Mixed-Income Development Study

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY MANDEL SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCE

Building Community in Mixed-Income Developments

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Research conducted in collaboration with:

Mixed-Income Development Study

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Building Community in Mixed-Income Developments[1]

The creation of mixed-income developments, with housing for residents of a variety of social and economic backgrounds, is central to the "Plan for Transformation" of public housing in Chicago. One view of mixed-income developments is that they are about *more* than building quality housing: they are about rebuilding urban neighborhoods. This goal is often talked about in terms of "building community." But how is this task being defined, and what are reasonable expectations for building community in mixed-income developments?

Our exploration into these questions focuses on four issues:

- Expectations for what mixed-income developments may accomplish
- Strategies used to build community in them
- Early resident responses to these strategies
- Implications for practice and policy moving forward.

Expectations for Building Community in Mixed-Income Developments

Although rationales and expectations for mixed-income developments vary; the promise and potential effects discussed by development stakeholders, community stakeholders[2] and residents can be described along four broad categories.

1. Social interaction
2. Neighborhood change
3. Individual change
4. Breaking down racism and prejudice

Expectation #1—Social Interaction

> *I think we came in with the idea that it was going to be*
> *like this big happy community where all mixed income—you know,*
> *public housing, market rate—were going to be playing together,*
> *neighbors were going to be chatting it up. And we've scaled that back.*
> [Development Stakeholder]

The stated policy rationale for mixed-income developments often includes an expectation of opportunities for social interaction among residents across income levels. In discussing their expectations for relationship-building in the new developments, stakeholders and residents commonly focused on expectations for casual, positive, or at the very least unproblematic informal interactions within a context of mutual respect and acceptance.

The opportunity to meet, talk, and interact with people from different backgrounds was mentioned by many residents as an important feature of building community. But expectations for the kind of relationships they would develop were modest. As an owner of an affordable unit put it:

> *Just having people understand and acknowledge and just be considerate to one another— think would be a great place to live.*

There were few expectations that instrumental benefits, such as connections to employment opportunities, would be created from these relationships. However, many people talked about how former public housing residents might benefit by watching and interacting casually with their working, middle-class neighbors. In the words of a market-rate owner:

> *It used to be empty on the sidewalks in the morning, but now there's people going to work, which I think to do in a mixed neighborhood is a good thing because you see that, oh people go to work in the morning and they have responsibilities…and I think that's the whole, kind of somewhat the point of doing mixed neighborhood is to show people different ways of life and to be aspiring to have that 9am to 5pm job if you didn't before.*

Although these benefits were discussed by a range of people, former public housing residents were less likely to expect living in these developments to change their behaviors for these reasons.

Expectation #2—Neighborhood Change

> *The goal here is really to try to create a community that is inclusive for everyone and makes everyone feel comfortable and brings basic services that have been missing.…*
> [Development Stakeholder]

Many people talked about the kinds of positive neighborhood changes they expect to see. At the most basic level, this includes clean, well-built, well-maintained housing. But it also includes a broad range of community level improvements, such as increased safety, improved services, and better-quality amenities. Higher-income residents stressed the broadest range of amenities, while former public housing residents mostly stressed their hopes for increased peace and quiet, better caretaking of the environment, and a decrease in crime.

Most people were optimistic that the benefits would be accessible to all residents, though a number worried that the development would result in a neighborhood dynamic that privileged upper-income groups. In the words of a community stakeholder:

> *There used to be a saying…that the goal [of the Plan for Transformation] was to create a middle and upper-middle-income ring around the Loop. That's going to happen…I think that's going to be successful and I think that the few public housing residents who have been able to take advantage of the opportunities that it provides will participate in that success, though I'm a little shaky about that.*

Expectation #3—Individual Change

Expectations for individual change were discussed less often and focused almost exclusively on former public housing residents. For young people, especially, interviewees expressed the hope that living in a mixed-income development would lead to such outcomes as better school achievement and higher future aspirations. For adults, expectations included increases in economic well-being (such as such as better employment and financial literacy), changes in behavior (such as responsibility and public decorum), and increased access to opportunity.

