



Church Hill North

Richmond, VA

Executive Summary

This site profile is part of a series that spotlights mixed-income community transformations that emphasize health and wellness in their strategic interventions. The Mixed-Income Strategic Alliance produced these profiles to better understand the health implications of creating thriving and inclusive communities with a socio-economically and racially diverse population. This site profile, which focuses on Creighton Court (and the new mixed-income community Church Hill North) was developed through interviews with local stakeholders and experts as well as a review of research, publicly-available information, and internal documents.

Creighton Court is a public housing development in the East End neighborhood of Richmond, Virginia. To address the issues surrounding this pocket of racially concentrated poverty in the East End, the Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority (RRHA) and the City of Richmond applied multiple times for funding through the federal Choice Neighborhoods Initiative to redevelop Creighton Court but have not been able to secure that funding. Despite not having these key federal resources, in 2016, Richmond stakeholders adopted key elements of the plan put forward in the Choice Neighborhoods application and began to execute a plan for a mixed-income community called Church Hill North, with a focus on addressing key social determinants of health.

This profile reveals the challenges of self-financing mixed-income transformation efforts, cobbling together resources from a combination of private sector, municipal, and philanthropic commitments and funding. However, united by a focus on residents, local leaders have organized and persisted across a number of efforts to find

approaches to the complex problems of housing quality and stability, concentrated poverty, asset development, food deserts, etc. This profile also notes the challenges that arise when the prioritizing and balancing of physical development and human capital development are not fully in sync.

The takeaways from this process are, first, the caution to local leaders about the limitations of what can be accomplished without federal resources and leadership and the necessary precondition of consistent local leadership at the City and Housing Authority. Public capacity can't be replaced with or relegated to civic leaders, despite best intentions. In addition, while there are ample efforts targeted to addressing the social determinants of health in the East End, the importance of balancing physical development with the other aspects of mixed-income communities is particularly evident. This story indicates the need to ensure physical development and human capital dimensions of mixed-income communities progress in tandem.

Background & Context

Richmond, Virginia is a mid-size city still grappling with the effects of historical and structural racism that have helped to create and sustain deep inequities. The geographic patterns of poverty in the city and accompanying racial segregation in housing are deeply entrenched, as they are in many cities with histories similar to Richmond's. These realities continue to shape the health and well-being of poor and Black residents in the East End today.

The East End is located in the eastern quadrant of the city, just outside of downtown Richmond. The neigh-



neighborhood was once a vibrant, residential and mixed-use neighborhood, but the area suffered from decades of disinvestment, disrepair, and decline. Now, the neighborhood has one of the highest concentrations of poverty in Virginia, with a median household income of about \$15,500. More than 55% of residents live below the poverty line. In 2016, the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Center for Society & Health released an analysis that indicated a 20-year difference in life expectancy between residents of the East End and affluent areas of Richmond.¹

The hopes and aspirations, as well as parallel suspicion and mistrust by some, about the Creighton Court redevelopment are informed by Richmond's previous efforts to create mixed-income communities. In 1999, the City of Richmond tore down the 440-unit Blackwell public housing development as part of the federal HOPE VI program.³ The goal was to transform the site into a 583-unit mixed-income community. However, only 153 units were planned to be made available for public-housing residents, and only 161 of the total number of planned units were ever built. This was due to a 2002 setback with the developer, after which the housing authority struggled to complete the project. The resulting displacement of public housing residents—with little apparent pay-off or follow-through in terms of promised new housing—has led to continued distrust about the intentions and promises of the RRHA among the City's public housing residents.

Despite its checkered history on mixed-income communities, the RRHA has made clear its vision and preference that creating mixed-income communities is the most appropriate plan for moving forward with public housing redevelopment in the East End.

East End Creighton Court Demographic Profile

The four public housing developments in the East End (Creighton Court, Whitcomb Court, Fairfield Court, and Mosby Court) include more than 1800 units, housing more than 2,000 residents. Creighton Court is Richmond's second largest public housing project. Built in 1953, Creighton Court consists of 503 public housing units in barrack-style townhouse buildings, and its occupancy rate is between 93-96%.² The layout and location of the development has left it relatively isolated from the rest of the neighborhood which, in the views of many, compounds the stigmatization of public housing residents.

