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Community Building and Neighborhood Associations: Strategies for Greater Mixed-Income Inclusion in Seattle's HOPE VI Neighborhoods[1]

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From 1997 to the present, under the auspices of the federal HOPE VI program, Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) has transformed three large public housing communities, New Holly, Rainier Vista and High Point, from concentrated public housing to mixed-income communities. HOPE VI was based in the theory that people with low incomes would be more likely to thrive when they could live in safe, well-designed, well-managed neighborhoods with access to good schools, parks, community organizations, stores, jobs, transportation options, social services, and neighbors with a wide range of incomes. As other authors in this volume have noted, recent research by Raj Chetty and his colleagues has been particularly influential in demonstrating the profound positive impact on low-income children who are able to grow up in communities of opportunity.

SHA's experience over the last 20-plus years indicates that the HOPE VI theory of change has merit, as long as there is continuing attention to sustaining all the elements that make strong communities. Making a mixed-income *community* requires more than taking some acres of land, building a lot of housing for people at different income levels, and leaving the rest to chance. To lay the groundwork for resilient, safe, welcoming communities, developers of mixed-income communities should strive to create the conditions for people to move outside the comfort zones of their class, culture, or race, and find common ground, mutual respect, and trust. Seattle Housing Authority has tested a variety of approaches and evolved new practices along the way to that end. In this essay, we explore some of those approaches and lessons learned, focusing on the role of two elements of ongoing organizational infrastructure: neighborhood associations and dedicated staff community builders.[2]

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[1] This essay appears in Mark L. Joseph and Amy T. Khare, eds., *What Works to Promote Inclusive, Equitable Mixed-Income Communities*, please visit the volume website for access to more essays.

[2] This essay was informed by interviews with a small group of people who lived and shaped the transformation of these communities in different ways. The authors extend our gratitude to George Nemeth and Carol Wellenberger of SHA's development and asset management departments; Willard Brown, former senior property manager of New Holly, Rainier Vista, and High Point; Tom Phillips, former manager of the High Point redevelopment; Joy Bryngelson, former community builder at New Holly and Yesler Terrace; Heather Hutchison, former HOA administrator at High Point; Terry Hirata, current High Point senior property manager; Asmeret Habte, current High Point community builder; Jeniffer Calleja, current Rainier Vista community builder; Sakina Hussain, current Rainier Vista homeowner; and Ed Frazier, current Rainier Vista renter.

In the early planning of these neighborhood transformations, SHA anticipated a number of significant challenges including attracting and retaining middle-income neighbors; finding common ground for connection and engagement across class, culture, race, and language differences; and empowering neighbors to advocate for themselves to shape their neighborhood's identity. As the communities came into being, SHA began to better understand other challenges including:

- Sustaining effective social services for vulnerable families and, in particular, strong, engaging, positive activities for youth;
- Cultivating and maintaining shared responsibility for keeping public spaces—parks, pathways, alleys, community gathering spots—safe and welcoming for all;
- Sustaining the commitment to community among residents over time as the first residents move away and new people move in; and
- Ensuring that every entity that has a role in managing the community buys into a shared vision of community and makes decisions in accordance with that vision.

As described below, over time SHA developed new structures and practices to address these challenges.

The SHA Strategy for Transforming Enclaves of Poverty into Thriving Neighborhoods

The federal HOPE VI grant program began in the early 1990s to transform failing public housing communities. The program was intended to replace worn-out, poorly designed, and poorly constructed public housing and reconnect these isolated, often high-crime enclaves of poverty with the surrounding community, physically and socially. Seattle Housing Authority seized the opportunity HOPE VI brought to remake three of its four World War II-era garden communities—Holly Park, Rainier Vista, and High Point—from the ground up.[3] In concert with government agencies, residents, and other partners, SHA envisioned and created plans for equitable, resilient, and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods woven back into the fabric of the city.

[3] In 2010 HOPE VI was replaced by the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, which broadened the redevelopment focus to the entire neighborhood in which a public housing development was located and bolstered investments in education, workforce development, and supportive services. SHA is transforming its fourth and last World War II-era community, Yesler Terrace, with two federal implementation grants totaling $30 million under the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative.

