

# PUTTING THE, “PUBLIC” BACK INTO PUBLIC HOUSING: SHARING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN LONDON



By: Tim Smuck  
Supervisor: Dr. Martin Horak

# BIG STATEMENTS

*“Housing fits into the middle of everything. It is physical design, it is community development, it is social development, it is important to health and educational outcomes, it can be a poverty reduction tool. It is both an individual and public good.” - D. Myers*

*Public housing is not the problem, global economic restructuring is the problem.”*

*“Historically Public housing was a positive community experience, therefore if once again well funded and maintained along side tenants, public housing can once again meet those standards as a good place to live.” - Sliver*



## WHAT IS PUBLIC HOUSING? HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM SOCIAL HOUSING?

**Social Housing Includes:** Project- or dwelling-based subsidized housing that is either public or private (that is to say, third sector, as in the case of private non-profit and co-operative housing). or in income-mixed projects of more recent decades.

**Public Housing Includes:** Entirely rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing, as in the early post-World War II public housing schemes, owned and controlled by a government body/ housing corporation. (LMHC)

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does the media and government discourse about public housing residents differ from lived experience of public housing resident?
2. In what ways can the lived experience of public housing residents inform a new discussion that better serves their social housing policy needs?

# WHAT I HAVE DONE

- ❖ **Literature Review:** De-concentration of poverty theory, right to the city theory, economic neoliberalism
- ❖ **Methodology:** Focus Groups within 2 communities. Southdale, and Limberlost
- ❖ All research gathered was done in the community through an informal conversation.



Census Tract 555.0031.00 in East London,  
East of Adelaide, south of Dundas, north of the tracks



Population 2011 Census  
1,296 persons  
(-10.2% decline in population  
since 2001)

LIM, after tax (2000): 31.8%



**LIM, after tax (2012): 42.3 %**

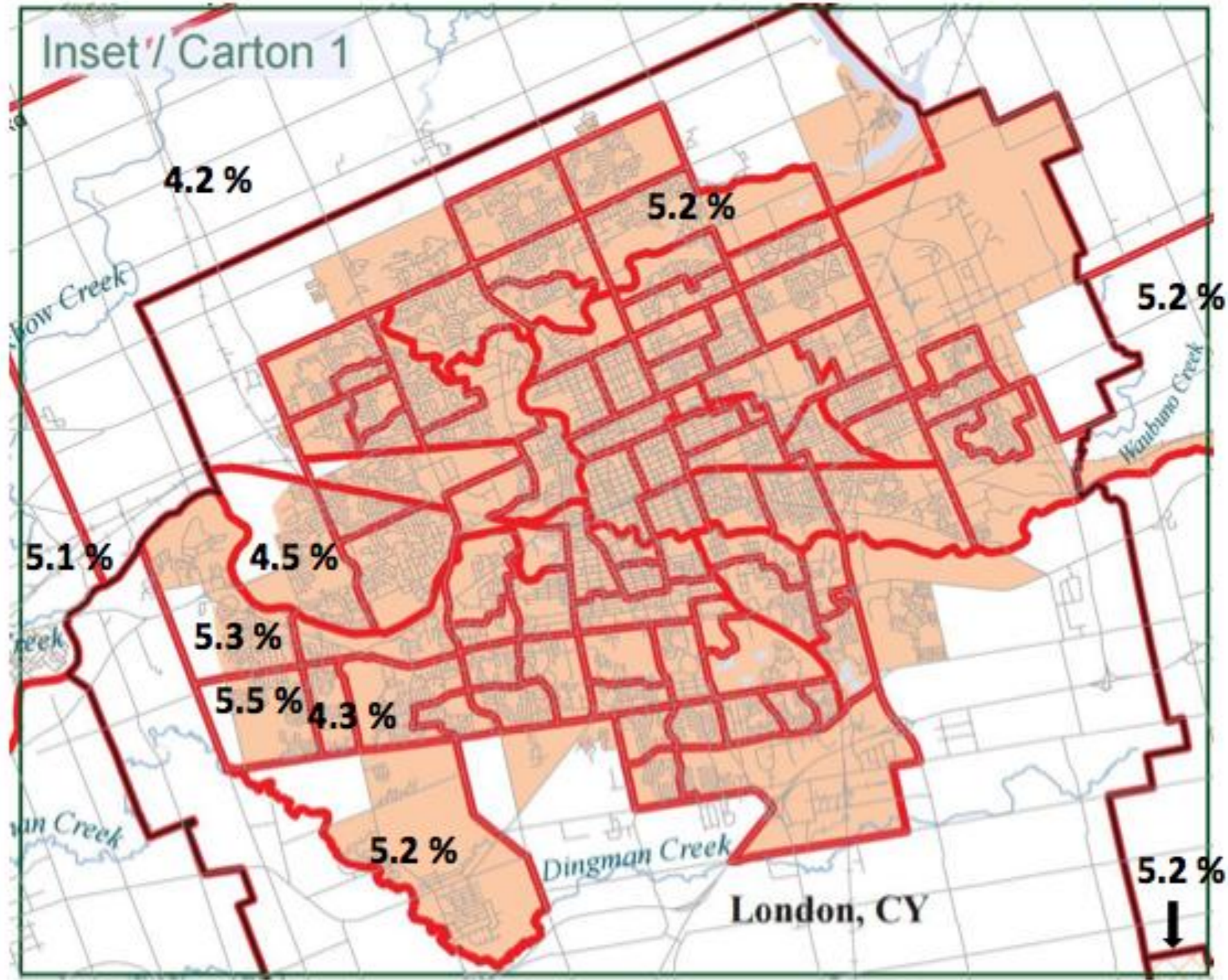
Median Income (2012):

