

## Alexandra Park: Dynamics of Redevelopment

A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies

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## Foreword

This paper represents a final submission to the Master of Environmental Studies (Planning) program at York University. It is the embodiment of the research, coursework, and fieldwork that was undertaken throughout a two-year Master of Environmental Studies program in which students are given the opportunity to create their own Plans of Study. These Plans of Study set the blueprint for course selection, fieldwork, research topics and the final Major Research Paper, which are interwoven to create an individual learning experience and research focus for each student. Students who have opted to focus on Planning, such as myself, have had to enroll in prerequisite planning-related courses at York in order to receive planning accreditation, as well as recognition from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute and the Canadian Institute of Planners.

My Major Research Paper topic and Plan of Study are closely related, as they both involve examining literature on gentrification, affordable housing provision, and the potential displacement of low-income households from neighbourhoods undergoing urban redevelopment. My research interests for the past two years of study focused on the interdependence of neo-liberal policy adoption in Canada, municipal regimes of governance and their increased responsibility in housing provision, the contentious privatization of public land, and how these systems have influenced the redevelopment of public housing neighbourhoods, and the subsequent supply of mixed-income forms of housing. I chose the Alexandra Park redevelopment project as a case study to be situated within the above noted research and planning interests.

I would like to thank my wife Kyesia, and my three kids Wynn timer, Sidney, and Townes, who have been extremely patient and understanding throughout my graduate studies. I would

also like to thank all interview participants who took time to discuss with me the Alexandra Park redevelopment project. I thank my superiors at Seaton House, in particular, and the City of Toronto, in general, who have granted me a two-year step-down from full-time employment to part-time hours to allow for the pursuit of education. I would like to extend thanks also to all of the professors in the Faculty of Environmental Studies whom I had the chance to meet and learn from, especially Stefan Kipfer, PhD, who graciously fulfilled the dual role of Plan of Study Advisor, and my Major Research Paper Supervisor. Lastly, I would like to thank the employees of the Office of Student Academic Services for their direction, patience, and ongoing support.

## Abstract

Mixed-income planning has become the common-sense approach to public housing redevelopment in Toronto. Based on the premise of physical design dictating behaviour, social mix theory hinges on the idea that diluting the proportion of rental tenure via the supply of privately-owned units will break apart pathologies commonly accepted as being produced by concentrations of poverty. Interestingly, both the perceived benefits of social mix theory and the pathologies assumed to be produced by concentrations of poor people are empirically unfounded. However, by exercising place-making strategies that focus predominantly on the negative social and physical attributes of low-income neighbourhoods, change appears necessary and to the benefit of all involved. In this Major Paper, I will introduce the proposed Alexandra Park redevelopment as a case study of municipally-managed gentrification and mixed-income planning. The idea of a redeveloped Alexandra Park has been sparked by a progressive councillor and an involved group of residents accustomed to transformations in the governance structure of their neighbourhood. However, without the high exchange value of its prime downtown location, private investment in this economically underutilized neighbourhood would be unlikely. Aided by the territorial stigmatization of the neighbourhood and the racialization of its residents, place-making has enabled the common-sense approach to redevelopment in Alexandra Park legitimized by the concentrations of poverty thesis. It is my position that the existing residents of Alexandra Park will not reap the assumed, yet unwarranted, benefits commonly associated with socially mixing economically polarized groups of citizens. Redevelopment, instead, will lead to revalorized land that generates revenue in the form of property taxes, and a micro-segregated neighbourhood threatened by long-term gentrification processes related to increasing property values and consequent service transformations. Federal government shifts from redistributive and protective public policies to neo-liberal policies supporting growth and privatization that have occurred over the past three decades, have enabled the downloading of public housing provision from higher orders of government to fiscally austere municipalities, forcing housing providers such as Toronto Community Housing to rely upon private investment to cover operational costs. Consequently for the current residents, however, private investment in Alexandra Park will reduce their proportional composition to half of what it is today. Its current composition comprised predominantly of visible minorities, new immigrants, and low-income households in general, combined with a high exchange value of the neighbourhood, renders Alexandra Park highly vulnerable to municipally-managed gentrification. To borrow Jim Silver's (2011) perspective regarding redevelopment, the razing of public housing neighbourhoods is less a response to the problems within them and more a project to valorize land and implement the agenda of neo-liberal governments, which are prepared to rearrange the lives of public housing tenants in the interest of more affluent soon-to-be residents.

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## Introduction

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this paper is to examine the planning process involved in the privately financed redevelopment of public housing neighbourhoods to uncover the reasons why such spaces of disinvestment are now attracting private investment interests. As such, I will investigate the social and political ideologies supportive of mixed-income redevelopments of publicly owned land. Socially significant planning topics, such as affordable housing provision, displacement, and gentrification, will be situated and discussed amidst broader forces of neo-liberalism, privatization and today's pursuit of fiscally strained municipalities to compete for resources in the absence of financial intervention from upper levels of government.

Public housing redevelopment is an important topic of inquiry, because it can have devastating negative consequences for the low-income households that make up the large majority of their populations. Although not the only strategy for public housing redevelopment the accepted and widely implemented formula that I will discuss in this paper relies upon investment from private interests with the goal of profit maximization. Because of this goal, this type of investment can have varying displacing effects on affordable housing.

Safe, adequate, and affordable housing is both a basic human right (United Nations, 2011, n.p.) and a leading social determinant of health (Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, 2006, p. 3). High costs of living, low wages, and meager government housing subsidies have rendered low-income housing security vulnerable to any increase in housing costs. While there are plenty of housing units being constructed, there remains an obvious affordable housing shortage in Toronto, evident in its homeless population, which has been increasing steadily since 1993

(Shapcott, 2004, p. 195). The 10-year waiting list for subsidized housing (Housing Connections, 2012, n.p.) also reinforces the need to build more housing targeted at low-income households.