Fig. 1:

BY THE NUMBERS: HOPE VI REDEVELOPMENT IN SEATTLE

	New Holly	Rainier Vista	High Point
Acres	102	67	120
Redevelopment timeline	1997-2006	1999-2016	2000-2010
Location in Seattle	Rainier Valley	Rainier Valley	West Seattle
Units pre-redevelopment (100% public housing)	871	481	716
Units post-redevelopment	**1414**	**895**	**1529**
Rental units			
Public housing	400	251	350
Affordable (low-income)	288	226	250
Any income level	16	48	104
Senior units (rental)			
Low-income, independent living	80	78	75
Low-income, assisted living	100		
Any income, assisted living	54		156
For people with disabilities		22	
For sale units			
Income-qualified	112	59	56
Any income level	364	211	538

These efforts directly affected 300 acres within the City of Seattle—the largest in-fill developments Seattle had seen in decades. Over a period of about 25 years, 2,068 extremely low-income homes have been replaced, and 1,346 low-income homes and 1,491 market-rate homes have been added. New parks, libraries, medical clinics, and other community facilities have been built. While each community has unique features, all of the redevelopments have the following inter-related elements in common.

Inclusive, Equitable Development. Features include:

- Full replacement of the public housing stock affordable to households with incomes below 30 percent of area median income; any units that were not replaced on-site were replaced elsewhere within the city limits;
- The addition of rental housing affordable to households with incomes at 50, 60, and 80 percent of area median income, along with market-rate and affordable homeownership;

- New housing with design features and supportive services customized for seniors;
- Housing choices for residents of the community prior to redevelopment, including the right to stay in or return to the rebuilt community;
- Comprehensive attention to the supportive-service needs of low-income residents of the community before, during, and beyond the redevelopment;
- Ongoing support for low-income residents to achieve their educational and economic goals and to eliminate barriers to their participation in community activities and governance; and
- Authentic community engagement in planning and design, involving residents of the public housing community and of the surrounding neighborhood.

People-Centered Design. Priorities include:

- Overcoming stigma of "the projects" with housing for people with a wide range of incomes spread throughout the community, designed so that the low-income housing is not readily distinguishable from the rest of the housing stock and so people on different points on the economic spectrum, living side by side, have informal opportunities to meet and get to know each other as neighbors;
- Connecting the street grid to that of the surrounding neighborhood and making the streets function for pedestrians, bikes, and public transit as well as cars;
- Increasing density to match the surrounding neighborhood, which leveraged the value of the land to help fund the building of affordable housing and community facilities;
- Health-focused building design, including state-of-the-art environmental sustainability and green building;
- Easily accessible, well-designed, safe open spaces: each neighborhood has several new public parks, including community gardens, small pocket parks, and a large central park accessible to all; and
- Community gathering spaces and facilities of various scales and types designed to welcome the neighborhood at large, including new libraries, medical clinics, community centers, and formal and informal gathering spaces, built in partnership with local government or nonprofit institutions.

Organizational Infrastructure. Examples include:

- Community builders: full-time SHA staff members who help bring neighbors together. Community builders have a broad mandate to empower neighbors to engage with each other, foster mutual understanding and support, and participate in community governance;

- Homeowners associations to integrate homeowners into the new community, in addition to traditional HOA functions such as insuring and maintaining properties; and
- Mechanisms for managing and maintaining open spaces. These mechanisms evolved over time as SHA grew to understand the impact open-space management has on operating costs and how the community functions. We look more deeply at this feature below.

Who Lives in These Communities? Fostering Community within a Highly Diverse Population

New Holly, Rainier Vista, and High Point neighbors—before and after redevelopment—have been exceptionally diverse in language, race, culture, religion, ability, age, gender, and family composition. The addition of units at several affordability levels introduces diversity in income, and the introduction of homeownership brings diversity in tenure. Low-income households usually are renters, although there are some lower-income homeowners through Habitat for Humanity-type programs.

Residents, particularly the residents of low-income housing, come from around the world, predominantly East Africa and Southeast Asia. They often have limited English proficiency. Many lack formal education in their native language. They may have been here for a generation, or have arrived within the last few years. They bring their religious and cultural traditions and ways of daily life, which can be profoundly different from each other and from the dominant culture in the United States. Often their journey to the United States was protracted, difficult, and filled with loss and trauma that has left lasting scars.

Many of the low-income families have children. Some families have six or more children, as is normal in their culture. As a result, these communities are home to a great many children and youth. Helping young people connect across cultures and engage in positive activities is, of necessity, a community-building priority. Many others are elders or people with disabilities with varying levels of supportive-service needs to remain independent and active.

