

Arresting the Decline of Housing in Low/Mod Census Tracts

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1.0 Abstract

Code enforcement along with public improvements, rehabilitation or services to be provided, may be expected to arrest the decline of blight within the City of Durham. To meet national objectives, all required criteria and proper documentation must be maintained. Geocoding the locations of accepted activities help meet both needs of the Durham's Department of Housing and Community Development. Our most crucial task is identifying code enforcement and other pertinent activities that occur within low to moderate census tracts. Spatial analysis is conducted to select activity locations that fall within low/mod polygons. Both low/mod and non-low/mod activities are uniquely symbolized as spatial data. This entire process provides significant information to be used for recording purposes.

2.0 Background of Community Development Block Grant Program

In 1974, Congress adapted the Housing and Community Development Act. Under Title I of this act, as amended, The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program was authorized (U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development). The primary objective of this act is the development of viable urban communities. These viable communities are achieved by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment and expanded economic opportunities principally for persons of low to moderate income. Entitlement communities benefit through the use of these funds; they receive a funding expansion without increasing tax dollars.

The Department of Housing and Community Development Code of Federal Regulations Volume 24, Part 570 (2004) details all necessary requirements. CDBG funds may only be used for eligible activities and for those that help meet the national objective. Title 24 Housing and Urban Development regulation cite §570.208 (2004) states that all eligible activities must benefit low/mod income persons, prevent or eliminate slums and blight or meet an urgent need (see fig. 2.1). To meet the low/mod national objective, activities must meet the area benefits test. The area benefits test is met if all the residents of a 51% low/mod area (see fig. 2.2) or upper quartile percentage (exception communities) are benefited by the eligible activities and that area is primarily residential (Lawrence and Roody, 2004, p. 1-11).

