The Neighborhood Context of Homelessness

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Background

- **Homeless persons cite affordable housing as critically important, but also as one of the most difficult needs to meet (Acosta, 2000). At the same time, emergency shelters and other subsistence services for homeless persons tend to be naturally concentrated in centralized urban boundaries.**

- **Von Mahs (2005) has suggested that homeless persons are geographically "warehoused" in these areas and that the particular environmental attributes of these areas make it more difficult for the homeless to improve their situation.**

Acosta, O. & Toro, P. A. (2000). Let's ask the homeless people themselves: A needs assessment based on a probability sample of adults. American Journal of Community Psychology, 28, 343-366.

Von Mahs, J. (2005). The sociospatial exclusion of single homeless people in Berlin and Los Angeles. American Behavioral Scientist, 48, 928-960.

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Research Questions

- Are homeless people 'warehoused' in regions with few opportunities for housing and jobs?

- How are prior neighborhood conditions (before the current homeless episode) different than homeless episode conditions?

- How do prior neighborhood conditions compare to conditions one or two years after the baseline interview?

Methods

- **NIDA-funded SUNCODA study (Service Use, Costs, and Outcomes in a Drug Abusing Homeless Populations) which included 400 subjects randomly sampled from shelter and street locations in the St. Louis region.**

- **Sleep locations at Baseline, Last Housed location, and at one and two year follow-ups (Last Wave) were geocoded and mapped using ArcView 9.1. St. Louis regional sites were joined to year 2000 Census demographic and housing information at the block group level**
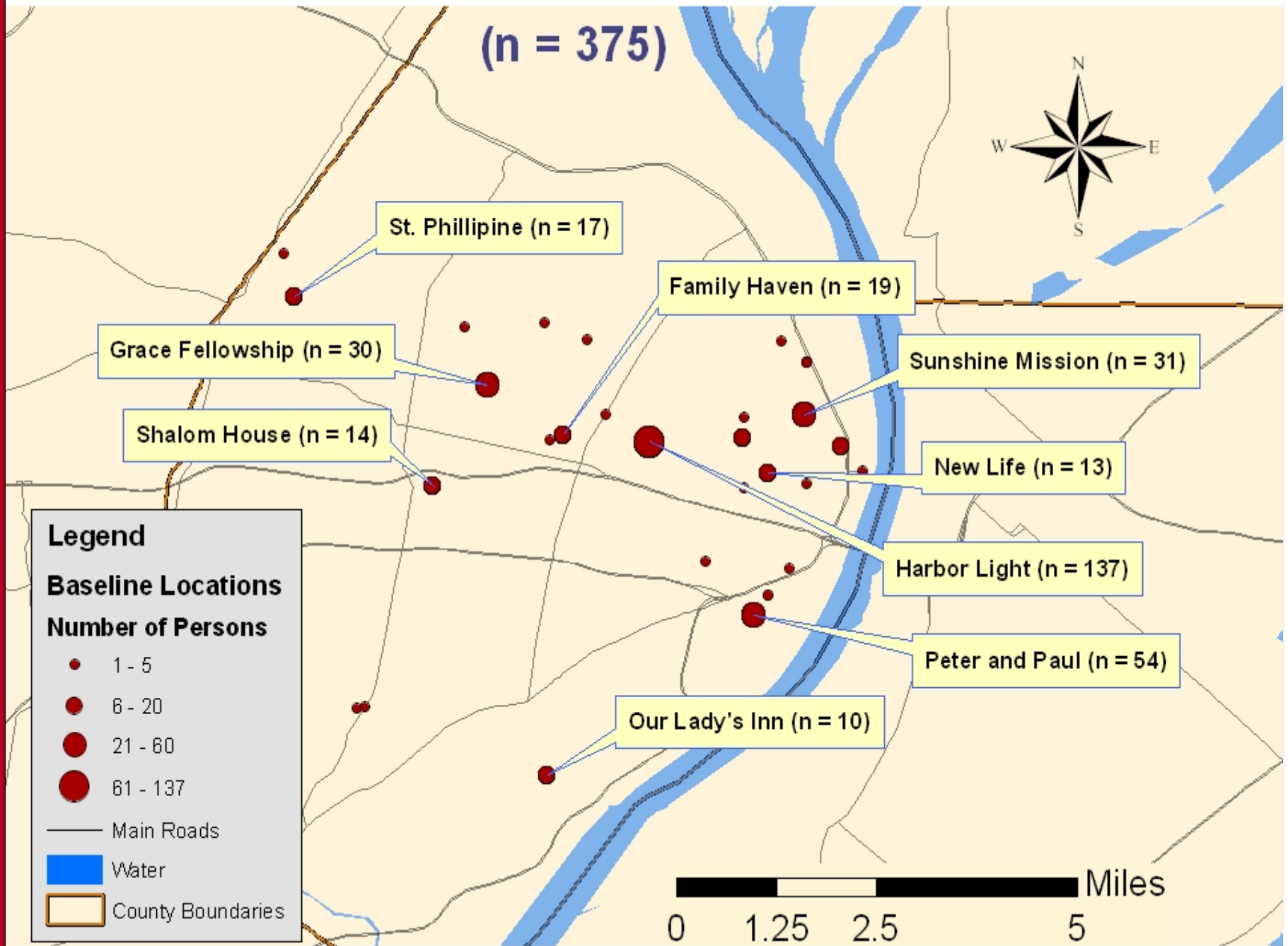
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Methods