Many low-income residents, whether U.S. or foreign-born, are employed, sometimes at more than one job; go to school or employment training programs; and frequently demonstrate remarkable perseverance in overcoming barriers to achieve a measure of economic stability.

The neighbors in the market-rate homes also are a mix of races, ethnicities, and countries of origin. They tend to be of working age or newly retired and of sufficient means to afford expensive market-rate housing in Seattle. Some have or are planning to have children. Some choose to live in these communities because of the diversity and their mixed-income nature; others like the location, design, or price point.

The SHA Approach to Community Building

SHA chose to invest in community building as an essential element of redevelopment projects. Without deliberate attention to fostering positive neighborhood interactions among such a diverse population, SHA was concerned that the new communities would not live up to their potential as places where low-income residents would find the quality of life and opportunities that were not available in the old public housing. SHA's approach to community building is by necessity multi-faceted, organic, and—to the degree resources permit—comprehensive. One goal is to nurture integration within each neighborhood across lines of tenure (renter/homeowner), income, race, ethnicity, and culture.

Over time, SHA learned the value of having organizational infrastructure to support community building. Organizational infrastructure differs in each community, reflecting lessons learned over time, as described below. All of the approaches SHA has put in place, including SHA staff, other on-site entities managing property (e.g., senior housing buildings), and on-site programmatic or social services, work best when they are well-coordinated with each other. The organizational infrastructure always includes a community builder.

Community Builders. In each redevelopment, SHA employs a community builder charged with working to build positive relations among neighbors before, during, and after the physical transformation of the site. The community builder's daily tasks can include encouraging people to volunteer for or come to events, coordinating one-time events, organizing ongoing "affinity groups" around a topic or issue that many people share (e.g., traffic), promoting neighborhood leadership development, responding to a community crisis (e.g., a shooting), conferring with property management or the Community Police Team officer about neighborhood issues, and getting accurate and timely information out about opportunities, events or incidents through multiple channels in multiple languages.

A significant portion of the community builder's time is straightforward volunteer management—finding people who want to help out in various ways, linking them up to work that needs to be done, and keeping them interested and engaged in the life and issues of the community. As Sakina Hussain, a homeowner at Rainier Vista, notes, "having the position of a community builder, a person who can champion things, organize events, send email blasts and the like, is essential. Most of the work is volunteer powered, so there needs to be one person whose job it is to hold it all together."

Homeowners Associations. Each community has one or more homeowners association(s), chartered under Washington State laws and regulations. SHA set up the HOAs to:

- Establish mechanisms for a high standard of property maintenance and control over the appearance of properties for the long term. Each HOA has instituted design standards and guidelines;
- Limit the conversion of homeownership units to rentals;
- Give homeowners a stake in management and maintenance of the community's public spaces in order to spread the cost and responsibility over the entire community, allowing SHA to keep its limited resources focused primarily on the low-income housing and its residents; and
- Unify the community through joint contracts between SHA and the HOA for landscaping and some building maintenance functions, such as window washing or roof and gutter cleaning.

In general, under state charters HOA roles and responsibilities do not include community building. SHA added engagement with SHA and other entities in the community to the legally required minimum mandate of HOAs in order to use them as part of the infrastructure for building community. The HOAs give homeowners a collective voice with other residents, property owners, and SHA in community-wide issues, and they provide a channel for homeowners to work together with all neighborhood residents on shared projects and issues.

With intention, an HOA can be an effective vehicle for informing new homeowners about their community. When SHA deliberately used the HOAs to inform homeowners about the mixed-income nature and diversity of the community from the very start, homeowners became (and remain) more interested and involved in community building with their renter neighbors.

New Holly was SHA's first mixed-income redevelopment and the first in which the agency had set up an HOA. As former SHA Association Liaison Carol Wellenberger noted, "the learning curve was steep." Successful home sales at New Holly were proof-of-concept that middle-income people would buy into places that used to be stigmatized as "the projects." This in itself was a significant accomplishment, not to be taken for granted. But it was only after some time that SHA also recognized the opportunity that HOAs represented to help bring together homeowners and renters.

