

Mixed Income or Gentrification?

Hawthorne's Spatial Transformation

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Preface

About one year ago I first heard about the New Urbanist urban planning paradigm and the powerful effects it could have on society and the environment. This urban design movement calls for “compact, mixed use, walkable, and relatively self-contained communities.”¹ I searched the Congress for the New Urbanism’s Web site to find neighborhoods influenced by New Urbanist principles in Philadelphia and learned about the Martin Luther King Plaza—four demolished public housing high-rises replaced by mixed-income, mixed use, low-rise housing units. This development struck me as an unusual opportunity to study a planned community in the urban core that included affordable housing.

At first I wanted to research how New Urbanism affected the community in terms of social cohesion. But when the rubber met the road, my ideas were too large to be accomplished in one semester. At the drawing board again, I decided to concentrate on how people used and interacted with the built environment compared to how the architects of MLK Plaza intended for the space to be used. I would research the plan and the planning process and observe the area to discern the architect’s intent for the space versus how the community was using the space. This would provide an assessment of New Urbanism in practice, revealing how the community’s behavior was in fact shaped by the built environment.

As the data came in, I struggled to make sense of it all. I was trying to isolate the work of the architect and the response of the community, when in fact MLK Plaza development is part of a greater context of multiple public and private players, and

¹ Jill Grant, *Planning the Good Community* New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, (2006): 3.

includes not only the project site but the surrounding area as well. I began to understand just how many forces were working to create this neighborhood, this place. The residents, the businesses, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, the developers, the architects, the Avenue of the Arts, the neighbors, the councilman, the displaced. I had been trying to confine my research to the architects and the current residents without seeing the rest of the equation.

Though many questions remain, through my research, observations and interviews, I have been able to draw some conclusions about the impact this public development is having on the neighborhood and its future. I give special thanks to those who made time for interviews, and to my cousin Cheyenne who first enlightened me about New Urbanism and set me down this fascinating path.

Introduction

The Martin Luther King Plaza was originally built in 1960 as four high-rise public housing buildings in the Hawthorne neighborhood, just south of Center City, Philadelphia. By the 1990's, the towers were physically dilapidated, the vast majority of the residents were unemployed, and the area was a breeding ground for drugs and violence. Through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) grant program, the Philadelphia Housing Authority demolished the towers in 1999 and rebuilt the area with mixed income, low-rise housing units soon thereafter. Congress passed this HOPE VI legislation in 1992 to eradicate severely distressed public housing, and grants are available for the demolition of these public housing units and the reconstruction of mixed income, architecturally consistent housing projects.

For my thesis I am researching how the architects and the housing authority have used HOPE VI to spatially affect the neighborhood and how the private market has responded to the revitalization in terms of spatial development. HOPE VI has three main goals, to “lessen isolation and reduce the concentration of very low-income families, and build mixed income communities; revitalize the sites of severely distressed public housing and, as a result, improve the surrounding neighborhood; and provide coordinated, comprehensive community and supportive services that help residents to achieve self-sufficiency, young people to attain educational excellence, and the community to secure a desirable quality of life.”² My research specifically pertains to the first two goals, examining the impact of HOPE VI’s mixed income housing in the Hawthorne neighborhood. I aim to answer the question, how has HOPE VI’s mixed income housing spatially affected Hawthorne?

The New Urbanism movement influences HOPE VI’s design principles. New Urbanism is a type of urban planning that “responds to the problems of sprawl by creating distinct, interconnected neighborhoods that minimize automobile use and promote public interaction.”³ The four guiding principles of New Urbanism are: diversity, pedestrian orientation, accessible public spaces and community institutions, and celebration of unique local elements.⁴ HOPE VI upholds many New Urbanist principles, including public open space, mixed income housing, mixed-use structures, and local architectural character.⁵ This is the first time New Urbanist ideas have been combined

² Seattle Housing Authority Website, “Building Community Through Hope VI”, <http://www.seattlehousing.org/Development/hopevi/hopevi.html> (accessed Dec. 2, 2007).

³ Jeremy R. Meredith, “Sprawl and the New Urbanist Solution,” *Virginia Law Review* (2003).

⁴ Jeremy R. Meredith, “Sprawl and the New Urbanist Solution,” *Virginia Law Review* (2003).

⁵ Seattle Housing Authority Website, “Building Community Through Hope VI”, <http://www.seattlehousing.org/Development/hopevi/hopevi.html> (accessed Dec. 2, 2007).

with public housing, and this is a significant test of the theory in practice. HOPE VI also serves as a significant test for alternative thinking about public housing.

