

Orange County Home Preservation Coalition

2025 Evaluation



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ABOUT THE COMMUNITY PRACTICE LAB AT UNC

The Community Practice Lab was founded in 2021 by Dr. Ryan Lavalley to enhance community well-being by fostering deep and sustainable community-university partnerships. The Community Practice Lab is housed within the Department of Health Sciences in the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We explore and mobilize everyday experiences and occupation, rooted in lived realities of residents, partners, and organizations, to enhance community and individual well-being through implementation, support, and translational practices rooted in the application of occupational therapy principles through collective and organizational approaches. Our work is guided by values of abundance, partnership, systemic analysis, occupation, and community practice.

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Executive Summary

The Orange County Home Preservation Coalition (OCHPC) is a collaborative network of organizations dedicated to providing home repairs and modifications for low-income homeowners in Orange County, North Carolina. Established through the Orange County Department on Aging's Master Aging Plan process and led by the Orange County Department of Housing and Community Development, the Coalition aims to streamline services, reduce barriers for residents, particularly older adults, and foster coordination among partner agencies.

OCHPC operates a shared online database to facilitate case communication and referrals, and convenes regularly to review progress and align efforts. Through a unified assessment process, the Coalition works to deliver comprehensive, efficient, and equitable home repair services to those most in need.

This evaluation draws on five years of data (June 2020 – June 2025), supplemented by interviews and secondary sources, to assess the Coalition's reach and impact. Key findings include:

Home Repair Activity*

- **214 homes** completed repairs and were formally closed with repair work completed.
- **100 cases** remain active, with repair work underway.
- **113 households** are currently waitlisted pending eligibility assessment for free repair services.

*It should also be noted that these numbers may not accurately represent the total amount of home repairs that occurred in the County during the evaluated 5 years. These numbers represent cases that moved through the coalition process, typically less in the first year and increasing in later years.

Demographic Highlights

Among households served or currently in progress:

- **85%** include older adults.
- **77%** of screening forms were submitted by women.
- **64%** identify as Black or African American.
- **58%** fall within the **30% Area Median Income (AMI)** threshold, indicating extremely low income.
- **50%** include individuals with disabilities.

These findings underscore the Coalition's role in reaching vulnerable populations and advancing housing equity through coordinated, data-driven service delivery.

2025 OCHPC Evaluation

Preserving affordable housing involves more than just building new units; it also requires maintaining existing homes owned or rented by low-income households (Reid et al., 2025). Home repair serves as one tool in a broader package of strategies for preserving affordable housing in Orange County, complemented by subsidies to support renters, property tax relief for long-term low-income homeowners, and first-time homebuyer counseling, loans, and other assistance. This report comes shortly after the recent flooding caused by tropical storm Chantal in Orange County in July 2025, highlighting how the intersection of extreme weather events, an aging housing stock, and the growing divide between high-wealth and low-income communities in the region intensifies the need for home repair.

Addressing both long-standing trends in housing deterioration and the need for support for low-income homeowners, along with the increasing impacts of climate change and rising property values, the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition (OCHPC) was formed eight years ago. It brings together local governments, home repair organizations, community groups, and residents to collaborate on coordinating home repairs across organizations and jurisdictions, with the goal of

holistically
restoring the
homes of low-
income residents.

Initiated in
2017, OCHPC
began collecting
repair data across
partner
organizations in
2020 (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - OCHPC Timeline

As we conclude the eighth year of OCHPC, this evaluation draws on both our most recent data since the last assessment in 2023 and a five-year review of OCHPC's administrative data. This evaluation provides both immediate and mid-term assessments of OCHPC's efforts, focusing on home repair cases and the demographics of residents who received repairs from partners. It assesses how OCHPC is working toward its mission of preserving affordable housing through partnerships, using the coalition's administrative data as well as interviews with local government partners and nonprofits engaged in the daily work of home repairs for low-income homeowners in Orange County, NC.

UNC's Community Practice Lab's (CPL) evaluation examines how OCHPC impacts the repair and preservation of affordable housing for low-income homeowners in Orange County, NC. This report is organized around three key areas of inquiry.

How and to what extent does OCHPC preserve affordable housing in Orange County through **holistic home repairs** during the study period?