Willard Brown, former senior manager of New Holly, Rainier Vista, and High Point during each community's redevelopment, highlighted the importance of using HOAs for community building through shared responsibility for maintenance. At Rainier Vista, this took the form of long-term leases of three small parks to the HOA, while SHA retained responsibility for the large Central Park and several other open spaces. "SHA worked closely with the HOA to prepare them," Brown explained. "Then, the HOA stepped up, raised some funds, and installed playground equipment. We jointly developed a Good Neighbor Agreement to ensure that the parks would be open to all. This instilled in the HOA the sense that their community included Rainier Vista renters, too."

With support from their community builder, renters and homeowners in the first redevelopment phase (called New Rainier Vista) formed a Multicultural Community Committee to hold cross-cultural events, potlucks, and other activities to bring people together. SHA worked with realtors to market the new neighborhood as a multicultural community. The HOA included information about the Multicultural Committee (now called the Community Building Committee) in its welcome materials for new neighbors. The community as a whole has adopted "multicultural community" as their community identity.

The effects of this early preparation can still be felt. For example, Sakina Hussain, the Rainier Vista homeowner and an active member of both the HOA and the Community Building Committee, has supported cross-cultural engagement using her grant-writing skills:

In 2017, I wrote a grant for the Vietnamese Senior Group, who are mostly renters, to the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods to pay for extra food and bring in some Lion Dancers for a Tet celebration. We got the grant. The celebration was held on a weekend day and widely publicized. More people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds came than in previous years.

Rainier Vista is bisected by a major thoroughfare running north-south through the community. Because home construction on Rainier Vista's east side stopped for several years after the Great Recession, SHA decided to create two HOAs. This allowed the homeowners on the west side to assume control of their HOA in a timely fashion. A second HOA was established for Rainier Vista East several years later. A consequence of this decision is that the scale of each organization is small, fostering participation among more homeowners. Another result is that the homeowners, especially those on the east side, tend to focus on their side of the neighborhood, making community building for the whole community a bit more challenging.

At High Point, SHA faced its most difficult marketing challenge to bring in homeowners, and the HOA approach reflects that situation. New Holly and Rainier Vista are located in Seattle's Rainier Valley, the most diverse area of the city. Buyers in these neighborhoods already expect to live among a wide variety of people. In contrast, High Point is located in the predominantly White[4] area of West Seattle. This public housing

[4] Editors' Note: We have recommended that essay authors use the term "African American" when referring specifically to descendants of enslaved people in the United States and the more inclusive term "Black" when referring broadly to members of the African diaspora, including African Americans, Caribbean Americans, and Africans. In this way, we seek to acknowledge the unique history and experience of descendants of enslaved people in the United States and also the diversity of backgrounds within the larger Black community. Though both are labels for socially-constructed racial categories, we join organizations like Race Forward and the Center for the Study of Social Policy in recognizing Black as a culture to be respected with capitalization and White and Whiteness

development historically had the deepest stigma of the three sites, with a long-standing reputation as a crime hotspot. Instead of focusing on diversity and multi-culturalism, High Point was primarily marketed to homeowners as a green community. In addition to an HOA, two other entities were created at High Point as organizational infrastructure evolved to sustain the community. We discuss these entities next.

High Point Innovations

Infrastructure innovations at High Point included an Open Space Association and a Neighborhood Association.

High Point Open Space Association. For New Holly, SHA's first redevelopment, SHA assumed management and maintenance responsibility for all the open spaces built on SHA land, and even for an adjacent City of Seattle Parks Department recreational field. This proved expensive and unsustainable. At New Rainier Vista, SHA took a first step toward sharing this cost with other property owners in the community by dividing ownership responsibility for the open spaces with the HOA. At Rainier Vista East, SHA took a slightly different approach, retaining ownership of all the common area parks but entering into a cost-sharing agreement with the HOA for maintenance of all the common areas. This ensured a consistent standard of maintenance for all the open spaces and the potential for some economies of scale in maintenance resources.

At High Point, open-space management required a fundamentally different approach. The area is in an environmentally sensitive watershed of Longfellow Creek, an urban salmon spawning stream undergoing restoration. The site's landscape was carefully designed with an integrated system to manage storm water runoff—a big part of High Point's green identity. The system includes a three-acre human-made pond for storm water management, storm water swales along streets and sidewalks, porous pavement, many mature trees, and a generous amount of land (12.5 acres, about 10 percent of the site) allocated to parks, open spaces, and community gardens of various sizes located throughout the neighborhood.

