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.