How and to what extent does the OCHPC preserve and repair affordable housing through **partnerships, policy, and community engagement**?

What **major issues** have the partners identified and how will **planned activities** affect these challenges moving forward?

We gather both quantitative and qualitative data to answer these questions. This includes administrative records, interview narratives from partners, and secondary data from the Census' American Community Survey (ACS) to provide context and compare OCHPC's work with broader state and county demographics and housing conditions. The report mainly focuses on OCHPC's data, which is reported in a shared coalition database, covering partners' repair outputs, including the number

and types of home repairs completed. US Census data for North Carolina and Orange County, NC, are used to help compare and contextualize OCHPC's efforts. CPL also interviewed staff from eight partner organizations in spring 2025. These interviews focused on the partners' achievements and challenges over the past two years, their insights into managing a growing waitlist, and their thoughts on the future of the coalition.

Preserving Affordable Housing through Repairs 2020-2025

OCHPC focuses on preventing the deterioration of housing occupied by families earning at or below 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) (individuals making less than \$64,750 a year in Orange County), with most households that receive repairs from OCHPC falling below 30 percent AMI (\$24,300 a year for one person, in Orange County). Targeted home repairs help **prevent displacement** caused by rising maintenance costs that compound rising property taxes, which disproportionately impact Black homeowners (Neal et al., 2022) and can disrupt the intergenerational transfer of wealth (McCabe, 2016). Repairs also enable older adults to stay in their homes through accessibility modifications and address serious health and environmental hazards, including mold, HVAC failure, and structural issues (Schiller et al., 2023).

OCHPC Repairs 2020-2025

Since data collection began, the coalition has received a consistent flow of repair requests from eligible residents, which are entered into the OCHPC database as screening forms. Based on screening form data, the coalition **completed repairs and closed the cases of 214 homes** from 2020 through June 2025. At the time of this evaluation, of the 100 cases where active repair work is ongoing, most (70 cases) were screened before July 2023, indicating

House Status	Count	Percent
Complete	214	40%
Waitlist	113	21%
Unable to Serve	107	20%
Active	100	19%

*Table 1 - Home Repair Status 2020-2025
(n = 534)*

that partners are still working through a backlog of repairs since the pandemic. Screening form data shows that the majority of the 113 cases on the waitlist for repairs (95 cases) are from the past two years (Table 1).

REPAIRS BY JURISDICTION

There is notable regional variation in repair work in Orange County (Figure 2 and Table 2). This distribution of repairs reflects several factors, including the benefits of the Towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro municipal funding support through CDBG and a town bonds, respectively, which can be layered with other state and local home repair funding sources to holistically repair homes in those jurisdictions. Notably, at present, the town of Hillsborough does not have a municipality-specific funding source for repairs and work in that jurisdiction only draws on county and state repair funds.

While data limitations prevent a systematic analysis of repair speed by jurisdiction, areas with more flexible and ample repair funds tend to have fewer homes on the waitlist. For example, over the past 12 months, coalition partners have actively recruited homes in Carrboro to ensure that funds were not left unused. Carrboro residents often move quickly through home repair processes because of the flexible and available funds from the Town. This reality often guides strategic decisions by Coalition partners to prioritize using county-wide resources in other parts of the county.

TABLE 2
Home Repair Case Status Location 2020-2025

Jurisdiction	Active	Complete	Unable to Serve	Waitlist	Total
Carrboro	8	28	14	12	62
Chapel Hill	32	83	44	30	189
Hillsborough	27	53	18	33	131
Orange County Unincorporated	33	50	31	38	152

