had somewhere to go, I'd go.”



"I'm just trying to build out to where I can get my ID and set up a bank account and everything. Trying to get out of this homelessness and actually become a regular citizen"

Right:
Vince

Interviewed at Uncoded Studio, Eureka







"Once you become homeless you know every day is more or less about, where are we going to eat? Where are we going to sleep? You know, it becomes a full-time job, being homeless, and then not even talking about, you know, the social aspect of it is like, a second class citizen.

Police are always, checking on you and I mean, I've had more contact with the police in the last year than I have my entire life. You know, and that's just because you're on Front Street, you're exposed. I mean police they got a hard job but they're human too and they make mistakes and, you know, you don't always catch them in the best moods. You know just getting a good night's sleep is a main challenge and then, you know, you're grumpy, they're grumpy. Words are said and next thing you know, you'll find yourself going to jail for nothing, or something stupid."

Page 14:

Drew,

Interviewed at Redway Baptist,
Bridging the Gap event.

"It's awesome because we have a place where I can get up, shower and eat and all that in an hour. It would take me like nine hours on the street to get that done, just to be able to get ready to go to a job interview because, you know, even a job interview, I couldn't go like this.

You have to have nice clothes. You don't do that on the river bar...

If I don't want somebody to come in here, they can't come in, maybe the managers or whatever. But even they have to give you a notice...

I'm safe. Yeah. And when you're in the tent and the rats are fighting under your tent and you're cold and you're hungry and your tent starts leaking. What do you do? That was my life just a few months ago.

"I've been here (Humboldt County) since I was four in 1971. I was born in Orange County and I guess we kind of just kind of slowly made our way up the coast. My mother was definitely a back-to-the-lander...

We had a very strong sense of community because we needed each other to survive back then. I remember when I was a kid, nobody had four wheel drive vehicles, everybody had old beaters and on the steepest muddiest parts of the road everybody would park at the bottom, and take turns standing on the back bumper jumping up and down. So each car can make it up past the steep, slippery part. Things like that build community and build strong ties. I guess that can't really be forged that way ever again because things are totally different now, but hopefully, in some other ways, maybe... A lot of people, maybe have a lot of separation in their hearts. And I don't know what could promote healing for that, but I know it has to happen on an individual level. As well as, you know, community wise I'm not sure what the remedy is for that, but it would be nice if we could get some ideas."

Page 15:

Shanan,

Interviewed at her camp in Redway

"I'm safe."

Right:

Melissa Johnson

Interviewed at The Grove, Arcata















Where's Alan?

I went to meet Alan to conduct an interview. He suggested the library would be a good place to find him since he spent a good portion of his days there throughout the week. However, the library was closed and all I could find were his belongings placed at the door.

Financial and housing insecurity makes life difficult, for many this means there is nowhere to sleep, nowhere to be warm or dry, nowhere to leave important documents or belongings. It makes it difficult to stay on schedule, arrange a meeting, travel to an appointment, and participate in modern society.

Arcata Public Library

I was exploring a portion of the "Gateway Area" and came across numerous encampments. A number of the residents were working on moving refuse out of the encampment into a large pile at the edge of the property to make it easier to clean up when they could obtain a dumpster. It was an obvious struggle, without access to trash removal, and with so many residents salvaging items from curbs and dumpsters, it seemed to be a larger task than was capable without heavy machinery. Even so numerous residents were searching the wetland areas to ensure they were clean of trash and debris.

Page 19:
Back 40, Arcata

After decades of stagnation, Humboldt County is at a housing reckoning.

The available housing stock is old, and new construction is expensive, so expensive that rents needed to recoup developers' investments are beyond the reach of many community members.

In Eureka and Arcata, many of the older motels are in the process of conversion into transitional housing to ease the houseless crisis, while in residential neighborhoods houses are being converted into short term rental units. Hotels to homes and houses to hotels. All the while, existing buildings fall into disrepair or are lost to natural disasters. Construction companies factor in as much as 30% higher costs to develop a lot which will require demolition and bringing old infrastructure up to current code is cost prohibitive too. The answers are complex and will involve regulations, revisions, incentives, and new ideas.

