

Background

U.S. church attendance is declining at an alarming rate, forcing many congregations to face financial strain and property vacancy. There has been a median attendance decrease of 50% over 25 years⁵. Yes In God's Backyard (YIGBY) is a policy initiative which proposes easing zoning and permit barriers so religious institutions can redevelop their land into housing. While gaining national traction, local adoption is uneven, with many resisting YIGBY reforms. This raises questions about YIGBY's actual effectiveness to address housing needs.

Research Questions

1. What common themes, if any, arise from the literature concerning the potential benefits or concerns of converting religious spaces into housing?
2. What real-world cases, if any, support or discourage the conversion of these spaces?

Methodology: Literature Review

Search: FSU Libraries Onesearch and JSTOR databases with mixture of following search terms: "YIGBY," "housing crisis," "religious," "housing supply," and "YIMBY" (Yes In My Backyard)

- Identified 12 U.S.-focused sources from 2018-2025, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and planning publications and conducted supplemental news coverage searches related to cases
- Organized findings by recurring advantages, disadvantages, and policy implications

Limitations

- Expanding the search timeline and adding an international frame could offer a more comprehensive review and identify a wider array of historical policy trends

Preliminary Results

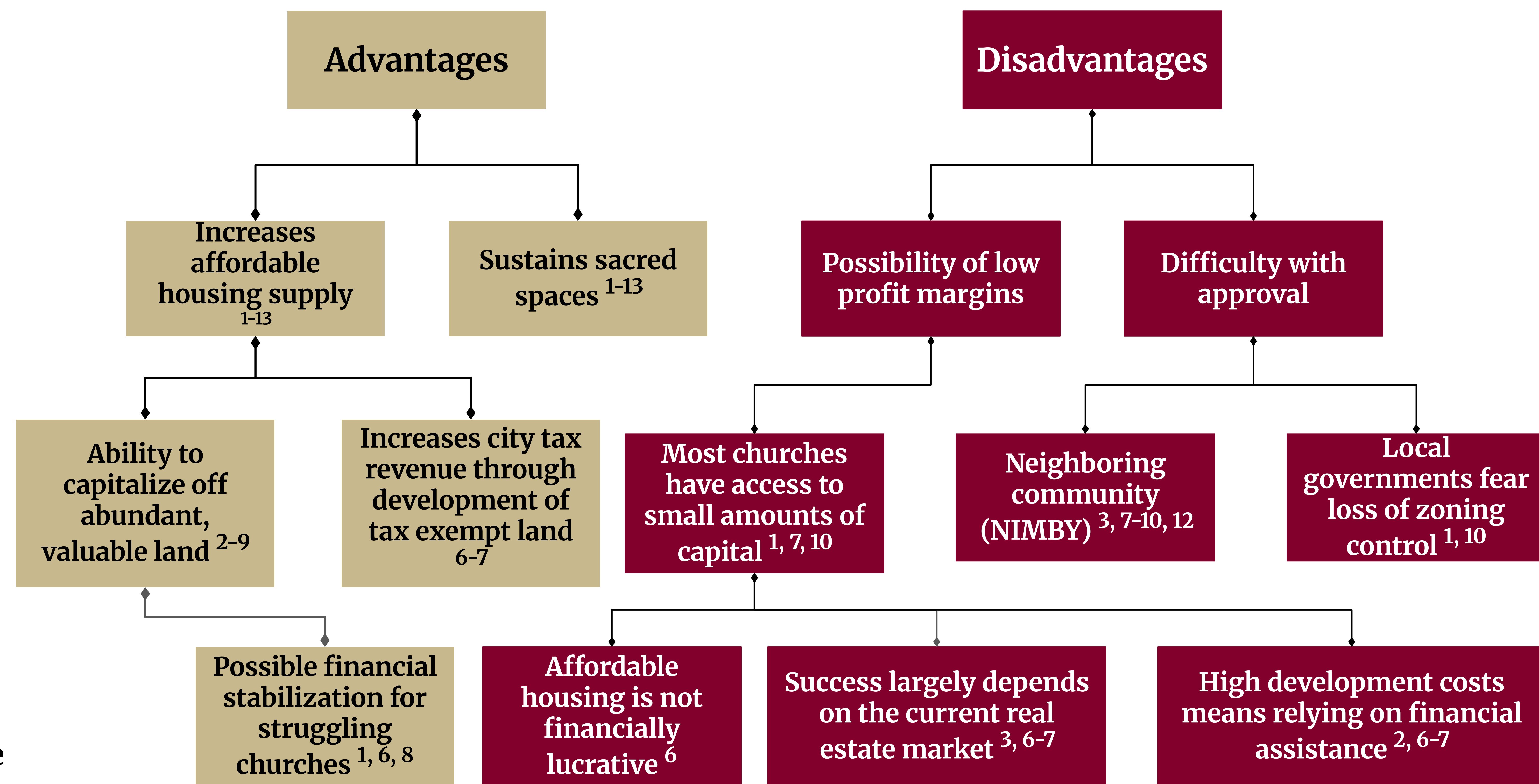


Figure 1. Themes of the commonly found advantages and disadvantages from YIGBY literature

Policy Implications & Future Research

While a creative solution to a complicated housing problem, YIGBY's success has been limited.

- Effective YIGBY legislation requires partnerships between local governments, developers, and congregations.
- Policy makers can support YIGBY by standardizing zoning allowances, providing more assistance to congregations, and addressing concerns about religious privilege.
- YIGBY has historically centered Christian-based denominations.
 - Local governments should make an effort to be more inclusive of other religions.

Future research should explore a quantitative analysis of a municipality's underutilized religious parcels compared to the potential effect on the housing supply.

References