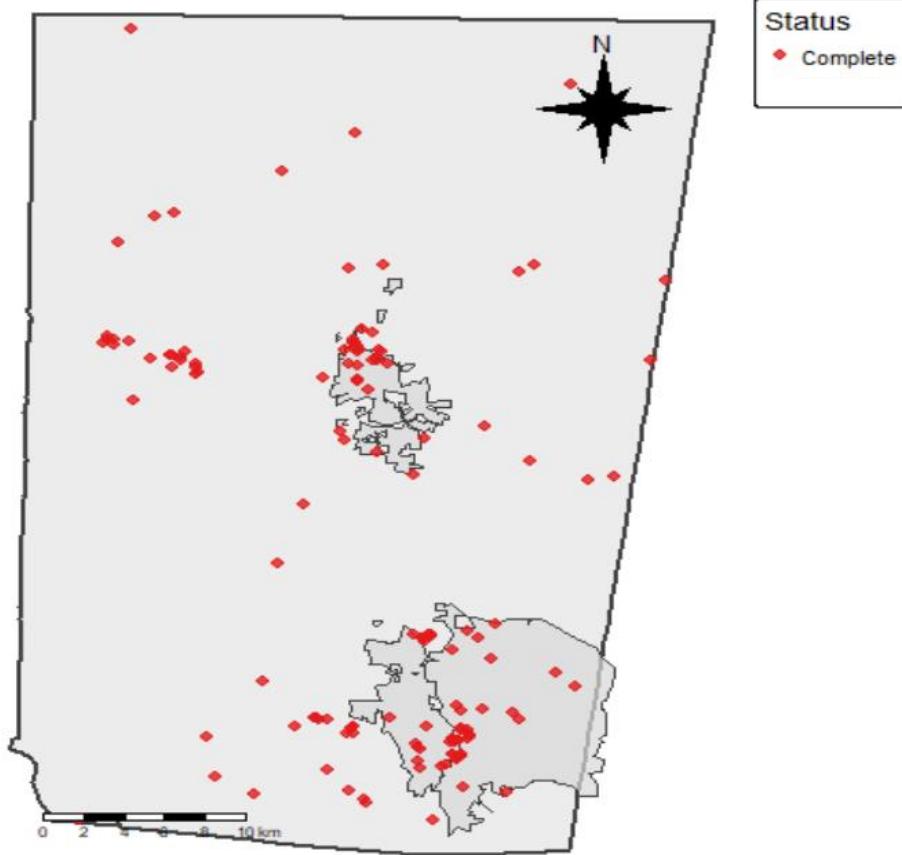


Figure 2 - Completed Cases in Orange County

REPAIRS BY RESIDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Older Adults and People with Disabilities

To understand the impact of OCHPC and its opportunities for partners to expand their home repair services, we examine the temporal and spatial aspects of home repairs in Orange County, along with the demographic profile of residents receiving repairs from the coalition. Originally developed from Orange County's Master Aging Plan, OCHPC continues to serve most older adult homeowners, **with 85% of all repair cases from 2020-2025 involving households with someone over 55.**

While many of the older adults served live within municipal jurisdictions, as the Active Home Repair Cases with Older Adults map shows in Figure 3, a large portion are in northwestern Orange County.

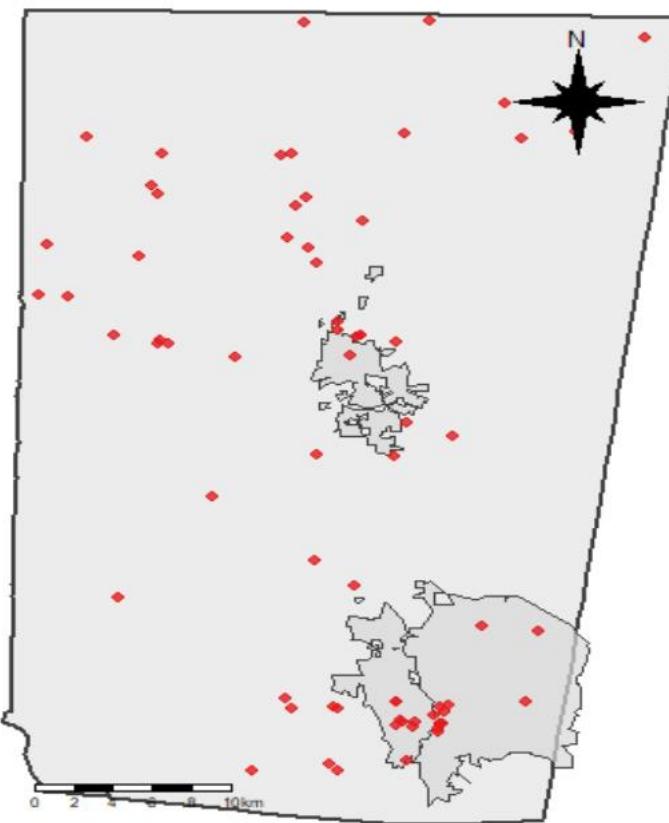


Figure 3 - Active Home Repair Case with Older Adults

Additionally, 50% of all Active and Completed cases from 2020 to 2025 include a member of the household with a disability.