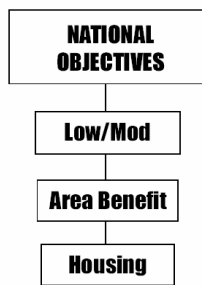


Figure 2.1 Durham's pathway to meeting the National Objective

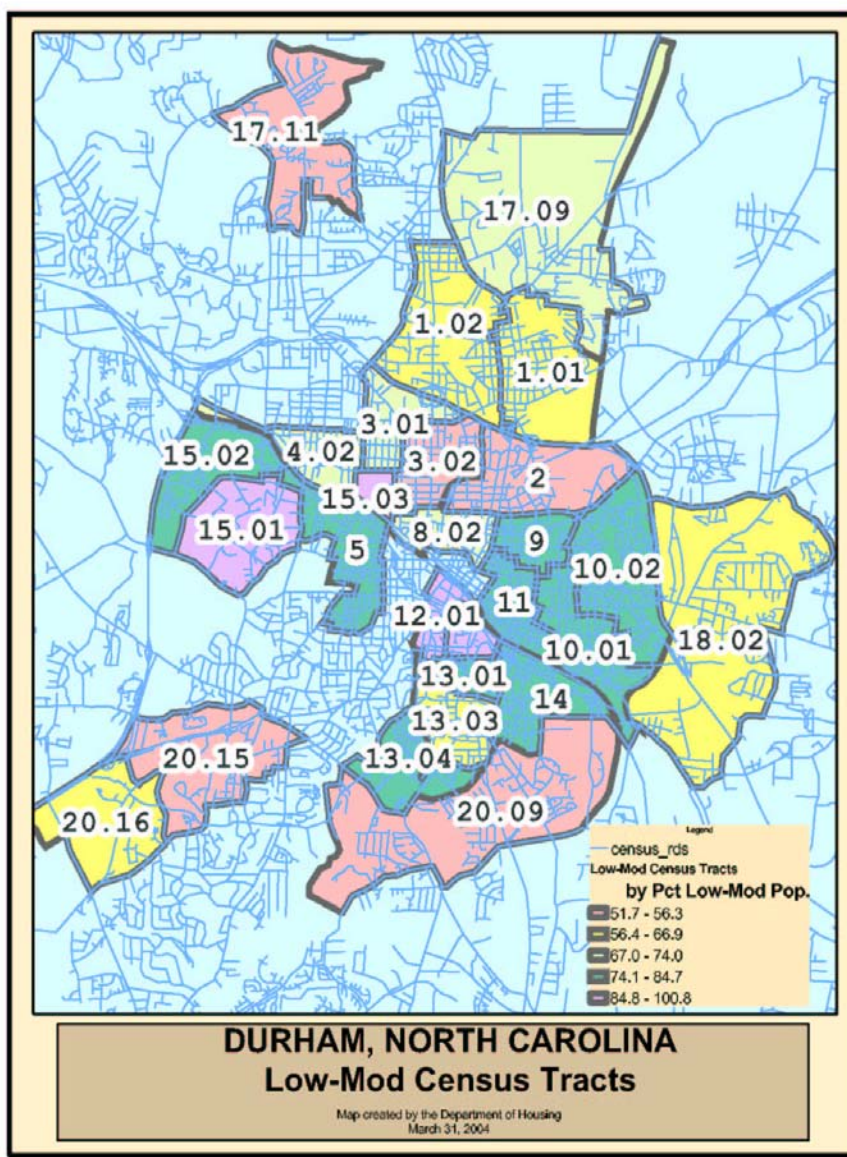


Figure 2.2 Low to Moderate Census Tracts by Percentage Low-Mod Population

3.0 Area Benefit to the Low to Moderate Population

Public and private improvements along with code enforcement encourage and secure more viable communities. Code enforcement promotes more improvement efforts in communities; improvements that wouldn't necessarily be made if not initiated by an inspector.

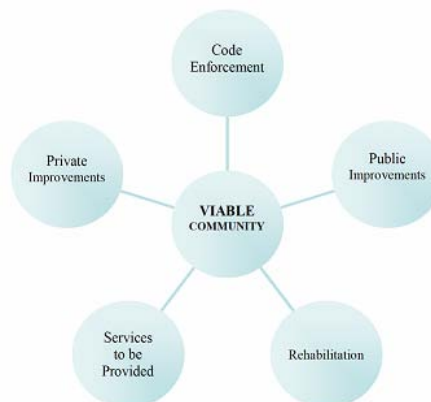
Code enforcement primarily affects the rental population. In most cases, renters are not required to make ordinary repairs to units. Even if tenants desire to make improvements to rental units, affordability would be a hindrance to that desire. According to the 2000 Census data for the city of Durham, in 1999 renters paid more than 35% of their income on rent (U.S. Census Bureau).

4.0 Obtaining Inspection and Improvement Data

Code enforcement is an eligible activity for CDBG funding as long as it compliments public and private improvements, rehabilitation or services to be provided (see fig. 4.0). To remain eligible, we must properly maintain documentation. Housing staff conducts inspections throughout the city limits, and enters the collected data into a Microsoft Access inspection database. A query is run on the inspection database. Queried data is imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Durham began recording information about housing inspections in a Microsoft Access database before the development of our GIS, therefore we must manually "clean" the address field. Any address information that would interfere with the geocoding service is removed (Cushman) (i.e., "Apt A", "right side," etc). We clean up the inspection data in the spreadsheet and save the file as a Microsoft 4.0 worksheet. That worksheet is then saved as a DBF 4 file. Unfortunately, this database is still the main depository for inspection activities.

Research must be conducted to obtain and record pertinent improvement activities within the low to moderate census tracts. We must identify and document investment and growth within the community and help to support it. We must also help protect investments, growth and improvements activities. Community improvement data that we must collect include: private improvements, rehabilitation, or services to be provided. Similar to the code enforcement data, this information is compiled into a community improvement spreadsheet, saved as a Microsoft 4.0 worksheet and then a DBF 4 file.

Figure 4.0
*Working together to
Arrest the Decline of
the area*



5.0 Using the power of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to document compliance with HUD regulations

Procedure

1. Geocode addresses to create a shapefile of points.
2. Add flag variable to help with symbolization (see *figure 5.1*).
3. Select by location to identify which inspection visits are within the low-mod area and thus eligible for HUD funding (see *figure 5.1*).

