



Height Restrictions on Student Housing: A Case Study of Tallahassee, Florida.

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RESEARCH QUESTION: ARE ZONING-RELATED HEIGHT RESTRICTIONS BARRIERS TO AFFORDABLE STUDENT HOUSING?

BACKGROUND

Scholars and legislators often look at general housing affordability issues for the broader population. However, housing affordability for college students is an often-overlooked public policy issue. Revisiting and revising zoning policies in popular neighborhoods for students is a critical step for determining barriers to housing affordability. CollegeTown is a popular, high-traffic neighborhood for college students in Tallahassee, FL. Within CollegeTown is the University Village (UV) zoning area which is an ideal case study for analyzing the relationship between height caps and housing unaffordability.

UV has a maximum height ordinance that limits the potential for future high-density development. *Figure 1* shows the layout of the UV district. The yellow area (UV East) has a maximum building height of 7 stories and the blue area (UV West) has a maximum building height of 5 stories.

In November 2021, the Growth Management Department introduced a “Glitch Ordinance” in an attempt to fine-tune existing zoning policies in Tallahassee. The building height ordinance in UV was one of the focuses of the “Glitch Ordinance,” leading to the department’s surveillance of building heights of 40 student housing developments, finding an average height of 12 stories. This revealed the maximum height in UV is relatively low. Following the survey, there was a draft ordinance to change UV West’s maximum to 7 stories to match the “urban fabric” of the area. The “urban fabric” of the area is maintained by the 17-story Florida Department of Education building to the east of CollegeTown.

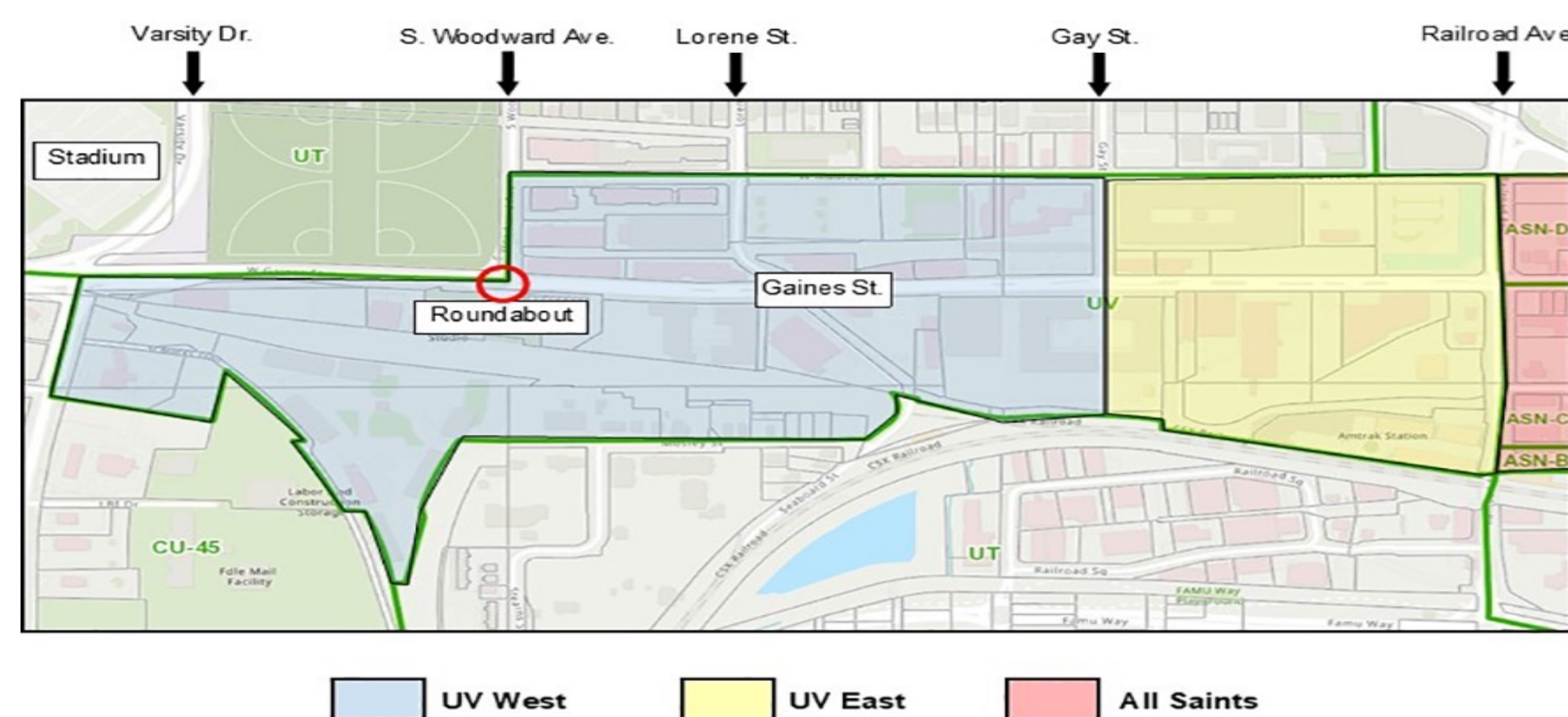


Figure 1. Zoning areas in the UV zoning district (City of Tallahassee Growth Management Department)

METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted a review of various articles, reports, and agency websites on the topics of urban planning, real estate, and urban economics. The search terms included zoning, affordable housing, height restrictions/ordinances, and upzoning. Additionally, the researcher used the city’s online Geographic Information System database to validate the zoning practices.