Expectation #4—Breaking Down Racism and Prejudice

> *They got…different nationalities living in here, so you get to mingle – you get to know about different nationalities.*
> [Former Public Housing Resident]

This fourth set of expectations, describing the possibility of decreased prejudice and racist attitudes among residents, was the least commonly emphasized. Yet a notable number of stakeholders did raise the issue when discussing their perspective on the potential value of the new community that could be built through the mixed-income developments. In the words of one developer:

> *I believe we all see the possibilities…for Chicago, a divided city, historically divided, and this is gonna be a transformation.*
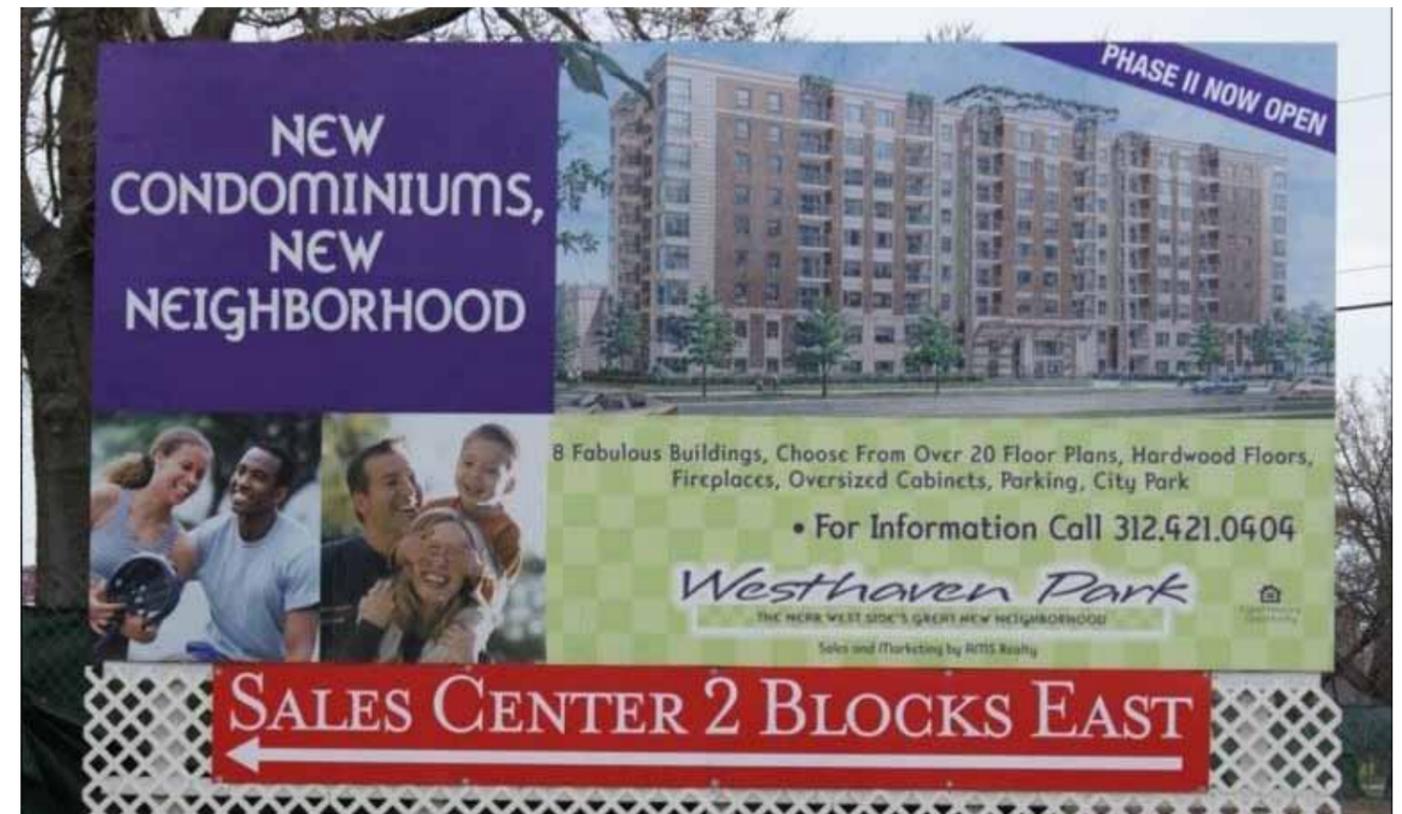
Strategies for Building Community

How have development teams and their partners approached recreating neighborhoods and building community? To date, we have learned of three major strategies for building community:

1. Promoting interaction among residents
2. Shaping physical design and community development
3. Providing formal services and supports

Strategy #1—Promoting Interaction among Residents

Development teams and their partners are attempting to promote interaction in the following ways:

Interaction through planning, governance and decision-making bodies

- At the *development level,* governance and decision-making bodies are in operation. These take many forms, including periodic public meetings, formal associations and neighborhood organizations (see Community Building Activities, below).