Issues of affordable housing security, displacement, and gentrification have particular relevance to public housing redevelopments. It has been evidenced that planned socially mixed communities often threaten veteran low-income residents with displacement (Lees, 2008, p. 2457) and replacement with more affluent inhabitants. Although legitimized in public policy as being in the best interests of existing residents, the direct and indirect displacement of low-income households is part of a larger process of gentrification, which attempts to make poor people invisible (Wacquant, 2008a, p. 199) either by displacing them or diluting their concentration. The concentrations of poverty existing in public housing neighbourhoods are a focal point for policy makers who suggest that the breaking apart of these concentrations will alleviate the problems associated with public housing neighbourhoods. Whether all residents are displaced from the community, spread throughout other (generally) low-income neighbourhoods, or diluted, as in the case of Alexandra Park's proposed redevelopment, the integrity of the community is threatened once it has been fragmented.

In these planning scenarios, public housing redevelopments represent a process of government-initiated gentrification. This paper adopts this viewpoint. It further argues that while the devolution of public housing provision to municipalities has set up a daunting situation for cities, where they cannot financially sustain this form of housing, this downloading process has actually benefited cities. By facilitating a situation where the supply of housing in the form of private ownership is necessary to cover social housing costs, municipalities are able to valorize land and further prepare it for more affluent residents.

The idea of a redeveloped Alexandra Park has been introduced by a progressive councillor along with an involved group of residents accustomed to transformations in the governance structure of their neighbourhood. However, without the high exchange value of its prime downtown location, private investment in this economically underutilized neighbourhood is unlikely. Aided by the territorial stigmatization of the neighbourhood and the racialization of its residents, place-making has enabled the common-sense approach to redevelopment in Alexandra Park legitimized by the concentrations of poverty thesis. It is my position that the existing residents of Alexandra Park will not reap the assumed, yet unwarranted, benefits commonly associated with socially mixing economically polarized groups of citizens. Redevelopment, in the end, will lead to revalorized land that generates revenue in the form of property taxes, and a micro-segregated neighbourhood threatened by long-term gentrification processes related to increasing property values and consequent service transformations.

In Chapter One, I will address the current state of the Alexandra Park neighbourhood. Demographic information on the employment experiences of residents, their income levels, their ethno-racial makeup, and higher-than-average immigrant proportions will be introduced along with the physical state of the built form and the overall design of the neighbourhood. This background information will offer a glimpse into the reasons why such a diverse neighbourhood is deemed in need of further diversification. In Chapter Two, I will examine social mix theory and its implications for both the new and veteran residents and those who stand to benefit financially from such redevelopments. I will also introduce select theories of gentrification and their connection to public housing redevelopments relying upon the private sale of public land. In Chapter Three, I will introduce Alexandra Park as a case study of redevelopment, whereby the main reasons for this particular redevelopment are examined and contextualized within the



broader literature regarding gentrification reviewed in Chapter Two. I will then use Chapter Four to directly address the main research question of why Alexandra Park is being redeveloped in the manner it is and offer alternatives to what has become a common-sense approach to public housing redevelopment. .

## Methods

To better understand the reasons why public housing neighbourhoods are being redeveloped in the manner, in which they are, I undertook a literature review, conducted interviews, and analyzed government and private documents. Within the literature review portion of this paper, I examined urban development processes and related policy implementation in areas of gentrification and public housing redevelopment and investigated how these government policies directly and indirectly affect vulnerable populations. As such, this paper focuses on the literature regarding the downloading of federal government's housing responsibility, the privatization of services within municipal regimes of governance supportive of neo-liberal policy restructuring, the consequences of place-making and gentrification, and the reliance upon mixed-income community planning for neighbourhood redevelopment.

This research paper is based on the assumption that government choice in intervention in housing provision has not subsided, but its targets have changed since the 1970s, producing rewards for some and negative consequences for others. The overarching position of the paper is that without help from upper levels of government, municipalities have to constrain spending, and as a result have to make revenue-generating choices that benefit some and hurt others. In particular, the main argument of this paper is that the downloading of services from upper levels

of government has benefited cities only in that they are then able to undertake austerity measures to justify inequitable approaches to public service provision.

I chose the proposed redevelopment of downtown Toronto's Alexandra Park public housing neighbourhood as a case study to be situated with the help of select literature on urban politics, gentrification, and public housing redevelopment. I undertook an extensive review of City of Toronto staff reports, recommendations to City Council, development applications, proposed zoning and Official Plan amendments, and submissions and reports from both Toronto Community Housing (TCH), and Urban Strategies, the private consulting firm that has been chosen to take the lead on the planning of this particular redevelopment.

I conducted 9 interviews that included residents, TCH employees, City of Toronto staff from the Affordable Housing Office and the Shelter, Support and Housing Division, Adam Vaughan (City Councillor for Ward 20), a City Planner, and an Executive Director of a nearby community centre. I also obtained information via email exchange from the Executive Director of the Cooperative Housing Federation of Toronto. The qualitative interviews held with residents were executed in an attempt to understand life in Alexandra Park, "from the subjects' points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world" (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). Similarly, interviews with professionals involved with redevelopment or directly affected by it were conducted in an open-ended manner to link Alexandra Park's redevelopment to the broader literature discussed above, as well as to better understand the limitations of their professional abilities related to job descriptions, performance expectations, and divisional mandates.

One problem that may have occurred in my interviewing of tenants is the likelihood that they may have feared repercussions associated with speaking negatively about their housing provider, or that a break in confidentiality may have legal, social, or financial consequences

(Corbin, 2003, p.336). Because of time constraints to complete the empirical portion of the study, it was simply not possible to interview more participants. If more residents had been interviewed, differing perspectives could have arisen, possibly leading to different conclusions. Obtaining reliable information from professionals such as planners and housing providers may have also presented similar limitations as both are bound by mandates, plans, and policies. They may have felt uneasy about speaking their minds if they felt that their opinions were in contradiction to the greater objectives and directives of their superiors. To ease any potential apprehension regarding confidentiality, I assured interviewees that they had the choice to remain anonymous. To ensure the information was reliable and accurate, data sources were triangulated with government documents. At times there were contradictions and discrepancies found, but for the most part, the information gained from interviews coincided with information obtained from document analysis.

I explained my own position as a researcher resulting from 12 years of professional experience working with homeless men in downtown Toronto in an effort to provide context to my interest in housing affordability issues, share my perspective on the symbiotic relationship between housing and homelessness, and highlight any perceived bias. I shared the fact that I am and will continue to be a City of Toronto employee after completing my academic requirements to avoid any conflict of interest issues associated with the research and my employment with the City of Toronto.