In terms of demographics, the Creighton Court community is 97% Black, 2% white, 1% American Indian or Native Alaskan, and 1% Latino. 89% of residents are categorized as Extremely Low Income. Residents report a number of adverse health conditions, including high blood pressure, allergies, arthritis, depression, and asthma. Twenty-five percent of heads of households are classified as disabled.

Site Redevelopment

In 2013, the RRHA applied for a Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant for Creighton Court. Although it did not receive Choice funding, the RRHA retained The Community Builders, Inc. (TCB) to redevelop Creighton Court into a new, mixed-income community named "Church Hill North." The plan for Creighton Court's redevelopment (as articulated in the Planning Grant application and picked up in the subsequent development plans) centers on resident participation, advancement of the economic well-being of residents and the neighborhood, the improvement of long-term resident health and well-being, and connections to supportive community resources. The Creighton Court redevelopment plan includes physical revitalization, early childhood development and education, community-building strategies, and additional elements focused on addressing the social determinants of health.⁴

The master planning document calls for both a build-first approach and a one-for-one replacement policy.⁵ In many people's minds, the replacement policy is animated by the previous dashed promises of the Blackwell redevelopment. In order to follow through on these commitments, TCB partnered with the City of Richmond to acquire the vacant former Armstrong High School site, located across the street from Creighton Court. To encourage housing stability, mitigate the trauma of offsite displacement, and to enable the equivalent of onsite relocation, current residents will be able to remain in their homes as the first phases of the mixed-income development are completed on the Armstrong site.

As of August 2018, the first phase of the redevelopment plan was funded and construction had begun. Funding for the second phase has not yet been secured, although TCB intends to submit a proposal for a 9% Low Income Housing Tax Credit for this phase, which would allow for completion of the Armstrong offsite housing development.⁶ Fully implementing the second phase will require the redoubling of efforts by the City and the RRHA to successfully complete the mixed-income build-out of the additional units which are planned for Creighton Court.

Scale of Redevelopment

During the phased redevelopment, the plan is for a total of 256 families to be relocated to the Armstrong site.⁷

The initial phase will include the construction of 60 units, one-third of which will be market-rate units, another third will be affordable housing units, and the remaining third will be reserved for fully subsidized or public housing residents.⁸ The initial phase also includes the construction of 45 senior rental units; these are viewed as particularly important, as the neighborhood does not have nearby resources to help seniors age in place. The first phase is scheduled to be completed in April 2019; and, in addition

to the residential units, this phase includes construction of a spacious community center with programming to offer children, youth, and families a “cradle to career pipeline” of support while also providing activities designed to strengthen relationships among community members and residents. The cost of this first phase is estimated to be between \$23-25 million.

The second phase of redevelopment will add 60 units by the end of 2019, 50 of which will be mixed-income rental units and 10 of which will be home ownership units. Creighton Court residents will continue to relocate either offsite or to the Armstrong site. Moderate-income and market-rate renters will also be recruited to the mixed-income units. The second half of the Armstrong site will undergo construction to add more rental and home ownership units. The cost of this phase will be about \$25-29 million.

The third phase of redevelopment is likely to be further refined, as RRHA and TCB are recalibrating what is possible, and by when, after not receiving Choice Neighborhoods funding. The third phase of redevelopment is thus currently unfunded.

