

There are more New Yorkers than ever, and lots of them are living alone.

To address the housing needs of a changing city, the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) put together a pilot project to make an apartment building entirely of micro-units, tiny studio apartments (finer than what's legally allowed these days). But how much space do we really need to live? And how else could we change the way we're housing ourselves?

# THE BIG SQUEEZE

How much space do you need to live?

The city is bigger than it was, and we really haven't replaced all of the housing we lost in the '70s.

Andy Reicher, Executive Director of the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (UHAB)

If you want an apartment in this city, you've got to fight for it!

We've always lived in groups like nuclear families.

But starting in the '50s more and more people began to live by themselves, mostly in cities.

Eric Kleinenberg, Author of *Going Solo*

We need to make new housing for folks that are moving to NYC. We shouldn't try to divide the housing. It leads to all sorts of underground problems we had in the teens and '30s, which led to stricter housing laws.

Jonathan Kirschenfeld, Principal at Jonathan Kirschenfeld Architect PC

The city wanted to do micro-units as a pilot project because there's a much greater number of singles and couples than there are studio apartments and one-bedrooms.

Gabriella Amabile, Urban Planner at the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)

Wait, what are micro-units?

Micro-units are apartments that are 275 to 300 square feet, which is smaller than the minimum size currently allowed by law in NYC, which is 400 square feet. The City launched the adAPT NYC Competition in 2012 to test whether micro-units were a good idea.

Where am I supposed to live?

The micro-unit concept is an interesting take on inefficiencies in the city. It's challenging the notion that one needs a lot of space.

Emily Ng, Director of Members Services at UHAB

Living alone, I can do whatever I want!

YES! Small Apartment = Small Utility Bill

People are going to be owning less stuff, so there is less of an environmental footprint with small apartments.

Ari Goldstein, Senior Project Manager at Jonathan Rose Companies

Now that's what I call space saving!

The more apartments I squeeze in, the more money I squeeze out!

What about our large family?

It sounds like some of these units will be priced at levels that are around \$2,000. Is that affordable for low-income New Yorkers?

Emily Ng, UHAB

I'm SICK of the overcrowding! (cough cough)

CONS  
Micro-units

But not everyone wants to live in a small apartment, including me.

Why else would you live in a city if you weren't willing and able to share?

Jonathan Kirschenfeld, Architect

So, what's stopping us from making these changes to housing?

## OTHER SOLUTIONS

I'm interested in other options for addressing housing needs. Like housing multiple adults in a single family home and sharing those spaces. How do you make the laws and zoning and safety work for that kind of housing?

Emily Ng, UHAB

50% of your market rate apartments have to have a parking spot. It's outdated and one of the main obstacles to doing more micro-unit housing in areas outside of Manhattan.

Ari Goldstein, Jonathan Rose Companies

There are aspects of the Building Code that could be looked at to allow for more flexibility.

Gabriella Amabile, HPD

You have reached the Limit!

There are zoning laws about density that say there's a maximum number of units that can be on any site. So if you're doing small units, you'd naturally have more of them overall. And this zoning rule would restrict that.

Gabriella Amabile, HPD

New York City has a law that no more than three adults who are unrelated can live in the same apartment.

Emily Ng, UHAB

The reason why these zoning laws were put into place was to prevent slum conditions, cramped quarters, and no access to light and air. I think that elected officials and regulators would want to make sure that any changes are done in a way that's thoughtful and doesn't open up development to those problems again.

Gabriella Amabile, HPD

The city is going to have to figure out how to grow without growing, because it can't get any bigger. So I think it's going to get more dense, and that means neighborhoods are going to change.

Andy Reicher, UHAB

CUP worked with teaching artist Chat Travieso and students from the Academy of Urban Planning to investigate the current micro-unit fad. We interviewed an architect, a sociologist, affordable housing advocates, a developer, and HPD. We built this poster from the ground-up to show the different levels of the housing size debate.

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement.

This project is one of CUP's Urban Investigations—project-based afterschool programs in which public high school students explore fundamental questions

about how the city works. Students collaborate with CUP and teaching artists to create multimedia teaching tools that reach audiences in the fields of arts and social justice. [welcometoCUP.org](http://welcometoCUP.org)

The Academy of Urban Planning is a public high school in Brooklyn, with an urban planning-based curriculum. [aupnyc.org](http://aupnyc.org)

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