Though the social effects of this development are beyond the scope of my research, New Urbanism rests on a philosophy that the built environment strongly shapes social interaction and cohesion. My research is significant because it begins the assessment of how this development has changed and continues to change people's lives in Philadelphia. MLK Plaza was redeveloped because of the negative effects that came from concentrated poverty in high-rises, such as violent crime and drug abuse. Millions of dollars have been spent on HOPE VI, and my research begins the process of evaluating whether this public housing scheme is an effective alternative or is a failed attempt at finding a solution by deconcentrating poverty, the opposite of what is proven unsuccessful.

My methods for answering this question are primarily interviews and visual observation and analysis. I spoke with representatives from the community, the government, and the architectural firm. I observed and mapped the neighborhood to determine how people interacted with the space and what the built environment consisted of in terms of residential, commercial, and public space. Through examining this data I claim that HOPE VI's revitalization of MLK Plaza is spurring the neighborhood towards gentrification rather than promoting the creation of a truly mixed income community.

Literature Review

Public Housing

Government housing began with the Housing Act of 1937, providing for municipal Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to "build own and operate housing for low

and moderate income households.”⁶ World War II prevented many public housing projects from being built under this legislation, and Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949 funding urban renewal and development. This act specified that 810,000 new public housing units were to be built, which took over 20 years to accomplish. In the early 1970’s, the federal government shifted the direction of public housing from government owned projects to subsidized private development, causing construction of new public housing developments to decline.⁷

Legislation did not provide for proper maintenance and required public housing to be constructed of inexpensive materials.⁸ Since public housing was needed in large cities where land is more expensive, PHAs were financially forced to build high-rises. The combination of a high density of residents and low quality construction has led many of the public housing structures built in the middle of the 20th century to deteriorate. As housing projects physically declined, operating costs increased and residents became dissatisfied, creating a public housing crisis.⁹

HOPE VI and New Urbanism

The HOPE VI program was created by The Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1992 in order to eradicate and replace severely distressed public housing. These grants are designed to revitalize failing housing projects by incorporating economic development and mixed income neighborhoods into public housing. The key elements of HOPE VI’s housing transformation are (1) change the physical shape of

⁶ Michael H. Schill , “Distressed Public Housing: Where Do We Go from Here?”
The University of Chicago Law Review, (1993), 499.

⁷ Michael H. Schill , “Distressed Public Housing: Where Do We Go from Here?”
The University of Chicago Law Review, (1993), 500.

⁸ Michael H. Schill , “Distressed Public Housing: Where Do We Go from Here?”
The University of Chicago Law Review, (1993), 503.

⁹ Michael H. Schill , “Distressed Public Housing: Where Do We Go from Here?”
The University of Chicago Law Review, (1993), 505.

public housing, (2) empower residents by establishing positive incentives for resident self-sufficiency, (3) promote mixed-income communities to lessen concentrations of poverty, and (4) establish local partnerships to leverage support and resources.¹⁰

HOPE VI represents a changing outlook on public housing, that of replicating what has worked in a particular city or neighborhood and integrating subsidizing housing into it, rather than creating visually jarring buildings that carry a stigma.¹¹ HOPE VI is heavily influenced by the Congress for the New Urbanism.¹² New Urbanism is based on ideas of “compact, mixed use, walkable, and relatively self-contained communities,” in response to sprawl.¹³ New Urbanism also supports mixed income communities under the theory of social capital, where the poor interact with those who are not and they learn from each other.¹⁴ HOPE VI promotes mixed use, mixed income, low-rise communities with public space, which are New Urbanist ideas.

Through the HOPE VI program, HUD wanted to decrease concentrations of poverty to attract private investment. By boosting the local economy, poor people would have a better chance of obtaining employment. Local schools would also fare better with a higher tax base, though poor schools could also deter potential middle class members from moving to mixed income communities.¹⁵

In 2004, the Urban Institute prepared a 63-page report on their research of HOPE VI’s successes and failures. Overall, they reported that the program succeeded in

¹⁰ Housing and Urban Development Website, “About HOPE VI”, <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/hope6/about/> (accessed Dec 1, 2007).

¹¹ Cheryl O’Neill, *The Making of Inner-City Neighborhoods*, Washington DC: Urban Land Institute, (1996).

¹² John Kromer, *Neighborhood Recovery*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, (2001): 53.