Low-Income Residents

Since OCHPC's founding the coalition has focused on repairing the homes of extremely low-income residents, defined as those living at or below 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or approximately making

\$24,000 or less a year for a single person. From 2020 to 2025, 58% of households served by coalition partners lived at or below 30% AMI, and the majority of repairs went to 30% AMI households in all jurisdictions (Table 3).

TABLE 3

The Majority of Repair Cases (Active and Complete) are at 30% AMI

Jurisdiction	30% AMI	50% AMI	80% AMI
Carrboro	54%	39%	5%
Chapel Hill	51%	29%	19%
Hillsborough	66%	26%	6%
Orange County Unincorporated	67%	23%	8%

Black or African American Homeowners

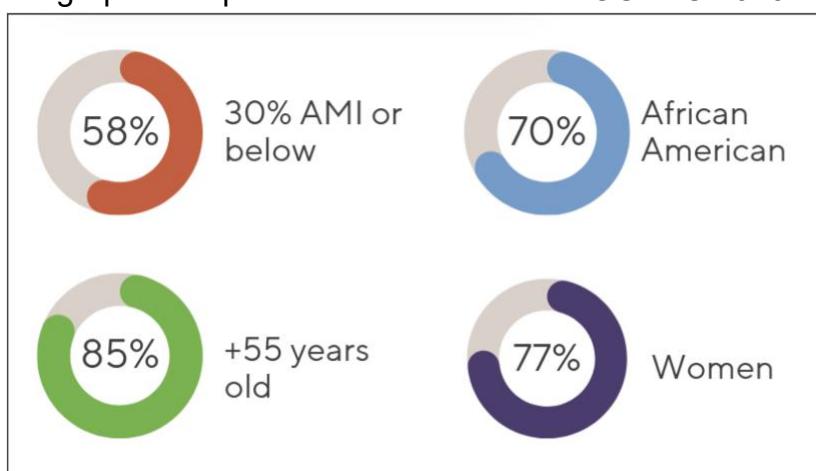
Over both the study periods, 64% of homeowners working with OCHPC partners identify as Black or African American (Table 4). This percentage stays consistent year after year despite Orange County's larger demographics, where only 10% of residents identify as Black or African American in the 2024 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

TABLE 4
Homeowner Race/ Ethnicity for Active and Complete Cases

Jurisdiction	Black/ African American	White		Latine		No Answer		Asian		Multi Racial		American Indian		
Carrboro	29	82%	3	8%	2	5%	1	2%	0	-	0	-	0	-
Chapel Hill	88	66%	23	17%	5	4%	13	10%	2	1%	2	1%	0	-
Hillsborough	55	58%	24	25%	2	2%	10	10%	2	2%	1	1%	0	-
County (Unincorp.)	54	55%	28	29%	2	2%	12	12%	0	-	0	-	1	1%
Total	226	62%	78	22%	11	3%	36	10%	4	1%	3	1%	1	0.20%

Despite growth of Latine and Asian homeowners in Orange County (Sanford, 2023), OCHPC has not seen a significant increase in requests from these groups. We explore insights into who the coalition is not reaching in the next section. Lastly, 77 percent of homeowners served from 2020 to 2025 were women. As the Figure 4 shows the typical resident OCHPC serves is a Black older adult woman who lives at 30% of the area median income.

Figure 4 - Demographic snapshot of households from OCHPC 2020-2025



HOMES THAT WERE UNABLE TO BE SERVED

Of the 107 cases where a homeowner applied and could not be served by any partner in the coalition, three main reasons explain these circumstances:

- 50% were unresponsive when a repair partner reached out to initiate a home assessment or start repair work
- 37% were ineligible for services due to issues related to heirs' property, bankruptcy or other personal legal issues
- 13% were renters or landlords ineligible for most free home repair services

As Table 5 shows, homes where repairs could not take place are distributed throughout the county.

