

Mixed-Income Development Study

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION
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Participation and Decision-Making in Mixed-Income Developments: Who Has a Say?

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Participation and Decision–Making in Mixed–Income Developments: Who Has a Say?¹

A major policy focus over the past two decades has been support for housing policies designed to deconcentrate poverty, remake public housing, and promote the development of mixed-income communities in place of the most deteriorated and problematic public housing developments. Part of the argument for these policies concerns the promise of inclusion and the benefits that should accrue to low-income, relocated public housing residents by integrating them into safe, well-functioning, and better connected neighborhoods. This brief focuses on one aspect of inclusion: low-income residents' participation in the deliberative and decision-making processes that shape the nature of community life in mixed-income developments (for example, with regard to design, amenities, eligibility requirements, service provision, resource allocation, norms of behavior, and rules).

Through interviews with residents and professional stakeholders at three mixed-income developments that are part of Chicago's Plan for Transformation—Oakwood Shores, Park Boulevard, and Westhaven Park—we find that a fundamental tension exists between two orientations to organizing opportunities for low-income resident participation. The dominant orientation privileges “mainstreaming” these residents into associations and structures where all members of the community are invited to participate. An alternative orientation focuses on providing avenues that allow for a specific focus on the needs of relocated public housing and other low-income residents. In this brief, we provide an overview of the mechanisms for participation in these communities, explore how key stakeholders view participation, and examine how the organization of opportunities and emerging patterns of participation shape dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in mixed-income contexts.

DESCRIPTION OF MIXED-INCOME DEVELOPMENT STUDY SITES

Oakwood Shores, on the south side of the city, is being built in place of Ida B. Wells/Madden Park, and will ultimately be one of the largest mixed-income developments in Chicago with 3,000 projected total units. One-third of these units will be occupied by relocated public housing residents, with the remainder split between affordable (23%) and market-rate (44%) residents. It is being developed by a national non-profit organization, The Community Builders, in partnership with Chicago-based private developer Granite Development Corporation.

Park Boulevard is being built in place of Stateway Gardens on the city's south side. Projected to have 1,315 units, occupancy will be split equally with one-third of units reserved for relocated public housing residents, one-third for affordable residents, and one-third for market-rate residents. Park Boulevard is being developed by Stateway Associates, LLC, a team of private developers.

Westhaven Park, is the second phase of the redevelopment of Henry Horner Homes on the city's west side, the first phase of which was completed prior to the launch of the Plan for Transformation. Units produced in the initial pre-Transformation phase were only for public housing residents. The entire development will consist of 1,316 units, 63% of which will be set aside for relocated public housing residents (including some off-site housing), 10% for affordable residents, and 27% for market-rate residents. Westhaven Park is being developed by Brinshore Michaels, a team of private developers.

¹ This brief is based on a longer paper, “Participation, Deliberation, and Decision Making: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Mixed-Income Developments” (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012, *Urban Affairs Review*, 48(6): 863-906).

Mechanisms for Participation

Opportunities for residents to participate in deliberation about neighborhood priorities and policies are organized into two categories. *Statutory mechanisms* are those put in place by legislative and legal mandate to support the participation of relocated public housing residents in their communities. In Chicago, these include Working Groups, Local Advisory Councils, the Office of the Ombudsman, and, at Westhaven Park, the Horner Residents Committee (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Statutory Mechanisms for Public Housing Resident Participation

	Description	Function & Issues	Roles, Participation, & Representation
Working Groups	Established in 2000 by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) at all sites undergoing mixed-income redevelopment	Charged with selecting developers, planning and overseeing redevelopment, and establishing eligibility criteria for returning families	Members include two former public housing residents, representatives of the broader neighborhood, city and legal authorities, and CHA staff
Local Advisory Council (LACs)	Established in the 1970s by federal law at all public housing sites; LACs were not re-established at Chicago mixed-income sites following redevelopment	Work on issues of management, security, services, and other policies; leaders of individual LACs serve on city-wide council that negotiates with the CHA	Leaders are elected by fellow residents; former leaders serve on Working Groups at sites undergoing mixed-income redevelopment
Office of the Ombudsman	Established in 2008 by the CHA to serve public housing residents in mixed-income developments	Provides individual mediation around lease violations, neighbor conflicts, and service provision; hosts regular listening forums for public housing residents	Available to public housing residents living in mixed-income developments; office is staffed by CHA personnel
Horner Residents Committee (HRC)	Established in 1995 by the courts to ensure direct representation of public housing residents during redevelopment of the Henry Horner Homes	Charged with approving all decisions about the redevelopment process and some operations of the new mixed-income site	Members include seven resident representatives and legal counsel

