

As a Sociology student in undergrad, *Sociological Imagination* (C.Wright Mills, 1959) was a foundational text in the four years of study. The sociological imagination is a framework that connects personal experiences to public society. At what point do personal troubles become social issues? Catskill New York is a historic community in the Hudson Valley, under 2 hours from New York City and situated on the Hudson River, a strong and organized community has always been a present force in the daily life of residents. Families stay there for generations. Throughout the past 10 years (catskillmountainhouses.com), the housing market has shifted drastically, and significantly more so during and following pandemic trends of the past 4 years. Just under 50,000 New York City residents moved to the Hudson Valley in 2020, according to the nonprofit research organization Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress. Because of this, housing is scarce and expensive.

Government and Community leaders are at a loss, the town and surrounding communities are currently experiencing an intense economic revival. The population is growing, and businesses are thriving. Tourism is thriving, which is amazing for local museums, shops, hotels, and restaurants. The AirBNB presence has significantly affected both homeowner and renter rates. With an increase in population, an increase in housing being utilized for vacation rentals, and a tight knit working/middle-class population preexisting for generations, this issue is a topic on everyone's mind.

The change in population has brought noticeable growth to the community. Farmers Markets are busy and popular- farmers and artists and educational services like the libraries and schools are growing, museums are growing and building popularity, allowing education to expand and grants to be awarded for development of community spaces. Historic homes and community buildings ([historic lumberyard converted to dance theater](#), [historic ironwork factory restored and converted into 47 room hotel](#), [century old family-owned motor lodge purchased and restored into boutique glamping destination spot for stars like Taylor Swift and David Byrne](#)) have been given a new life. Specifically, the [Foreland Campus](#), located on Main Street in Catskill states on the Greene County EDC site:

Erected in the mid 1800s, the Foreland buildings were first mills that produced uniforms for Union Soldiers during the Civil War. After sitting dormant for decades, the three historic buildings that comprise Foreland have been reimagined as a mecca for the contemporary art world.

Our 85,000 square foot campus includes contemporary art galleries, studios, food and beverage programs, special projects, and events, situated on the bank of Catskill Creek in the Hudson River Valley.

Foreland participates in a long history of artist-run, artist-occupied industrial buildings. In this spirit, the campus uniquely serves 21st-century arts and artists through modern,

progressive programming within historically-inspired, functionalist grounds.
(<https://greenecountyedc.com/revitalizations/foreland/>)

Encouraging artist workspaces, tourism, community involvement and restoration, the Foreland Campus feeds the community. For three years, the [Hudson/Catskill Housing Coalition](#) had been renting office space on the Foreland campus for a subsidized rent of \$400. The Housing Coalition's mission is as follows:

We believe that treating housing as a human right is a form of investment in human and community life that can fundamentally transform society. Realizing this vision begins from where we stand. We work to transform Hudson and Catskill, the places we come from and call home, through empowerment, education, and mobilization around housing justice. (<https://www.hudsoncatskillhousing.org/our-vision>)

In August of 2023, the Coalition was informed that there rent would increase to \$950, with the landlord stating, "To say \$500 is going to make or break you is ridiculous." while simultaneously claiming that Foreland had "happily" subsidized HCHC's rent for years, but a "tremendous amount of debt and outside financial pressure" at Foreland made it "impossible for us to continue to do so." So, the extra \$500 a month will make or break Foreland, but it is ridiculous to assume that would make or break the Housing Coalition.

The opposite side of this coin of progress are the individuals left behind repeatedly. The Housing Coalition was founded in response to a specific community issue, "Housing insecurity, food insecurity, a lack of healthcare—especially mental health care—has gotten out of control," says Neva Wartell, the executive director of the Catskill Food Pantry. Wartell, who has a long history of community activism, believes Catskill, and Greene County as a whole, doesn't have a precedent for organizing on the community level. "It's something that never came up before," she says. "Now the lack of housing, the lack of services, the lack of food and healthcare is coming to a head." (<https://www.chronogram.com/hv-towns/catskill-shelter-from-the-storm-16926809>)

The service industry is booming, and the service workers cannot afford to live. Creative solutions have provided a unique relief for some, a 2022 Times article written by Anna Kode examined the business owner response to housing insecurity in the Hudson Valley.

... to retain employees, business owners and managers are building houses, renting out apartments and, in some cases, opening up their own homes, significantly expanding a longtime tradition in the area of work force housing. For some employees, it's the only way they can keep their current jobs, and they are more than happy to avoid the stress of finding their own housing in the area. But it has also created a situation that is hard to get out of — when one's housing is tied to their job, it can feel like there is no escape from work. (Kode, 2022)

Within my network specifically, as a 22-year-old lifelong resident with generations of family rooted in the surrounding areas, currently living with my parents and working in the service industry housing is a major issue for me and my kinship. A friend is living on the property of the hotel he works at as a chef- they could not afford to give him a raise, but they have an empty staff house and offered to house him for free if he headed the events for the summer. Alongside him, he shares the staff house with a 20-year-old dishwasher, the restaurant manager and his husband live in a standalone home on property, and the hotel manager lives in an apartment above the maintenance garage, they all receive housing in exchange for work. Business owners can afford to pay their employees less than their value if they can provide free or subsidized living accommodation for the staff. I just left my previous position for housing. My previous job did not pay enough for the cost of living, my new position as a fellow at a local historic site provides free housing for a year of work and research with stipend pay. The pay cut is justified in relation to the free housing and work experience. I would not be able to afford to live independently in my hometown without this position or one like it. I am privileged to be at a place in life where this situation is feasible, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

This trend is a creative way for business owners to respond to community issues, but it is unique and does not fit all individuals' situations. For example, the previously discussed hotel does not allow children of staff in the staff housing, the 20-year-old dishwasher is 8 months pregnant with the issue of finding housing for the baby's arrival. The business leadership should be getting this woman in touch the [Hudson/ Catskill housing coalition](#), [For the Many, Greene County housing resources](#), [the Catskill Housing Authority](#), [Family of Woodstock](#), or [the Catskill Catholic Charities office](#). Spanish is her first language, and right now, she needs her community to support her. She needs to be informed of the resources available to her via community and government support.

The issues of housing, like most other social issues, impact most significantly individuals of marginalized races, genders, and ethnicities. Social issues have the greatest impact on individuals with a lower socioeconomic status. Education and accessible resources for all members of the community to know where to get help and how to provide help should be shared when in conversations about the cultural changes of the community. Too many individuals in this space are experiencing housing insecurity, these are not personally troubles to be dealt with alone, the statistically significant amount of individuals and families struggling with the cost of living must work together with the entire community to remedy these social issues. As the University of Kansas [Community Tool Box](#) describes problems as opportunities to do "make something good happen." Problems should be motivation to create beneficial change.

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