Beyond the short supply and expensive new builds.

Pages 20, 21:

Bishop Pines, Trinidad

The Bishop Pines motel and Cabins vanish slowly into a forest as they are consumed by time and the elements.

Page 22:

Rio Del

A home damaged by an earthquake and lost to fire

Page 23:

Arcata

New build in progress

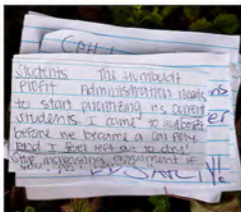
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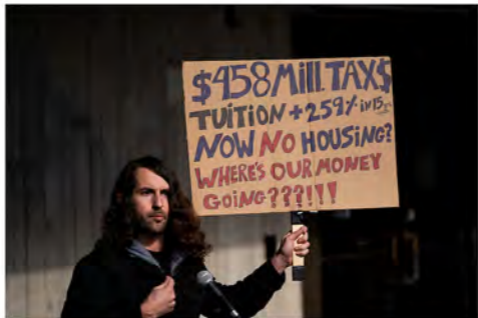
Cal Poly Humboldt, Campus Center for Appropriate Technology

Students at CPH show off the Hempcrete demo wall. The answers to many of today's problems lie in the excitement of younger generations, solutions and technologies they will bring forth to shape a world they believe in.

Top, Madi

Bottom, Suzuki











Previous Pages:

In early 2023 Cal Poly Humboldt announced plans to significantly increase enrollment for the 2023-24 school year. This came in the face of an already existing housing shortage on campus as-well-as in the city of Arcata and the region in general. As the University scrambled to find a housing solution for the following year it announced it would no longer ensure housing for returning students. The university suggested plans to house students off campus in numerous motels, as well as potentially on a large barge which could be situated in Humboldt Bay in the neighboring city of Eureka. Students organized protests on campus in light of this news. Cal Poly Humboldt, formerly Humboldt State University is no stranger to housing controversy, it has been named as having one of the highest numbers of students facing housing insecurity multiple years in a row. It is not uncommon for students attending CPH to live in vehicles, continually couch surf, and even in tents in the nearby community forest.

Around this time the University also announced residential developments for the area formerly known as the Craftsmans Mall. The new construction is not set to house new students until sometime in the 2025 academic year.

Page 25:

Cal Poly Humboldt Campus, Arcata

Top: Student organizer Lars Hansen speaks at the February 8th CPH Housing Protest.

Left: hand written notes from students left for organizers to read throughout the event.

Right, A student protest sign

Page 26:

Top: Transfer student Rick Toledo voices his concerns and displays a sign at the student housing protest.

Bottom, Students and protest signs.

Pages 27, 28:

Arcata City Hall, Arcata

Looking in through the doors of Feb 15th Arcata City Council meeting, where Cal Poly Humboldt students showed up to protest over enrollment, and to support an Arcata proposal to add additional safety oversight to rental units within the city.

Page 29:

Arcata City Hall, Arcata

Arcata City Council addresses a chamber room of students protesting over enrollment at CPH and voicing support of stricter oversight of health and safety inspections for rental units within the city, Feb 15th.

Page 30:

Left, CPH Student Sawyer Stoddard, holds a sign at the Feb 15th Arcata City Council meeting.

Right, Protester and sign supporting local and student solidarity at the Arcata City Council meeting on Feb 15th.



Answers come through a multitude of sources, but paramount are city government and local organizations that facilitate building and infrastructure codes. A community's ability to assess what has worked, what may work, and how to move forward with the future in mind is key to thriving and equitable cities.

"There are all of these things aligning, to kind of just change the makeup of our community and you know we're reluctant to have that happen rapidly. I do think we need to be understanding, that's coming, and then, how we want to manage that in a healthy way so that we don't just see massive gentrification. That we don't see, the sort of community we've all worked so hard to create and love here, go away because we're seeing these outside pressures that are better resourced than the people who are here already. "

Previous Page: Beth Burks, Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG)

Interviewed at Uncoded Studio, Eureka
Beth Burks Executive Director, HCAOG

Page 35:
Gary Goade
Building Official, City of Fortuna
Fortuna City Hall

Building officials hold a lot of power in a community, particularly the ability to ensure new projects follow code and regulations of municipalities. Cognizant of the limitations of the geography of their city Fortuna has set to be more friendly to growth, is looking to incorporate new construction into revitalizing the city.