¹³ Jill Grant, *Planning the Good Community* New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, (2006): 3.

¹⁴ Jill Grant, *Planning the Good Community* New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, (2006): 70.

¹⁵ Patrick Boyer, “The Proposed Benefits of Mixed-Income Development.” *American Institute for Social Justice*, Spring/Summer (2007): 101.

demolishing tens of thousands of units of deteriorating public housing supply and replacing them with innovative, high quality housing. As far as relocation, they remarked that some former residents were able to use vouchers to move to safer areas. They also concluded that the neighborhoods surrounding these once blighted areas have been made better off by the HOPE VI program.¹⁶

Relocation and development efficiency were noted as the greatest failures of this program, both of which have plagued MLK Plaza. The report concluded that many residents suffered as a result of the demolition, some of which were forced to move to other severely distressed public housing units. The voucher program was said to need better planning as well.¹⁷ The relocation issues stirred up by HOPE VI are widely discussed, since “HOPE VI destroyed many more low-cost units than it generated”.¹⁸ The long lag times between demolition and redevelopment were the last failure mentioned in the Urban Institute’s report.

John Kromer argues that HOPE VI “perpetuates a tradition of disparity in ownership” since “most HOPE VI developers are white-owned businesses”, and the program does not address this issue. He cites HOPE VI’s two major limitations as the lack of funding and the decreased amount of public housing units. This program receives a small amount of HUDs overall budget, and most PHAs who apply for grants are turned down. Fewer units are rebuilt than are demolished, resulting in fewer net public housing units. “The funding used to promote [middle-income housing] should not be taken from the only resources available to house a city’s lower-income citizens—and that is exactly

¹⁶ Mary Cunningham et al., “A Decade of Hope VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges,” *The Urban Institute and The Brookings Institution*, 2004: 47.

¹⁷ Mary Cunningham et al., “A Decade of Hope VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges,” *The Urban Institute and The Brookings Institution*, 2004: 47.

¹⁸ Jill Grant, *Planning the Good Community*, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006, 180.

how HOPE VI works.”¹⁹ He cites MLK Plaza as an example of a project that has fewer units due to HOPE VI revitalization.

Background

Built in 1960, the Martin Luther King Plaza was originally known as Hawthorne Square, but was renamed in 1970 after Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech in the neighborhood. The four high-rise towers held 576 units, nearly 200 of which were vacant when it was demolished.²⁰ When MLK was originally built, ideas of public housing revolved around cost effectiveness, so many public housing projects were high-rise towers.²¹ But the high concentration of poverty caused the MLK towers to become crime and drug infested, leaving 200 of the units dilapidated and vacant. As Carl Greene, the head of the Philadelphia Housing Authority put it, “concentrating large numbers of nonworking people turned out to be something that just didn't work.”²²

In the mid-1990's all eyes turned towards MLK Plaza as South Broad Street, which bordered the housing towers, began to transform into “The Avenue of the Arts”. Philadelphia designated Broad Street south of City Hall to become the home for several new arts-related facilities in the city. “Philadelphia is trying to remake South Broad Street into a cultural center that will attract restaurants, clubs, hotels - and tourists....For those things to happen, everyone seems to agree, the four towers at Martin Luther King Plaza

¹⁹ John Kromer, *Neighborhood Recovery*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, (2001): 150.

²⁰ “MLK Towers Tumble down failed PHA homes, Projects implosion called rejuvenation of a neighborhood,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 18 October 1999, 03.

²¹ Michael H. Schill, “Distressed Public Housing: Where Do We Go from Here?” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, (1993), 505.

²² “Memories come crashing down within a minute hundreds saw the King Housing Project razed. An air expert said the weather probably helped control the dust,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 October 1999, B01.

in South Philadelphia must come down.”²³ Councilman Frank DiCicco commented that “[MLK is] so identifiable as a project - who would want to develop around there?”²⁴, alluding to development as an incentive to remove the towers. ““I think there's a general uneasiness about poverty abutting an area that you want to be pedestrian-friendly,’ said Rylanda Wilson, PHA's senior planner. ‘If people want to park two blocks into the neighborhood and walk to Broad Street, there should be pedestrian-friendly ways to do that.’”²⁵

Plans to demolish MLK and replace the towers with low-rise, mixed income housing through HUD’s HOPE VI program emerged in the mid ‘90s. Public officials spoke out about how the revitalization would benefit the MLK residents. ““The families that live in King Plaza deserve better,” said PHA executive director John F. White Jr., “and we are on the cusp of meeting that challenge for them.””²⁶ But the residents of MLK did not agree. The developers and the architects invited the community to meetings, which at times deteriorated into “shouting matches between residents and panelists.”²⁷ Community members also contested the condemnation of several other houses in the neighborhood and the lack of ample notification.²⁸

Continued support from the Philadelphia Housing Authority and Councilman Frank DiCicco pushed through community backlash. The towers were imploded on

²³ “Public Housing Towers: ‘Ghettos of Poverty’\Rebirth of South Broad St. hinges on replacing them,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 11 August 1997, 06.