- At the *neighborhood level,* a number of bodies were either already in existence or emerged as a result of the development progress. CAPS (Community Alternative Policing Strategy) meetings, in particular were frequently noted as important places for different kinds of residents to interact. Town-hall meetings have provided an opportunity for information exchange and input to the development process. Block clubs have created opportunities for resident-led planning and activities.

Community Building Activities at the Three Mixed-Income Development Sites

Planning and Governance Bodies

Development Level: Horner's Resident Council; Local Advisory Councils; Condo and Homeowners Associations; Security Meetings; Informal Resident Groups & Block Clubs; Renter Meetings,

Neighborhood Level: CAPS Meetings, Near West Side Homeowners Association, Near West Side Community Development Corporation/Center for Working Families, Conservation Community Council; Kenwood Oakwood Community Organization; Quad Community Development Corporation; TIF Advisory Council

Community Events

Family and Friends Day, Halloween Party, Movie Night at the Park, Clean and Green community clean-up event

Projects and Services

Neighborhood Challenge—Sponsored by Project Match/Pathways to Rewards; Tenant Patrol, Community Newsletters

Interaction across income and housing tenures

Although there is a concern about ways to promote interaction across income groups, many of the existing governance bodies are geared only toward particular groups of residents. Homeowners are represented by their condo or homeowners associations. Former public housing residents are represented, to a lesser extent, by the Local Advisory Councils (LACs) that represented them when they were residents of public housing.[3] Some non-public housing renters have no clear group in which their particular interests are represented.

Across sites, stakeholders discussed the possibility for an overarching, inclusive council in which all residents can participate and have a voice. To date, this type of organization has not been established in these three developments. In the words of one stakeholder:

> *I do believe there's a need because just from the town hall meetings with the market-rate [residents], there's so [much] stigma. Like when the market-rate [residents] get together, they don't blatantly say it but it's little comments like, you know, something happened in the building: "what's the process for evicting public housing people?" It's like, how'd you get from like there was trash in the elevator to what's the process for—you know? Then when you get all the public housing people together it's "they don't want us here. They're trying to take over our neighborhood." So just to crush a lot of that, if everyone was in the same room and then people could see that a lot of your concerns are my concerns…*

Interaction through community activities

> *Community events—block parties, neighborhood festivals, barbeques, bingo nights, skating parties, performances, field trips—are being organized as ways to provide opportunities for neighbors to meet and interact. As one former public housing resident put it: "It was not pick-and-choose discrimination of who gets to go; they just put up flyers and say everyone's welcome."*

Attracting higher-income residents to these events has been a challenge, and youth are often considered potential bridges in pulling together members of the community. In the words of a development stakeholder:

> *You might be interested in your kids going to a basketball camp, and that's something that we would offer the opportunity here, or like a community spelling bee, you know. A market-rate kid would love to be in a community spelling bee just as much as a public housing kid. So those things don't have a social service stigma. There's not a worker attached to it, you don't have to be in a program per se. If you're interested, you just kind of attach to the activity or the event. That's more attractive for whatever reason to other income levels.*

So far, however, these events have attracted many more former public housing residents, and have not often provided a forum for interactions across groups.

[3] On April 30, 2008, the Chicago Housing Authority Board of Commissioners passed the Proposed Amended and Restated Moving to Work Agreement which eliminates the Local Advisory Councils in the new mixed-income developments and instead creates a centralized "ombudsman" that represents residents' concerns (CHA Board of Commissioners, Meeting Minutes, April 30, 2008).

Interaction through community-focused projects

Stakeholders and resident leaders have organized around particular interests. Some of these are focused on community issues, such as:

- A "neighborhood challenge" to foster planning for community projects among residents
- A neighborhood-cleanup effort
- A tenant patrol to address issues of safety
- A newsletter to promote community-wide communication

Others are focused on individual enrichment and recreation:

- Classes and clubs (e.g., book clubs, tutoring programs)
- Volunteering

These activities have been limited in number and have not been particularly successful thus far in forging connections across groups. Many people noted that expectations for participation in these activities must incorporate a realistic view of residents' lives, interests, and lifestyles. As one community stakeholder put it:

