

Mar 14, 2025

# Air Conditioning Policy Brief

---

## Executive Summary

Charlotte is facing a significant climate risk, with extreme heat days increasing by 300%, disproportionately affecting low-income neighborhoods with limited greenery and high rates of asthma. While long-term solutions like planting trees are crucial, immediate action is needed to provide air conditioning (A/C) for all residents, particularly in multifamily housing. Although Charlotte Housing & Neighborhood Services has recognized the need for A/C mandates, concerns about costs and rent increases persist. However, historical precedents suggest landlords can absorb these costs without causing excessive rent hikes. Advocates propose a partnership with Duke Energy to create a multifamily A/C program for low-income neighborhoods and recommend a \$2 million pilot program to fund energy-efficient A/C units for 400 rental apartments. This program would help ensure healthier living conditions and mitigate rising temperatures. The city should commit to this initiative by including it in the 2026 budget and direct staff to develop a housing code provision for mandatory A/C within six months.

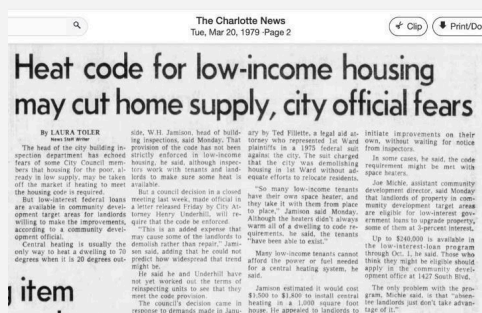
## Community Need / Scope of Work

Climate risk emerged as the primary concern in the SEAP+ public survey. According to the SEAP Action Plan, Charlotte has seen a 300% increase in extreme heat days, with low-income neighborhoods being the most affected. These areas are particularly vulnerable due to limited greenery and increased concrete coverage, which exacerbates heat. Additionally, these neighborhoods suffer from high rates of asthma and respiratory issues, which are worsened by extreme heat.

---

As highlighted in a recent report on underserved communities (source: [North Carolina Health News](#)), these communities are most vulnerable to extreme heat and urgently need better climate resilience strategies.

While long-term solutions, such as planting trees and increasing greenery, are essential, providing air conditioning (A/C) for all residents should be an immediate priority. Charlotte Housing & Neighborhood Services has acknowledged the need to mandate A/C in all multifamily units, noting that this aligns with SEAP goals. However, they hesitated to recommend the mandate due to uncertainty about how many apartment units lack A/C, the costs of installation, and the potential burden on tenants due to increased rent and utility bills.



These concerns mirror challenges faced when advocates pushed for heating mandates and affordable housing development in Charlotte. While some landlords may increase rent to cover installation costs, most landlords understand that excessive rent increases will not be viable in the low-income housing market. These landlords can amortize the cost of equipment over time and receive tax deductions. When landlords were required to install heating equipment in 1979, they did not impose excessive rent increases or remove units from the market.

We also recognize that air conditioning may lead to increased electricity bills, but it is only fair that tenants have access to the equipment to protect themselves from extreme heat

---

when necessary. Tenants can regulate their thermostats and learn how to avoid excessive consumption and high bills, as they have done with heating. Additionally, with existing weatherization programs by Charlotte Housing & Neighborhood Services and Duke Energy's energy savings programs, tenants can manage increased utility costs.

### **Proposed Solution**

The need for A/C is growing more urgent as higher temperatures and record-breaking heat become increasingly common. A/C also helps prevent mold growth, a significant issue not directly addressed by the housing code but affecting many families.

### **Long-Term Goal**

Advocates aim for Charlotte to show the political will to implement an A/C mandate for multifamily housing, similar to other major cities such as Dallas, New Orleans, and Chicago. We propose collaboration between the city, the business community, and community organizations to address concerns surrounding the mandate and provide answers over the next year.

### **Estimating the Need**

Approximately 75,000 housing units in Charlotte were built before 1970. It is reasonable to assume that the majority of units lacking A/C are in these older buildings. Based on rental market trends, an estimated 10% of these units lack A/C, which equals roughly 7,500 units—about 2% of all dwellings in Charlotte.

---

### **Action Step - Identify Business Partnerships**

---

The city can leverage the business community to offset the cost of the A/C mandate. Duke Energy currently offers a program that provides landlords with up to \$8,000 to add or replace A/C equipment, but this program typically excludes multifamily housing. The City of Charlotte could partner with Duke Energy to create a multifamily housing option for landlords in low-income neighborhoods, focusing on energy savings and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For more details, see Duke Energy's assistance programs: [Duke Energy News](#).

---

### **Short-Term Goal**

Advocates seek an immediate commitment from the City to assist landlords in providing cooler, healthier, and more environmentally friendly options for low-income residents. This commitment should be reflected in the 2026 City Budget through the creation of a \$2 million fund for the following pilot project:

#### **\$2,000,000 Pilot Program**

This program will fund the purchase of 400 energy-efficient A/C units for rental apartments currently without A/C (maximum payment of \$5,000 per unit, for up to 10 units per owner). Landlords must commit to not raising rent for 2 years.

During community meetings and canvassing, advocates will inform tenants about the minimum housing code requiring functional A/C in rental units. If landlords fail to maintain A/C systems per their lease agreements, code enforcement will be contacted. These cases will also be used to inform landlords about the pilot program and encourage their participation.

---

---

## **Path Forward**

### **Council Action**

City Council should direct staff to work with partners to develop a housing code provision requiring A/C in multifamily housing. This directive should include a 6-month timeframe for presenting a proposal to the full council.

### **Funding the Pilot Program**

Charlotte should include \$2 million in the 2026 budget for the A/C pilot program.