²⁴ “Public Housing Towers: ‘Ghettos of Poverty’\Rebirth of South Broad St. hinges on replacing them,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 11 August 1997, 06.

²⁵ “Public Housing Towers: ‘Ghettos of Poverty’\Rebirth of South Broad St. hinges on replacing them,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 11 August 1997, 06.

²⁶ “Plans call for demolition of King towers\Federal funds are being sought to revive the S. Phila housing project. Mid-rises and duplexes are eyed,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1997, B01.

²⁷ “Questions on King plans, angry residents grill PHA and developers at church meeting,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 18 May 1999, 10.

²⁸ “Razing Cain, not all residents see demolition of MLK as a dynamite idea,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 15 October 1999, 07.

October 17, 1999, and the ground broke for the redevelopment one year later. The revitalized MLK Plaza would be far different from the original, with the Philadelphia street grid, low-rise row homes and mixed income residents. The new development would not only cover the original MLK site, but would also include infill housing in nearby vacant lots.

The City contracted Uni-Penn to develop MLK, a partnership between Universal Community Homes CDC, founded by former songwriter and record producer Kenny Gamble, and Pennrose Properties, another development firm. Gamble has bought and rehabilitated over 100 parcels of land in South Philadelphia, where he grew up. The architects were Torti Gallas and Partners of Silver Spring, Maryland who won the job through a competitive bidding process.