I think what we have to kind of do is understand that people are not coming into these developments as infants. You know, they already have lives. They already have relationships. This is a place to live. That's what it is for them—a place to live, and hopefully live in harmony.
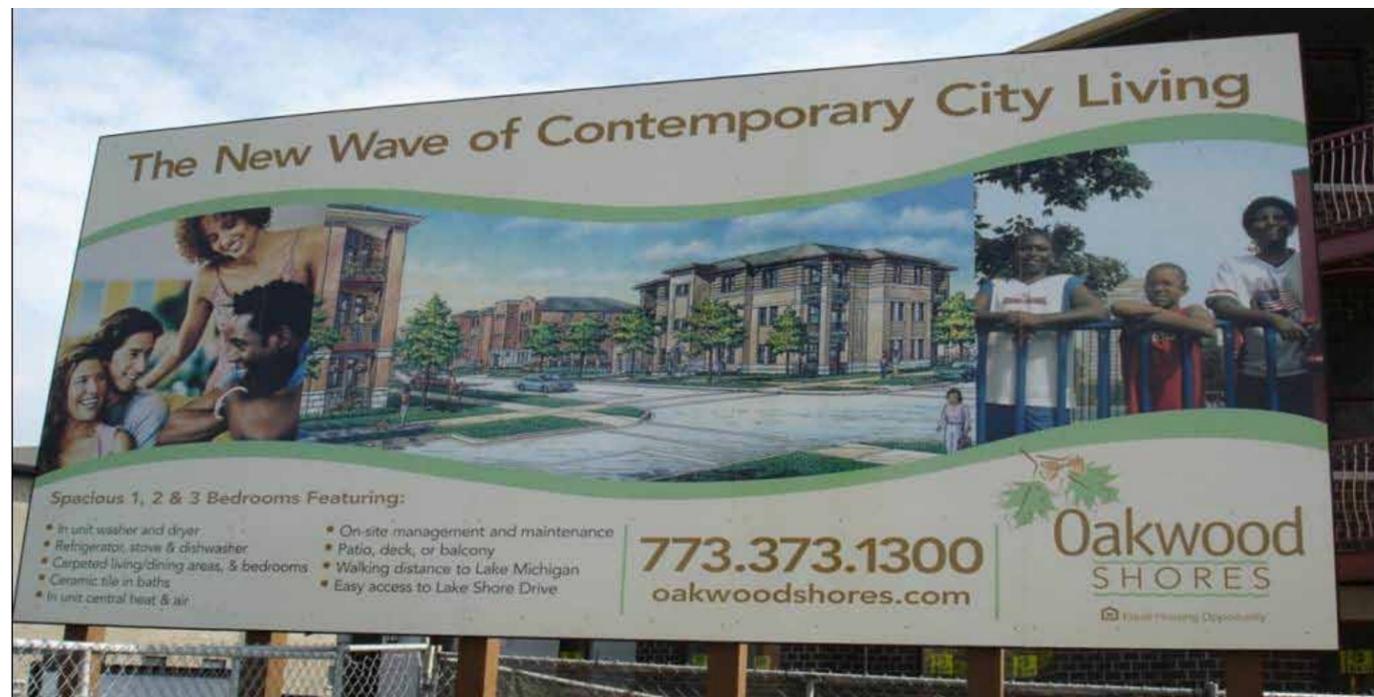
Strategy #2—Shaping Physical Design and Community Development

Development teams and their partners are striving to build community by shaping the environment in and around the development. These efforts focus on three aspects: (a) physical design, (b) community norms, and (c) community institutions.

Physical Design

- Unit design and integration: Since one goal is the reduction of obvious distinctions between residents, buildings are designed to be indistinguishable from the outside so that people are unable to make assumptions about income level based on design features. In addition, different kinds of units are distributed across the development, although the number of different kinds of units planned—public housing, affordable, market rate—differs across site, as does the degree of geographical integration among them.

Table 1—Planned Units by Housing Category

	Oakwood Shores		Park Boulevard		Westhaven Park	
Former development	Madden/Wells		Stateway Gardens		Henry Horner Homes	
Units for Former CHA	1,000	33%	439	33%	824	63%
Affordable Units	680	23%	421	33%	133	10%
Market-Rate Units	1,320	44%	456	33%	360	27%
Total Units	3,000		1,316		1,317	
% For-Sale	27%		50%		23%	

Source: Chicago Housing Authority, 2008

- Availability of Common Civic Space: Stakeholders and residents discussed the importance of common civic space, including parks, meeting space, and "community rooms." These common spaces are serving as both important amenities and also as sites of tension. In some cases, the lack of immediate access to outdoor gathering space led young people to use spaces like parking lots and front yards for recreational activities, and adults used these same spaces for socializing with friends. In another instance, tension arose when condo owners complained about the use of a lobby area by former public housing residents as a social gathering place.