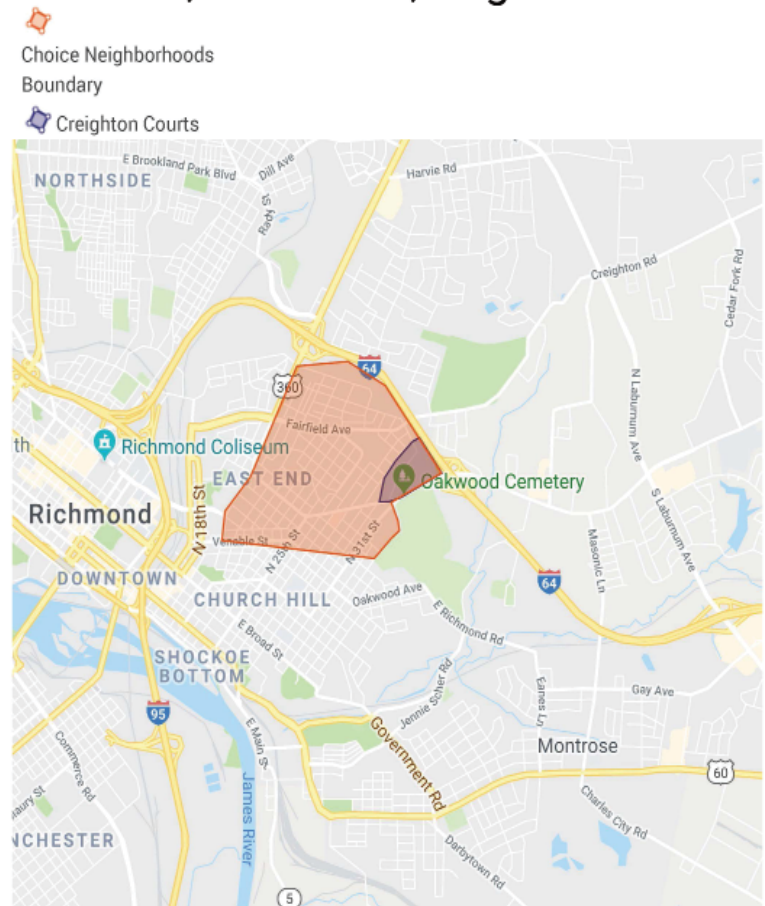
Funding

After the RRHA decided that the development efforts would proceed as planned even without Choice Neighborhoods funding, local organizations, city agencies, and larger institutions confirmed some of the financial commitments they had made to the development as part of the federal application. However, as they survey the likelihood of putting the required funding package together, many community leaders believe that the current citywide effort around improving schools is a higher funding priority than public housing transformation for the mayor and for the city council, and that the City is thus looking to the RRHA to rely on more conventional financing methods for housing redevelopment (such as tax credits and bonds). In fact, in December 2018, the City Council approved the issuance of \$4.9 million in general obligation bonds to help fund the construction of the Creighton Court first phase of redevelopment.

Stakeholders cite the need to leverage additional local funds among corporate and philanthropic partners. In the past, much of the funding for Richmond’s public housing redevelopment has come from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, so the need for continuing interaction between the RRHA and the local philanthropic community has not seemed essential.

Stakeholders see this broadened partnership as vital in the current context, as the scale of the Creighton

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Court/East End redevelopment is very large in scale and extends beyond the prior experience of both the City and the RRHA.

Design & Implementation of Strategies

Preparing the Choice Neighborhoods application, while ultimately unsuccessful, gave purpose and an orientation to local stakeholders as they put together their goals and plans for the East End transformation. Local leaders and residents used the process to articulate the capacities, resources, and possibilities for the transformation of Creighton Court, and they took the occasion to establish a framework for addressing key social determinants of health. Further, in preparing the Choice application, the RRHA secured significant financial commitments from city government and from local foundations and corporations, as leaders came together from across sectors to build a plan for the redevelopment. The framework for the Choice application also both required and allowed local leaders to articulate a “People Plan,” using the framework that is central to the Choice Neighborhoods approach. Beyond the People Plan, other initiatives and efforts have sought to keep the residents’ needs and aspirations front and center.

The “People Plan”

The “People Plan” for the Creighton Court redevelopment continues to focus on the importance of holistic, family-based development for residents of the community.⁹ The Plan names the Richmond City Health District (RCHD) as the leader of the People strategy and case management by RCHD as the central element of the strategy. Supported by the City and local institutions, the plan anticipates key investments and services, including a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) and a “wide array of educational, health, economic development, and recreational service providers.”

The priorities for the People Plan are grounded in information from multiple rounds of data collection efforts that have sought to gauge needs and priorities of Creighton Court households. These include regular resident surveys by the RRHA; an additional RRHA Resident Needs Survey from 2014; a 2015 survey by Urban Strategies, Inc. on resident needs, priority rankings, and perceived quality of existing services; and a 2016 survey by the Creighton Court Resident Transformation Team, which collected data on methods of communication and engagement, health, and school attendance. In addition to leveraging these resident surveys, newer structures like the Creighton Court Resident Transformation Team and Informed Neighbors Corps,¹⁰ and existing ones like the Creighton Court Tenant Council were examples of efforts designed to keep residents at the center of the redevelopment, glean and share important information, and build residents’ leadership capacity for change.