I provided interviewees with background information on the nature of the research regarding public housing redevelopment, the academic purpose of the research, and a brief overview of the Master of Environmental Studies (Planning) program at York University. I also explained to the interviewees that I had received ethics training and that I understood the situated

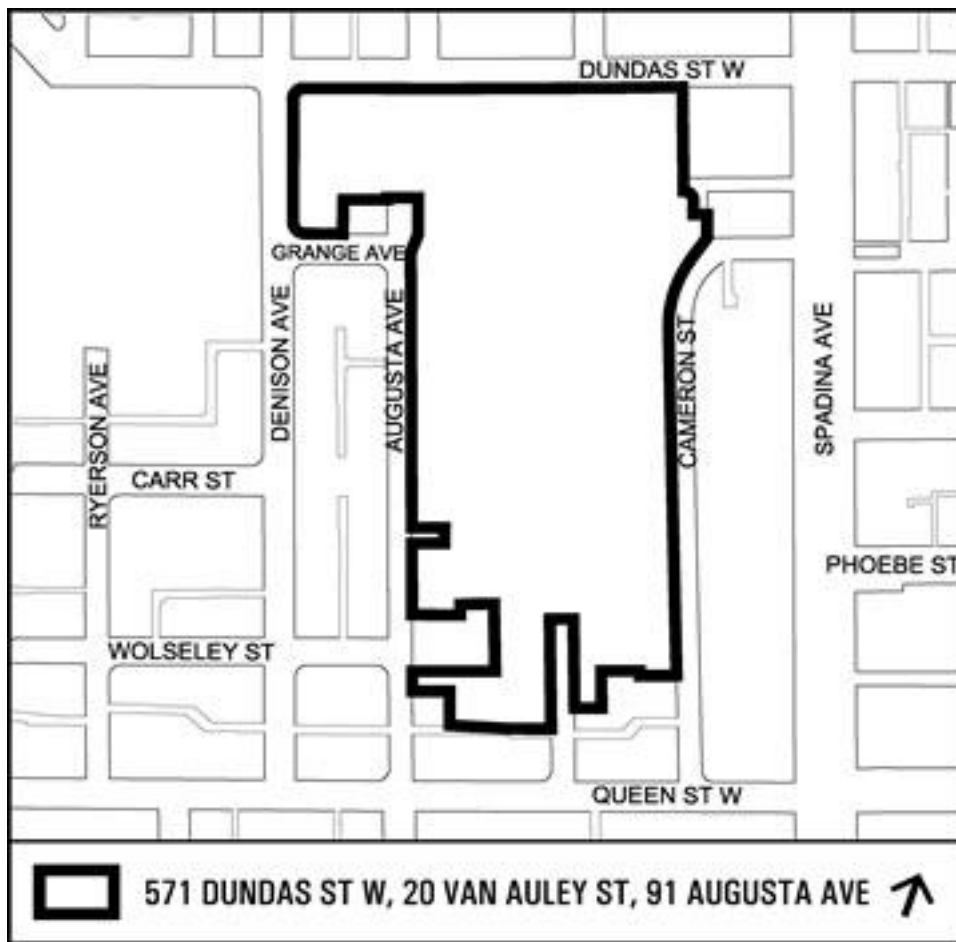
and relational character of social science research. I then assured them that they were in complete control of the questioning in the sense that they could exercise their rights to decide to not answer all or some of the prepared questions, or choose to stop the interview at any time. I also informed interviewees that their identities would be kept confidential, at their request, and that all information would be kept secure for a period of at least two years, at which time it would be destroyed. I then presented interviewees with a letter describing the nature and purpose of the research study to sign, signifying their informed consent.

Overall, the information and knowledge gained from these interviews has been used to connect to the broader literature in an attempt to provide answers to the research questions of why this particular parcel of public land is attracting private interest, what has led to its revalorization, who is pushing for the redevelopment, whose interests are being respected and how inclusive the planning process, why it is being redeveloped now, and why it is being redeveloped in this manner. Understanding that public housing redevelopments are not in the best interests of the residents as they tend to lead to either their immediate displacement, gradual displacement, or fragmentation, the answers to the research questions above will hopefully lead to a clearer picture of the reasons for redevelopment in Alexandra Park.

## Chapter One The Neighbourhood

### A Brief History of Alexandra Park and Its Current Situation

Alexandra Park is a public housing neighbourhood in downtown Toronto physically bounded by Dundas Street West to the north, Queen Street West to the south, Denison Avenue to the west and Spadina Avenue on the east. Its current land-use designation in Toronto's Official Plan is Residential. A majority of the buildings within this neighbourhood were built in



(City of Toronto, 2012a, n.p.)

1968, at a time when governments began to regard public housing as being too expensive to construct and maintain, and feared it could potentially develop into ghettos with higher-than-

average crime rates, and social problems related to concentrations of poverty and isolation from the greater community (Souza & Quarter, 2005, p. 424).

In 2003, approximately one half of Alexandra Park residents joined the newly created Atkinson Housing Cooperative, named after Sonny Atkinson, who, as a resident, community advocate, and former president of the Alexandra Park Residents Association, was instrumental in the social development of the neighbourhood (Atkinson Housing Cooperative 2011, n.p.). This conversion from public housing to non-profit cooperative housing was the first of its kind in Canada (Souza & Quarter, 2005, p. 423), creating a hybrid governance and operation structure within the neighbourhood. Initiated by Sonny Atkinson, the conversion project was promoted in order to protect tenants' rights and enhance their control over decision-making processes (Ibid, p. 425). Like public housing, social housing cooperative units cannot be sold on the private market and thus provide secure tenure for residents in good quality housing at a fair price (Ibid, p. 424).

Today, TCH operates the Alexandra Park Apartments at 20 Vanauley Street (Family Housing Division), 91 Augusta Avenue (Senior's Housing Division) and 73-75 Augusta Square. The Atkinson Housing Cooperative, which has both an operating agreement (expiring in 2013) and a long-term lease (expiring in 2023) with TCH, manages the rest of the buildings covering the majority of the land mostly in low-density, low-rise townhouse form (TCH, 2011a, p. 1) and one apartment building at 170 Vanauley Walk. This current dual operating nature of the lands is a result of a decision to allow residents either to join the housing cooperative or to remain as public housing tenants at the time of its conversion. There are approximately 2500 residents currently living in 806 rent-geared-to-income rental units.