The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) created Working Groups at each mixed-income site as the principal participatory mechanism to inform design and oversee implementation. Current CHA policy allows for two public housing resident leaders from the Local Advisory Council (LAC) to serve on each Working Group alongside a range of professional stakeholders representing the CHA, mixed-income development, City of Chicago, and neighborhood surrounding the development. Because LACs are no longer in place at mixed-income sites, the residents who serve on the Working Groups are those who were elected prior to redevelopment. The CHA also established the Office of the Ombudsman to replace the resident-elected LACs. Unlike the LACs, the Office of the Ombudsman is a centrally-located and CHA-staffed office that mediates and responds to the individual concerns of relocated public housing residents living in mixed-income developments.

In most mixed-income sites, the Working Groups and Ombudsman are the only formal mechanisms specifically established to provide for the participation of public housing residents. At Westhaven Park, however, a lawsuit by the Henry Horner Mothers’ Guild led to a consent decree that established the Horner Residents Committee

(HRC) to guarantee that public housing residents have direct representation in decisions about the redevelopment process and new site. The HRC is composed of seven resident representatives and their legal counsel.

Associational mechanisms offer participatory opportunities to residents of various income levels and include organizations and forums both in the developments and surrounding neighborhoods. Mechanisms put in place by developers, property managers, and service providers at the new developments include tenant meetings run by property management, where renters can provide input on building concerns; projects facilitated by service providers (such as a tenant-led security watch committee); and owners’ associations like those required under condominium law. In addition, opportunities to participate are offered by community-based organizations contracted by the developers to handle case management, employment services, and community-building initiatives (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Associational Mechanisms in and beyond the Mixed-Income Developments

		Description	Function & Issues	Roles, Participation, & Representation
Development Mechanisms (For residents of the mixed-income developments)	Renter Meetings	Sponsored by property managers to discuss building concerns with renters	Focus is on lease compliance, security, and maintenance issues	Property managers facilitate; attendance is highest among public housing residents
	Homeowner Associations	Created to manage and maintain the for-sale property, protect financial interests of owners	Focus on maintenance, security, and property rules; some address broader neighborhood issues (e.g., policing)	Composed of all owners with elected boards; some developers have voting rights for rental or unsold units
	Non-profit Orgs	Contracted to offer supportive and community-building services to residents	Coordinate services and activities (e.g., employment training, youth activities)	Led by independent boards with little resident representation
Neighborhood Mechanisms (For residents of the mixed-income developments and broader neighborhoods)	Emerging Neighborhood Associations	New structures formed by residents of mixed-income developments to address broader community issues	Focus on issues such as business development, youth leadership, and safety & security	Participation draws from broader neighborhood and is typically segregated by tenure
	Community-based Orgs and Associations	Existing structures formed to represent interests of area residents and businesses	Address issues related to real estate and retail development, neighborhood safety, and amenities	Led by independent boards; open meetings and events elicit participation from diverse population of residents
	Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS)	Created by police department to facilitate communication between police and private citizens	Police officers share crime statistics for local area; residents discuss range of concerns (e.g., loitering, noise, criminal activity)	Community volunteers facilitate; participation varies by neighborhood but usually includes mix of income levels and tenure

Mechanisms also exist to address broader community concerns in and surrounding the developments. New associations have emerged as residents move in and organize themselves. At Oakwood Shores, for example, the Bronzeville Oakland Neighborhood Association (BONA) was formed by a group of primarily renters, and at Westhaven Park, a group of owners established the Neighbors' Development Network (NDN). In addition to these new groups, several existing community-based organizations and associations remain active in the neighborhoods surrounding the developments, including non-profit community organizations, citizen action groups, block clubs, merchant associations, parks advisory committees, local school councils, and neighborhood planning boards. Finally, neighborhood residents have the opportunity to participate in Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) meetings, where citizens have direct access to police in efforts to address local safety concerns. As we discuss below, CAPS meetings have become important forums for bringing together residents of different income levels in the neighborhoods surrounding mixed-income developments.