- **Material deprivation was measured using the z transformed Townsend Index = log(%crowding) + log(%unemployment) + %nocar + %renter**

Coded Addresses by Location and Time Point		
	National	St. Louis Region
Last Housed	348	310
Baseline	375	375
Last Wave	229	219

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Sleeping Locations for Baseline Sample-St. Louis, MO
(n = 375)

St. Phillipine (n = 17)

Family Haven (n = 19)

Grace Fellowship (n = 30)

Sunshine Mission (n = 31)

Shalom House (n = 14)

New Life (n = 13)

Harbor Light (n = 137)

Peter and Paul (n = 54)

Our Lady's Inn (n = 10)

Legend

Baseline Locations

Number of Persons

- 1 - 5
- 6 - 20
- 21 - 60
- 61 - 137

— Main Roads

Water

County Boundaries

Miles

0   1.25   2.5   5

Last Housed Address
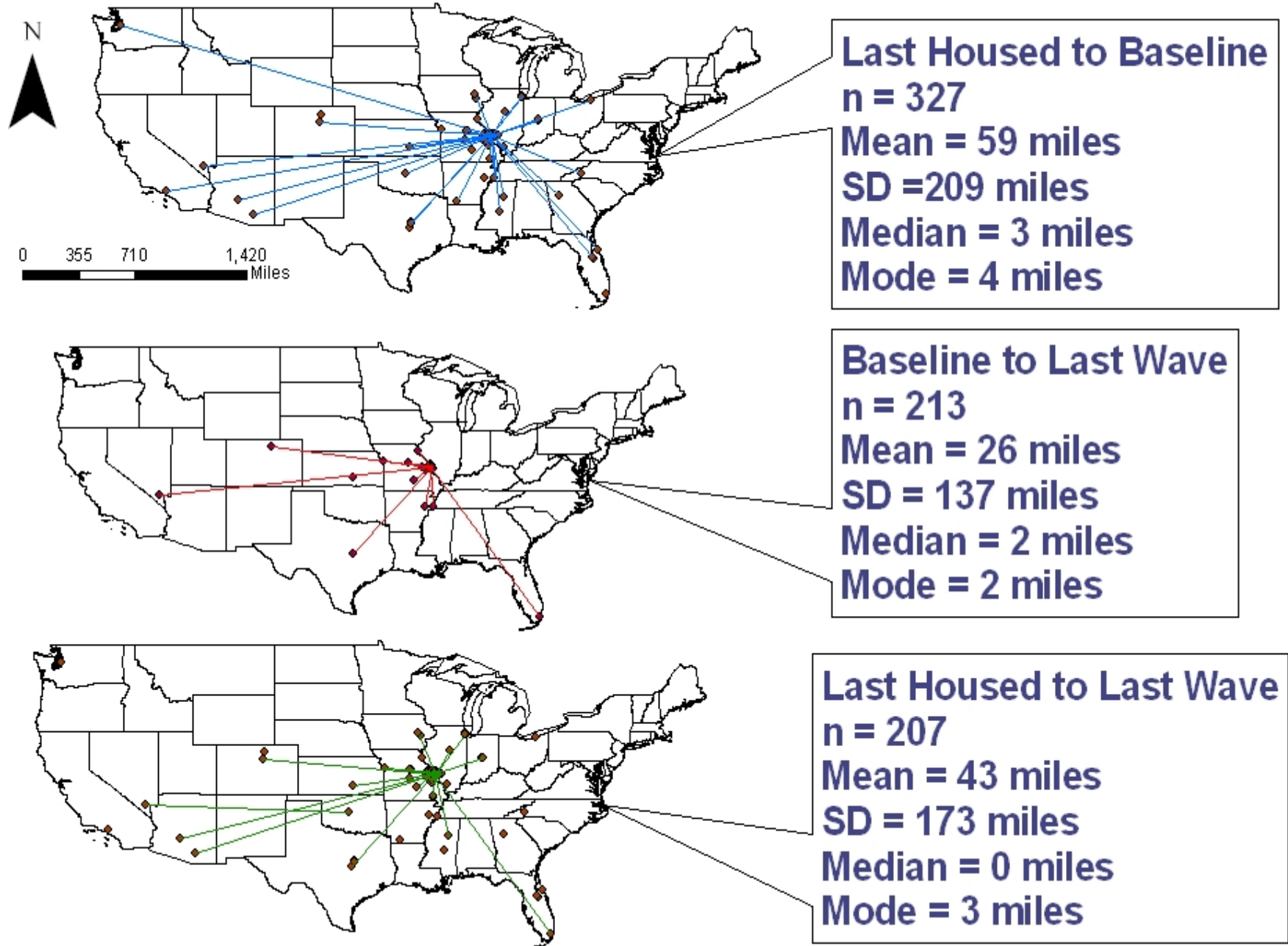
Nationwide (n = 348)