The central downtown location of Alexandra Park is already built up and well serviced physically, economically, and socially due to its close proximity to the established

neighbourhoods of Queen Street West, Chinatown, and Kensington Market. Residents identified Alexandra Park's convenient downtown location as one of the many positive attributes associated with living in this neighbourhood (Sidhu, 2008, p. 14). The immediate and surrounding areas include the Alexandra Park Community Centre, the St. Felix Community Centre, Scadding Court Community Centre (servicing between 500 and 600 users a day), and St. Stephen's Community House (servicing 29,000 people a year). There are also 15 schools within the Alexandra Park Secondary Study Area (including Ryerson Community School located within the Alexandra Park neighbourhood), approximately 9 childcare facilities, and both the Sanderson Library and the Lilian H. Smith Branch of the Toronto Public Library (Kamin, 2004, p. 25).

The Alexandra Park Community Centre has a mission to “promote and assist the development and well being of children, youth and families within the community”, and a mandate “to be community-oriented with a range of social, recreational and cultural services geared to the overall needs of the community” (Alexandra Park Community Centre, n.d., n.p.). The St. Felix Community Centre, located north of Alexandra Park on Augusta Avenue, offers services focused on “the emotional, social, cultural, economic and spiritual needs of individuals” in the neighbourhood (St.Felix Community Centre, 2007, n.p.). The Scadding Court Community Centre, located on the south-east corner of Dundas Street West and Bathurst Street, gears its services towards equitable access and anti-racism promotion, food access and security, newcomer integration and settlement provision, and programs for seniors and people with disabilities (Scadding Court Community Centre, 2012, n.p.). The St. Stephen's Community House, also located on Augusta Avenue, offers childcare services, a corner drop-in, employment, newcomer and language training, and services for both seniors and youth alike (St. Stephen's Community House, 2003, n.p.).

As we will see in the section regarding demographics, the services offered by these community centres are oriented towards the existing population of Alexandra Park and the immediate surrounding area. They are clearly addressing the needs of newcomers and immigrants, families with children, youth and seniors, and low-income families in general. Judging by the heavy use of these centres noted above, the services offered are essential to the residents of the Alexandra Park neighbourhood. This is imperative to understand considering that Alexandra Park's proposed redevelopment will forever change its demographic makeup. One has to, therefore, remain skeptical of potential service transformation as these existing services adapt to new residents with potentially different needs. The threat of changing, or at least adapting, the services relied upon by the existing residents to make room for new residents are very real. Even more threatening is the possibility that residents may have to relocate to other neighbourhoods to follow services if the ones located nearby no longer meet their needs.

### Social Life in Alexandra Park

Residents of the Alexandra Park community are predominantly satisfied with their current neighbourhood, like its downtown location, and enjoy the proximity to vital services, such as transportation, health, and recreation, along with other downtown amenities (Sidhu, 2008, p. 9). They have a tight connection to their place of residence and their neighbours, and describe a strong sense of community. As such, many residents participate in activities to make their community a better place to live and many others expressed a desire to participate more (Ibid, p. 4), envisioning living in the neighbourhood for a long time (Ibid, p. 16). The average length of residency for Alexandra Park residents is 11.1 years; however, some have reported



living in the area for more than 40 years (Ibid, p. 12). Two people I interviewed lived in the neighbourhood when it was built. One of them still lives there.

Negative attributes of life in Alexandra Park accompany the positive aspects of the community mentioned above. The problems noted by residents are not unlike those associated with other areas of concentrated poverty that are typically cited as a means to justify intervention as a way to fix supposed problems within public housing projects. These problems were voiced during community meetings regarding redevelopment, where those in attendance expressed concerns regarding the safety, maintenance, and appearance of the existing neighbourhood. They, therefore, advocate for beautification measures, a general cleanup of the neighbourhood, repairs, physical improvements to the Community Centre, and adding more programs for children and youth, as well as the addition of a significant supermarket (Sidhu, 2008, p. 9). It should also be noted that the youth feel as though they are cast in a negative way from both the older residents of Alexandra Park as well as people from outside the neighbourhood (Ibid, pp. 9, 10).

These are the same negative aspects that have been highlighted by TCH and the City of Toronto, leading me to question if the residents are only repeating what policy-makers, the media, the public, and academic discourse on life in public housing neighbourhoods have already expressed. Furthermore, I am not convinced that a full redevelopment is necessary to address these few negative attributes of Alexandra Park, suggesting that there is more to this redevelopment than the need for a few physical repairs.

## Demographics

A review of the current demographic make-up of residents of Alexandra Park will help to better understand its diverse population and to contextualize their political, social, and economic positioning as a group. I will revisit and discuss many of these variables within this paper to link both the present situation in Alexandra Park and its proposed redevelopment to the broader literature regarding politics and planning. I will, therefore, present statistics from a 2008 document prepared for The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (now Social Planning Toronto), which collected information gauging resident satisfaction with life in Alexandra Park. I will use this secondary information to present a picture of the diverse group of people that make up the Alexandra Park community. I will also use this information to highlight both the negative and positive attributes of Alexandra Park and triangulate it with information obtained from official documents and the people whom I interviewed.

There are approximately 470 households, with an average of 3.3 persons per family living in the neighbourhood. Youth between the ages of 5 years old and 19 years old, and seniors aged 55 years old and older represent the two largest proportions of residents at 30% and 27% respectively. Residents between the ages of 35 years old and 54 years old make up 20% of the population, while those between the ages of 20 years old and 34 years old make up 18% of the population. Only 5% of the population is under 4 years of age. In total, the population in Alexandra Park is quite young, with an average age of 36.9 years (Sidhu, 2008, p. 9).