According to Tom Phillips, former High Point redevelopment manager, "When we started to plan for managing the community, we realized that High Point's unique green features called for launching an association that would have the resources and authority to make the 120-acre site look really good."[5] Beyond maintaining an attractive appearance, which was important for home sales, was a commitment to maintaining these features in an organic way with low

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as a social privilege to be called out. After considerable deliberation, we have also recommended the capitalization of Black and White. All references in this essay to Black/African-American, White, or Asian populations refer to non-Hispanic/Latinx individuals unless otherwise noted.

[5] Tom J. Phillips, *High Point: The Inside Story of Seattle's First Green Mixed-Income Neighborhood*, (Splashblock Publishing, 2013).

environmental impact. This required careful and ongoing attention to *how* the open spaces are managed, and, therefore, additional oversight.

SHA created a formal structure for sharing and sustaining this vision, as well as spreading the responsibility and cost for common-area upkeep among all property owners in the neighborhood. Every unit on site is assessed the same amount; SHA pays dues for the units it manages, as do the other property owners. The Open Space Association focuses on the details of property maintenance and budgets. Decision-making authority for the Open Space Association is vested in a volunteer board of directors consisting of three homeowner representatives appointed by the HOA, three SHA representatives, and one representative for the other on-site property owners. Staff support for the Open Space Association is contracted out to a firm that also manages the HOA. Compared to all the other approaches, this approach puts SHA and the homeowners on the most equal footing.

High Point Neighborhood Association. The intent of the Neighborhood Association was "to officially create an organization that would work to break down the class, income, and ethnic barriers we anticipated would be present in the new community," Phillips said. "Our idea was that this entity would focus on building social networks, including through events such as community potlucks, clubs for mutually shared interests, block parties, and so on."[6] This association's governing board was to be made up of a 50/50 mix of homeowners and renters elected by residents, though that mix was never achieved in practice. (Finding people, especially renters, who wanted to participate in an ongoing committee proved too difficult; it was easier to find people to volunteer for specific events or short-term tasks.)

The Neighborhood Association as a stand-alone entity was short-lived. Funding for the Neighborhood Association initially came from a small fee captured on each property sale, and when the state legislature allowed authority to levy the fee to expire, a replacement revenue source had to be found. In addition, the Neighborhood Association on its own could not find affordable insurance coverage for community events. For these practical reasons, the Open Space Association's annual dues were increased slightly to make up the lost revenue and the Neighborhood Association evolved into a standing committee of the Open Space Association. This also solved the insurance problem, as the Open Space Association could add event coverage to its policy at minimal cost.

Community-Building Challenges and Solutions

Community building is a complex, organic, ever-changing process, and organizational infrastructure alone—while necessary—is not sufficient to guarantee that redeveloped public housing projects will become true communities. This section explores

[6] Phillips, High Point.

how having community builders and the various associations has addressed key challenges.

Meeting and Managing Homeowner Expectations in Mixed-Tenure Communities. People who buy homes in communities with HOAs understand that they are also agreeing to a set of rules that govern what they can do with their properties, particularly building exteriors and yards. One of the advantages of living in a community with an HOA is the implied promise that these rules will help the community retain its character and value over time. In SHA's HOPE VI communities, SHA is also a member of the HOA, responsible for ensuring that its properties meet HOA rules. This has several important implications, such as:

- Property maintenance: Homeowners expect that SHA-maintained rental properties and public spaces will always look as good as the homeowner's properties. This is a higher standard of maintenance than was typically achieved in 100 percent public housing communities, given tight public housing funds. Over time, SHA has gotten used to the neighborly oversight and has become better at planning for the additional workload and expense, but it remains a challenge.
- Property (and people) management: SHA property managers are responsible for ensuring that tenants abide by both SHA and HOA rules for how to use porches and yards. Prior to redevelopment, for example, typically a few residents would use their outdoor spaces for long-term storage. Even though this was technically not permitted, property managers often would choose to prioritize other lease enforcement issues and let this infringement go. With homeowner vigilance in redeveloped communities and underlying HOA rules, as well as lease terms, property managers have to work with residents to stop this practice. This has opened up several issues. For example, in some of the cultures represented in the community, it is inappropriate to keep certain items (such as shoes) in the home; and some large families living in small houses have struggled to find room for all of their belongings inside. So, some exceptions for outside storage have had to be made.