Table 5
Case Unable to be Served by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Unable to Serve	Total in Jurisdiction	% of total
Carrboro	14	62	22%
Chapel Hill	44	189	23%
Hillsborough	18	131	14%
Unincorporated	31	152	20%

The majority of homeowners unable to be served by OCHPC partners identify as Black or African American (Table 6). Additionally, although very few homeowners who identify as American Indian submitted screening forms to OCHPC over the past five years two of the three homeowners were unable to be served. Over half of the homes coalition partners were unable to serve were single-family homes (Table 7).

Table 6 - Cases Unable to be Served by Race

Race	Count	% of Total screened
Black	60	18%
White	30	24%
Latine	4	25%
No Answer	9	17%
Multi Racial	2	40%
American Indian	2	67%
Asian	0	0

Table 7 - Case Unable to be Served by Home Type

Home Type	Unable to Serve
Single Family	60
Mobile Home	27
Apartment	3
Duplex	2
No answer	15

When partners were interviewed about the challenges of serving residents who are not eligible for traditional home repair programs funded by the state and federal governments, some mentioned the possibility of expanding the coalition's scope to help renters, especially when tenants are in unsafe conditions and have limited ways to advocate for repairs. This aligns with another shared goal: increasing the coalition's ability to handle complex cases beyond traditional service categories. For example, some households live in multigenerational homes that may be legally owned by one family member and rented to another at very low cost. Partners emphasized the need for flexibility in these situations.

"I would like to see the Coalition be able to take on more complex cases that require larger funding components, including different types of repairs or repair-adjacent solutions. I want to see partners in the coalition able to work on properties that are still family-owned and not rented in the usual sense, which happens often in the neighborhoods we serve." – Marian Cheek Jackson Center

OCHPC WAITLIST AND TIME TO COMPLETE HOLISTIC HOME REPAIRS

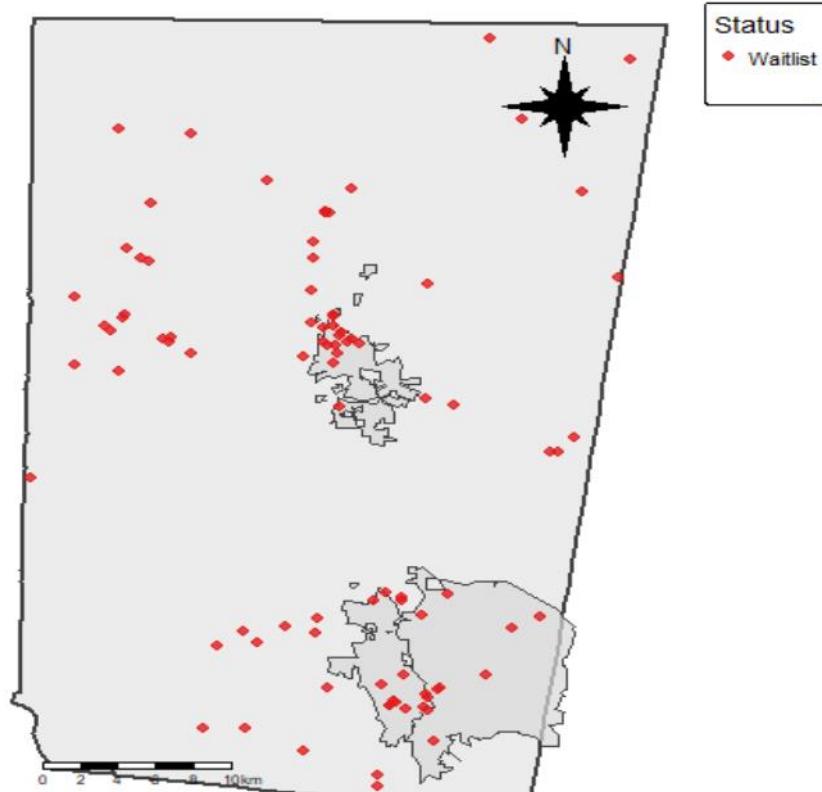


Figure 5 - OCHPC Waitlist Cases in 2025

A growing waitlist of homeowners currently challenges OCHPC. **From 2020 to 2025, it takes an average of over a year (388 days) from when a screening form is submitted to the coalition until repair work begins on a home.** Due to data limitations in tracking case closure dates, an estimate of the average time from the start to the completion of repairs is less precise.

