

LEAH BROOKS

Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Affairs
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EXPERIENCE

George Washington University

Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Affairs
Professor, 2023 to present
Associate Professor, 2017 to 2023
Assistant Professor, 2014 to 2017

Center for Washington Area Studies

Director, 2017 to present

Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

Visiting Scholar, 2018 to present

Federal Reserve Board of Governors

Household and Real Estate Finance Section
Economist, 2011 to 2013

University of Toronto

Department of Economics
School of Public Policy and Governance
Assistant Professor, 2008 to 2011; on leave, academic year 2009-2010
Courses: Undergraduate Urban Economics, Graduate Public Economics

Russell Sage Foundation

July Scholar, July 2010
Visiting Scholar, September 2009 to June 2010

McGill University

Department of Economics
Assistant Professor, 2005 to 2009, on leave 2008-9
Courses: Undergraduate Urban Economics & Public Economics, Graduate Public Economics

Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, UCLA

Non-Resident Visiting Scholar, 2005 to 2007

Brookings Institution

Intern, Center for Urban and Metropolitan Studies, Summer 2003.

Research Assistant, Economic Studies Section, 1999-2000.

RAND

Summer Intern, Summer 2001.

U. S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division

Research Assistant, Economic Analysis Group, 1998-1999.

EDUCATION

UCLA, Ph.D. in Economics, 2005

Thesis Title: *Volunteering to be Taxed: Business Improvement Districts and the Local Provision of Public Goods*

NBER Non-Profit Dissertation Fellowship, 2004-5

Lincoln Institute for Land Policy Dissertation Award, 2003

Jacob Javits Graduate Fellowship, 2000-2004

University of Chicago, B.A., Economics & Public Policy with Honors, 1998

University of Chicago College Honors Scholarship, 1994-1998

RESEARCH FIELDS

Public Economics, Urban Economics, Political Economy

PUBLICATIONS

Retail on the Ground and on the Books: Vacancies and the (mis)Match between Retail Activity and Regulated Land Uses

Joint with Rachel Meltzer

Journal of the American Planning Association, September 2024.

Media coverage: [Slate](#), [CityCast DC](#).

Destruction, Policy and the Evolving Consequences of Washington, DC's 1968 Civil Disturbance

Joint with Jonathan Rose and Stan Veuger

forthcoming, *Review of Economics and Statistics*

Does Housing Growth in Washington, DC Reflect Land Use Policy Changes?

Joint with Jenny Schuetz

Cityscape, 2023.

Media coverage: City Cast DC, Brookings

Infrastructure Costs

Joint with Zach Liscow

American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 2023

Media coverage: [Scientific American](#), [Bloomberg](#), [Brookings](#), [Pedestrian Observations](#), [The Week](#), [Construction Dive](#), [Engineering News Record](#), [Forbes](#), [Bloomberg Opinion](#), [Economist](#) (paywall), [Christian Science Monitor](#), [Vox](#), [George Will in the Washington Post](#), [Claremont Review of Books](#), [Fareed Zakaria in the Washington Post](#), [Reason Magazine](#).

The Local Impact of Containerization

Journal of Urban Economics, 2021 v126.

joint with Nicolas Gendron-Carrier and Gisela Rua

What If You Build It and They Don't Come? How the Ghost of Transit Past Haunts Transit Present

Regional Science and Urban Economics, 2022.

joint with Genevieve Denoeux

Media coverage: [Washington Post](#)

Can America Reduce Highway Spending? Evidence from the States

Economics of Infrastructure, 2020.

Edited by Edward Glaeser and James Poterba, National Bureau of Economic Research.

joint with Zachary Liscow

Vestiges of Transit: Urban Persistence at Micro Scale

Review of Economics and Statistics, 2019 101(3): 385-399.

Joint with Byron Lutz

Featured in *Curbed: LA*, September 26, 2014; Featured in CityMetric, November 11, 2014; Featured in BigBadBroker, September 26, 2014.

From Today's City to Tomorrow's City: An Empirical Investigation of Urban Land Assembly

American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, 2016 8(3), 69-105.

joint with Byron Lutz

Media coverage

“Is it too hard for cities to get denser?” American Economic Association website, August 17, 2016.

“The little misfit buildings that make cities wonderful – and hold them back,” *Washington Post*, Wonkblog, September 20, 2016.

Spending Within Limits: Evidence from Municipal Fiscal Restraints

National Tax Journal, 2016 69(2), 315-352.

joint with Yosh Halberstam and Justin Phillips

Where does the Bucket Leak? Sending Money to the Poor via the Community Development Block Grant Program

Housing Policy Debate, 2014 24 (2), 119-171.

joint with Maxim Sinitsyn, May 2013.