Lone parent households are quite common in the neighbourhood at 59% of the population. With 45% of the households spending 30% or more of their income on shelter (Sidhu, 2008, p.6), the reality is that nearly half of Alexandra Park's population lives in unaffordable housing situations. Affordable housing, a topic that I discuss further in Chapter

Two, is commonly defined as shelter that costs families 30% or less of their gross household income. Also related to the topic of housing affordability are income levels and employment participation rates. The average Alexandra Park household income is a mere \$26,771 with a median household income of only \$19,265, and of the residents 15 years of age and older, 59% are not in the labour force, 36% are employed and 4% are unemployed (Ibid). Low labour-market participation and income levels can likely be attributed to the large proportion of seniors and children living in the neighbourhood combined with racial discrimination in the workforce. As discussed below, Alexandra Park houses a large majority of visible minorities. According to Block (2010), “Racialized Ontarians are far more likely to live in poverty, to face barriers to Ontario’s workplaces, and even when they get a job, they are more likely to earn less than the rest of Ontarians” (p. 3).

Considering the differentiation of the labour force, residents of Alexandra Park are employed mostly in the sales/services, business/finance, and administrative/clerical sectors of the economy, much like residents of Toronto as a whole, with the most prominent occupations falling in the sales/services field (Kamin, 2004, p. 17). A higher-than-average percentage of residents are employed in processing and manufacturing jobs at 12% compared to 7% in Toronto (Ibid).

Of Alexandra Park’s population aged 25-64, 14% have received a university degree, 10% have received a college diploma, 7% have received an apprenticeship certificate, 36% have completed high school, and 34% are without a degree, diploma, or certificate (Sidhu, 2008, p. 6). Compared to Toronto as a whole, where 37% of the population in the same age bracket holds a university degree, 16% a college diploma, 6% an apprenticeship certificate, 21% a high school

diploma, and 21% without any recognized education (Statistics Canada, 2006, n.p.), it is clear why Alexandra Park is currently a neighbourhood of concentrated poverty.

A large immigrant population inhabits Alexandra Park, as is the case in many public housing neighbourhoods in Canada. Alexandra Park's immigrant population represents 64% of its total population (Sidhu, 2008, p. 6). Of the population over 15 years of age, 72% are first-generation immigrants and 55% of these residents have lived at the same address for at least five years (Kamin, 2004, p. 16). This makes Alexandra Park the first resident destination for many newcomers to Canada, who may be attracted to social housing options, and proximity to public services and amenities (Ibid). The population is made up of 42% Chinese, 30% Black, 10% South Asian, 9% Southeast Asian, and 5% West Asian residents. In Alexandra Park, 90% of the population identifies with visible minority categories with 54% of its residents speaking languages other than English or French at home (Sidhu, 2008, p. 6).

Judging by the statistics compiled above, one can conclude that Alexandra Park is currently a very culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse neighbourhood. Due to racial discrimination in hiring practices and stigmatization, its residents suffer from high levels of unemployment, with over half of the households not in the labour force. The income levels of the residents are quite low considering the fact that Toronto is one of the most expensive cities in Canada. Despite economic hardship, however, residents reported being satisfied with living in the area, hope to continue to live in the area, enjoy participating in the development of the community, and expressed a strong connection with their neighbours. In fact, 49.5% of residents talk to their neighbours on a daily basis (Sidhu, 2008, p. 19). One resident reaffirmed the neighbourly atmosphere inherent in Alexandra Park when he explained in an interview that it would often take him much longer to walk home, because he would stop to converse with fellow

neighbours (personal communication, May 12, 2012). I will revisit these topics of neighbourhood diversity and community cohesiveness throughout the paper.

#### Current Governance in Alexandra Park

TCH was created on January 1, 2002 by the City of Toronto by merging the former Toronto Housing Company and the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Corporation. Its mission is to “provide affordable housing, connect tenants to services and opportunities, and work together to build healthy communities” (TCH, 2012a, n.p.). A 13-member Board of Directors appointed by the City of Toronto governs TCH. This board consists of three city councillors, the mayor or his/her delegate and nine citizens (two of which are TCH tenants). TCH owns, maintains, and operates 2215 buildings of various forms including high-, mid-, and low-rise apartments, townhouses, and single homes. It is the largest social housing provider in Canada, housing 164,000 low-to- moderate-income tenants in 58,000 units (TCH, 2012b, n.p.).

TCH owns the land in which Alexandra Park is situated, and the City of Toronto is its major stakeholder. The long-term lease and operating agreement between TCH and the Atkinson Housing Cooperative allows for collaboration on issues such as capital repairs (personal communication, January 31, 2012). The Atkinson Housing Cooperative is part of the Cooperative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT), which represents more than 45,000 people in more than 160 non-profit housing cooperatives in Toronto and York (CHFT, n.d., n.p.). As noted above, residents not interested in becoming cooperative members at the time of conversion remained public housing tenants governed by the Alexandra Park Residents Association (personal communication, January 31, 2012). Tom Clement, who is the Executive Director of the Cooperative Housing Federation of Toronto, explained to me in an email exchange that those

who did not join the cooperative at the time of conversion are welcome to attend co-op meetings and speak. However, voting remains reserved for members only, and any new residents must agree to become cooperative members before being accepted into the Alexandra Park community (personal communication, May 24, 2012).

The Atkinson Housing Cooperative's households, like other public housing projects, and unlike other cooperative housing, are all subsidized through rent-gear-to income subsidies due to the low incomes of the residents (Souza & Quarter, 2005, p. 426). Typically, it is the practice of housing cooperative members to decide upon the maximum rent for units at market price. TCH, however, establishes the maximum rent for Atkinson's units (Ibid, p. 432). Unlike other public housing projects, the Atkinson Housing Cooperative is not part of an overarching budget for all TCH properties. It has its own operating budget, and the revenue generated comes from both the housing charges (rent) and government subsidies (Ibid, p. 428). Unlike other housing cooperatives, Atkinson does not have a capital reserve fund; therefore, all capital improvements continue to fall under the jurisdiction of the government's housing agency (Ibid, p. 429), which is TCH. Further differentiating the Atkinson Housing Cooperative from other housing cooperatives is its formula for tenant selection. Unlike typical housing cooperatives whose boards are in charge of the tenant selection process, Atkinson's members are selected from the same centralized database (managed by Housing Connections) that is used for all public housing placements in which all members must be eligible to receive a housing subsidy (Ibid, p. 431). Once a cooperative member displays the means to pay market prices for the units for an extended period of time, he/she must leave (Ibid, p. 432), keeping units available to those who cannot meet private-market rents. While maintaining affordable units on site, this formula does not allow for

a mixed-income neighbourhood typical of housing cooperative models. This contentious topic of mixing is addressed in the literature review in Chapter Two.