However, based on cases with reported data, it takes an average of 101 days from the start of work to the completion of the last repair, or approximately **three months**.

Partnerships and Policy

Since 2020, OCHPC has evolved how partners connect and coordinate home repairs to comprehensively address cases. In 2023, key partners, including Orange County Housing, the Marian Cheek Jackson Center, Preserving Home, and Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, began meeting monthly to discuss challenging cases and determine how to address the various repair specifications assigned to each case. In 2025, Hope Renovations and Handy Helpers began joining the coordination meetings as well. This element complements the universal screening tool, shared database, and the monthly all-partner meetings to improve consistent coordination of repairs across partners (Figure 6).

Across partner interviews, limited organizational capacity and insufficient funding emerged as persistent barriers to effective collaboration and service delivery. These challenges are both structural and operational, shaped by shifting priorities, staffing fluctuations, and reductions in available funding at both the state and federal levels.

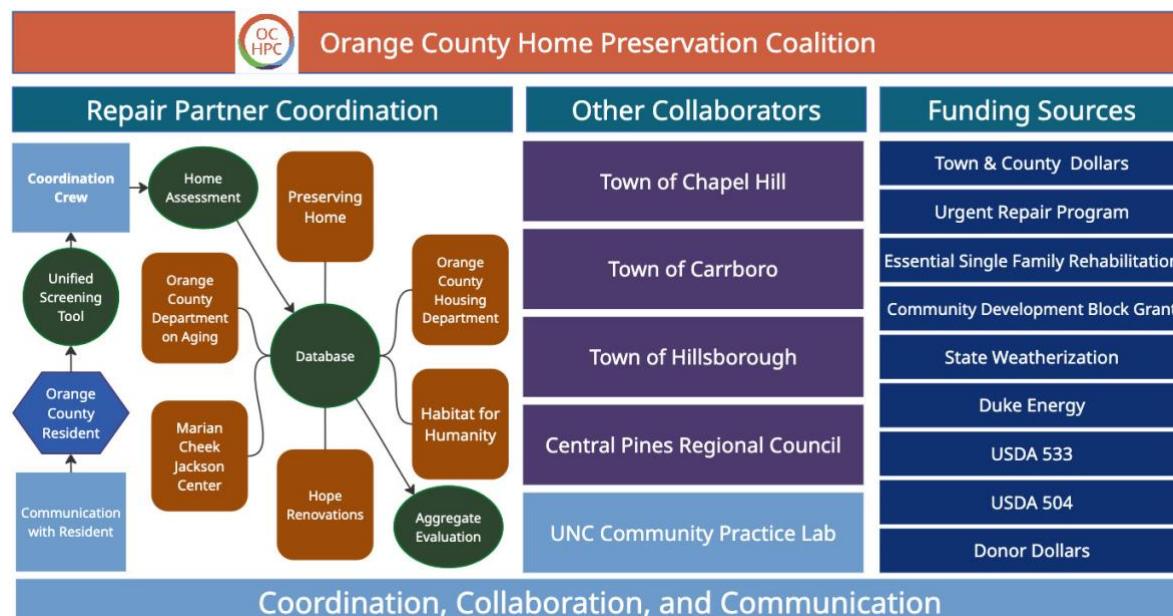


Figure 6 - OCHPC Organizational Structure

Partner Capacity

From July 2024 – June 2025, several key developments have strained the coalition's collective capacity:

1. The weatherization provider CPCA dissolved.
2. Habitat for Humanity—a major county repair organization—reduced active coalition participation to refocus its home repair efforts internally.
3. The North Carolina State Finance Agency denied Orange County's application for Urgent Repair Program (URP) funds for the coming fiscal year.

Most partner organizations remain understaffed, with limited administrative support to meet the rising demand from residents. Under these conditions, capacity constraints manifest in both large and small ways. For instance, organizations report difficulty conducting routine follow-up with clients, which impedes the repair process.

