

Mixed-Income Development Study
University of Chicago
Research Brief #1: Building Community in Mixed-Income Developments¹
January 2009

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall Question:

Are mixed-income developments about more than just building housing, are they also about building “community”?

- What does building community mean to those involved with this?
- What is being done to build community?
- How are the efforts at building community playing out in this early phase of the developments?

Research Overview

Three developments: Oakwood Shores, Park Boulevard, Westhaven Park

In-depth interviews: 65 residents, 47 stakeholders; Observations: 66 meetings and events

Findings:

Expectations beyond building housing

- Only modest expectations for social interaction across income levels
- Broadly shared expectations for neighborhood-level improvements, but some questions about who those changes will benefit
- Broadly shared expectations for individual-level change, primarily focused on behavioral changes among former public housing residents
- Hope among a few about a reduction in racism and prejudice among residents

Strategies for building community

- Intentionally promote interaction through governance bodies and community activities
- Facilitate community building through design and management of environment: indistinguishable, integrated units, rules of behavior, shared institutions
- “Level the playing field” by providing supports to former public housing residents to build up their well-being and sense of efficacy

Responses to efforts to build community

- Uneven participation: community activities attended mostly by former public housing residents, governance bodies include certain residents not others
- Perceptions of differences among residents create social distance: avoidance, grouping, self-isolation
- Practical limitations of time, timing of events, priorities

Implications for Consideration:

- How *intentional* should stakeholders and residents be about generating and managing opportunities for the building of community in the new developments?
- Whose *role* is it to take responsibility for this?
- What *venues* and activities can serve this function, and what does it take to generate these?
- Is it a goal to have people of various backgrounds begin to see themselves more as residents and neighbors with *shared concerns and interests*, and if so, how can this be achieved?

¹ This summary is based on a longer paper, “Building ‘Community’ in Mixed-Income Developments: Assumptions, Approaches, and Early Experiences” (Chaskin and Joseph, 2010, *Urban Affairs Review* 45(3): 299-355). For more information about the Mixed-Income Development Study at the University of Chicago, please contact svoelker@uchicago.edu. This study is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.