The Micro-Empirics of Providing Collective Goods: The Case of Business Improvement Districts,

Journal of Public Economics. 2011 95 (11-12), 1358-1372.

joint with Will Strange.

The Cabals of a Few or the Confusion of a Multitude: The Institutional Trade-off Between Representation and Governance, *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, February 2011 3 (1), 1-24.

joint with Justin Phillips and Maxim Sinitsyn

Does a Rising Tide Compensate for the Secession of the Successful? Illustrating the Effects of Business Improvement Districts on Municipal Coffers, in *The Changing Landscape of Local Public Revenues*, Cambridge: Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, 2010.

joint with Rachel Meltzer

An Institutional Explanation for the Stickiness of Federal Grants, *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, August 2010 26(2), 243-264.

joint with Justin Phillips

Volunteering to Be Taxed: Business Improvement Districts and the Extra-Governmental Provision of Public Safety, *Journal of Public Economics*, January 2008 92(1-2), 388-406.

Poster Prize, Population Association of America Meetings, March 2004.

Cited in the *Los Angeles Business Journal*, July 3, 2006.

Unveiling Hidden Districts: Assessing the Adoption Patterns of Business Improvement Districts in California, *National Tax Journal*, March 2007 60(1), 5-24.

Does Spatial Variation in Heterogeneity Matter? Assessing the Adoption Patterns of Business Improvement Districts, *Review of Policy Research*, November 2006 23(6), 1219-1233.

WORKING PAPERS

The Perils and Promise of Living Together: Condominiums in the Urban Landscape

Joint with Bryan Stuart and Lu Han

E-commerce, Retail Clustering and Property Values

Joint with Rachel Meltzer

WORK IN PROGRESS

Internet and the Past and Future of Retail

Joint with Rachel Meltzer

Bringing Quantitative Tools to de Tocqueville's Conjecture: A Century of Public Participation

Joint with Bridget Dooling

OTHER WRITING

Center for Washington Area Studies

State of the Capital Region

2024: *Crimes, Convictions and Corrections*

2023: *Housing Market Whiplash*

2022: *Commuting Patterns and Transportation Infrastructure*

2021: *When Capital Region Workers Live and Labor*

2020: *A Region in Economic and Demographic Transition*, with Addendum: *The Region in the Wake of COVID-19*

2019: *Housing Growth and Affordability*

Policy Briefs

How Much Does Infrastructure Cost in the Capital Region? November 2019. Joint with Genevieve Denoeux

Democratic Presidential Hopefuls Take Aim at Housing Reform. What Does It Mean for the Capitol Region? October 2019. Joint with Genevieve Denoeux and Jenny Schuetz

Beyond Amazon: DC Area High Tech Tax Incentives. Joint with Caitlyn Valadez, November 2018.

African Americans in the Greater DC Area: 1930 to the Present. Joint with Caitlyn Valadez, November 2018.

Has the Retail Apocalypse Hit the DC Area? Joint with Urbashee Paul and Rachel Shank, April 2017

Tracing African Americans in the DC Area: 1930 to the Present. Joint with Caitlyn Valadez, October 2016.

Make the Infrastructure Bill Tell Us the Cost of Each Bridge, Road and Train, *The Hill*, March 29, 2021. <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/545384-make-the-infrastructure-bill-tell-us-the-cost-of-each-bridge-road-and-train> joint with Zach Liscow

Long-Dead Streetcars Still Shape L.A. Neighborhoods, *Zocalo Public Square*, September 23, 2014.

Locally-Imposed Tax and Spending Limits, *State Tax Notes*, November 16, 2009. joint with Justin Phillips

Municipally-Imposed Tax and Expenditure Limits, *Land Lines* April 2009 21 (2), 8-13. joint with Justin Phillips

Invited comments on Ingrid Ellen, et al, “The Impact of Business Improvement Districts on Property Values: Evidence from New York City,” *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs*, 2007, 32-35.

AWARDS

Arnold Ventures, “Documenting the Rise of Citizen Voice and Testing for its Impact,” 2025-2026, joint with Bridget Dooling,

Real Estate Research Institute, “E-commerce, Retail Clustering and Property Values.” Fall 2024 to spring 2025, joint with Rachel Meltzer.

New York University and Pew Charitable Trusts, “Does Housing Growth Correlate with Policy Change?,” February 2022-December 2022, joint with Jenny Schuetz.

Kauffman Foundation, “Has the Rise of Ecommerce Impacted Retail Entrepreneurship?,” January 2021-June 2025, joint with Rachel Meltzer.

Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, “Retail Lease and Land Use”, January - December 2021, joint with Rachel Meltzer.

Fannie Mae, funding for “Quantifying Land Use in the Capitol Region,” Center for Washington Area Studies, May 2019 - May 2020.

Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, funding for “A Century of Change in Land Use Regulation,” joint with Byron Lutz, 2015-2016.

George Washington University, University Facilitating Fund grant for “The Local Impact of Containerization,” 2015-2016.

Policy Research Scholar, George Washington University Institute for Public Policy, 2015-2016.

Aareal Award of Excellence in Research, “Vestiges of Transit”, 2015 (declined due to travel limitations).

Reis Best Paper Award, 2011 American Real Estate and Urban Economics International Meetings, for “From Today’s City to Tomorrow’s City: An Empirical Investigation of Urban Land Assembly,” joint with Byron Lutz.

Connaught New Faculty Grant 2011, University of Toronto.

David C. Lincoln Fellowship, “Estimating the Regulatory Land Tax in Boom and Bust,” 2010 & 2011, joint with Byron Lutz.

University of Toronto Internal Graduate Expansion Grant, 2009-2010.

Fonds de recherche sur la société et la culture, “Where Political Economy Allows for Building Up Instead of Out: Land Use Regulation in Los Angeles,” 2008-2011 (could not accept 2009-2011).

Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, funding for survey of locally-imposed tax and expenditure limits, 2007-8, joint with Justin Phillips.

Russell Sage Foundation, “The Politics of Inequality: Neighborhood-Level Allocations of Community Development Block Grant Money,” 2006-2008, joint with Justin Phillips.

John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation Major Research Grant, “Volunteering To Be Taxed: Assessing the Impact of Business Improvement Districts on Commercial and Residential Properties,” 2006-2008, joint with Paul Ong.

Lincoln Institute Grant, partial funding of data purchase for “Volunteering To Be Taxed: Assessing the Impact of Business Improvement Districts on Commercial and Residential Properties,” 2006.

McGill Internal Research Grant, 2006.

Honorable Mention, Association for Public Policy Analysis and Mgmt. Dissertation Award, 2006

Second Runner-Up, National Tax Association Dissertation Prize, 2005

Robert Ettinger Prize (Tied for Best Graduate Student Paper, Economics, UCLA), 2005

PRESENTATIONS

Academic

Internet and the Past and Future of Retail

New York Federal Reserve Bank Local Government Breakfast, May 2025

E-commerce, Retail Clustering and Property Values

Real Estate Research Institute Annual Conference, May 2025

The Perils and Promise of Living Together: Condominiums in the Urban Landscape

Berkeley Haas, fall 2025 (scheduled); Virginia Tech (scheduled), March 2025; Fannie Mae/Philadelphia Federal Reserve Conference on Housing and Demographics, October 2024; Hong Kong University, October 2024; Purdue University, fall 2024; Urban Economics Association, fall 2024; Real Estate Group, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, spring 2023

Infill Housing in Washington DC: Old Industrial and Repurposed Healthcare

Association for Public Policy and Management, November 2022

Working from Density

Urban Economics Association, October 2022.

Can America Reduce Highway Construction Costs? Evidence from the States

NBER Economics of Transportation and Infrastructure in the 21st Century, June 2020; NBER Infrastructure Conference, November 2019

Destruction, Policy and the Evolving Consequences of Washington, DC's 1968 Civil Disturbance

McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University, September 2023; Urban Institute, July 2023; Universite du Quebec a Montreal, spring 2023; Conference on Urban and Regional

Economics, December 2022; Wharton Real Estate Department, October 2022; National Bureau of Economic Research Summer Institute, Development of the American Economy and Urban Economics, July 2022; Emory University, Department of Political Science, April 2022; Furman Center Seminar, New York University, April 2022; Online Spatial and Urban Economics Seminar, March 2021; Department of Economics, George Washington University, October 2020; Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank, October 2020; Urban Economic Association, October 2020; Weimer School for Real Estate, January 2020; National Building Museum, November 2018

Internet and the Past and Future of Retail

Association for Public Policy and Management, November 2018

Infrastructure Costs

NBER Economics of Infrastructure, July 2020; Price School, USC, November 2019; DC Urban Economics Day, May 2019; American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association National Meeting, May 2019; Urban Economics Association, October 2018; National Tax Association, November 2018

A Century of Change in Land Use Regulation

Economic Studies, Census Bureau, April 2017; Association for Public Policy and Management, November 2016