Legend
State Boundaries
● Sleep Location

St. Louis Region (n = 310)

Madison

St. Charles

St. Louis

St. Clair

Franklin

Jefferson   Monroe
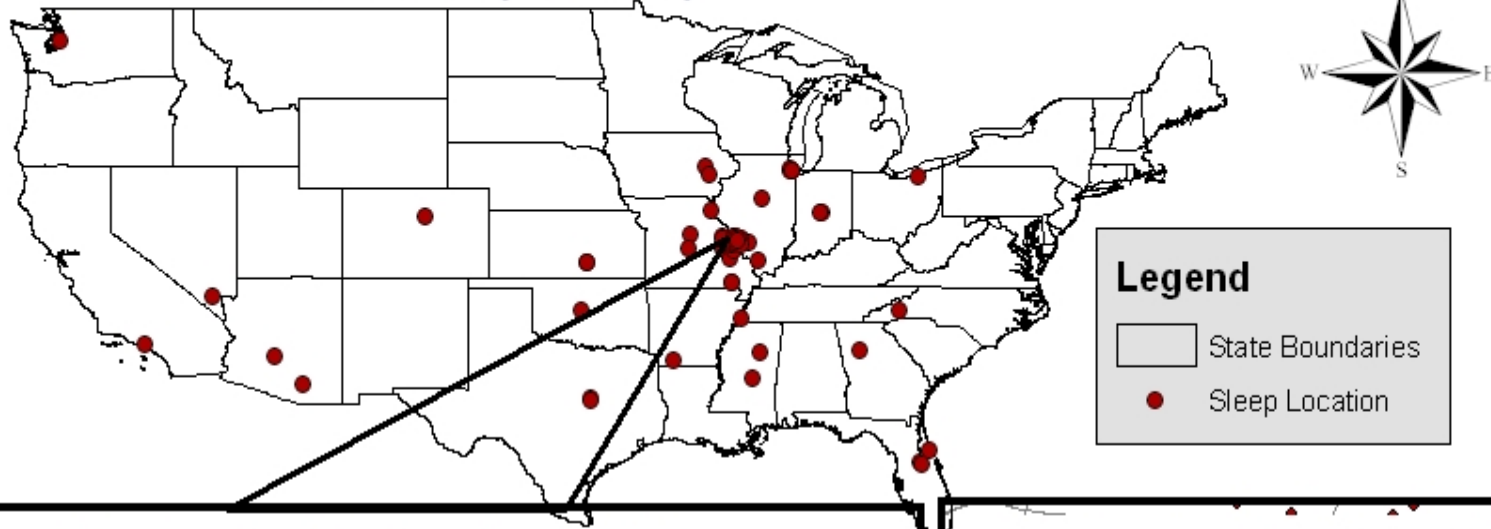
Miles
0 5 10   20

St. Louis City (n = 242)