Shared Norms of Behavior

The tension around use of common areas points to the difficulty in building community when expectations for normative behavior are not shared. Residents and stakeholders discussed the need for former public housing residents to behave differently than they did in "the projects." In the words of a community stakeholder, "people are not made to feel comfortable hanging out, so that's a shift."

More formally, rules play an important role, particularly as they relate to the duties of property management. Much of the discussion about rules focused on the need to monitor and enforce behaviors of former public housing residents. Ultimately, the goal is to promote a high degree of safety and order, through both community monitoring and working with the police.

Neighborhood Institutions

There has also been a focus on connecting with, and helping to strengthen existing institutions, such as schools, parks, and police. In some cases, development teams are considering the creation of new institutions and amenities that might provide a place for community interaction, such as a youth and recreation center. These amenities are seen as potentially bringing together the community as well as attracting and retaining middle-income families. One development stakeholder describes a neighborhood charter school, in which recent investment has been targeted:

> *This is very simple when you think about kids because…the fact that we have homebuyers who have kids who are going to that school, those homebuyers are going to have to interact and are interacting with renters from that neighborhood. So that's a natural way for them to evolve hopefully into friendships and relationships and "who is this person?" I know this person because my daughter and her go to school together.*

Strategy # 3—Providing Formal Services and Supports

A third strategy seeks to help build a healthy community not through collective activity but through providing individual supports to residents. At one level, these programs aim to "level the playing field" so that all residents can participate actively:

> *As far as what we're doing, we're all about building a community, because what's happening in this area is changing and so we want to make sure that they're provided with all the things that they're going to need to be able to be successful in this area, because there's going to be a lot of things going on, and being able to adapt is one of the biggest things.*
>
> [Development Stakeholder]

These programs include a broad range of supports: case management, counseling, financial literacy, home maintenance instruction, training, education, and employment services. Many of the services aim to assist former public housing residents in meeting requirements for eligibility to reside in the development, but also to help them work toward self-sufficiency within the new context of a private housing development. Part of the goal of this work is to help former public housing residents adapt and become successful through changes in *behavior and in mindsets*—a work ethic, respect for property, and adherence to public standards (such as curbs on noisy behavior and public "hanging out"). As a development stakeholder put it:

> *When you really get a chance to go inside of these people's home and you sit down and talk with them and you take five or ten minutes, you realize that the community building, the community itself, the returning residents have issues… So even though they switched housing overnight, their mentality is not switching like their housing has and so, like they say, you can take the person out of the projects but you can't take the project out of the person... and if you don't have enough services to try and transition them mentally, regardless of what community you put them in, it's not going to work.*

Stakeholders are also concerned with alternative opportunities, particularly for young people that will give them, as one put it, "something positive and constructive to be involved in."

Resident Responses to Efforts to Build Community

Early resident responses describe three broad challenges to community building in mixed-income developments:

1. Uneven participation
2. Perceptions of difference
3. Practical limitations

Response #1—Uneven Participation

Participation in community building activities is uneven and compartmentalized. These strategies are also seen by many to serve specific subpopulations, not all residents. As a market-rate owner points out:

> *They have meetings for the residents in the rental buildings, and we have meetings for residents in the condo buildings, but there's never like one unified—so it's always like, "they did this', or they're saying "they did this." And their complaints are different, and no one ever hears what they are.*

Resident perceptions and personal interests also lead some to selective participation. Most of the programs and social events sponsored by the development have tended to attract far more former public housing residents. In the words of one development stakeholder:

> *We do community bingo, we have salsa class, we have stepping class, we have financial workshops, and 90 percent of our participants would be public housing. We have very few [residents of] market-rate or [affordable units] that would sort of attach because there was a stigma that any offerings were sort of social service.*

Response #2—Perceptions of Difference

Residents perceive and act on perceptions of difference among each other. Many former public housing residents maintain relationships with those they knew from their days in public housing; beyond this, they prefer to keep to themselves, and note the tendency for homeowners to do the same, or to connect primarily with one another. As one former public housing resident put it:

> *The owners, they had their own little get-together as far as, like, meeting each other when they first moved in…and I've seen—like one day I was coming from the store or something, and they were all mingling and having a little get-together and everything. It was like, just for them.*