Professional Stakeholder Perspectives on Representation and Participation

There was general agreement among professional stakeholders, including developers, property managers, service providers, housing authority officials, and leaders of community-based organizations, that they all have some role in generating opportunities for low-income residents to participate in decision-making processes in and around the mixed-income developments. Their perspectives varied, however, on the rationale for eliciting participation from this population and the appropriate strategies for doing so.

A small group of professional stakeholder respondents cited *information sharing* as an important purpose for providing participation opportunities to low-income residents. Yet the mechanisms that most regularly incorporate participation of relocated public housing and other low-income residents are largely focused on sharing information. These generally take the form of meetings between property management and renters where the focus is on hearing residents' concerns and clarifying rules and responsibilities.



A larger group of professional stakeholder respondents discussed *capacity building* as a rationale for supporting low-income resident participation. These stakeholders talked about the need for low-income residents to develop knowledge, skills, and experience in order to participate on more equal terms with their new, higher-income neighbors. Professional stakeholders focused in particular on the importance of relocated public housing residents learning to work within existing participatory mechanisms and adopting different, less confrontational communication and organizing styles than those used by some of the former LACs.

The largest group of professional stakeholder respondents talked about opportunities for *influence* as an important purpose for promoting low-income resident participation. Some respondents supported direct engagement of residents with elected officials, public institutions, and neighborhood planning processes (for example, through attendance at ward meetings or volunteering on local advisory councils of parks and schools) as a way to participate in political agenda-setting and help shape neighborhood priorities. Others believed that professional stakeholders are adequately able to broker influence on behalf of low-income residents through their representative roles on structures such as Working Groups.

Regardless of how professional stakeholders framed the rationale of providing opportunities for participation, the vast majority of these respondents supported “mainstreaming” relocated public housing and other low-income residents into mechanisms through which other neighborhood residents get information, share their perspectives, and contribute to collective deliberation about priorities and concerns. A small minority of professional stakeholder respondents discussed the importance of ensuring that specific mechanisms exist to represent the concerns of low-income residents, while others viewed this as potentially perpetuating division and isolation. As a CHA staff member explains:

The whole idea behind the Plan for Transformation was that if you've got a public housing subsidy you shouldn't have a scarlet letter on your vest. ... So I feel in the mixed-income developments, that eventually they should become like neighborhoods and that representation should be like neighborhoods. So if they're going to have community groups, or neighborhood organizations, or block clubs and have leadership and have organizations they should have that, but they shouldn't have something separate in a mixed-income neighborhood for public housing residents in the long run.

As we discuss below, despite the widespread support for mainstreaming among professional stakeholders, opportunities for mainstreaming have generally served to limit the participation and influence of relocated public housing residents.

Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion

How do patterns of participation and influence shape dynamics of inclusion and exclusion? The very organization of participatory opportunities has an influence on the nature, level, and impact of resident participation. Criteria for group membership, for example, tend to promote participation among residents of similar housing backgrounds (owners, renters, and relocated public housing residents) while reflecting and reproducing differences between groups.