The Atkinson Housing Cooperative will remain intact throughout the proposed redevelopment to represent a strong voice for a resident-led planning process, a progressive move distinguishing this project from prior TCH redevelopments, such as Regent Park. The fact that Alexandra Park has undergone transformations by establishing a cooperative housing model, and the fact that all new residents must become cooperative members indicates that Alexandra Park has taken steps to shed the stigma attached to public housing for quite some time. It further leads me to question whether or not the zero displacement principle would have been applied had Alexandra Park been a typical public housing neighbourhood with less of a collective voice.

The desire of the residents to remain in the community and the respect of decision-makers to uphold the zero displacement principle is unequivocal. By respecting the residents' desire to stay, the completion of this redevelopment will be stretched out over a 15-20-year period of building, demolition, and renovation. Had TCH used past redevelopment processes and employed a quicker redevelopment process, it would be impossible to not displace people, thus sacrificing the solidarity and cohesiveness of the housing cooperative (personal communication, January 31, 2012). As we will see in the following chapters, however, this principle (albeit progressive compared to other TCH redevelopments) also benefits interests other than those of the Alexandra Park residents.

## Chapter Two

### Contextualizing Redevelopment

To fully determine the forces shaping the redevelopment of public housing in general and Alexandra Park's redevelopment in particular, land transformation processes must be explored. This chapter thus introduces the topic of place-making, and theories of gentrification and their combined relationship to the redevelopment of public housing neighbourhoods promoting mixed-income, mixed-tenure models. I will examine the planning processes underlying redevelopment, the recomposition of the resident population and the re-design of the neighbourhood, all undertaken in the name of diversity and mixity. I contextualize redevelopment by shedding light on broader housing trends, such as the condominium boom and the shrinking supply of affordable rental and social housing. This context will help us to understand why stigmatized housing projects like Alexandra Park have become attractive real estate and how the process of gentrifying undervalued downtown space by way of redevelopment has become integral to municipal agendas.

#### Place-Making, Racialization, and "Territorial Stigmatization"

Places are more than a collection of physical structures. Social relations, memories, experiences, interactions, and group collectivity also make up what one considers place. Those on the outside of a neighbourhood can have differing and often opposing views of what a particular neighbourhood may represent or what life is like for those who live there, compared to the first-hand experience of the residents. Images of public housing neighbourhoods portrayed in magazines, newspapers, movies, and television shows often paint a very negative picture of the residents, their homes, and their lifestyles, concentrating heavily on the problems, and rarely from the perspective of the residents themselves. Often, middle-class lenses are used to judge the



lifestyle and living conditions of those living in low-income neighbourhoods (Silver, 2011, p. 39), such as public housing projects. This forces an identity on such neighbourhoods and perpetuates false perceptions of what they represent without alternative perceptions ever being given the same consideration and weight, and without the proper forum to hear from those who actually live in these neighbourhoods.

The public's image of these neighbourhoods focuses on the concentration of poverty existing in these neighbourhoods rather than the causes of such poverty, which are "a combination of segregation, stigmatization and political abandonment" (Wacquant, 2008b p. 225). In this sense, public housing neighbourhoods become racialized as outsiders focus on stereotypes regarding their predominantly non-European composition, thereby homogenizing the diversity that actually exists. As we will see, the stigma of racialized concentrated poverty is used heavily to justify redevelopment. According to Kipfer and Petrunia (2009), "Racialization and racism are intrinsic to the formation, crisis, and delegitimation of public housing" (p. 114).

Studies suggest that public housing neighbourhoods are racialized as being non-white and their residents are stigmatized accordingly as the "undeserving poor" as opposed to the "deserving poor" whom are employed in low-wage employment. Alexandra Park's residents, like other public housing residents, are fully aware of this stigmatization or even participate in perpetuating it. In fact, one participant whom I interviewed continually made reference to the fact that he lived in the Atkinson Housing Cooperative, and not the Alexandra Park Apartments, which have remained public housing units (personal communication, May 12, 2012). This stigma was perpetuated by residents at community meetings discussing potential redevelopment options in hopes that redevelopment would eliminate the stigma as an unsafe, ugly, poorly designed neighbourhood of government housing. It must also be kept in mind that the conversion from

public housing to cooperative housing in Alexandra Park took place not only to exercise better resident control over decision-making processes, but also to shake the stigma attached to public housing.

Residents are often seen mistakenly as the cause of the problems associated with public housing (Silver, 2011, pp. 29-30) and concentrations of poverty in general. Indeed, the association of social problems with place lies at the heart of mixed-income redevelopment theory and its recipe: break up housing estates by attracting higher-income outsiders. However, the racialized problems often associated with life in public housing neighbourhoods would more accurately be seen as symptoms of poverty and racial discrimination. These symptoms include large numbers of people living under the poverty line, low levels of formal education, high minority numbers, female-headed households, violence, and illegal activity. These symptoms of poverty are definitely present in Alexandra Park, but they are outweighed by the positive attributes of and satisfaction with life in public housing expressed by the residents themselves, such as its ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, its tight-knit community, and the abundance of services targeted at low-income households.

It is my position that the concentration of poverty existing in Alexandra Park and other low-income neighbourhoods has more to do with external forces that have relegated certain populations to these neighbourhoods, leading to their racialization and stigmatization. These overarching forces include the continual loss of manufacturing jobs as the economy becomes more automated, racial discrimination in hiring practices, and the fact that immigrants have witnessed declining incomes relative to native-born Canadians. The loss of unskilled labour associated with de-industrialization has disproportionately affected poor people by excluding them from the labour market (Wacquant, 2008b, p. 98). Wacquant states succinctly:

With deindustrialization and the shift to deregulated service employment, the spread of mass unemployment and work instability, and the universalization of schooling as means of access to even unskilled jobs, the unified and compact working class that occupied the front stage of history until the 1970s has shrivelled, splintered and dispersed. (2008a, p. 199)

Economic restructuring facilitating and depending upon flexible, part-time work without employment benefits has led to a “desocialization of wage labour” that is no longer homogeneous and has increasingly become fragmented (Wacquant, 2008b, pp. 234-235). The greatest relative poverty levels are found in advanced post-industrial developed countries, where policies supporting free-trade, financial deregulation, and globalization has broken apart union entrenchment, lowered wages, reduced benefits, limited labour regulation, and forced the labour mobility of its workforce (Lightbody, 2006, p. 524; Hall, 2010, p. 64). The racialization of poverty has given rise to new forms of social exclusion most apparent in cities with high immigration rates and ethnic diversity (Walks, 2010, p. 174). There, “growing social polarization in Canadian society, which has been mirrored in the spatial polarization of Canadian cities is most evident at the scale of the neighbourhood” (Ibid, p. 177).