Miles
0 1.5 3   6
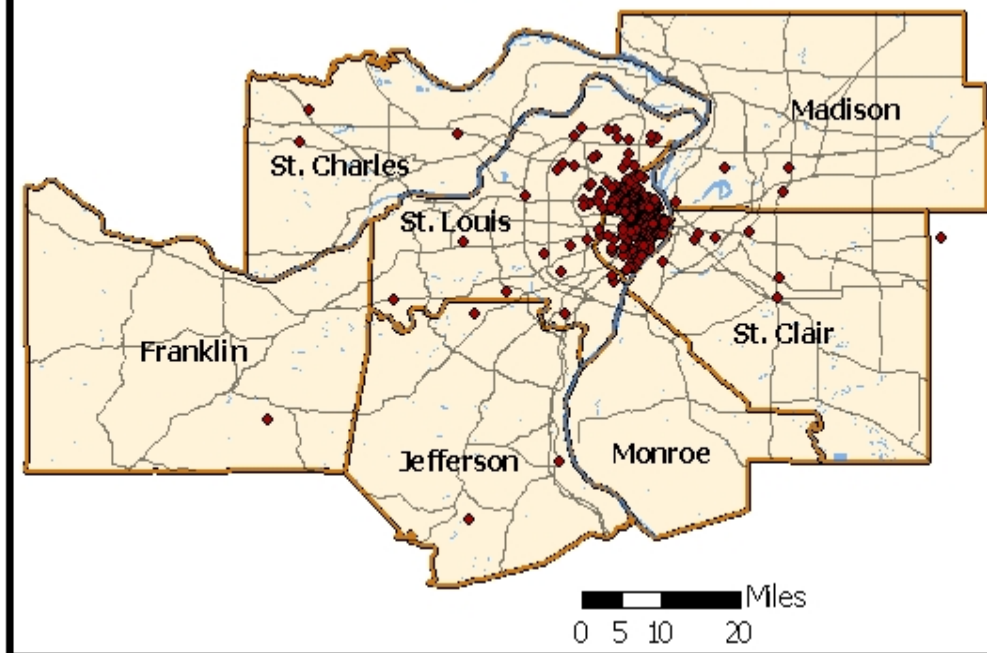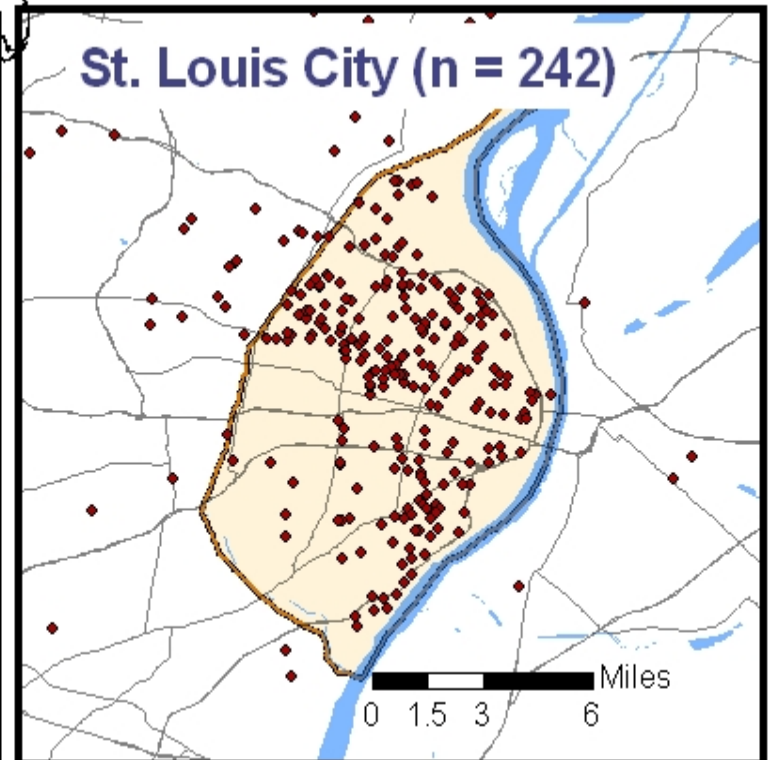
Distances Between Timepoints

Last Housed to Baseline
n = 327
Mean = 59 miles
SD = 209 miles
Median = 3 miles
Mode = 4 miles

Baseline to Last Wave
n = 213
Mean = 26 miles
SD = 137 miles
Median = 2 miles
Mode = 2 miles

Last Housed to Last Wave
n = 207
Mean = 43 miles
SD = 173 miles
Median = 0 miles
Mode = 3 miles

Mean Centers and Directional Distributions

Last Housed

Baseline

Last Wave

Miles
0 1.25 2.5   5

Legend

•   Sleep Locations

▭   Directional Distribution (1 SD)