“I would also say a challenge is the lack of homeowner response. Preserving Home doesn't have the capacity to follow up as well as we'd like. Because of that, our letters requesting income information often go unanswered. If we had the capacity to follow up with phone calls, we'd probably have better luck.” — Preserving Home

Increasing the number of staff at partner organizations in both case management and construction, along with expanding the number of repair and construction organizations offering free repairs to homeowners in Orange County, will be essential for reducing wait times and boosting repair work for the increasing number of homes requesting support. Hope Renovations, which has faced several staffing challenges since 2023, reflected on the ongoing capacity constraints in the following way, focusing on how OCHPC can better support the repair partners working in Orange County.

“Even once we have the right person on board, our capacity will still be limited. Like several other partners, we will also be working outside of Orange County. Making partnerships as easy as possible is essential. This could include: 1 year – Conducting an Airtable crash course with our team to better identify open cases, available specs, assessments, and ongoing work. By the end of this year, I want us to be fluent in understanding these processes so we can consistently help reduce the waitlist. 5 years – Hiring a dedicated employee responsible for identifying the best funding sources for a project.” - Hope Renovations

Differences in organizational missions, funding sources, and reporting requirements shape how partners approach collaboration. These structural variations can create confusion or misalignment in service delivery and planning:

“Each organization and agency within the county will have a slightly different understanding of what it means to maximize benefit. They will have different theories of change and, frankly, different incentive structures for contributing to the development of solutions. That creates a challenge. Additionally, a very real challenge is that all these organizations, including my own, are limited in capacity.” — Orange County Department of Housing

Partners who work closely with residents, such as the Marian Cheek Jackson Center, echoed these concerns from the perspective of clients navigating the fragmented repair landscape.

“It’s tough because, while different organizations have different models and might meet needs differently, it’s also frustrating when there are many barriers. This isn’t necessarily the coalition’s fault; it could be due to restrictive funding or limited staff capacity. Still, one of the persistent issues in our repair landscape, both globally and within the coalition, is the feeling that red tape prevents people from getting the outcomes they need for their homes.” — Marian Cheek Jackson Center (MCJC)

Several partners expressed particular concern over Habitat's absence from the coalition, citing disruptions in data sharing and increased administrative burdens for those seeking coordination outside the coalition structure. As one partner explained:

“I would say the biggest challenge was actually Habitat leaving the coalition because I feel like it's less about, you know, the benefit of the coalition being the level of internal communication. I think that just becomes a little bit harder. Not impossible, but without the regular check-ins and the ability to coordinate consistently—like what all the repair partners are doing at the same time and how they might connect with the repair landscape and the neighborhoods—it’s just a bit more difficult.”

Funding and Repair Policy Eligibilities

Across all interviews, limited and unstable funding was identified as the most significant constraint to realizing the coalition's mission. Partners cited not only the withdrawal of key repair partners, such as Habitat and CPCA, but also the limited capacity of partners like Hope Renovation and Handy Helpers, due to insufficient funding or limitations in mission scope, to fill the gaps. These partners' capacity limitations are significant, particularly when they operate with more flexibility than other repair partners who are reliant on federal and state funds. Organizations leveraging these additional funds face additional eligibility restrictions associated with these more substantial funding resources, which they also cited as barriers. One common example involved the exclusion of manufactured homes on leased land, a growing segment of the population in need of repair support.

"I believe that the partners themselves face many limitations, whether it's funding or actual human power. Like the Department on Aging only serves people over 55 and can only do so much, and Preserving Home doesn't work with mobile homes on rented lots, and we have many homes on rented lots, so that just leaves the county. However, the county is also limited by what they can do. I think the organizations are limited by their funding sources as well as their own capabilities." – Habitat

Ultimately, this reality leads to homeowners with complex or substantial repairs – particularly those outside the Chapel Hill and Carrboro jurisdictions – waiting significantly longer than those with repairs that call for less funding or are simple in nature.