Statutory mechanisms, such as Working Groups, structure participation in ways that limit resident representation and control the degree and nature of residents' influence. For example, relocated public housing residents are represented on Working Groups through their former LAC leaders. The relationship between the residents and these leaders, however, is complicated by the fact that LAC leaders—some of whom do not live in the new developments—are no longer elected by relocated public housing residents at the mixed-income

sites. In addition, there is little dedicated space within Working Group meetings for significant resident influence on actual decision-making. Rather, these bodies function largely as coordinating forums where professionals and public officials share information about upcoming development phases, applications for financing, progress toward service goals, and the status of leasing and tenant occupancy. Representatives of relocated public housing residents are a small minority of the Working Groups, which are dominated by professional stakeholders. As populations at the developments have increased and the Working Groups have begun to focus more on post-occupancy issues, the idea of including more residents (including owners, non-public housing renters, and residents of the broader neighborhood) on the Working Groups has been discussed. While such a move may increase the diversity of resident representation, it could also further *decrease* the influence of relocated public housing residents.

In Westhaven Park, other statutory mechanisms exist, and they are more relevant in shaping the opportunities for relocated public housing residents to be represented. Here, the HRC and an active Horner LAC, backed by legal representation and the terms of the consent decree, provide public housing residents with greater leverage to engage with developers, property managers, service providers, housing authority executives, and other leaders. Public housing residents have, for example, effectively influenced decisions about tenant screening, work requirements for residents, future development phases, and security measures. As a community stakeholder notes:

[In] most of the other mixed-income [developments], the Working Group decides what to do when, you know, and the public housing residents and reps are just one member of the Working Group. Here, we have a federal court order that says you've got to sit down and talk to the residents and figure out what to do and if you can't reach an agreement you come to [the lawyer representing public housing residents under the consent decree]. That's—that's a pretty big stick.



Associational mechanisms—which represent a variety of resident interests and community concerns—organize residents in ways that compartmentalize participation, often by housing tenure. The number and relative influence of these mechanisms tend to further overshadow the influence of relocated public housing and other low-income renters in mixed-income contexts. Homeowner associations were described by homeowners and professional stakeholders at all three sites as important mechanisms for owners to organize around shared interests and make collective demands. Owners in the mixed-income developments have been effective in instituting security measures, organizing campaigns for better amenities, and gaining the attention of public officials through public meetings and letter-writing campaigns. Their influence is supported by the clear representation such associations provide, the strong expectations owners hold for the new neighborhoods, and the nature of their claims-making, which resonates with developers and institutional players. As a community stakeholder at Park Boulevard suggests:

There are condo associations but these folk are coming in with a different kind of agenda, different way of getting stuff done based on their environment and their history, their core, their community. They're business oriented and that's what was kind of lacking before but now this is what's good....You have a corporate way of doing things and making accountability.

The organization of homeowners stands in stark contrast to the situation with renters. Beyond the limited representation of relocated public housing residents on the Working Groups and on the HRC at Westhaven Park, there are no renters' associations at any site. This lack of organization is felt not only by relocated public housing residents but also low-income renters in tax-credit units. Few market-rate renters expressed awareness of, time for, or interest in participating in such forums (with the exception of CAPS meetings) either because they view their presence in the community as temporary or because they see the meetings they hear about as unimportant or not “for them.” Renters of tax-credit units, in contrast, were often concerned about the lack of participatory opportunities for renters in general. A tax-credit renter at Westhaven Park, where the HRC is active, explains:

[Relocated public housing residents] have a resident council....And then the other people that live here, as far as people on Section 8, and I'm on Section 8, and people who pay full rent, we don't have anything....Any kind of power base, nothing, no council.

In lieu of such associations, site-based renters' meetings, facilitated by development staff, provide the principal opportunity for all renters to convene and discuss issues. Renters' response to these meetings was overwhelmingly negative, as almost all perceive that these forums lack opportunities for deliberation and result in little follow-up on resident concerns. As a relocated public housing resident at Oakwood Shores states:

I know they asked for our opinions in the meeting, but I don't think they really take it to heart or whatever....I think they gonna do what they want to do anyway. You know they might say well we want to know your ideas and everything, but...they're not really paying attention. I think they just saying it just to say it. And they still have the last decision.

Beyond these mechanisms, most neighborhood-based organizations and public processes have not engaged renters, and there has been limited integration of residents living in the mixed-income developments into them. The major exception is the CAPS meetings, which often draw residents from across income groups and housing tenure to engage in deliberation around issues of community safety.