H   Mean Center

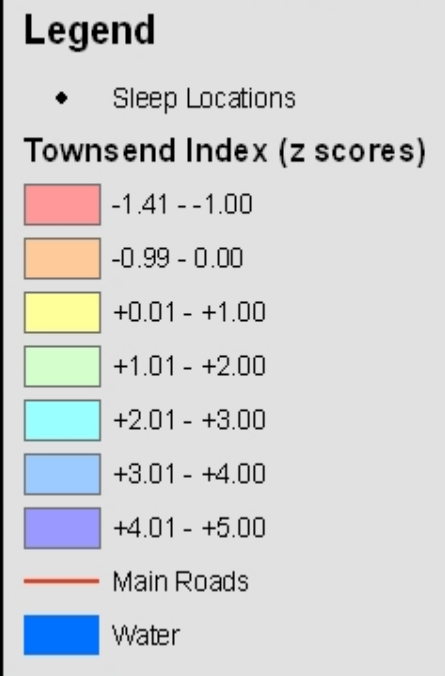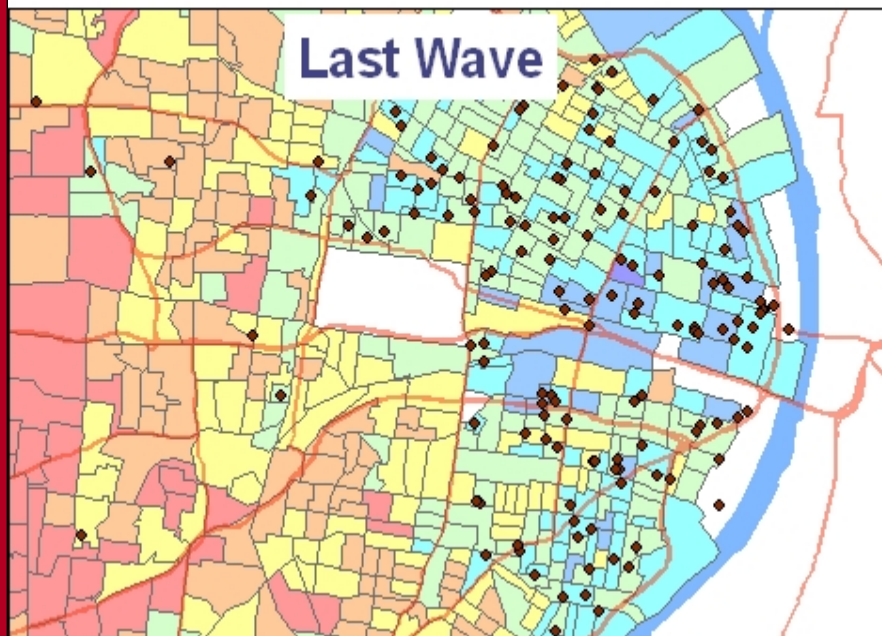—   Main Roads