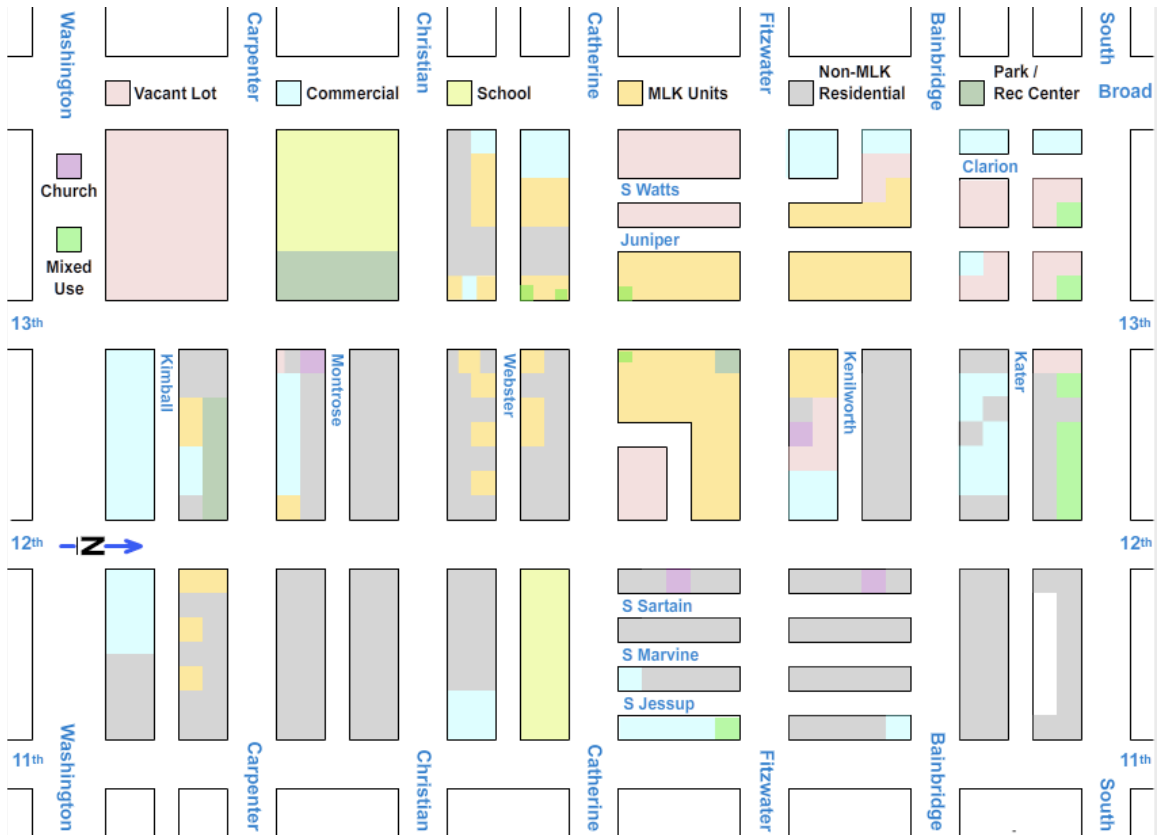


Figure 1: Map of Hawthorne by uses. Not to scale.

Above is a map of the Hawthorne neighborhood according to its uses in Fall of 2007. The area that is almost entirely yellow is where the former towers once stood and where revitalized MLK homes are now. MLK homes are also scattered throughout the southern half of Hawthorne. Several vacant lots are still in this neighborhood that will likely be developed in the near future given the booming real estate market here. There is very little green space in Hawthorne.

As of December 2007, 245 new units have been built, 95 of which are resident owned. MLK residents' yearly income is between \$23,000 and \$69,000. 19 new market rate homes will be completed in the next year. Rental units began filling in 2002, though homeowners did not move into MLK until 2006.²⁹ PHA's budget for MLK Plaza totaled \$74 million, \$25.2 million of which was from HOPE VI grants.³⁰

Methodology

In order to assess HOPE VI's spatial impact on the Hawthorne neighborhood I began by observing and visually analyzing the area. I spent time early in September 2007 biking around the neighborhood to familiarize myself with the architectural style, local businesses, pedestrian behavior, and traffic patterns. After speaking with Cheryl O'Neill, MLK's chief urban designer of Torti Gallas and Partners, I learned that the primary intention for the new units was to create architectural unity. TGP wanted the new MLK homes to architecturally blend into the neighborhood by looking similar to the preexisting homes in Hawthorne. From then on I began to conduct a visual survey of the built environment and compare the parts of Hawthorne with and without MLK units, noting

²⁹ Interview with Edward Garcia, December 3, 2007.

³⁰ Carl Greene, "Redefining Public Housing," Philadelphia Housing Authority slideshow.

characteristics that did or did not suggest integration. I considered the goals of HOPE VI and the plans of the architect as I observed. I visited MLK several times, at different times and on different days of the week.

To make my observations more meaningful, I mapped the uses throughout each block of Hawthorne, noting MLK units, non-MLK residential units, vacant lots, schools, public/green space, commercial space, mixed-use units and churches. This helped me visualize the 18 square block neighborhood and view Hawthorne within a context of uses. This exercise also helped me to think about each space, why it is there and how it is used. Making this map was particularly useful for identifying the location of MLK units.

Conducting this visual survey sparked many questions concerning the space, the development, and the intentions for the space. My observations gave me initial hunches that I was able to clarify during interviews. I interviewed several stakeholders with different perspectives in order to gain insight from the government, the community and the designer.

I interviewed:

- **Brian Abernathy:** Aide to Councilman Frank DiCicco whose district includes Hawthorne
- **Pat Bullard:** former President of Hawthorne Empowerment Coalition, current member of the Zoning Board of HEC
- **Edward Garcia:** President of the Board of MLK Homeowners
- **Cheryl O'Neill:** Urban Designer of MLK for Torti Gallas and Partners
- **Rylanda Wilson:** MLK Senior Planner for the Philadelphia Housing Authority
- **Ethel Wise:** Former MLK resident and local business owner

By speaking with these representatives, I learned about the development process through a variety of viewpoints, adding depth to my claims. I supplemented this

information by reading local press coverage of the planning and development process to learn more about the stakeholders' roles in the MLK revitalization.

Data and Discussion

Integration

The first claim my data suggests is that the urban design by Torti Gallas and Partners (TGP) successfully integrated the new MLK housing units into the existing fabric of Hawthorne. In a mixed income community, the built environment can play a role in either unifying or dividing socio-economic classes. My interview with TGP architect and urban designer Cheryl O'Neill along with my observations and visual analysis suggest that the MLK housing units are spatially and architecturally integrated into Hawthorne.