Synthesizing much of this information, the People Plan names two primary desired outcomes for redevelopment of Creighton Court. The first is that children, youth and adults will be physically and mentally healthy, with strategies to increase the utilization and expand the network of health and wellness services and to improve health literacy and behaviors. The second is that households will be economically stable and self-sufficient, with strategies to increase residents’ incomes through employment and to create additional employment opportunities.

Richmond Opportunities Inc. (ROI) (2018)

The challenge of funding the future phases of Creighton Court redevelopment has necessitated increased collaboration among organizations. These partnerships have included the strong leadership of organizations like VCU and Richmond Promise Neighborhood. Local leaders have also coalesced around Richmond Opportunities, Inc. (ROI), which has become a forum for organized and intentional goal setting and for accountability to ensure that the People Plan is preserved and that key participants in the creation of the Choice application continue to coordinate efforts.

ROI was originally created by the RRHA in 1990 with a mission to secure college funding for prospective

students. At that time, the organization was completely controlled by RRHA and approximately six to eight of the board members were RRHA staff. In recent years, ROI has evolved into an independent nonprofit that is a more broadly supported vehicle for community coordination, planning, and decision-making. ROI now has only one RRHA representative on the board, and it is much more inclusive of the local philanthropic community. The acting director of Richmond Opportunities Inc. is on loan from the Community Foundation.

ROI has taken responsibility for the coordination of services among and between nonprofit and government agencies, as well as the efficient allocation of resources and evaluation of short and long-term goals.¹¹ Specifically, ROI is focusing on coordinating efforts among organizations and institutions to secure a successful transition for the first 154 residents of Creighton Court who will be using project-based vouchers to relocate to the Armstrong site.

As a structure for collaboration, ROI operates at multiple levels. Overall, strategic guidance and decisions are the responsibility of a Steering Committee which is comprised of a number of city institutions, resident leaders, and community organizations, including the RRHA, the Richmond City Health District, VCU, and others. The Steering Committee in turn ensures that work is done through three work groups focused on community engagement and communication, data and evaluation, and coordinating case management. As an example of the work that gets done through work groups, the data team is looking at what indicators might be most important for Family Transition Coaches to use over time in order to measure the changes in the health of Creighton Court and future Church Hill North residents during and after the redevelopment.

Family Transition Coaches (FTCs)

Case management by Family Transition Coaches (FTCs), who are employed and supervised by RCHD, is a major component of the strategy to support residents through the redevelopment process. The idea for the FTC program grew specifically from the 2015 Creighton Court Public Housing Community resident needs assessment, which was funded by the City and RRHA and looked in depth at the status and needs of Creighton Court residents. As part of this program, each Creighton Court household will develop a Family or Individual Development Plan with their FTC and will receive ongoing assistance in making connections to local community-based resources and supports, ranging from education, employment, health and wellness services, financial preparation, and relocation needs. A highlight of the FTC role is to directly assist residents with their transition to the new Church Hill North redevelopment.

The Plan calls for 10 FTCs, which would provide a staff to family ratio of 50:1. TCB worked with the City’s Office

of Community Wealth Building and the RRHA to establish and fund the FTCs. Support for a coach is also being provided by Richmond Opportunities, Inc. (ROI).

Invest Health and the Market Value Analysis (2016)

Further support for strategies aligned to the principles of the “People Plan” came when Richmond was selected as one of 50 mid-sized cities to participate in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Invest Health Initiative. The aim of Invest Health is to boost health outcomes in low-income neighborhoods. Applying for the program brought community leaders together to focus on building the relationships needed to address effectively the social determinants of health in the East End. The process catalyzed further alignment of local leaders and created shared language and aspirations for the East End. While the city was awarded a \$60,000 grant and the effort was time limited, many local leaders believe that the deepest value of being involved in Invest Health was the opportunity to have challenging and creative conversations about deploying resources more effectively to improve the social determinants of health of East End residents.

Participants in the Invest Health Initiative included a wide swath of civic and community leaders, including leadership of the RCHD; a staff member with the city’s Office of Community Wealth Building; the CEO of the RRHA; the president and CEO of the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation (RMHF); and the vice president for health policy and community relations at VCU Health System.