▬   Water

▭   County Boundaries
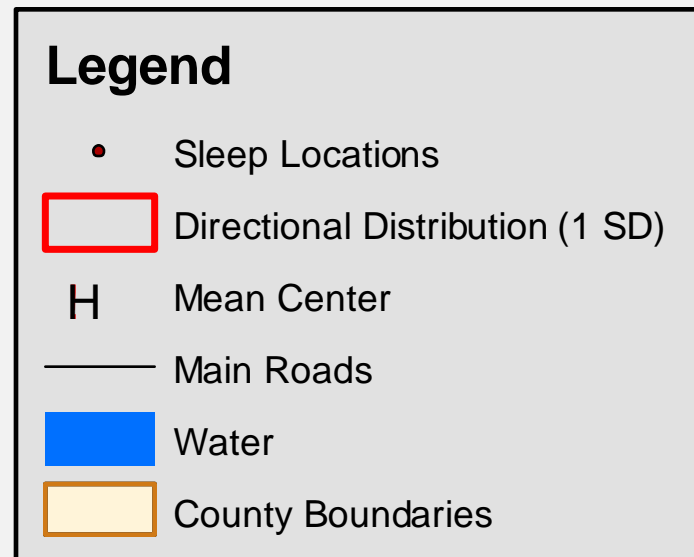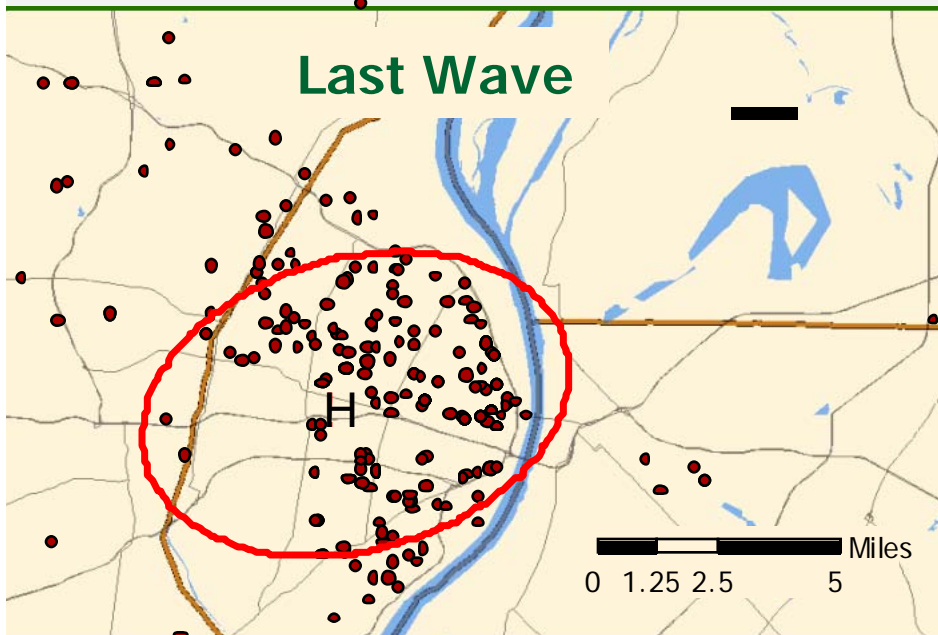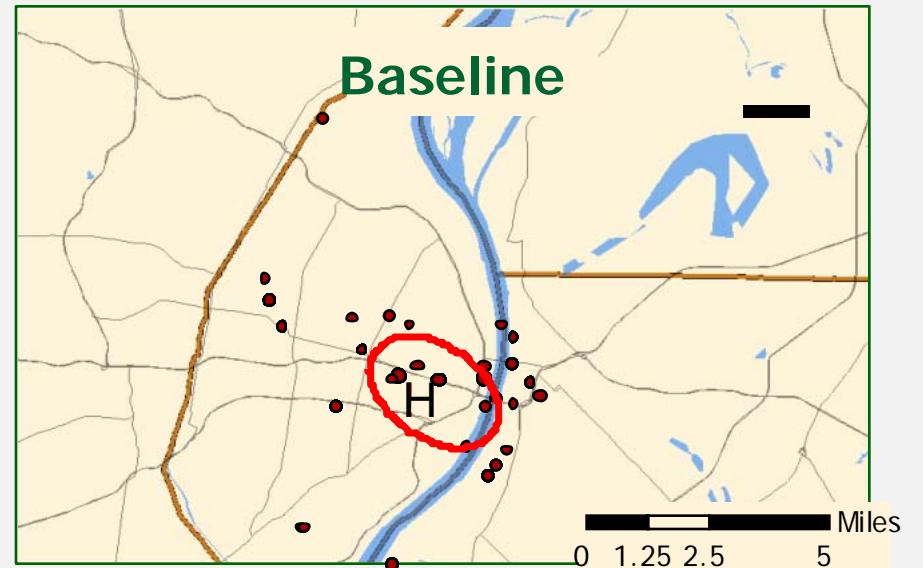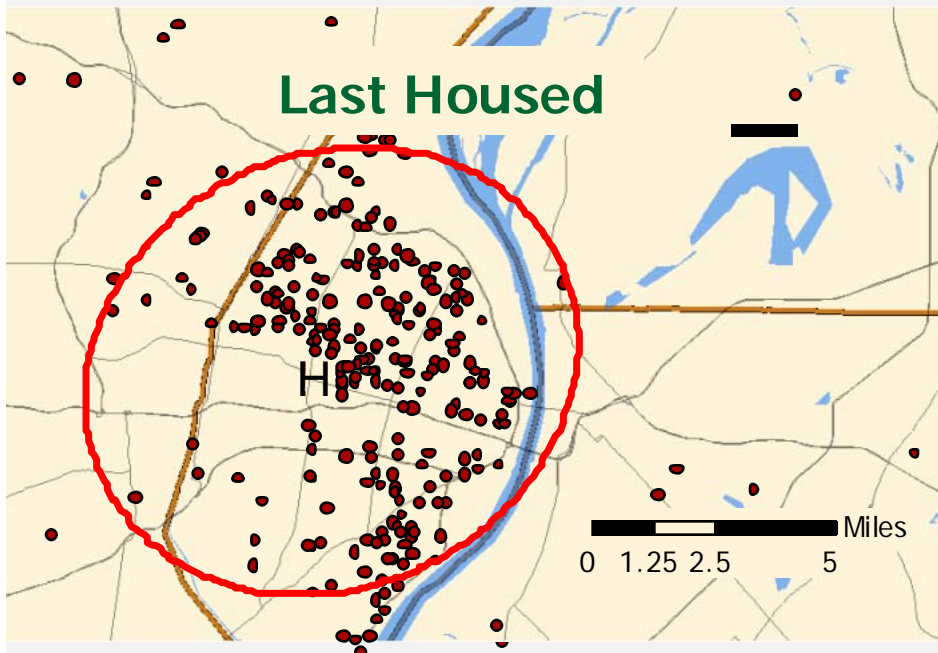
Results