Promoting Stronger Neighboring. In addition to the interpersonal dynamics one might find in any neighborhood, residents of mixed-income communities need to negotiate a wide variety of worldviews and cultural expectations about what constitutes acceptable behavior in the neighborhood's public spaces. Having organizational infrastructure in place for residents to come together, explore their differences, and arrive at common understanding is one way for a community to deal with the tensions that can arise. For example, in the early days of the Rainier Vista East HOA, several homeowners raised concerns with the HOA board that a multiracial group of teens using the playgrounds wasn't adequately supervised. The 30 or so homeowners at that meeting had a long discussion about who these teens were (i.e., Rainier Vista residents or from elsewhere), whether what they were doing was actually inappropriate or causing anyone or any property harm, and the harm that might come to the teens if the police were called. In the end, the homeowners left with a deeper understanding of what it means to live in a multicultural

community and encouragement to get to know their neighborhood teens and their parents so that they would feel comfortable interacting with them as neighbors.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE PAYS OFF WHEN DIFFICULT THINGS HAPPEN

A shooting occurred in Rainier Vista just before Community Builder Jen Calleja started her job, followed by widespread vocal concerns about safety and finger-pointing about who was to blame. The tragic event and its chaotic aftermath had the potential to tear the community apart. Jen spent much of her energy in the months that followed working to rebuild trust among homeowners, renters, and SHA. She also had to work on rebuilding trust among young people, parents, and police.

Calleja began by listening to the youth to hear what they needed to avoid getting caught up in violence. Then she engaged the mothers of teens targeted by neighbors and the police as the source of the problem, and convened elders to provide a way for them to air their concerns.

Several changes were made as a result:

- SHA hired a youth engagement specialist who works at Rainier Vista and New Holly to provide ongoing capacity for high-quality youth programming.
- Residents came together to deal with one contributing factor—cars speeding around the Central Park. They developed physical changes to the street grid, which interrupted the circle that intruders were driving around. This effort required residents to work with the City of Seattle to close off part of a street with bollards and speed bumps. Residents also raised funds to create a pavement-to-park project on that section of road, which included a pavement mural painted by neighborhood youth. This project was so successful, and participants had so much fun, that two more mural projects were planned.
- Property management did its part with better lease enforcement of families with gang-involved members who were opening the door to the community for gang activity.

Cultural sensitivity is required in community building programming as well. Heather Hutchinson describes some of the dynamics she encountered at High Point:

What brings people together in most communities? Pets, music, arts activities, sports. Typical programming in these areas doesn't really work for the Somali community. Dogs are not a positive thing in their culture. For conservative Somalis, programs where girls and boys play together aren't acceptable. Ongoing programming that doesn't take these kinds of things into account doesn't reach that many people."

Heather described one particularly successful event that she attended and felt participants enjoyed, one of the quarterly neighborhood nights out. These events always had a theme and sharing of food, and were open to everyone but usually attended by renters. This event was attended by about 15 people, "a fantastic cross-section. Participants were given prompts to talk about themselves with others. It allowed them to feel creative, open up, and bond with each other," Hutchinson said.

Enabling Renters' Self-Advocacy. Prior to redevelopment, all three communities had a formal resident council that, among many other purposes, gave residents a structure through which to articulate their issues and concerns and to advocate for their needs with SHA and other agencies, such as social service providers or the police department. In reimagining these communities, the exclusively renter-focused resident council structure was not maintained; planners hoped it would no longer be needed and would be replaced by organizations that included all types of residents (e.g., High Point Neighborhood Association and Rainier Vista Community Building Committee). In practice, these new structures did fulfill many of the functions of the resident councils, because renters and homeowners often have many interests and concerns in common. However, there are situations when their interests diverge and residents need a voice of their own in their relationship with landlords. Since renters don't have a formal association or council, they may seek help from the community builder to support their organizing and advocacy.