The initiative resulted in the creation of a Market Value Analysis (MVA) for the city, which used data to create an objective real estate map that identifies opportunities for equitable development in Richmond. The MVA was completed in the fall of 2017 by the Philadelphia-based The Reinvestment Fund in partnership with the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation. The MVA documented the predominant racial and income segregation in Richmond and the evolution of the city’s housing affordability crisis, making the case for public and private capital to create more equitable, inclusive communities.

Members of the Invest Health team funded a supplemental analysis, which examined the relationship between socioeconomic factors and housing markets. This analysis was completed by the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis at VCU. One of the most striking insights to come out of the VCU analysis was that median life expectancy in the East End is 20 years less than that in wealthier Richmond neighborhoods.

Invest Health participants express hope that the power of these data might be used to further explore the potential for investment and transformation in the East End and to create a baseline for stakeholders to understand investment options to increase funding for affordable housing there (perhaps in a next phase of the initiative).

While there are other elements of the Invest Health work in Richmond, the above were seen as the most aligned to the Creighton Court mixed-income redevelopment.

Sarah Garland Jones Center (2017) and VCU Health and Wellness Center

In recent years, two large health systems have also targeted investments in the East End. In 2017, Bon Secours Health System opened The Sarah Garland Jones Center in the East End, named after the first Black woman to be licensed to practice medicine in Virginia. The center offers health programming, group-based therapy sessions, community health education, and training/workforce development to East End residents.

In the fall of 2017, VCU Health System announced that it would be establishing a health education and wellness center in Richmond’s East End. The center is collaborating with Bon Secours to ensure that the efforts of both health systems are coordinated and that their services complement each other.

Key Takeaways

The lessons from Richmond’s efforts to create sustainable, equitable, inclusive, mixed-income communities grow from decades of experience, as the city has grappled with undoing and moving beyond the patterns of economic and racial segregation that still contribute

to conditions in the city today, and specifically to the stark disparities evident in the East End. Richmond’s experience also illuminates the difficulties and challenges—and also the tenacity of local commitment—in trying to undertake major redevelopment without the engine and funding of large influxes of federal support such as that available to other communities that were successful in securing Choice Neighborhoods planning and implementation funding. Several reflections or lessons seem particularly apt, recognizing that the story of the redevelopment of Creighton Court is still in progress.

First, Richmond demonstrates the value of broad and tenacious civic leadership and commitment to redevelopment as a way to keep aspirations for neighborhood redevelopment on track. Richmond’s experience demonstrates that the stewardship of mixed-income communities cannot live only in one place; it must be embraced across sectors. When the federal Choice Neighborhoods opportunity did not materialize, it was a combination of many private sector partners, a developer, and the City and RRHA that kept the plans for redevelopment alive and allowed redevelopment to move forward. Those civic leaders found a mechanism through ROI to foster accountability for the People Plan. The importance of these external leaders cannot be understated given the organizational challenges at the RRHA and the transitions at City Hall over the last years.

The capacity of Richmond’s private and philanthropic sector to collaborate seems to be a particularly important part of this story. Progress in Richmond has been made on the strength of existing relationships among community leaders, based on the familiarity with and trust in one another’s work that comes with working in close partnership over the years. Not only do leaders of different organizations seem to appreciate each other on an interpersonal basis, but they often serve on boards and committees for each other’s organizations. Leaders of the RMHF and RCHD are particularly worthy of note given their connectivity and credibility across the venues and sectors. The “coming together” of leadership in various guises through ROI seems to represent a way of leveraging these existing relationships and creating a space for leaders to discuss goals, think together (with residents) about what can be done to improve outcomes for public housing residents, and to agree on a framework—such as the social determinants of health—through which organizations might work together. Through its various structures, ROI has enabled resident voice and knowledge to influence other leaders and foster networks where residents can be supported through the transition to the new Church Hill North.

This collaboration is not always smooth or seamless. On occasion, it can look like a flurry of loosely connected activities across sectors and organizations, where the same leaders are common across those activities. However, in Richmond, according to many local leaders, these connections and working relationships are taking on a new coherence with the support of the People Plan, and the nonprofit sector is looking forward to collectively making more strategic decisions.

Second, the Richmond experience demonstrates how public sector leadership is critical to any truly ambitious plan for mixed-income community development.