O'Neill said the main intention for the space was to integrate MLK into the rest of Hawthorne. The prior high-rise towers jarred the street grid and the sense of cohesion within the neighborhood, isolating the residents of MLK from the rest of the community (See Figure 2). With the goal of mixed income in mind, TGP's design aimed to seamlessly weave the MLK homes into the existing community.



Figure 2: Old MLK Tower



Figure 3: New MLK Plaza

Source: PHA

Though the area where the old towers stood is solely made up of MLK houses now, I saw that pedestrians used the streets in MLK Plaza just as often as they did around Hawthorne. Cars drove through similarly. The MLK houses are clearly new and have parking behind them, but the architectural character is aligned with the rest of Hawthorne. It is entirely possible to casually travel through the neighborhood not knowing that there is a public housing project anywhere in the community.

The new MLK units are row houses, like most residences in Philadelphia. TGP built the houses at various heights and in different colors to give the feel of piecemeal building, which is how the rest of Hawthorne looks since most lots were developed one or two at a time (see Figures 4 & 5). TGP also brought back the grid of the city streets to MLK Plaza, which the towers had disrupted, promoting interaction and continuity.



Figure 4: A typical Hawthorne street.



Figure 5: : MLK houses, different colors and heights.

Along with building on the site where the towers once stood, TGP built infill houses, renovating abandoned or blighted lots on nearby streets. I identified these TGP houses by making a visual survey and mapping the uses of the neighborhood (see Figure 1, Background Section). By building these infill houses, TGP truly wove their units into the fabric of Hawthorne. Visually, this acts as a litmus test for TGP, showing that their architectural style truly is aligned with the character of Hawthorne. Spatially, by scattering units TGP ensures that if the unit is affordable, that is, set below market price for those who qualify, the family won't be stigmatized based on location.



Figure 6: Block of Hawthorne with both MLK homes and existing homes.

Through my observations and speaking with the designer, I claim that the architects successfully integrated the new MLK homes into the existing built environment of Hawthorne. This is an important step for public housing, which has historically looked very different from its surroundings and concentrated low-income families. The next step would be to research the social implications of this architecture, studying the relationships that form and the community reactions to this revitalization.

Lack of Political Will for Community Public Space

My interview with Cheryl O'Neill also revealed aspects of the original plan that have not yet been executed, namely the creation of the public square and the renovation of the historic Hawthorne Cultural Center. Though creating public space and areas for civic activities are within HOPE VI's guidelines, the MLK revitalization has not included any. My interviews have revealed the conflict of interests between the community and the Philadelphia Housing Authority.

O'Neill cited the absence of a public square in MLK as the biggest disappointment of this project. TGP intended the currently vacant space on 12th and Catherine Sts. to resemble one of the five public squares that William Penn created when he planned Philadelphia. Green space is an essential ingredient for a healthy neighborhood, and Hawthorne has very little. Now, 7 years after the project began, a gated vacant lot stands where a park was intended (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: 12th and Catherine Sts., vacant lot where park was intended.

In 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech on the steps of the Hawthorne Cultural Center. Two years after his assassination, the residents successfully advocated for the name of the project to change from Hawthorne Square to the Martin Luther King Plaza. The round building on whose steps he delivered his speech has become a very historic and precious landmark for the community, whose members do not want the building to come down. Though the building is structurally sound, it needs to be renovated before it is safe to use. Ironically, the doors of this community center were open when the towers still stood, but since the towers came down this building has been locked. HOPE VI money was budgeted for the revitalization of the Cultural Center, which was promised to the community during initial negotiations.



Figure 8: MLK Community Center from the side and back. Posted signs outside the building.

According to Pat Bullard, former president of the Hawthorne Empowerment Coalition, throughout the development process PHA has wanted to build houses where the Cultural Center is and where the park is planned, contributing to the stalled progress. On November 19, 2007, the community received a letter from HUD saying that the space on 12th and Catherine would become a park, though the Cultural Center may be demolished, both a gain and a loss for the community.

On December 3, 2007, Jan Pasek in the Communications Department of the Philadelphia Housing Authority confirmed Bullard's statement that PHA wanted to build houses over the Cultural Center and proposed park in MLK Plaza. Given that there is a

recreation center on 12th and Carpenter Sts. and a public park on 13th between Carpenter and Christian Sts., “What’s the point of building duplicate facilities?”³¹ PHA has been fighting HUD to use the park and cultural center land for more houses. Pasek said HUD gave PHA the go ahead to build over both areas, considering it a “huge win for us.”³²

Rylanda Wilson, senior planner for PHA and authority on this matter, said the park would in fact be built though the cultural center will be torn down, though these decisions may be subject to change. The decision process was a long one, with PHA and HUD negotiating back and forth. Wilson’s reasons for tearing down the Cultural Center were that PHA needs room to build more houses to meet the HOPE VI quota and a lack of funding.