Page 36:
Matthew Simmons,
Arcata Planning Commission

Interviewed at Uncoded Studio, Eureka

"I want to make sure Arcata builds enough new housing to handle the influx of people that are coming...If we don't build housing to help absorb that, they are going to displace folks that have been here and I want to make sure that doesn't happen."

"We're
spread out
more."

"After the war (WWII), we kind of changed the way that we built things and we went to, single homes and we used a lot of land. Large lots, single homes. A lot of our buildings downtown became empty. We used to have a lot more housing up above stores. The center of town kind of hollowed out and then they tried bringing Old Town back, you know, with different things...

Transportation has gotten a lot worse. Actually, in the old days, they had a Trolley here and now it's all cars and we're spread out more. So I couldn't believe how busy Broadway got. You know, that's really a change and I lived just one block off Broadway for 50 years."

Page 37:
Kay Escarda
Interviewed at Uncoded Studio, Eureka

Formerly worked on two Housing Elements and has been active in housing issues for decades.









There are a multitude of answers and these ideas are pushed forward through community members, average citizens, activists, professionals and idealists, doing what they can to improve the lives of their neighbors in hopes of a stronger and better community tomorrow.

Pages 38, 39:

Redway

Pastor Christopher Andrews of Redway Baptist patrols a small portion of the city to inform the region's houseless of "Bridging the Gap", an event to feed and offer resources to those in need.

Houseless as a teenager and young adult in Southern California, in her 30's she encountered housing insecurity again after moving her family from Redding to Humboldt County to attend Humboldt State University in 2015, later she became the off-campus housing coordinator until her resignation in 2023.

"If you look at the historical context of houselessness, at least in the student, body you see a correlation between housing, racial issues and parking issues about every seven years. That matches with the growth spurt of the campus and it's directly correlated with those three issues. There's no doubt in my mind as a sociologist that those three continually connect, because there's competition for everything once that happens.... I gave a resignation Friday, I am no longer the off-campus housing coordinator. I can no longer represent an institution that does not align with morals

and values of protecting individuals who are coming in on grants, that are promised to the state. Basically, they're collateral. The students are collateral for bonds. So I cannot sit there in my right mind and support an institution that is causing classicism and racism and housing insecurity. It is legitimately causing more than half of the problem here. I hope that our administration, our government, comes together and creates better infrastructure for the growth that we are about to have... I just hope that through all this work that has to happen, we'll create a good foundation so that it doesn't create as many impacts as it could."

Right:

Chanté Marie Catl-Nesser

Interviewed at Soot Sprite Farm, McKinleyville

"They're doing something that I thought was impossible."

Page 42:

Keno Williams,

Interviewed at The Grove, Arcata

"I'll tell you a little bit about Arcata House just for a moment. They're the most passionate people I've ever worked with and it's in an awfully difficult situation, here, where it's overwhelming. And when I came on board I was naive and I am absolutely stunned by these people and the team. They're doing something that I thought was impossible. It is a complicated place operating in a complicated environment. But I don't think this team could be better."









Vision and inspiration for an inclusive community in McKinleyville.

From the We Are Up website:

Our family – perhaps like yours – includes children with autism and other developmental disabilities. As they grow older, we must contemplate their futures as adults, and prepare for the day when relatives are no longer able to care for them, or when they are ready to live more independently. The We Are UP project was born from the hope that these children from our family – and from yours – will have access to secure, long term and affordable housing, training and education that leads to rewarding employment, and life in a supportive community.

From an 80 acre homestead in Southern Humboldt to a successful cheesemaker and business owner, Mary Keehn envisions a future where community members support each other and her granddaughter and others will continue to thrive in the community they call home.

