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Mixed-Income Development Study

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Whose Space? Whose Rules? Social Challenges in Mixed-Income Developments

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Co-Principal Investigators:

Robert Chaskin is an Associate Professor and the Deputy Dean for Strategic Initiatives at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and a Affiliated Scholar at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Mark Joseph is an Assistant Professor at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University and a Faculty Associate at the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development.

Research Team:

Sara Voelker serves as the Project Director for the Mixed-Income Development Study through the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration.

For more information, please contact:

Mixed-Income Development Study
School of Social Service Administration
The University of Chicago
773.834.3003
svoelker@uchicago.edu

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Lloyd DeGrane, Janet Li, and Marc PoKempner



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Whose Space? Whose Rules? Social Challenges in Mixed-Income Developments¹

Mixed-income developments are being built in Chicago and across the country as a strategy to help address poverty and rebuild communities in the inner city. These efforts seek to attract higher-income residents to the sites of former public housing developments and integrate low-income residents back into them in contexts of greater safety, stability, opportunity, and order. Such efforts are not without challenges, however. Based on fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2009, this brief focuses in particular on the challenges raised in negotiating the uses and expectations of space in three mixed-income developments that are part of Chicago's Plan for Transformation: Oakwood Shores, Park Boulevard, and Westhaven Park. We explore residents' perspectives on crime, safety, and disorder in the three developments, the kinds of behavioral expectations and cultural assumptions that lie behind these perspectives, and the ways in which formal rules, enforcement, and perceptions of fairness impact dynamics around these issues.

We find that residents' main concerns are less about safety *per se* than they are about "disorderly" behavior in the developments. Residents differ in their definitions of acceptable behavior, and perceptions of acceptable behavior differ particularly between higher-income residents and low-income renters. Some rules that strictly limit behavior and the use of space contribute to this conflict. We suggest that, moving forward, development teams and others involved in the planning and ongoing operation of mixed-income developments reconsider development design and the allocation of public space, increase opportunities for residents of all income levels to be involved in decision making, put more effort towards creating mixed-use spaces in the community that are accessible to everyone, and promote the developments as diverse, urban spaces.

¹ This brief is based on a longer paper, "'Positive' Gentrification, Social Control, and the 'Right to the City' in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place" (Chaskin and Joseph, accepted for publication pending revision, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*). For more information about the Mixed-Income Development Study at the University of Chicago, please contact Sara Voelker at svoelker@uchicago.edu. This study is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, with additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

DESCRIPTION OF MIXED-INCOME DEVELOPMENT STUDY SITES

- **Oakwood Shores**, on the south side of the city, is being built in place of Ida B. Wells/Madden Park, and will ultimately be one of the largest mixed-income developments in Chicago with 3,000 projected total units. One-third of these units will be occupied by relocated public housing residents, with the remainder split between affordable (23%) and market-rate (44%) residents. It is being developed by a national non-profit organization, The Community Builders, in partnership with Chicago-based private developer Granite Development Corporation.
- **Park Boulevard** is being built in place of Stateway Gardens on the city's south side. Projected to have 1,315 units, occupancy will be split equally with one-third of units reserved for relocated public housing residents, one-third for affordable residents, and one-third for market-rate residents. Park Boulevard is being developed by Stateway Associates, LLC, a team of private developers.
- **Westhaven Park** is the second phase of the redevelopment of Henry Horner Homes on the city's west side, the first phase of which was completed prior to the launch of the Plan for Transformation. Units produced in the initial pre-Transformation phase were only for public housing residents. The entire development will consist of 1,316 units, 63% of which will be set aside for relocated public housing residents (including some off-site housing), 10% for affordable residents, and 27% for market-rate residents. Westhaven Park is being developed by Brinshore Michaels, a team of private developers.