On the plus side, RRHA demonstrated leadership in supporting redevelopment even in the absence of Choice Neighborhoods funding. Recognizing that plans would have to be adjusted and scaled down, the City, RRHA and other local partners put together a funding package that allowed Phase I of the Creighton Court redevelopment to move forward.

At the same time, local leaders suggest that Richmond also exemplifies the limitations of mixed-income transformation of public housing when the public housing authority and/or City Hall are not fully and consistently at the table or prioritizing the effort. Political leadership transitions, albeit normal, can create discontinuities, the emergence of new priorities (that displace previous ones), and capacity challenges. Even though housing development naturally invites people to think about how much role and responsibility the private sector can assume, mixed-income public housing transformation cannot be completely outsourced to the private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. Sustaining the roles of

RRHA and of city government over the long term cannot be underemphasized.

Some stakeholders suggested that, in the Richmond context, the most effective role of the public housing authority is to partner with organizations like ROI and other community groups to support residents in the transition, while serving as a liaison to HUD to manage requirements on the ground. RRHA’s obligations to HUD and expertise mean they are familiar with regulations and are in a position to connect and translate these expectations for community organizations. Beyond RRHA’s regulatory and translation roles, local leaders expressed confusion about the appropriate role of the public housing authority in relationship to service provision and redevelopment in general.

City government must also must embrace redevelopment and play an active role in securing funding (recognizing the constraints and competing priorities all municipalities face) because funding provides such an important signal to community development organizations and developers that the City is prioritizing the effort. In Richmond, the City has signaled its commitment, indicating that it sees housing as an important part of its poverty reduction strategy. However, funding for all three phases of the Creighton Court redevelopment has not been realized. There is an appreciable fear that a Blackwell predicament may emerge again. While the City gave support for the redevelopment with some financial commitments at the end of 2017, some leaders outside of the public sector expressed concern about what the City’s commitment might look like going forward.

Third, in terms of the intersection of health strategies with broader physical and human capital development in a neighborhood, Richmond illustrates the power of a framework that focuses on health and the social determinants of health within mixed-income community development. By using the social determinants of health framework as central to the “People” strategy, Richmond demonstrates that this is a framework capable of rallying community partners, sustaining their efforts, and launching valuable, concrete strategies. Those strategies ranged from the Family Transition Coaches to the understanding that new health care providers, capacities, and resources are necessary (such as the planned FQHC). These resources meet well-documented resident needs, have broad resident support, and can serve as very valuable neighborhood strengths in themselves when the progress toward complementary housing redevelopment is delayed, as in Richmond. While necessary preconditions for the success of mixed-income redevelopment, they are not sufficient as other leadership, organizational, financial, and development capacities must be present as well.

Finally, Richmond illuminates lessons about the power of markets to shift fundamentally the housing afford-

ability dynamics in a city and in its neighborhoods, presenting opportunities and challenges for mixed-income transformation. Ten years ago, most stakeholders in Richmond were not paying attention to the need to preserve and create affordable housing. Since then, however, housing in both the city and region has become largely unaffordable for the most vulnerable residents. Now, with phases of the Creighton Court redevelopment starting and East End gentrification pressures manifesting even while a mixed-income vision prevails, the question is whether the East End can be preserved in a way that is recognizable to and inclusive of longtime residents. The possibility that future phases of redevelopment may have different occupancy, tenure, and diversity demographics than those envisioned concern many local leaders. No one wants a situation in which, because affordable housing units could not be financed due to unavailable subsidies, the neighborhood will change in ways that are no longer welcoming to those who have long called East End their home. This would only reinforce a narrative that benefits were never intended to accrue to the original Creighton Court residents.

The story of Richmond's East End is still very much in progress. Addressing wealth disparities and housing propelled Richmond forward in the Culture of Health Prize for the neighborhood changes that are starting to happen. Anchor institutions like VCU, Bon Secours and others are helping to build capacity; foundations are investing in key neighborhood strategies; and non-profits and civic leaders are collaborating. However, the permanent, at-scale markers of physical transformation still lag. Important, yet small efforts like urban gardens and mobile markets galvanize residents around healthy eating while a large grocery store, albeit planned for, has been elusive to date.

How the balance of physical and human capital development in the East End continues to develop is in the hands of Richmond's public and private sector leaders and neighborhood residents, and can be expected to change in many ways in the years ahead.

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