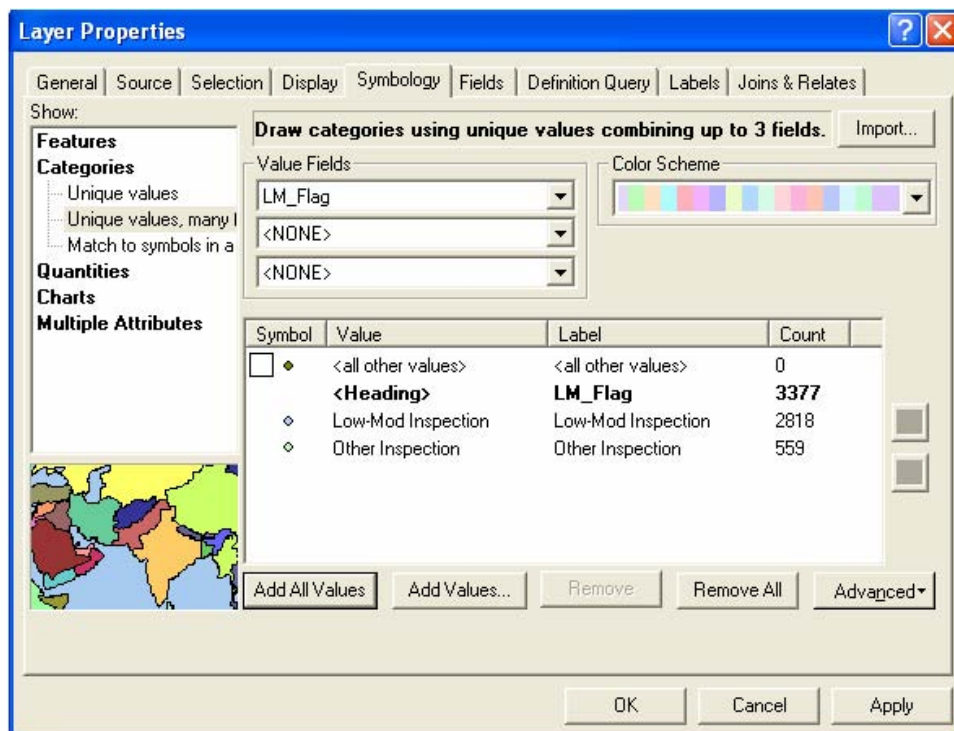
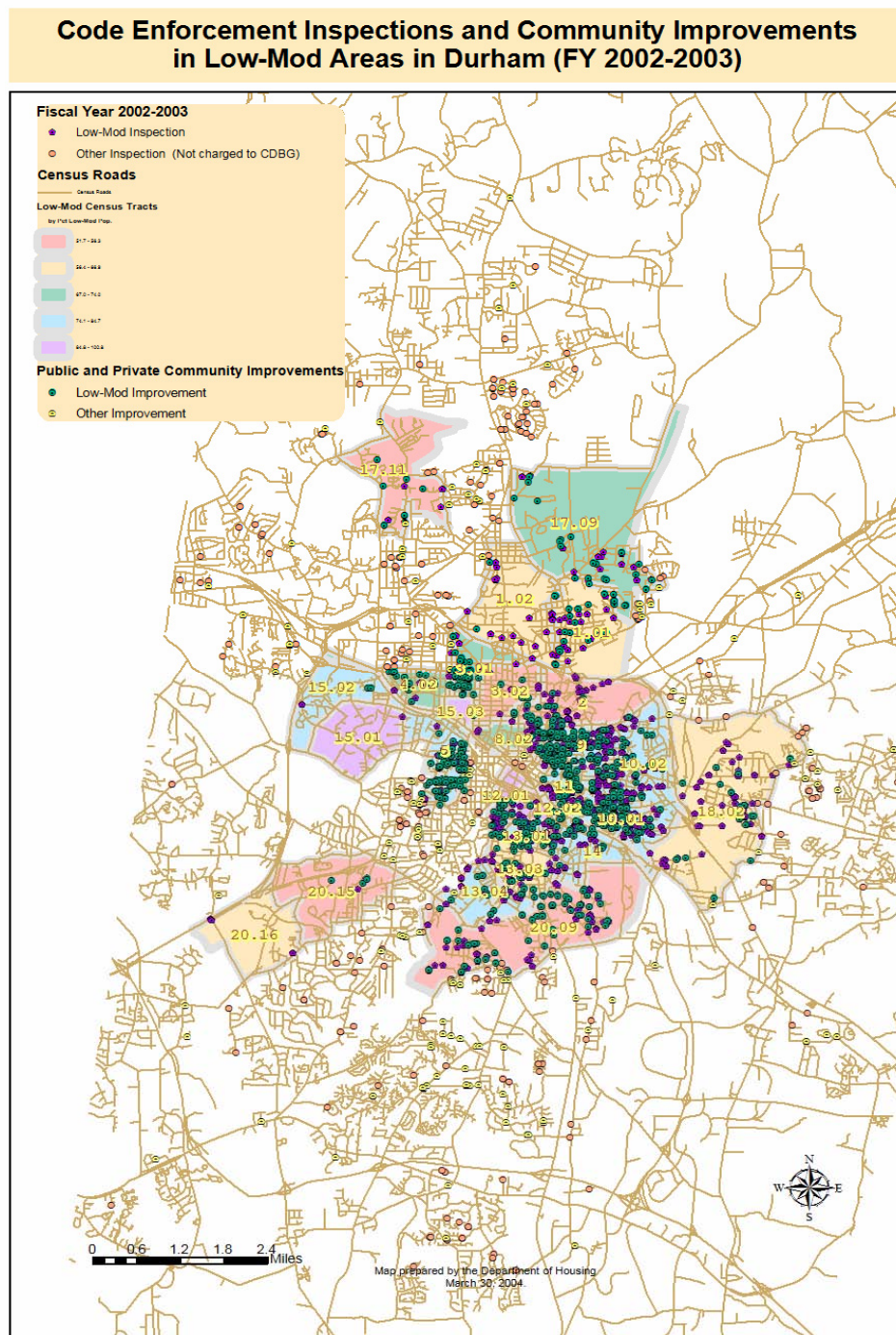