Mary Keehn envisions a future where community members support each other and her granddaughter and others will continue to thrive in the community they call home.

Page 43:
Mary Kheen and Jayden
Interviewed in Fieldbrook

“A man, like me, can be so much more, he's not a sum of his experience.

You could be more...”

“We're hosting what we like to call Bridging the Gap. It is the ministry that was started from the warming center from a show program that we had over the winter time. We continued it on, so we could serve the people, that people discarded, the homeless and the downtrodden. So, we got food and clothes and, all the amenities, toiletries, and all the stuff. Most of all we have Christ here, we show the love, that needs to be shown to the people that have like I said have been discarded...”

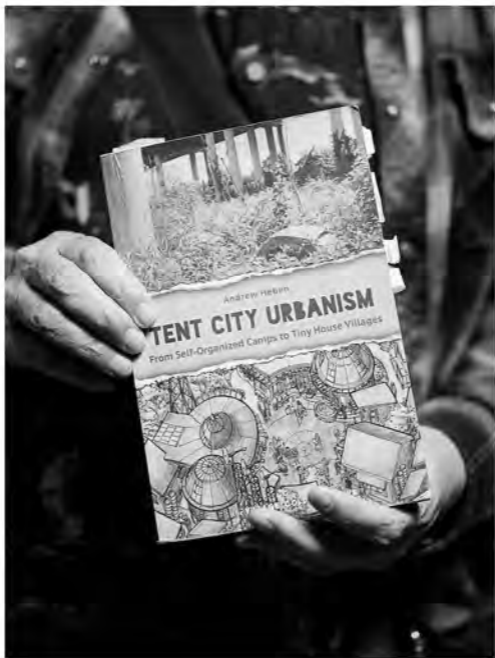
“Up to August 13, 2018. I was a meth head, for about 26 years....I had psychosis....I was two years homeless, and ended up at the Eureka Rescue Mission...

I got ordained a year ago. And I took over this church August 1st last year...

It's beginning a bloom. My hope is that this becomes larger. That more people understand that, a meth head, psychosed homeless, man, like me, can be so much more, he's not a sum of his experience. You could be more...”

“There was an officer, that didn't take me to jail when he could have. And he took me to Sempervirens instead and then escorted me down to Eureka rescue mission. Where I met Bryan Hall and because of that, he spoke kindness into me. He actually reasoned with me and I needed that the most, in my most desperate moment. That man spoke love into me.”

Page 44:
Pastor Christopher Andrews
Interviewed at Redway Baptist





Considered by many to be an important guidebook to help those in need of shelter and community to form self organized villages.

"We've always been with the people and they [people experiencing houselessness] clarified for us what it is that they wanted. They want a place where they can invest and build community and have neighborly relationships. It's all about mutual aid; helping one another. They do that now. That's how they survive and so they just wanted to be able to do it in a way that could be a longer term stability and not be disrupted... You know, places for people to move into a system of care and housing by just getting stable in either, safe parking, safe sheltering in tents or tiny house villages that are really inexpensive."

"They want a place where they can invest and build community and have neighborly relationships."

Page 47: Nezzie Wade
Interviewed at the A.H.H.A. office Eureka, CA

Co-Founder of Affordable Housing Homeless Alternatives, a non-profit that champions community based solutions to advance the health, wellbeing, and safety of people experiencing houselessness.

I would like to extend my gratitude towards the numerous people I met, photographed, interviewed or simply conversed with through the process of this project.

To HCAOG and the REAP Grant for enabling me to put in the time necessary to bring this compilation of works together, and for helping me to feel more invested in our community through the public process, through knowing my neighbors, and becoming a more informed citizen.

Often this project was heartbreaking, but it was also fulfilling. In large part, I have hope for our community. I believe we can work together against great odds to be neighborly and to help each other in ways that will ensure a brighter and more equitable future.

I want to extend additional and particular gratitude to the organizations and individuals who put themselves out in the community often at great personal expense to help those in need. In what often seems to be a winner-takes-all capital first society they are examples to aspire to.

James Adam Taylor | December 2023