The Local Impact of Containerization

Columbia/NYU Spatial Economic History, October 2018; University of California at Irvine, Economics Department, March 2016; Southern Economic Association Meeting, November 2016; Wharton School and Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank Conference on Urban and Regional Economics, September 2016; AREUEA/American Economic Association Meeting, January 2016; Federal Reserve International Trade conference, November 2015; North American Regional Science Council, November 2014

Where does the Bucket Leak? Sending Money to the Poor via the Community Development Block Grant Program

Urban Affairs Association, March 2014; AREUEA National Conference, May 2013; National Tax Association, November 2012

Vestiges of Transit: Path Dependence and the Modern City

George Mason University School of Law, March 2015; Wagner School, New York University, February 2015; Drexel University, Economics Department, November 2014; Third Workshop on Urban Economics, University of Barcelona, June 2014; National Bureau of Economic Research, Urban Economics & Real Estate, Summer Institute, 2014; George Washington University, Economics Department, February 2014; AREUEA/American Economic Association Meeting, January 2014; Lincoln Institute for Land Policy Urban Economics Conference, May 2013; All-UC Economic History Conference, May 2013; UCLA Economics Alumni Conference, April 2013; North American Regional Science Council, November 2012; Federal Reserve Board Work-in-Progress Seminar, October 2012; AREUEA Mid-Year Conference, May 2012; AREUEA International Conference, July 2012

Using Census of Governments Data to Study Municipal Political Economy

Census of Governments Data Users Seminar, July 2010

From Today's City to Tomorrow's City: An Empirical Investigation of Urban Land Assembly (previously titled "Sclerosis of the City")

University of Oklahoma, December 2011; Regional Science Association, November 2011; NBER Summer Institute, Real Estate & Law and Economics Groups, July 2011; Planning Law and Property Rights, May 2011; American Economic Association, January 2011; Canadian Public Economics Group, May 2010; American Economic Association, Am. Real Estate and Urban Econ. Section, Jan. 2010; American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association Int'l Meeting, July 2009

Does a Rising Tide Compensate for the Secession of the Successful? Simulating the Effects of Business Improvement Districts on Municipal Coeffers

Lincoln Institute for Land Policy Local Public Finance Conference, June 2009

When Do Cities Bind Themselves? The Existence and Extent of Locally-Imposed Tax and Expenditure Limits

5th Fiscal Federalism Conference, University of Barcelona Institute of Economics, June 2013; Federal Reserve System Regional Conference, October 2011; Regional Science Association, November 2009; Association for Public Policy and Management, November 2009; Wagner School, New York University, September 2009; University of Toronto CEPA Lunch, April 2009; National Tax Association, November 2008

The Micro-Empirics of Providing Collective Goods: The Case of Business Improvement Districts

Columbia Center for Urban Research and Policy, April 2010; UCLA Law and Public Finance Seminar, March 2010; Harvard University, Inequality and Social Policy, February 2010; National Tax Association, November 2009; University of Illinois at Chicago, December 2009; CUNY Graduate Center, November 2009; Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank, October 2009; NBER Summer Institute, Real Estate & Local Public Finance, July 2009; Cornell University, October 2009; American Economic Association, January 2009; Southern Economics Association, November 2008; Association for Public Policy and Management, November 2008; University of Guelph, September 2008; American Real Estate and Urban Economics International Conference, July 2008; University of New South Wales, May 2008; University of Sydney, May 2008; Canadian Public Economics Group, May 2008

The Cabals of a Few or the Confusion of a Multitude: The Institutional Trade-off Between Representation and Governance

previously titled "Inside the Gift Horse's Mouth: City Spending, Political Institutions, and the Community Development Block Grant"

Australia National University, April 2008; University of Toronto, March 2008; George Washington University, November 2007; Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, November 2007; American Political Science Association Annual Meetings, August 2007; American Real Estate and Urban Economics International Conference, July 2007; Canadian Public Economics Group, June 2007

An Institutional Explanation for the Stickiness of Federal Grants

University of Toronto, March 2007; Haas School, UC Berkeley, January 2007; Carleton University, December 2006; Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, November 2006; National Tax Association, November 2006; McMaster University, October 2006

Unveiling Hidden Districts: Assessing the Adoption Patterns of Business Improvement Districts in California

American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association – AEA Meeting, January 2007; National Tax Association Conference, November 2006; American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association Int'l. Meeting, July 2006

Does Spatial Variation in Heterogeneity Matter? Assessing the Adoption Patterns of Business Improvement Districts

DeVoe Moore Center Critical Issues Symposium, February 2006; McGill Social Statistics Workshop, November 2005