Significant Mean Differences of Census Variables Between Time Points				
	Last Housed to Baseline		**Baseline to Last Wave**	
Variable	Difference	p value	Difference	p Value
Median Income	($6,311)	<0.0001	$2,789	<0.005
Median House Price	$35,998	<0.0001	($30,768)	<0.0001
Proportion Rental Units	0.26	<0.0001	-0.17	<0.0001
Townsend Index	1.16	<0.0001	-0.48	<0.005

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Material Deprivation in St. Louis Region

Last Housed

Baseline

Last Wave

Miles
0 0.5 1   2

N

Legend

- ♦ Sleep Locations

Townsend Index (z scores)

	-1.41 - -1.00
	-0.99 - 0.00
	+0.01 - +1.00
	+1.01 - +2.00
	+2.01 - +3.00
	+3.01 - +4.00
	+4.01 - +5.00
—	Main Roads
	Water
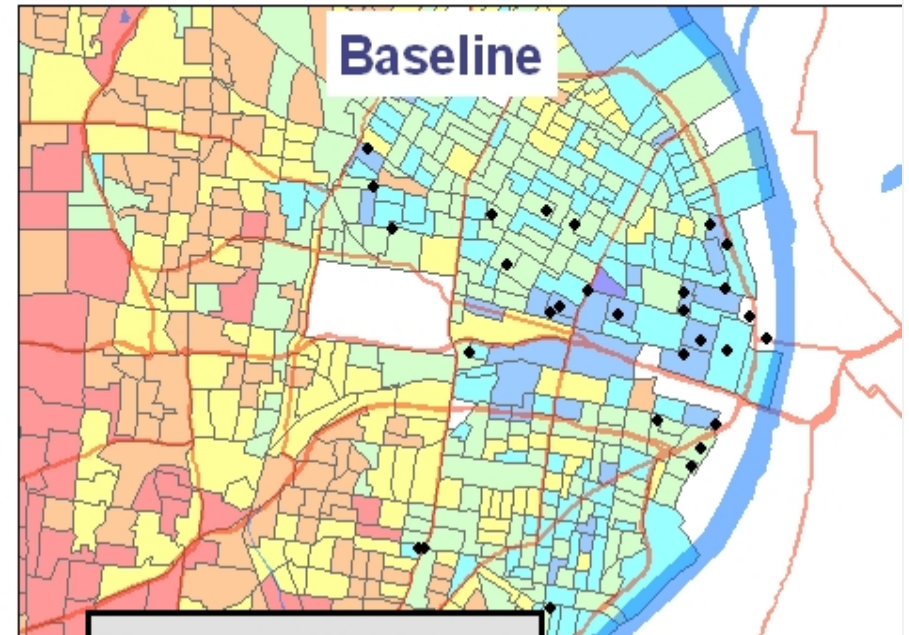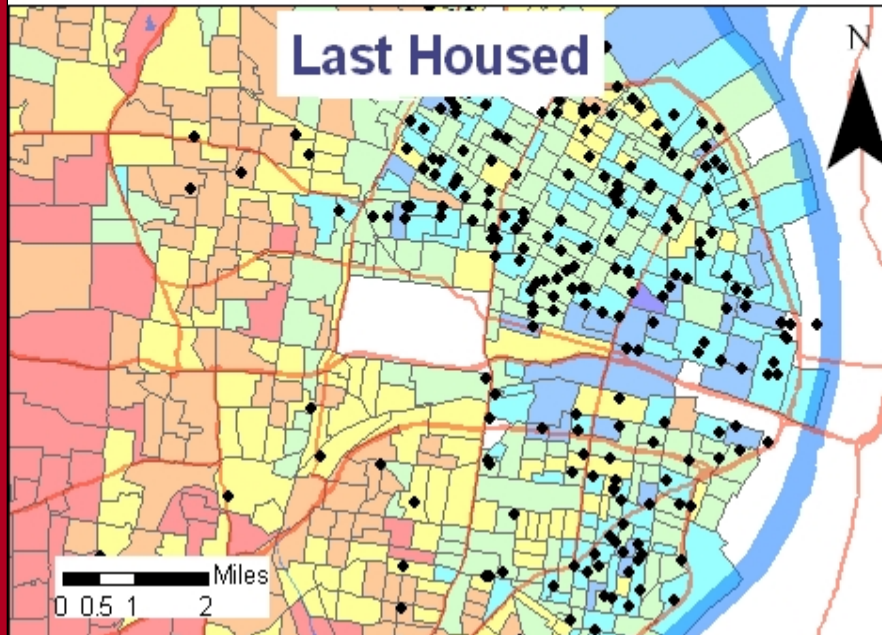
Results