Juggling the Demands Placed on Community Builders. Because community builders are trusted, readily accessible, and work for SHA, low-income residents sometimes look to them for help finding social-services support or resolving conflicts with property management. Sometimes community builders help low-income neighbors with urgent problems either directly or through a referral to other resources, but the demand for this kind of service support can pull community builders' attention away from their work of bringing the community together. Joy Bryngelson, former SHA community builder at New Holly and Yesler Terrace, describes the challenge:

> *In working with low-income residents, there is often a pull toward basic social work. Someone comes to you with an urgent concern about their kid or making rent, you can't just ignore that and say, "Here's a great volunteer opportunity for you," or "Why don't you come to the neighborhood event?" You need to do something practical and focused on responding to that particular urgent need. And from a community building point of view, building trusted and respectful relationships with people is actually for the good of the community as a whole. Attention does need to be paid to sustaining a culturally relevant social services infrastructure. When the necessary supports and resources are not in place, or if there's a cultural gap, the community builder can be drawn more toward the urgent needs of the individuals and families in crisis, and not have the bandwidth to focus on the longer-term work of building community and neighborhood development.*

Finding Sustainable Funding for Community Building. Community building is never finished. As SHA Senior Housing Developer George Nemeth notes, "Community building requires continuous, active engagement to instill a sense of ownership, especially among the renters, that this is their place and that they can care for it. That builds confidence and hope."

This means that the funding to support the community builder and activities also must never end. With each redevelopment, SHA has gotten better at accounting for the expense as part of setting up the community-building organizational infrastructure. However, since SHA's share comes from ever-decreasing federal funds, the challenge of finding funding is never finished.

The funding challenge also pertains to supportive social services, another key element of community building (though not addressed in this essay). Mixed-income communities will always have a large proportion of low-income residents, even as individual residents move on and new people move in. A robust, comprehensive, culturally sensitive supportive-services infrastructure to address basic needs and support residents' economic self-sufficiency goals is essential. People who are hungry, looking for work, concerned about their teen getting in trouble, or struggling to pay the rent are not going to want to hear about, much less participate in, community activities or decision making. The lack of adequate, sustainable funding for social services puts a strain not only on low-income families but also the whole community.

Over time, homes are sold and newcomers move in. The HOAs and other associations provide some institutional memory about the unique nature of these communities and can help transmit community identity. Several people interviewed for this essay noted that keeping the vision of a mixed-income community alive takes ongoing effort. This visioning has to be deliberate, inclusive, and revisited from time to time as conditions change.

Community Building: What Success Looks Like

Joy Bryngelson describes designing community building events as "a bowl of mixed nuts. Some people like the cashews, others the macadamias or pecans. You need variety so that there's something for everyone." With the support of the community builder and active, committed volunteers, each community has benefited from a program of varied and frequent activities open to everyone.

The breadth and depth of diversity in these communities, in the context of our current divisive political and social environment, makes community building across the vast divides of culture and class particularly challenging—but also increasingly necessary. The connections forged among people through fun activities and shared interests can serve the community well in times of crisis. For example:

- At High Point, when Seattle Public Schools attempted to change the boundaries for elementary school assignment in a way that would have sent neighborhood children to two different schools, High Point residents—renters and homeowners—organized and successfully advocated that their neighborhood remain in one school's assignment area.

- In February 2017, about 200 New Rainier Vista residents (mostly homeowners) who were concerned about the impact of the Trump Administration's anti-immigrant policies on their Muslim neighbors, sent a letter to everyone in the community saying, in part, "As we watch the rising tide of fear in our nation, as we listen to preposterous hate speech and rhetoric from this President, our hearts are cracked wide open. Today, we want to say loudly and clearly that if they target Muslim Americans, or any member of our diverse community, they target all of us; for we stand together as one." In response, several Muslim neighbors hosted a thank-you potluck and invited everyone in the community, which hundreds attended. Out of these interactions grew a community-wide cultural celebration on Eid-Al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, in summer 2017. The community hopes to make this an annual tradition.[7]

The fact that SHA communities have come together several times in trying circumstances is due, at least in part, to the investment in community building infrastructure described here.

New Holly, Rainier Vista, High Point are fundamentally different places now. SHA's initial ambitious visions and hopes for community building may not always have been achieved. As George Nemeth notes, "At High Point we had dreams of blocks of homeowners and renters living together as neighbors separated only by a driveway, becoming friends, and forming mentoring relationships. We thought that if that didn't happen, we would have failed. It didn't happen, mostly. But we didn't fail either. The lesson is to focus on something more basic: people recognizing each other as neighbors, seeing each other as human beings and not strangers across lines of class, race, or ethnicity."

Nemeth continues, "It matters that low-income people live in safe, beautiful places where they are exposed to opportunity and have access to the regular services that someone in a city should expect—libraries, safe parks—that they didn't necessarily have in public housing." Adds Tom Phillips, "The whole tenor of High Point is different. Parents let their kids go outside and play. People are civil to each other. The residents aren't living with the chronic stress from fear of violence; it's a better situation for them physically and mentally."