Couple Families \$42,760

All Families and Non-Family Persons \$20,270



**The 10 Census Tracts with the lowest low income rates all circle the city...**





# LET'S THE STATS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

	Southdale	Limberlost	Marconi	Boulee
Number of Units	172	160	51	136
Number of Adults	224	247	62	203
Number of Dependents	325	433	131	338
Total Population	549	680	193	541
Average Annual Income per household	10,416.00	14,316.00	15,708.00	12,288.00
Number of Working Households	7	27	8	16
Year Built	1971	1973	1966	1968
Building Type	Row House	Row House	Row House	Row House

# WHAT THE MEDIA THINKS



- ◆ **Media Review:**
- ◆ “Much-Maligned Complexes.” “Eaten Alive in Public Housing.”
- ◆ “Are you addicted to drugs or have mental illness?”

# WHAT THE TENANTS HAD TO SAY

❖ *“I feel safe in this community. That is not to say that everyone is perfect but I rather have my kids play in the complex than outside of it, you know. Everyone here looks after one another and my kids have many friends in the complex.”*

*“I feel a sense of togetherness and awareness here in Southdale. Many of us moving in with nothing or coming from horrible situation. My community members understand my position and the stuff I have gone through. We witness the good and the bad in this community like the drug and booze abuse. But I can also go to my neighbours and borrow anything I need. I guess you gotta take the good and the bad.*



*“The City of London does not care about us. You never see them investing in us, you never see them bringing services to us. Why not? Why can't we be invested in?”*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **1. To hire a full-time community developer within each community.**

*“LMHC Administrators need to leave their administrative offices and come be with the people. We need someone who works here, who has lived experience, you know! We need a familiar face that knows the community best, someone who builds relationships. They do not even know what goes on here. I feel like I can't trust them or go to them with problems cuz nothing gets done.”*

## **2. Establishing a Resident Committee with policy influencing power.**

*“Why can't we help make decisions around here. I know many people that would sit on a committee but we want to be able to more than just suggest things. We know what's best, we live it everyday.”*

## **3. Bring back the THAW program and make suggestions for alterations to the RGI rent calculator.**

*“They say public housing is affordable but it's just not. I had no utilities and for some reason my hydro bill is normally higher than my rent. LMHC also makes me pay higher when I make more or if my kids work. How does that make me want to make more when I then have to pay more?”*



## **4. Portable education and job training programs for new-comers and youth.**

*“Bring education into our community. And I mean good education. We would work hard at it and it would better many tenants. Education can keep kids off the street and help newcomers gain valuable skills in order for them to gain meaningful employment. Open up a little portable or maybe even use a unit. Having it in the community would also allow for easy access*