- **When compared to Last Housed and Last Wave locations, the Baseline sample was located in areas with significantly:**

  - **Lower median income**
  - **Higher median house prices**
  - **Higher proportions of rental housing**
  - **Higher Townsend Index Scores of Material Deprivation**

- **There were no significant differences between Last Housed and Last Wave locations on any of the tested census variables**
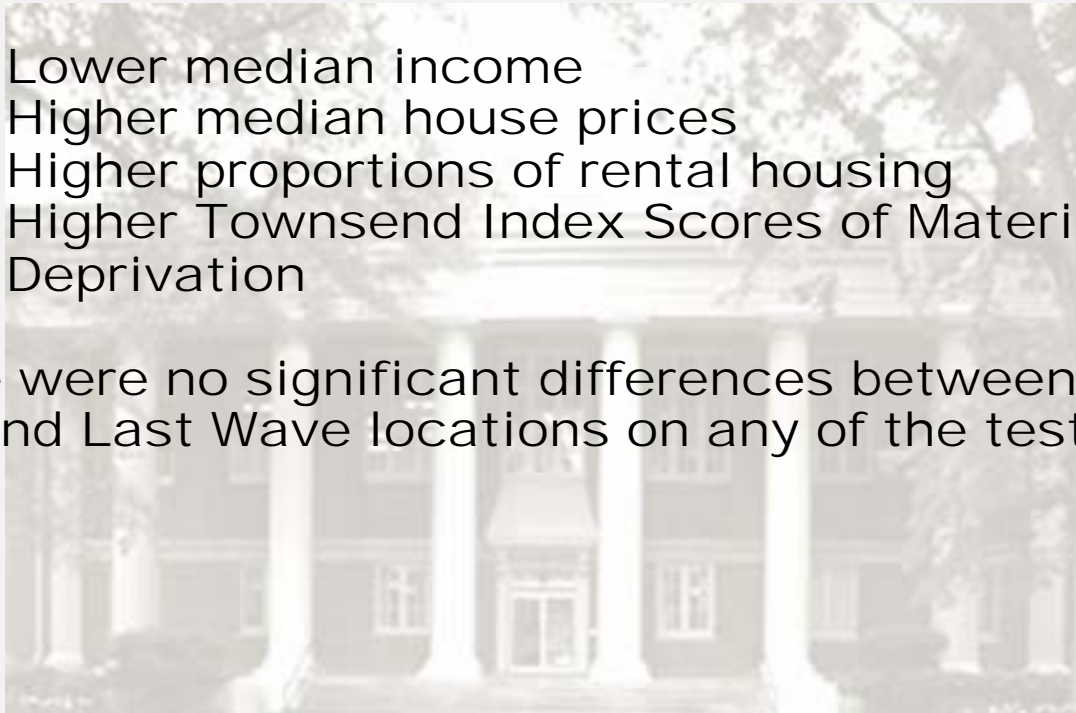
Discussion

- **The finding that Baseline block groups have lower income and much higher house prices may reflect a movement towards areas of lower housing opportunity in this sample. Shelters, which serve the majority of this sample population, are concentrated in a relatively small urban area of the greater St. Louis region**

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Discussion

- The combination of higher proportions of rental occupied properties, lower income, and higher house prices may be an indication of areas of redevelopment or gentrification.

- The findings from this study lend support the "warehousing" explanation posited in previous research, although a more detailed analysis will be necessary to take into account other variables associated with housing availability.

Next Steps

- Five year trajectories of individual parcel data will be compared to surrounding neighborhood and area-level parcel values to identify salient patterns of housing value changes for those who eventually become homeless.

- These results, along with neighborhood-level indicators may be used to target high risk areas or parcels for preventive interventions.

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