Economic restructuring, racialized social polarization, and territorial reorganization become linked to symbolic processes by which particular neighbourhoods are stigmatized by outside institutions. For Wacquant (2008b), “territorial stigmatization” refers to:

*The powerful stigma attached to residence in the bounded and segregated spaces, the ‘neighbourhoods of exile’ to which the populations marginalized or condemned to redundancy by the post-Fordist reorganization of the economy and the post-Keynesian reconstruction of the welfare state are increasingly consigned.*  
(p. 169)

Although clearly out of the control of residents, yet dominated by outside portrayals and perceptions of life in public housing, outsiders perceive these places as “the lawless zones, the

problem estates, the no go areas or the wild districts of the city, territories of deprivation and dereliction to be feared, fled from and shunned” (Wacquant, 2008 b, p. 1) and hold the residents solely responsible for their situation (Silver, 2011, p. 16) perpetuated on the unfair and false assumption that everyone starts from the same position in life.

In a *Globe and Mail* newspaper article, Kelly Grant discusses the “dramatic plan that will revitalize the decrepit environs of Alexandra Park” (April 24, 2010). Grant also discusses the “low-level gang war between Alex and Regent parks”, and the crack dealing and shootings that occurred in Alexandra Park in the 1980s, and how “proponents of redevelopment” cite a necessary “overhaul” to complete the neighbourhood’s “turnaround” (Ibid). This current example of the subjective and distorted stigma that has attached itself to public housing neighbourhoods has become entrenched and thus widely accepted by many, and in turn, has been utilized by policy-makers to implement planning schemes of urban renewal (Silver, 2011, p. 38), and, more recently, redevelopment and revitalization projects. In the American context, Galster and Zolbal articulate the legitimization of public housing demolition by stating:

The idea that the spatial concentration of poverty is a major cause of social problems such as joblessness, poverty, and crime has provided a rationale for far-reaching changes in federal public housing policy, which focuses on the need to deconcentrate poverty via the demolition of public housing. (as cited in Crump, 2002, p. 582)

The stigma attached to public housing life presents the perfect case for seemingly necessary municipal intervention. The media perpetuates the stigma by only running stories on gun violence occurring in low-income areas of the city while overlooking any other stories that may not be deemed newsworthy. Consider how many gun-related stories the media has featured regarding the Jane and Finch neighbourhood<sup>1</sup> of Toronto. There must be other stories to choose from, or other angles to take on crime-related stories. Planners often look at the problems of

“Garden City” style planning typical of public housing projects constructed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to highlight their “uninspiring” and economically underutilized land. They also indicate that these designs do not match well with the surrounding fine-grained street pattern, and, therefore, lack necessary through streets. Police focus on the dark corners that allow for criminal behaviour and their inability to properly provide surveillance due to public housing projects’ insular design, confusing layout, and separation from city blocks. Politicians concentrate on the need to break up the concentrations of poverty (that have had to rely on this form of housing) to fix up neighbourhood “blemishes” in their wards to improve their chances of being re-elected without considering the reasons why public housing is increasingly becoming the only option for affordable housing. Neighbourhood groups, residents’ associations, and business improvement associations are generally not in favour of having public housing in their vicinity for the same reasons of racialization and stigmatization. At best, these groups understand the need for social housing, but express NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) attitudes if it is proposed too close to home.

By focusing solely on the negative aspects of public housing neighbourhoods, outside decision-makers are able to legitimize their demolition and redevelopment, further perpetuating the racialization of the residents (who are predominantly non-white), and the stigmatization of the neighbourhoods (which are predominantly low-income). Interestingly, redevelopment schemes remain justified as being in the best interests of the poor residents (Lynch and Ley, 2009, p. 327), but rarely materialize as such. It is this same type of top-down reasoning that facilitated “slum clearance” in the urban renewal period of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In “what planners saw as a successful way of achieving social control through physical design and moral policing” (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009, p. 116), neighbourhoods were severed and low-income

people were segregated in the same public housing projects that are today slated for redevelopment. When it comes to community planning, either the attitudes towards the poor have not changed since the 1950s or history is simply repeating itself.

Place-making (via racialization and stigmatization), therefore, can exaggerate the unsavoury attributes of a neighbourhood, while ignoring both the more favourable conditions as well as the perspectives of its inhabitants. Politicians, policy-makers, and certain academics have agreed that the problems of the inner city are defined by the individual pathologies of the residents and that their concentration in particular neighbourhoods has intensified matters (Bickford and Massey, 1991, et al. cited in Crump, 2002, p. 582). Infused with territorial stigmata, place-making represents a top-down approach to localized problems that ignores the larger structural and systemic problems that have combined to concentrate and relegate impoverished people into segregated neighbourhoods. Once the stigma of such neighbourhoods becomes shared by policy-makers, planners, politicians, and the public, ideas about redeveloping and fixing the widely agreed upon problems become common sense and, as such, are accepted as being necessary and justified to be in the best interests of residents. Place-making, therefore, enables the gentrification and transformation of space, and social control of those inhabiting that space through public tools, such as historic preservation, selling off of public lands to private investors, and zoning re-designations such that urban space grows and becomes cleansed through design and surveillance (Kipfer & Keil, 2002, pp. 243-244).