This organization of representation results in different levels of participation and influence for different resident groups and prioritizes the interests of homeowners and key institutions (developers, the CHA). Many relocated public housing residents and other low-income renters expressed concern about the processes in place to provide them with a voice in decision-making, and most professional stakeholders acknowledged a disparity as well:

The opportunities are not also given to CHA residents. That's the reason I say they're getting screwed as well....Nobody is speaking for them, but somebody is speaking for the homeowners.

Despite this acknowledgement, most professional stakeholders are wary of creating robust forums specifically for relocated public housing residents. Instead they argue that integrating relocated public housing residents into the “normal” mechanisms and processes of the neighborhood will reduce the isolation that characterized their life in the old public housing developments. As one CHA official puts it, “we want you to learn how to operate within the constraints of a normal environment, not a separate environment.” For relocated public housing residents, however, this shift is largely seen as disempowering. According to one relocated public housing resident:

Well, it was different at Stateway [Gardens] because Stateway always had a meeting. You was always able to get up to the mike and, you know, give them your opinion....Since I've been here... they not having any meetings and if they is, it must be private.

In support of the goal of integrating residents across income and housing tenure, most professional stakeholders suggest the need for an inclusive neighborhood association that incorporates all residents. In two sites, efforts to create such a forum have shown mixed results. BONA at Oakwood Shores and NDN at Westhaven Park both attempted to recruit a diverse group of residents to participate, but for the most part residents who have become involved are either renters (BONA) or owners (NDN), but not both. A member of BONA describes this challenge:

When we started doing our meetings, we had some slips where we'd slip [into talking about] tenants' issues....Then we recognized that some people might take people as, “Ugh, that's just rentals' issues. That's not homeowners' issues.” So we've changed....But rather than just trying to stay away from the wordings or the themes that say “tenants v. homeowners,” we're just trying to say “residents.”



The primary forums that draw broad participation from relocated public housing residents, renters, and owners in the development and surrounding neighborhood are the CAPS meetings. While major crime issues in the neighborhoods (gang violence, narcotic sales, and burglaries) are raised, much of the discussion at CAPS meetings centers on community standards around loitering, noise, appropriate youth behavior, curfew, and unruly park activities. The discussion around such issues is often contentious, and undesirable behaviors are often blamed—sometimes by implication, sometimes explicitly—on relocated public housing residents and their guests. As a Westhaven Park community stakeholder explains:

The target becomes people in public housing; it's just easier to lump them in as a group....The police have told them a dozen times: this is a social situation, you have to figure out ways culturally, socially, to deal with it, you can't police this away, and so those tensions are heightened, because [the relocated public housing residents] know who called the police, know who's giving them grief....It's a clash unlike anything I've seen, and to get anywhere remotely close to that, you'd have to go back to when Blacks were trying to integrate communities back in the '60's, to get that kind of venom and rabid anger that comes out when people are talking about the neighborhood.

The dynamics of CAPS meetings challenges the extent to which “mainstreaming” strategies, by themselves, provide meaningful opportunities for low-income residents to have influence on community deliberations about collective concerns. Even in contexts of broader participation, the interests of property owners and institutional players tend to outweigh those of relocated public housing residents and other low-income renters.



Conclusions

We find that a fundamental tension exists between two orientations to framing opportunities for participation in mixed-income contexts. On one hand are those who support “mainstreaming” public housing residents into the structures in which other neighborhood residents participate. On the other hand are orientations that support mechanisms that maximize low-income resident representation and advocate for their specific needs in these new contexts. In practice, the voice of low-income residents within forums representative of “mainstreaming” is quite weak. These residents are also limited in their opportunities for participation by the number and relative influence of mechanisms representing the interests of key institutions and higher-income residents. Thus, the ability of low-income residents to advocate effectively for their priorities and concerns has been limited in these communities.

Establishing more inclusive decision-making processes at the new developments seems critical, both to make good on the commitment to create revitalized communities where low-income residents have opportunities for inclusion and to create marketable communities where tensions among residents of different income levels and tenures are minimized and constructively managed when they do emerge. We offer the following recommendations:

Revisit federal policy to strengthen public housing resident representation. Unlike the explicit policies the federal government put in place to ensure that local housing authorities created LACs and elicited resident input during planning for HOPE VI grants, HUD has remained silent about expectations for governance and decision-making in mixed-income developments. In Chicago, this has led to the elimination of LACs at these sites.