Recommendations and the Future of OCHPC

The most frequently cited goal among partners asked about the future of OCHPC was the need to grow the pool of available funding for home repairs through creative combinations of state, local, and civic-sector resources. This included both current initiatives and proposed future strategies. For instance, the Town of Chapel Hill launched a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) for affordable housing development in 2025. While the RLF does not directly fund home repair, it is expected to indirectly benefit the repair landscape by easing competition for Community Development Block

Grant (CDBG) funds, thereby freeing up more of those resources for repair-focused organizations.

In Hillsborough, town leaders are in the early stages of creating a local affordable housing fund, which will include allocations for home repair administered by the County. Carrboro continues to offer dedicated resources for weatherization repairs. These emerging efforts suggest a growing commitment among municipalities to integrate preservation strategies into local housing finance systems.

Staff from Orange County Housing emphasized the importance of articulating a bold and coordinated funding goal across the coalition:

“I think that the Town of Chapel Hill is a model in some ways for saying we need \$50,000,000 to address affordable housing within our community. I believe we should be bold and unified in stating that we have a specific monetary goal to meet the preservation needs within Orange County. Then, we need to create a multi-pronged strategy including local, state, and federal funds as well as civic sector dollars to raise that funding. I think the first step is to clearly state publicly that we have this need, what it is, and how much funding is required. The second step is to develop this multi-pronged funding plan to address it.” — Orange County Department of Housing

Government partners emphasized the need to more effectively target resources to homeowners at greatest risk of displacement—particularly low-income older adults, Black homeowners, and households earning well below the area median income (AMI). These priority groups reflect both current coalition goals and persistent patterns observed over the past five years.

To advance this objective, the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition (OCHPC) can build on existing strengths, especially the role of the Marian Cheek Jackson Center (MCJC) in guiding residents through the application and repair process. Since 2020, 91 cases have been identified as MCJC referrals, underscoring the value of community-based navigation. Future evaluations

Since 2020, 91 cases have been identified as MCJC referrals, underscoring the value of community-based navigation.

should assess how organizations like MCJC contribute to the broader ecosystem of partnerships and communication necessary for successful home repairs.

Additional support channels are already in place. The Orange County Department on Aging, which administers the Handy Helpers program, also operates aging and housing helplines that frequently serve as entry points for homeowners seeking assistance. In 2024, OCHPC launched a dedicated phone line for homeowners to speak directly with CPL members about their case status. This new resource may help bridge gaps for residents not currently connected to MCJC or the Department on Aging.

To further strengthen homeowner engagement, OCHPC should consider expanding partnerships with other trusted community organizations that have experience in construction and repair. These groups could assist residents in responding to repair partners once contacted, helping to reduce the current 50% attrition rate due to non-responsiveness. By deepening community-based navigation and outreach, the coalition can improve repair outcomes and better serve those most vulnerable to housing instability.

Orientation and Awareness of Coalition

Local government staff, who are generally less involved in the day-to-day repair process, highlighted additional opportunities for improving coalition coordination. Many suggested implementing a brief orientation for new staff members at partner organizations. Over the past two years, each municipality has onboarded new primary staff who interact with OCHPC. Government partners believe that one-on-one orientations could support continuity and help new members understand both the coalition's operations and their own role as government representatives. In addition, several partners emphasized the importance of establishing shared goals for coordination and implementation, particularly those that could lead to more streamlined homeowner experiences and reduced wait times. However, these long-term process improvements remain dependent on expanded staffing and increased funding across repair organizations.

Data Recommendations from the 2025 Evaluation

After five years of data collection and reporting, the OCHPC team and its shared database is well-positioned to take on new quality checks and streamlining of data to improve evaluation.

1. As partners submit quarterly reports on repair cases, they can share information on the funding sources used and the total cost of projects. This practice would create standardized data to assess the full costs of housing repairs and the various expenses that coalition partners incur annually.
2. The developer of the shared database recently released a new feature that allows administrators to track changes in cases status. This update will allow future evaluations to produce more granular details on how homes move through the coalition from screening form to assessment, to different queues of funding before a case is closed.
3. Since 2023, consistent and timely reporting facilitated by the coordination team has improved the accuracy of the coalition data. As more partners, including Handy Helpers, Hope Renovations, and Central Pines Regional Council, join the coordination team, future evaluations will be able to better assess the work of those partners who are becoming more engaged in OCHPC.

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