Perceptions of Crime, Safety, and Disorder

Although a salient issue, fear of crime has not been overriding in these developments, especially for low-income residents, who view the mixed-income developments as much safer than their previous environments. Concerns about crime vary from site to site and emerge and subside at different times. At the time of our fieldwork, residents at Oakwood Shores were more likely than other residents to discuss property crime, while concerns about drugs and gangs were most often voiced by residents at Westhaven Park.² Violent crimes were more often discussed at both of these sites than they were at Park Boulevard. Overall, much of the problem with crime is perceived to stem from nearby public housing complexes or from visitors to relocated public housing residents in the mixed-income developments rather than from residents of the new developments themselves.

Rather than criminal activity or concerns about safety, most concerns—particularly those of homeowners and market-rate renters—center instead on public behavior and the use of public space. Concerns about unsupervised youth are particularly prevalent, but other kinds of public behavior—playing loud music, barbecuing in public, and “hanging out” during the day and late into the night—are considered unacceptable by some and continue to be points of conflict.

Most residents view such incidences as annoyances, though several see the behaviors as potentially threatening. As an owner of an affordable unit in Westhaven Park puts it:

Like the loitering that takes place. It's kind of like they're bouncers. It's like if you walk in [the stores around here], sometimes they look at you funny. . . . That's the reason why we don't use those places.

Some question how much they should be concerned, or are at a loss about what should be done about it. As one owner of a market rate unit in Oakwood Shores states:

I mean for the most part our neighbors are pretty cool. . . . But there are some people who are probably not real good to know and I would say that their behavior's probably not illegal, but it's not acceptable to everybody. There's a lot of cursing. There's a lot of fighting in public. There's some violence. There's just—I really can't say, 'cause it's not illegal. There's nothing you could do about stuff like that, but it's just not—it doesn't make for a very friendly environment.



² More recently, through our attendance at community meetings, we have observed a number of residents of Oakwood Shores expressing concerns about more serious crime including drug and gang-related activity.

Interests, Expectations, and Cultural Assumptions

When discussing basic expectations for behavior in the developments, most residents talk in different ways about respect and common sense as essential guiding principles. Almost everyone expresses the need for and value of having rules that govern behavior, assuming they are reasonable, appropriately enforced, and fairly applied. However, residents disagree about what types of behavior are acceptable and whether or not a double standard is used in setting and enforcing these standards.

One source of tension lies with the concern for maintaining a community that is a good financial investment; one where home market values increase over time and where market-rate renters will feel like they are getting value for their money. Behaviors like people hanging out on corners or in front of buildings, hanging laundry in plain view on balconies, washing or repairing cars in the street, and barbecuing and playing loud music in public spaces are seen as negative cues for potential investors or higher income renters. As one community stakeholder in Westhaven Park put it:

I'm a market-rate person, you think about your property value . . . So, yeah, you may like the kids on the block and think that they're cool and think they should be hanging out but, at the same time, you don't want people driving around seeing them hang out because it may give the wrong impression of the, of your property value, you know.

Some behaviors are generally agreed upon by residents as nuisances—things like late-night shouting, raucous behavior, or loud music. In other cases, however, exhibited behaviors are more innocuous and opinions about appropriateness are more clearly a matter of preference. These preferences are rooted in different perspectives on what many residents view as life-style choices attributed to a difference of “culture.” In particular, when focused on disorderly behavior, they reflect assumptions about underclass or “ghetto” culture perceived as associated largely with public housing residents. Though often unstated and difficult to tease out from discussions of culture, race is a critical dimension of the social dynamics at play in some of the developments, and often informs assumptions about individuals’ housing background and lifestyle choices.



Much of the behavior at issue here concerns the very presence of (primarily black) people in public view, congregating openly for leisure or without apparent purpose—behavior that gets labeled by those opposed to it as loitering, a censurable offense. As the renter of a market-rate unit at Westhaven Park put it:

I think when you start hanging out like that, it makes it look more like a quote/unquote ghetto. So I don't like that. I don't like that part of the area, where people sort of just hang out and they gather, because it's not—there's nowhere to sit. There's no—I mean, it's not really a good place for people to gather, right outside the door.