The prospect of a park in MLK’s future is important for the health of the community. “Research has shown that green space is more than just a luxury, and the development of green space should therefore be allocated a more central position in spatial planning policy. Healthy planning should include a place for green space and policy makers should take the amount of green space in the living environment into account when endeavoring to improve health situations.”³³ Contrary to Pasek’s comments, Hawthorne is in desperate need of green space. The one park they have takes up approximately one quarter of a city block and has a fence surrounding almost all of it.

Losing the Cultural Center will be disappointing for Hawthorne. Community members have called representatives, rallied, and petitioned to save this building. The community would like to turn the cultural center into an arts building, housing art studios,

³¹ Interview with Jan Pasek, December 3, 2007.

³² Interview with Jan Pasek, December 3, 2007.

³³ Jolanda Maas, “Green space, urbanity, and health: how strong is the relation?” ,J Epidemiol Community Health, (2006).

providing art training and education, and connecting Hawthorne to the Avenue of the Arts.³⁴

It is clear that the Philadelphia Housing Authority has not prioritized public space in the MLK development despite community desires and HOPE VI guidelines. PHA did not have the political will to develop these areas, spatially affecting Hawthorne by precluding ample open and civic space.

Gentrification

Through the MLK revitalization, the architects and PHA have spatially affected the neighborhood of Hawthorne, and so has the private market. The area around MLK Plaza is thriving with private investment, fulfilling a HOPE VI goal of improving the surrounding neighborhood. A new luxury condominium building just opened its doors on 11th St. and Washington Ave. Two vacant lots along Broad St. will soon become apartments and office/retail space. Only a few burned out houses remain, and construction workers are building new houses on several blocks. Private investment has increased, real estate values have increased, and crime has decreased.

Newspapers conclude the same. “Kenny Gamble's Universal [Co.] Plan is simply to create a healthy and wealthy community in a section of South Philadelphia.”³⁵ “In the blocks surrounding the Martin Luther King Plaza development, just south of Center City, the average sale price of homes rose 161 percent from 1999 to 2004, almost three times the citywide increase.”³⁶ But this neighborhood transformation begs the question: Has

³⁴ Interview with Edward Garcia, December 3, 2007.

³⁵ “Jobs, homes, businesses, all part of the plan,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 17 April 2003, 08.

³⁶ “RISING from RUINS - Why public housing, once the scourge of the city, now is a vital part of its life and its future”, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 December 2005, A01.

MLK Plaza encouraged a “mixed income” neighborhood? New development projects are telling.

At The Lofts at Bella Vista, brand new luxury condominiums on 11th St. and Washington Ave., one bedroom units begin at \$349,000 and two bedroom units go up to \$549,990.³⁷ On Broad St. between Catherine and Fitzwater, Dranoff Properties has been approved for a mixed use, “luxury apartments over high-end retail development”.³⁸ There will be four stories of 146 residential units over 18,000 sq. ft. of retail space. The Hawthorne Empowerment Coalition asked that parking be underground, but the most recent plan has 155 above ground parking spaces. Prices for these residential units have not yet been determined.



Figure 9: The Lofts at Bella Vista



Figure 10: Simulation of Dranoff Proposal³⁹

Rimas Properties Inc. has nearly completed “1352 Lofts” on the 13th block of South Street. This is another mixed-use development with retail beneath luxury apartments. Residential units range in price from \$379,000 to \$1.5 million.⁴⁰ Rimas is also in the planning stages of the most contentious residential development in Hawthorne, proposed for the currently vacant lot at Broad and Washington. For this area, Rimas

³⁷ www.centercitycondos.com (accessed November 20, 2007).

³⁸ <http://www.dranoffproperties.com/> (accessed November 20, 2007).

³⁹ <http://www.dranoffproperties.com/> (accessed November 20, 2007).

⁴⁰ Interview with Mike Weigand, November 20, 2007.

applied for C-5 zoning status, which allows for the highest density of development.

