

Editor's Introduction

Don't End It, Blend It: Are Mixed-Income Housing Projects Good Social Policy?

Public housing has been the subject of much recent experimentation. Over the past few years, *Housing Policy Debate* has published works that looked at several public housing innovations. Volume 7, Issue 3 highlighted public housing reforms necessitated by devolution and disinvestment. Volume 8, Issue 3 included a forum on challenges public housing authorities face as they use the market to reform public housing. Volume 9, Issue 1 contained an article on New Urbanist efforts to redesign public housing.

Here we turn to another key public housing issue: Are mixed-income public housing projects good social policy? Proponents of mixed-income housing argue that the presence of middle-income tenants attracts more resources to public housing developments and introduces different values and behavior that may have a positive impact on crime and safety. Creating an income mix in public housing is also one suggested remedy for the social ills that result from concentrated poverty. In fact, mixed-income housing projects are now mandated by law under the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998. The new law requires that every public housing project have an income mix—40 percent of the units reserved for the poorest of the poor and 60 percent for those earning more, ranging from the working poor to middle-income families. However, mixed-income projects are not without their problems or critics. This issue of *Housing Policy Debate* looks at the current dialogue on mixed-income housing by focusing on one noteworthy project.

James Rosenbaum, Linda Stroh, and Cathy Flynn examine Chicago's Lake Parc Place, where a traditional low-income public housing project was transformed into a mixed-income one. The authors find that Lake Parc Place successfully attracted and kept middle-income renters. They are unable to test the hypothesis that middle-income residents served as role models for other tenants, but their research suggests that middle-income tenants improve safety in public housing by insisting that all rules and regulations be strictly enforced.

In a comment on Rosenbaum, Stroh, and Flynn, Philip Nyden also sees mixed-income public housing as a means for providing subsidies to the working poor and creating a supportive social environment. Yet Nyden questions which social forces produced the desired

changes at Lake Parc Place. He finds that involvement in the political process inherent in protecting quality housing builds the civic participation and self-determination commonly found in middle-income communities. Thus Nyden detects a process whereby a critical mass of middle-income tenants creates a positive neighborhood effect.

In another comment, Lawrence Vale argues that it is unclear how much of Lake Parc Place's success is due to income mixing and how much occurred simply because Lake Parc Place was turned into a well-managed development with a carefully screened group of tenants. Vale cites Boston's Commonwealth Development as an example of how a socially and physically devastated public housing project can be transformed into an attractive, secure, desirable living environment while still reserving all of its occupancy for low-income residents. He argues that we can revitalize public housing without sacrificing a commitment to serve the least advantaged.

The Forum on Lake Parc Place also includes a qualitative supplement to Rosenbaum, Stroh, and Flynn's research by Shazia Rafiullah Miller. Miller applies the classic theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill to the issue of social control in public housing. She finds that public housing residents at Lake Parc Place willingly submit to strict rules to secure a sense of safety. Thus, as Hobbes argues, the need to establish order supersedes the interests of civil liberties. Yet once social order is established, public housing residents shift their interest to self-governance, in a manner described by Mill in which order serves as a prerequisite for participatory democracy.

In sum, all of the authors agree that the Lake Parc Place experiment worked, yet they disagree on why. Rosenbaum, Stroh, and Flynn suggest that middle-income tenants were essential in providing the social support necessary for enforcing rules and improving security. Philip Nyden largely concurs with these findings and further suggests that the struggle to maintain the quality of housing and the numerous other physical improvements at Lake Parc Place created a social cohesion that reinforced the project's success. In contrast, Lawrence Vale argues that Lake Parc Place benefited from program elements such as physical improvements, better management, and a selective screening process that combined to produce positive results. In Vale's estimation, Lake Parc Place might have succeeded on the basis of these changes alone—the income mixing having little or no impact. Finally, Shazia Miller argues that social control per se leads to a civic order that improves civic participation and subsequently the quality of life for residents.

This collection of articles is a step toward understanding how to achieve the appropriate income mix for public housing projects. Researchers and policy makers need to determine how many middle-

class residents are necessary to produce a positive neighborhood effect while displacing the smallest number of low-income households. As of yet, we do not have an answer. It is important to find this balance if mixed-income projects are to be used to improve public housing.