A number of residents, however, noted that these behaviors are reacted to differently depending on when and where they occur and, perhaps most centrally, who's doing them. As the owner of an affordable unit in Westhaven Park noted:

Well, if you're low income, I think that they look at you differently. . . . If a whole bunch of low-income people were just like hanging out in front of a building, it looks a little different than if me and four or five other people that are owners are hanging out in front of the building. It just looks different, so people can say whatever they want.

Since people with more spending power can exercise greater choice in selecting a neighborhood to live in and the type of housing to rent or buy, their preferences with regard to expectations for behavior are likely to take precedence. To maintain standards in accordance with these preferences, mixed-income developments set specific rules that restrict certain behaviors and the use of space in particular ways.

Rules, Enforcement, and the Appropriation of Space

In most cases, the rules developed within the context of mixed-income developments by property developers and management are no different than those that govern any rental community or condominium: on-time payment of rent and fees, keeping noise down after a certain hour at night, maintaining property upkeep. However, although these basic rules extend to all residents (with the exception of owners, who are not bound to some of them, like barbequing or owning pets), there are different perspectives on the extent to which they are uniformly recognized, monitored, and enforced.

In part, this is due to different concerns. Low-income renters are seen by some as more likely to engage in illegal activities than their higher-income neighbors. In light of this, for some residents—particularly owners—concerns about disorderly behavior are seen as related to more general issues of safety. This creates a kind



of gray area in which behaviors that are seen as undesirable but are not against the law are viewed in criminal terms. An owner of a market-rate unit at Westhaven Park makes this link seamlessly:

I think the message that [property management is] sending is: We care. We want you to live in decent housing but we also want you to care, but—and we don't want people living in the housing who are going to, you know, mess it up. And that's drug dealing. That's prostitution. That's, you know, selling cigarettes out of the back of your place. That's loitering at, you know, at 2 a.m. That's people swinging by in the car with the loud music. You know that's the whole kind of attitude.

These concerns are often used as a reason to constrain behavior. This is partially a matter of design, for example, a preference for individual entrances, private balconies, and common spaces that can be effectively monitored and managed, like community rooms. But it also includes rules governing the use of spaces that might otherwise be seen as public—such as streets, playgrounds, the areas in front of buildings, alleyways, the areas behind buildings—and those that might more readily be understood as private—front steps, parking lots—but are available for the use of development residents and their guests. These rules, which are primarily set by development teams and homeowner associations, limit residents' access to and use of common areas not explicitly designated for social uses.

Relocated public housing residents and renters of affordable units across sites see these rules as largely targeting them, and frequently note these prohibitions, some with particular rancor. As the renter of an affordable unit at Westhaven Park put it:

You can't go onto the front. They don't want you on the front. They don't want you on the back. You can't barbeque. I ain't never lived nowhere where you can't go out to the back of your house and barbeque. You a prisoner in your own house.

Or, as a relocated public housing resident at Park Boulevard stated:

They must have been sitting out on their porch or sitting outside on the crate or something but they put notices in all their mailboxes telling them that was very ghetto. You know: You're not allowed to congregate in front of the property. Well, where do you want me to go?



These rules are meant to limit disturbances and curtail visible “hanging out.” As an alternative, development teams encourage the use of public parks near the development where it is available. However, these parks are also frequently a source of disappointment or conflict grounded in the kinds of expectations regarding use described above. As the owner of a market-rate unit at Oakwood Shores describes:

Well, people barbecued at [the park] at the walking track. I mean—and they do like serious barbecues. One night there was like tons of cars out there and it’s like out of place to me. . . . I mean [some people] like to walk around that track. And then people are like competing with this barbecue smoke and music and whatever else is going on out there. So it’s almost like there are two different groups that are using the park for almost two different purposes.