Zoning Law	Rationale	Impact on Price	Sources
Height Ordinance	Increases prices by limiting the possible supply of housing through height restrictions	+	2, 4, 6, 5
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	Increases prices by capping the amount of building space relative to the lot size, decreasing the possible number of units per building.	+	1
Upzoning	Increases building potential and maximizes the number of units by raising far and building heights.	-	2, 3, 5

Table 1. Literature Review of Land Use Regulations & Tools

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Preliminary findings indicate that zoning-related height restrictions are low compared to other university housing developments. Building unaffordability has been linked to building height caps by the Brookings Institution. *Table 1* illustrates that height ordinances place a restriction on floor area ratio and are associated with higher rent. Another major finding from a review of the permit database shows the majority of all new construction permits in the CollegeTown area have developers building at the maximum height. Upzoning policies are associated with increased rental housing affordability. Additionally, the Cowles Foundation at Yale University acknowledged that to achieve housing affordability, the first step is through a “market-led supply response” that can be achieved through upzoning in the form of the removal of height ordinances.

CONCLUSIONS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The city of Tallahassee should revisit the “Glitch Ordinance” and propose a revision to remove the height ordinance, or at the very minimum, raise the height ordinance to 17 stories to match the area’s “urban fabric.” Revising the height ordinance in UV with the continual promotion of upzoning policies will maximize the potential for future development. This will increase the number of dwellings—and population density—and likely increase the overall housing affordability for college students.

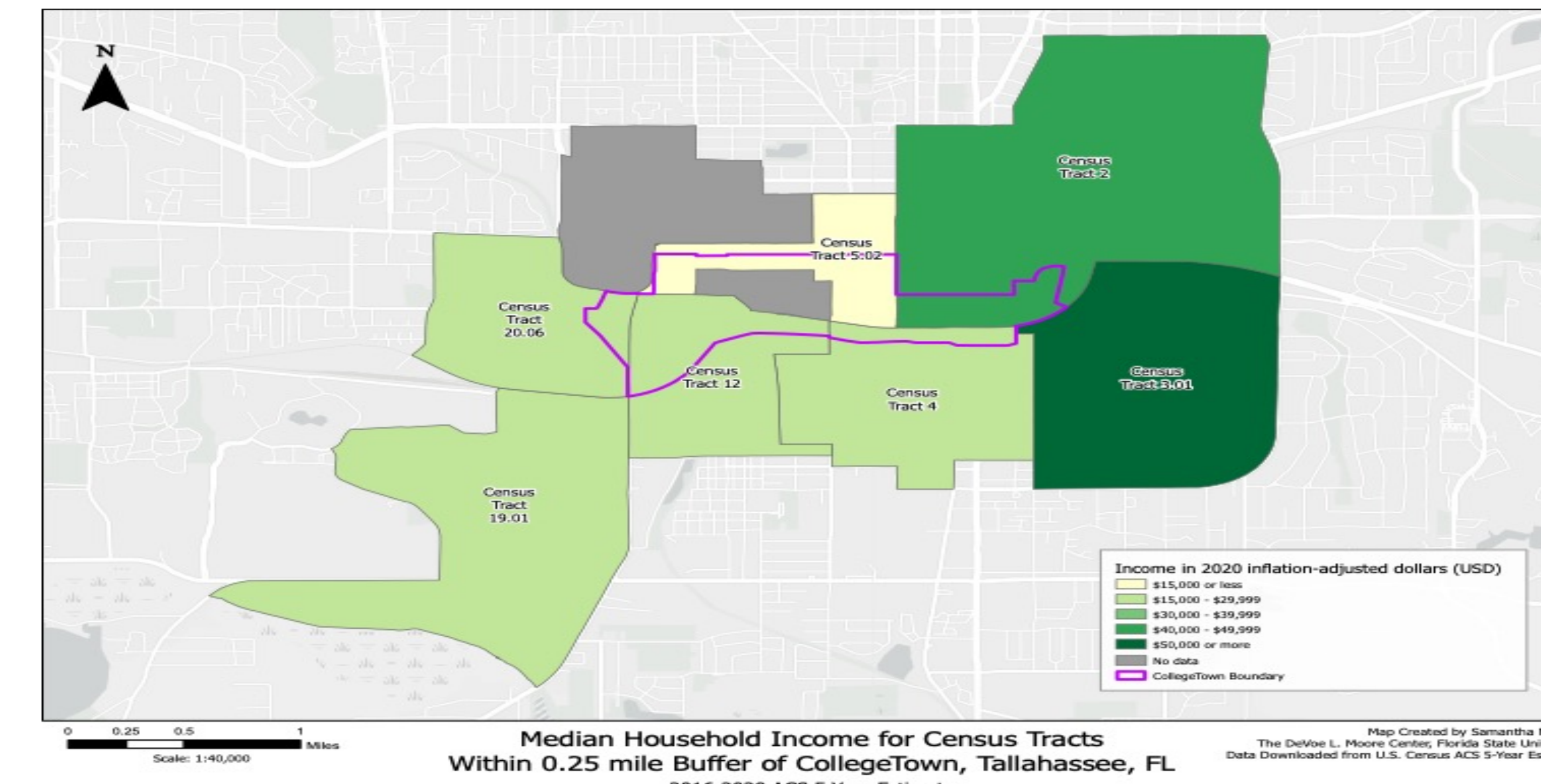


Figure 2. Median Household Incomes in CollegeTown, Created by Samantha Murray

FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

Future research would entail a comprehensive comparison of student housing rental prices in Tallahassee. It is also important to consider the amenities found in student housing as well as other variables that may increase housing rent. The future research is especially important with the consideration of *Figure 2*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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