Perceptions of difference in terms of interests, values, and behavior also limit interaction and community engagement. Residents describe their tendency to identify and label residents based on their public behavior. An affordable owner puts it this way:

> *I guess in theory you're not supposed to be able to tell who's low-income, who's middle income, who's high income. But even in this mixed income neighborhood, you can tell. Do you know what I mean? Renters for example—I mean I'm sorry I'm assuming a lot because you see a bunch of kids on bikes and so forth…I mean that the park's dirty here and clean here, it's not so much safety but it's like they still treat the area like it's the old area. "We ain't got to keep the streets clean. We don't have to pick up the trash," like it's still the projects…*

Similarly, former public housing residents often perceive owners as stand-offish, either unsociable or opposed to lower-income residents' presence there.

Response #3—Practical Limitations

There are also a set of pragmatic barriers to broader participation, including limited interest and time that a resident can dedicate to community building activities. This lack of time and energy was mentioned frequently by interviewees across the board. As a former public housing resident put it:

> *For me working third shift, I don't really be up to interact with most of the things they have going on because it's the daytime and I'm working from 7:00 to 7:00.*

In addition, neighborhood dynamics such as fear of crime may also make people reluctant to come together. Safety concerns were based for some on experiences in previous neighborhoods and for others on their perceptions of public gatherings and behavior. In the words of a market-rate owner:

> *Because there's gangs that form on corners, and I'm just—don't want to set myself up for anything. So when there's big groups of people hanging out I'll be like, "okay, I can't walk through that corner." And there are still some areas in this area that are just not safe areas to be walking through.*

Implications for Practice and Policy

Given the early challenges to building community in mixed-income developments, there are a range of questions that could prove helpful to stimulating discussion and shaping ongoing implementation among policymakers, advocates, developers, property managers, service providers, residents, and other stakeholders.

1. What are reasonable expectations for building community in mixed-income developments? To what end are such efforts meant to lead?

2. What are the opportunities for interaction among residents of various backgrounds and incomes? What forums would increase the opportunities for interaction? How can barriers to participation be reduced? How can residents be more engaged in planning and facilitating these opportunities?

3. How can existing forums, such as CAPS meetings, condo associations, and broader neighborhood groups, be better used? How can participation across housing tenure occur?

4. What are the possibilities for creating and managing governance structures in which all residents are represented? What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of an integrated "neighborhood council" for residents throughout the development? Whose role would it be to consider and facilitate its development?

5. How can issues of common concern, such as safety, serve as a potential bridge across perceived and real differences in background? In what ways can residents be helped to identify areas of common interest?

6. Where common civic spaces exist—such as parks, meeting spaces, and community rooms— how are the rules for use established, monitored and enforced? In what ways can they be modified in order to reduce tensions but also remain conducive to comfortable interactions across resident groups?

Resident Sample Characteristics
(small random sample only, not full population)

	Overall	ACC	AFF	MKT	RTR	FS
Number of respondents	65	23	21	21	44	21
% Female	77%	96%	81%	52%	89%	52%
Race						
% African-American	82%	100%	81%	62%	100%	43%
% White	9%	0%	10%	20%	0%	29%
% Other	9%	0%	9%	20%	0%	29%
Average age	41	41	40	41	43	36
% Married	25%	9%	24%	43%	18%	38%
Education level						
% high school grad	85%	61%	95%	100%	77%	100%
% college grad	39%	0%	52%	67%	18%	81%
% Employed	69%	39%	81%	91%	57%	95%
% With children in HH	44%	65%	33%	32%	54%	25%
Income						
% Under $20,000	31%	74%	14%	0%	46%	0%
% Over $70,000	14%	0%	10%	34%	7%	29%

ACC: 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 former CHA
FS: All owners

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

This study focuses on three developments: Oakwood Shores, Park Boulevard, and Westhaven Park. There are three primary data sources thus far: interviews with resident and other stakeholders, structured observations, and document review. Due to early move-in status at Park Boulevard, no resident interviews were conducted at that site at this time.

• Interviews with a broad range of current residents, developers, service providers, property managers, and community and citywide stakeholders of the mixed-income developments.

• Observation of meetings, community events and other places where residents and community members gather in order to learn about dynamics as they unfolded in post-occupancy operations.

• Review of documents from organizations working on mixed-income developments. We also reviewed public media sources for articles related to the development sites and the overall Plan for Transformation.

Mixed-Income Development Study

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