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implications for Policy.

- Mixed-income communities created under HOPE VI or its successor program, Choice Neighborhoods, will always have a significant percentage of low-income residents. Building strong, cohesive communities is easier when households in poverty have their basic needs met. Community building in mixed-income communities occurs in a

[7] Sources for this anecdote include an interview with Shakina Hussain by Monica Guzman, "'We know they would stand up for us.' How good neighbors are helping South Seattle Muslims lose their fear in the Trump era." *The Evergrey*. March 30, 2017, https://theevergrey.com/muslims-losing-fear-trump-era/

context where, in our current social safety net orientation, housing authorities have an important role in bringing services to their public housing residents through partnerships and other means. As long as this system continues, housing authorities and their partners must advocate for sustained means of addressing the barriers that people who have historically been marginalized face that could prevent full participation in their neighborhoods. These barriers include child care, economic insecurity, cultural norms, and English proficiency.

Implications for Research and Evaluation.

- Evaluation partners should create protocols and surveys for measuring community connectedness that developers and managers of mixed-income communities can use to measure the success of their community-building investments. Indicators of community include people caring about each other and being comfortable around people who are different from themselves; people chatting when they meet on the street; and neighbors knowing the names of their neighbor's children, and going out of their way to check on each other when someone might need extra help.[8]
- Assessing the status of mixed-income developments every two or three years would help illuminate how these places function as communities over time. In addition to assessing community connection, periodic surveys should help residents and property managers understand community concerns, such as whether residents feel safe and empowered to solve problems together, and whether the services and facilities offered meet their needs. This type of attention would be a useful step in sustaining ongoing community engagement.

Implications for Development and Investment.

- Developers of mixed-income communities should be deliberate and clear about their vision for community building. George Nemeth and Carol Wellenberger articulated a series of questions developers should consider: "Is it general neighborliness, people knowing each other? Is it the formation of friendships between residents that extend beyond the public spaces in the community? Is it developing a shared culture of expectations for how people behave and interact with each other? Is it strong enough bonds to permit community-based problem solving? Is it being 'just like any other neighborhood?' 'How does the vision account for differences among residents including ownership stake (renters and homeowners), race, language, class and culture?'"
- Developers should ensure that all partners who join the project (e.g., home builders or realtors) also understand and can convey the vision to incoming residents.

[8] (Joy Bryngelson, pers.comm.)

- Developers should position homeowner associations as a mechanism for setting the tone and expectations around community norms, especially during the period before the developer turns control of the association over to the homeowners themselves. Through the homeowners association, a developer can establish practices on themes such as, “This is one community, not renters versus owners”; “This is a multicultural community with respect for all cultures”; and, “This is a listening and problem-solving community, not a finger-pointing one.”
- Operating budgets for communities undergoing redevelopment should include an adequately funded community-building line item prior to, during, and after redevelopment to ensure reliable financial resources for ongoing community building.

Implications for Residents and Community Members.

- Residents and community members should advocate for ongoing organizational capacity for community building support, such as a staffed position of community builder or the equivalent. Neighborhood organization does not happen by itself; it requires intention, commitment, and sustained effort. In other Seattle neighborhoods and probably most other places that don’t have community builders, neighborhood organizations emerge and disappear as local issues change and as motivated, committed people come and go. Having a dedicated community builder gives the communities described in this essay ongoing support for community members to organize and advocate together on issues they care about. Even a handful of residents who are willing to put in the time to make community building events happen, with the support of a community builder, can increase the likelihood that neighbors will get to know each other and form a stronger sense of community.
- Residents and community members of all backgrounds can reap the rewards of community building. As Heather Hutchinson observes, “The people who live in these communities are getting a richer, more rewarding experience than they would get elsewhere.” A goal of community building is to create places where residents, regardless of tenure, understand the opportunities available and feel welcome and able to take advantage of them.

About the Volume

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The views expressed in the essays reflect the authors' perspectives and do not necessarily represent the views of The Kresge Foundation, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco or of the Federal Reserve System.

Readers can view this essay, the framing paper for the volume, and all currently posted essays on NIMC's website where new pieces are being uploaded every month. Essays will be compiled and released in a final print volume, with an anticipated release in 2020.

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