

## Mixed-Income Development Study

University of Chicago

Research Brief #4: Whose Space? Whose Rules? Social Challenges in Mixed-Income Developments<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### Overall Question:

How are different expectations for behavior and the use of public space negotiated in mixed-income developments?

#### Research Overview:

Three developments: Oakwood Shores, Park Boulevard, and Westhaven Park

In-depth interviews: 85 residents across two waves (June to October 2007 and July 2008 to March 2009)

#### Findings:

##### Perceptions of Crime and Safety

- While not overriding, concerns about crime vary by site and emerge and subside at different times. Residents of nearby public housing complexes and low-income visitors are often viewed as the source of criminal activity.
- Most residents are more concerned with public behavior than crime, particularly issues of unsupervised youth, playing loud music, and “hanging out.”

##### Expectations for Behavior

- Most residents stress the importance of respect and common sense and agree that certain behaviors (e.g. late-night shouting and loud music) are undesirable.
- Where there are differences in expectations, these are often attributed to concerns by higher-income residents for maintaining property values and differences in “culture.”
- Some residents believe there is a double standard with respect to what is considered acceptable behavior depending on when and where it occurs and the income level of the people involved.

##### Rules, Enforcement, and the Use of Public Space

- Residents agree on the need for rules that govern behavior but disagree on the extent to which these rules are uniformly recognized, monitored, and enforced.
- Relocated public housing residents and renters of affordable units view rules that restrict the use of public space—streets, playgrounds, and the areas in front of buildings—as largely targeting them.
- While aimed at reducing “hanging out” and other behaviors, rules and design choices that limit access to public space also have the offsetting effect of leading to an informal reclaiming of these spaces for social uses (e.g. kids playing in the streets and people gathering in parking lots).

#### Implications for Consideration:

- Public space is limited in the developments; how can different expectations for its use be addressed and reconciled?
- There has been limited attention thus far to developing community and mixed-use spaces (e.g. stores, coffee shops, recreational facilities, and schools). What are the current plans for this? How can existing spaces be better used to bring residents together?
- Responses to crime and problematic behavior tend to implicate low-income residents. What strategies can be used to more clearly identify the source of these issues and respond to them in a more targeted manner?

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<sup>1</sup> 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](mailto: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.