Design choices and the enforcement of rules that limit access to public spaces are partially effective at reducing some of the behaviors development stakeholders and higher-income residents wish to limit, but they also lead to a countervailing process to re-appropriate these spaces for social interaction, recreation, and leisure. This can be seen when a single individual or small groups pull up chairs to socialize outside, kids run up and down the streets, playing between cars in the parking lot and in alleyways, and parties are held on the street to eat, drink, and listen to music. The owner of an affordable unit at Oakwood Shores, to give just one example of a common complaint, describes a particular evening in which “mobs of people” set up a late-night party behind her building, “totally invading[ing] the parking area.”

To some extent, these two responses are mutually reinforcing: The privatization of common areas, a lack of accessible public space, and rules perceived as overly restrictive or inconsistently enforced leads to the informal reclaiming of such space for social uses, while the use of spaces in front of buildings, in parking lots, and on the street to socialize—as well as some kinds of activities in public parks—leads to complaints by some higher-income residents and censure by property management.

Conclusions

Given the goals of integration and inclusion that drive mixed-income development, it seems imperative to explore ways to address the tensions around the uses and expectations of space that will protect residents' desire for safety, order, and sound investment without overly constraining individual behavior and access to public space. We suggest four potential directions:

Reconsider design and the allocation of public space. There is limited public space in the three mixed-income developments, often leading to conflict over how it (and other private space) should appropriately be used. But increasing public space alone may not be sufficient to address conflicts over its use.

Increase residents' opportunities to make decisions. Renters in general and low-income renters in particular have limited opportunity to participate in ongoing planning, deliberation, and decision making regarding a range of aspects of community life. More inclusive deliberations and decision-making about issues of shared concern in the new developments, through forums and associations that provide voice to residents across income and housing tenure, may be a key element to adding a greater sense of equity among residents in the development.

Create community and mixed-use spaces. Cultivating and strengthening organizational places that provide opportunities for both provision and shared use—stores, coffee shops, recreational facilities, schools—may diversify the kinds of spaces available to residents, integrate their activities into the broader community, and provide a range of neutral grounds on which to find some commonality or greater comfort in difference.

Promote these places as diverse, vibrant, and urban. Fostering a different orientation to space and city life—one that finds pleasure in difference, embraces inclusion, and celebrates shared public space and the experiences that brings—may help further the goal of these developments to contribute to an integrated and inclusive city.



Key Questions for Policy and Practice

Given the early challenges, there are a range of questions that could prove helpful to stimulating discussion and sharing ongoing implementation lessons among policy-makers, advocates, developers, property managers, service providers, residents, and other stakeholders.

1. Given the limited amount of public space in the developments, how can diverse expectations for its use among residents be addressed and reconciled? Whose responsibility is it to facilitate this process?
2. What opportunities currently exist to convene residents across income and housing tenure for deliberation and decision-making, particularly around issues of rules and expectations for behavior? What has been learned from these? What are the possibilities for creating and managing new structures to take on this role? How can development teams, resident leaders, neighborhood groups, and the CHA Ombudsman assist with this effort?
3. Thus far, there has been limited attention to creating community and mixed-use spaces that provide opportunities for shared amenities and shared use. What are the current plans for developing these types of places? How can existing spaces—schools, retail spaces, and other local institutions—be better leveraged for this purpose in the meantime?
4. How can these developments be effectively marketed in a way that promotes them as diverse, urban spaces? Who should be responsible for carrying this message?
5. Although much of the crime and problematic behavior in these developments is perceived by residents as coming from outsiders—residents of nearby public housing complexes and visitors to the property—responses tend to implicate low-income residents in the developments as well. Is this perspective shared by others on the ground? What strategies can be used to more clearly identify the source of these issues and respond to them in a more targeted manner?



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

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

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

AFF: Renters and owners in units priced affordably

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

RTR: All renters including relocated public housing residents

FS: All owners



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