Figure 5.1 Symbology for Low-Mod and Other Inspections

4. Prepare a map as a visual aid for reporting to HUD



5. Export the inspection attribute table and calculate the actual amount due the city. Export community improvement attribute table and calculate the total improvement expenditures.

Housing Inspection Code Cost FY 2002-2003		
Low-Mod Census Tracts		Inspection Costs
TRT2000	TRACTID	
000101	1.01	\$14,250.00
000102	1.02	\$7,200.00
000200	2	\$14,400.00
000301	3.01	\$10,000.00
000302	3.02	\$2,325.00
000402	4.02	\$5,450.00
000500	5	\$33,075.00
000802	8.02	\$6,750.00
000900	9	\$58,825.00
001001	10.01	\$116,750.00
001002	10.02	\$24,625.00
001100	11	\$61,475.00
001201	12.01	\$12,600.00
001202	12.02	\$4,825.00
001301	13.01	\$25,725.00
001303	13.03	\$9,150.00
001304	13.04	\$14,125.00
001400	14	\$18,800.00
001502	15.02	\$1,250.00
001709	17.09	\$6,050.00
001711	17.11	\$2,000.00
001802	18.02	\$17,150.00
002009	20.09	\$18,900.00
002015	20.15	\$1,000.00
002016	20.16	\$4,250.00
Total Cost for All Low-Mod Tracts:		\$490,950
Total Cost for Rest of City:		\$86,100
Percentage of Inspection Costs in Low Mod Tracts:		85.1%
City-wide Total Cost of Inspections:		\$577,050

6. Prepare comparison summary table of inspection and community improvement data.

CDBG Summary
FY 2002-2003

* Charges to CDBG Program for Code Enforcement	\$325,322.60
** Code Enforcement Expenditures in Low-Mod Tracts (based on MOU July 1, 2000)	\$490,950.00
*** Balance of CDBG Program Charges and Expenditures for Code Enforcement in Low-Mod Census Tracts	(\$165,627.40)
Public and Private Expenditures to Arrest Decline in Low-Mod Tracts	\$31,493,133.50
Charges to CDBG Program as % of Total Expenditures to Arrest Decline in Low-Mod Tracts	1.0%

* Back up materials include all activities conducted by Housing, including those not within Low to Moderate census tract areas. "Other inspection" data is provided for informational purposes only. These activities were not charged to the CDBG program.

** These expenditures are based on an assumed cost of \$75 per "abandoned vehicle" inspection, \$100 per "weedy lot" inspection, and \$250 per "house" inspection, as agreed upon in a City of Durham Memorandum of Understanding dated July 1, 2000.

*** The City of Durham's total eligible CDBG Expenditures for Code Enforcement in Low-Mod Census Tracts for the 1 year period (\$490,950.00) exceeds the total amount billed to HUD as CDBG Expenditures for Code Enforcement (\$325,322.60) for the 1 year period by \$165,627.

Conclusion

In the year 2003, the City of Durham was faced with the challenge of putting together an adequate system that would document and support our code enforcement funding for the previous six years. Looking at a possible one million dollar finding from HUD, we worked diligently to put this system in place. Our hard work prevented a finding, and afforded us the opportunity to receive a credit from HUD in the amount of \$146,850 for monies not previously charged. Our system of documentation has been deemed by HUD as a “National Model.” We look forward to invoking more of our GIS power into the model.

Acknowledgements

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References

R. Cushman, personal communication.

K. Lawrence and K. Roddy, HOME and CDBG Workshop Manual, March 16-17, 2004 (ICF Consulting on behalf of North Carolina State HUD Office, Fairfax, VA, 2004).

Title 24 Housing and Urban Development, Parts Vol. 4, 500 to 699, (Regulations of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, DC 2004).

U.S. Census Bureau <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development <http://www.hud.gov/>.

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