Consider a new model of low-income resident representation in mixed-income developments. Although the Ombudsman’s office may provide an outlet for individual residents to express grievances, it does not provide the potential for collective organizing, planning, and claims-making. Building an effective and constructive governance capacity among relocated public housing and other low-income residents requires support beyond the Ombudsman and independent of the CHA.

Increase resident representation on the Working Groups. Working Groups were originally planned as transitional entities to oversee the build-out of the developments, but they could potentially provide a mechanism for planning and deliberation that includes more robust representation of relocated public housing residents and other low-income renters. As the CHA considers and implements changes to the Working Group structure, resident representation should be accompanied by effective democratic processes for selecting representatives, training to enable effective participation, and support for activities that promote information exchange and the potential to organize in response to collectively recognized challenges.

Provide support to existing associations to recruit and engage low-income residents. This could include training and resources to provide residents with information, capacity building, and leadership development in order to advocate effectively for themselves.

Key Questions for Policy and Practice

There are a range of questions related to issues of low-income resident participation and influence that could prove helpful to stimulating discussion and sharing ongoing implementation lessons among policy-makers, advocates, developers, property managers, service providers, residents, and other stakeholders.

1. The transition from LACs to the Office of the Ombudsman has left relocated public housing residents without a mechanism for collective planning and action. What resources (e.g., meeting space, funding) might be made available to low-income residents at mixed-income developments who wish to come together around a shared goal? What role can development staff and the CHA play in supporting the organization of low-income residents at the mixed-income developments?
2. The CHA is currently considering changes to the Working Group structure that would add resident representatives from the development and broader neighborhood. What mechanisms should be put in place to select resident representatives, allow for communication between these representatives and the broader resident population, and deal with contrasting opinions in decision-making? How can the already limited voice of relocated public housing residents on Working Groups be strengthened in this new structure?
3. Residents at Oakwood Shores and Westhaven Park have established their own neighborhood associations in BONA and NDN, though participation is largely segregated by housing tenure. What strategies can be used to recruit a more diverse resident population to participate? What support and resources can development stakeholders and the CHA offer to these groups? How might they work more cooperatively with other community organizations and groups in the neighborhoods?
4. CAPS meetings—as well as more recent efforts to form a park advisory council at Oakwood Shores—have successfully drawn residents across income levels and housing tenure, yet dynamics at these meetings often privilege higher-income residents. What can be done to better support the voice of relocated public housing residents and low-income renters in these forums?
5. In addition to efforts at mainstreaming, what might the benefits be of establishing representative bodies similar to owners' associations for renters at mixed-income sites? What can be learned from the experiences of the Horner Residents Committee in this respect?

Resident Sample Characteristics
(Random sample only, not full population at sites)

	Overall	RPH	AFF	MKT	RTR	FS
Number of respondents	85	35	25	25	56	29
% Female	74%	89%	76%	52%	86%	52%
Race						
% African-American	84%	100%	76%	68%	100%	52%
% White	8%	0%	12%	16%	0%	24%
% Other	8%	0%	12%	16%	0%	24%
Average age	42	44	41	42	45	38
% Married	19%	6%	20%	36%	13%	31%
Education level						
% high school grad/GED	82%	60%	96%	100%	73%	100%
% Bachelor's degree	40%	0%	56%	80%	16%	86%
% Employed	69%	43%	84%	92%	57%	93%
% With children in HH	48%	66%	32%	40%	57%	31%
Income						
% Under \$20,000	39%	83%	13%	0%	58%	0%
% Over \$70,000	22%	0%	26%	48%	7%	50%

RPH: Relocated public housing residents in units with a public housing subsidy

AFF: Renters and owners in units priced affordably

MKT: Renters and owners in units priced at market-rates

RTR: All renters including relocated public housing residents

FS: All owners



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