“These districts permit the type of high density commercial, entertainment, mixed-use and residential development generally found in the business core of large cities.”⁴¹ This ordinance has passed, despite community opposition. As Pat Bullard put it, “The community no longer has input once C-5 zoning is passed.” According to the Councilman’s Aide Brian Abernathy, “Councilman DiCicco was the prime sponsor of the remapping of the Broad and Washington site.”⁴² The community also asked Rimas to set aside some units for senior citizens or low-income families. This request was denied.



Figure 11: 1352 Lofts, South and Broad **Figure 12: Sketch of Broad and Washington Proposal**

“MLK Plaza is mixed income, but not Hawthorne.”⁴³ These new developments certainly confirm that statement. Of course, it is not the responsibility of HOPE VI to encourage mixed income housing outside of its development, but when the towers came down Carl Green was quoted saying, “What we’re looking to develop now is a housing model that contributes to revitalization of the neighborhood by attracting mixed-income

⁴¹ “Zoning Remapping in Philadelphia”, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2000.

⁴² Correspondence with Brian Abernathy.

⁴³ Interview with Pat Bullard, November 20, 2007.

families.”⁴⁴ MLK went from having 576 affordable units to 245, while hundreds of new luxury residential units are being built in these four apartment buildings. A neighborhood with thousands of homes, 245 of which are affordable, is hardly an evenly mixed income community.

It is ironic that concentrated poverty in high-rise towers is being replaced by concentrated wealth in high-rise towers. Though the MLK Plaza was aimed at increasing interaction among people at many income levels, these new developments aim to do just the opposite, separating a portion of the community based on income. Though MLK was built to reflect the local architecture and reduce the stigma of public housing, these new developments disrupt the community’s built environment and intend to bring an upper-class status to their residents. The MLK towers were a clear, visual symbol of poverty, and the new developments are a clear, visual symbol of wealth. If the old MLK Plaza led to blight, the new MLK Plaza is leading to gentrification.

Conclusion

“‘You look at the supply, you look at the need, and the gap is extraordinary and getting bigger,’ said George Gould, who heads the housing practice at Community Legal Services. ‘The housing available for the lowest-income people has been dramatically reduced.’

The lower density of the new developments makes them more attractive, physically and socially, than their much-maligned predecessors. But the change means fewer units in a city with a vast shortage of affordable housing.”⁴⁵

TGP did an excellent job of integrating the new MLK homes into the existing urban fabric of the Hawthorne neighborhood. This architectural design created an

⁴⁴ “Tearing down to build up a new day for public housing creates stable neighborhoods, not enclaves,” Philadelphia Daily News, 20, October 1999, 08.

⁴⁵ “A longer wait for housing - For the poor, new units aren't nearly enough,” The Philadelphia Inquirer, 6 December 2005, A01.

egalitarian built environment for families of different incomes to live in the same neighborhood. The absence of the promised park and a renovated community center show PHA's priorities and lack of commitment to the community's needs, resulting in a neighborhood without ample green or civic space.

The most significant spatial changes that Hawthorne has undergone since the MLK revitalization have been two new and two proposed luxury condominium buildings. These new developments are reversing the work of MLK's design ideals of a mixed-income neighborhood with low-rise row homes. Instead, these new condominiums separate the wealthy from the rest of the community, similarly to how the old MLK towers separated the poor.

The neighborhood of Hawthorne is better off, though. Pat Bullard of the Hawthorne Empowerment Coalition said that the neighborhood changes have been positive since the new MLK homes have been built. The value of real estate has risen, crime has gone down and private development is taking off. The MLK Plaza has won wide acclaim, including awards from The Congress of New Urbanism, The American Institute of Architects, Residential Architect Magazine, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁴⁶ To live in a new MLK home as opposed to in an old MLK apartment would seem like a dream come true.

But what about the displaced? This question lies outside of the scope of my research, but is crucial to address nonetheless when assessing the MLK revitalization. The number of affordable units in the new MLK Plaza is less than half of what the old

⁴⁶ www.tortigallas.com (accessed November 20, 2007).

towers held. Hundreds of poverty-stricken people were displaced throughout this process, and likely ended up in severely distressed public housing elsewhere but without the kinship ties that had helped sustain them in MLK Plaza. By displacing the poor and cleaning up one neighborhood, the problems of poverty are not overcome, but displaced.

For further research, I suggest a project to find where displaced former MLK residents ended up and what types of housing stock they live in to see if HOPE VI actually deconcentrated poverty or only relocated the concentrations. I would also recommend looking at HOPE VI projects across the country in terms of location within cities to see if other projects that occur near the central business districts have similar outcomes.

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