Volunteering to Be Taxed: Business Improvement Districts and the Extra-Governmental Provision of Public Safety

National Bureau of Economic Research, Summer Institute, July 2006; American Economic Association, American Real Estate and Urban Econ. Section, Jan. 2006; Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Conference, November 2005; National Tax Association Conference, November 2005; Regional Science Association Meetings, November 2005; American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association Int'l. Meeting, July 2005; McGill University, 2005; University of Toronto, 2005; Harvard Business School, Business Government and the International Economy Unit, 2005; UC Merced, 2005; New York University, Wagner School of Public Service, 2005; Canadian Public Economics Group, May 2005

Broader Audience

Keynote Speaker, Ohio Economic Forum, Akron Ohio, November 2023.

[Trustee Briefing](#), Committee on Economic Development, Conference Board, on infrastructure costs. October 2022.

Comments on “Measuring Infrastructure,” Bureau of Economic Analysis Advisory Committee, November 2021

“Using LODS Data”, Census LEHD Program Webinar, April 2021 and November 2021.

“Housing in the Greater Washington Area,” Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Elected Officials Retreat, July 2019

TEACHING

Graduate

George Washington University

Data Visualization Using R (created new course), spring 2018-2025, summer 2022

Intermediate Microeconomics, fall 2014-2015, 2017-2024

Capstone, spring 2015

Econometrics for Policy Research, spring 2014-2015, 2017-2025

University of Toronto

Empirical Public Economics, fall 2009, winter 2011 (Toronto)

McGill University

Empirical Public Economics, winter 2006, 2007, 2008 (McGill)

Undergraduate

University of Toronto

Urban Economics, full year, 2008-9, 2010-2011

McGill University

Urban Economics, winter 2006, 2007, 2008

Public Economics, winter 2008

Service

American Economic Association's Summer Program for Minority Students, Albuquerque, summer 2012

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

University

George Washington University, Trachtenberg School

Co-Chair, Director Search Committee, 2018-2019

Member, Research Committee, 2017-2018, 2019-2022

Recruiting Committee, Economics Teaching, 2018

Recruiting Committee, Public Budgeting/Public Economics, 2017

University of Toronto

Recruiting Committee, Applied Microeconomics, 2011

Recruiting Committee, Political Economy, 2010

Recruiting Committee, Empirical Microeconomics & Political Economy, 2009

McGill University

Member, Undergraduate Committee, 2005-present

Majors Advisor, 2005-present

Outside University

Co-Editor, *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 2024-2027

Board of Editors, *Journal of Urban Economics*, 2019-present

Board of Editors, *National Tax Journal*, 2019- 2022

Board of Editors, *Real Estate Economics*, 2021-present

Volunteer Mentor, Job Market Boot Camp and Tenure Track Mentoring Workshop, American Economic Association program for traditionally underrepresented students, 2021-2024
 Organizing Committee, National Academy of Sciences Meeting on Enhancing Urban Sustainability, 2022
 Board Member, Board on Infrastructure and the Constructed Environment, National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2020-2026
 Co-Chair, Program Committee, American Real Estate and Urban Economics National Meetings, 2017 & 2018
 Organizer, Washington DC Urban Economics Day, 2014-present
 Board Member, American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association, 2013-2016, 2019-2021
 Program Committee, American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association National Meeting, 2013-2015
 Co-Organizer, George Washington/Federal Reserve Board Real Estate Seminar, 2011-2013
 Board Member, National Tax Association, 2010-2013
 Member, Organizing Committee, Canadian Public Economics Group Annual Meeting, May 2010
 Organizer, Canadian Public Economics Group Annual Meeting, May 2009
 Program Committee, American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association Annual Meeting, January 2009
 Program Committee, National Tax Association Meetings, 2006 & 2012

REFeree

American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, American Economic Review, American Journal of Political Science, Canadian Journal of Economics, Contemporary Economic Policy, Economics of Governance, International Regional Science Review, International Tax and Public Finance, Israeli Science Foundation, Journal of Economic History, Journal of Housing Economics, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, Journal of Regional Science, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, Journal of Urban Affairs, Journal of Urban Economics, Housing Policy Debate, Mercatus Policy Series, National Science Foundation, National Tax Journal, PLOS ONE, Policy Studies Journal, Progress and Planning, Public Budgeting and Finance, Public Finance and Management, Public Finance Review, Publius, Regional Science and Urban Economics, Review of Economics and Statistics, Russell Sage Foundation, Simulation and Gaming, Southern Economic Journal, Urban Studies

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Languages: Spanish, advanced; Russian & German, intermediate; French, elementary
 Citizenship: U.S.

February 2025