Place-making can also be utilized to attach a positive sense of place to conglomerations of inanimate objects to portray a sense of normalcy. Regarding redevelopment, the ideals of normalcy, mixity and diversity that are used for its legitimization are indeed place-making exercises to promote “normal” neighbourhoods. To justify the redevelopment of public housing

neighbourhoods, however, place-making must first present a blighted situation to make change appear necessary before a new sense of place is promoted through and after redevelopment. This first step often includes the racialization and homogenization of the residency. Place-making can thus provide the necessary justifications for public housing redevelopment. According to Bennett and Reed, images of the poor perceived and portrayed by outside observers, perpetuated by the “public’s predilection to view the poor as undeserving and ‘dependent’, provided legitimacy for a wide range of policies that explicitly aim to deconcentrate poverty by reorganizing the spatial structure of the city” (as cited in Crump, 2002, p. 584).

## Gentrification

For Neil Smith (1979), gentrification is part of a large economic process that is precipitated by a migration of capital (not people) to the inner city (pp. 546, 547). In this sense, gentrification is explained in terms of the supply of capital for investment in the built environment (“real estate finance”). Attracting affluent households to typically low-income neighbourhoods is important, but gentrifiers cannot move back to the city without accessing real estate capital supplied by banks and other such institutions. Gentrification thus requires a broader process of investment in the built environment (Ibid, p. 546). This is particularly important in the case of what Hackworth and Smith (2001) have called “municipally-managed gentrification” where local government intervention in gentrification processes has increased over the last 3 decades at a time when governments are scaling back from regulation duties (p. 465).

Hackworth and Smith (2001) describe the gentrification process in the United States as having three waves dating back to the 1950s (p. 466). The first wave of gentrification taking place before the 1970s, was funded publicly as governments “sought to counteract the private-

market economic decline of the central city neighbourhoods” (Ibid) as those with the financial means fled to the suburbs. This government-led gentrification was justified as offsetting urban decline, and deemed necessary because without it, investment in the inner city was unlikely due to economic risks associated with investing in a decaying core (Ibid).

During the second wave of gentrification in the late 1970s, local governments focused on “prodding the private-market” rather than directly intervening, where investment in up-and-coming trendy neighbourhoods, such as SoHo, Tribeca, and the Lower East Side, was associated with “a wider range of economic and cultural processes at the global and national scales” (Ibid, pp. 466-468). Queen Street West is a Toronto example of a trendy neighbourhood that has been branded as an arts corridor.

The recession of the early-1990s slowed gentrification in most neighbourhoods, but then provided the ideal situation for re-investment (Ibid, p. 468) leading to the third wave. Although they cite that gentrification naturally began to expand its reach into more remote areas away from the central business district, that globalisation has set the stage for larger developers becoming involved in the gentrification process, and the fact that the continual displacement of the working class has resulted in less resistance to gentrification, Hackworth and Smith (2001) finger municipalities as being a prominent force of gentrification (Ibid).

The resurgence of municipal intervention in the gentrification process (after the second wave) results from the fact that most of the easily upgraded neighbourhoods close to the central business districts have already experienced re-investment (Ibid, p. 469). According to Hackworth and Smith (2001), “By necessity, gentrifiers and outside investors have begun to roam into economically risky neighbourhoods - e.g. mixed-use neighbourhoods, remote locations, protected parcels like public housing - which are difficult for individual gentrifiers to make



profitable without state assistance” (Ibid). It is these larger-scaled cases of gentrification that are of importance to public housing in general and Alexandra Park in particular.

Public housing redevelopment has become an important feature in Euro-American cities. In Canada, there has been the redevelopment of Little Mountain Housing in Vancouver, and Lord Selkirk Park in Winnipeg, and talks of redeveloping Uniacke Square (housing that was provided for residents displaced from the bulldozed Africville community) in Halifax. In Toronto alone, there are the redevelopments of Don Mount Court, Lawrence Heights, Regent Park, and most recently, Alexandra Park. Hackworth and Smith (2001) argue that some public housing redevelopment can be called a form of “municipally-managed gentrification”. Municipally-managed gentrification involves heavy local government intervention in the place-making, upgrading, and gentrification of a neighbourhood by relaxing of zoning by-laws, Official Plan amendments, height and density restrictions, streamlining of the development application process, and waiving of development fees associated with development if the number of affordable housing units is being maintained. Public housing redevelopments are not always a ploy to initiate gentrification and they are rarely marketed as such. It is more common to hear the word redevelopment or revitalization – not gentrification. In fact, as I discuss below, the word gentrification has been intentionally hidden in urban policy discourse in an attempt to hide its ugly effects. In examples of municipally-managed gentrification, public housing redevelopment hinges on land valorization and includes an important component of private real-estate investment. It threatens to have a displacing effect on residents. Public housing authorities who embrace this formula often want to dilute the concentration of subsidized rental units, for example by introducing market or ownership housing (such as condominiums) to the neighbourhood. In numerous cases, this formula is supported on the assumption that it will create

mixed neighbourhoods that are healthy and vibrant, regardless of their current vitality and the diverse cultural backgrounds of their residents.

The fear, however, is that these planned mixed-use, mixed-income, mixed-tenure compact neighbourhoods will replace one group of tenants (low-income renters) with another group (affluent, middle-class homeowners), or at the very least (as in the case of Alexandra Park), dilute their concentration and, as such, their collectiveness as a group sharing similar life experiences. This process of social upgrading through commodification sets up a political situation whereby the exchange value of land is privileged over its use value, and the interests of those who can afford market housing prevail over those who now live in social housing (Sidney, 2009, p. 175). This is particularly the case when the number of subsidized rental unit numbers shrinks or remains unchanged but becomes outnumbered by owner-occupied units from the new majority.

## Mixing

Integrating owner-occupied housing forms in almost exclusively low-income rental neighbourhoods is evident in the approved and proposed redevelopment of public housing projects in Toronto, where market-priced owner-occupied condominiums are to be physically placed into the lower density public housing communities. Toronto's Official Plan is fully supportive of these projects, using terms like "revitalization", "diversity", and their ability to create "healthy neighbourhoods" to justify redevelopment and to attract new business to the city (City of Toronto, 2009 (pp. 2-20 – 2-30)). However, some urban scholars have identified major shortcomings and negative consequences associated with urban research that promotes social

mixing and its justifications of emancipating the inner city and its low-income residents from their perceived blighted situation.

These same scholars have examined the language used in policy implementation and the broader literature supporting mixed-income redevelopments and found interesting changes in the choice of words used to make policies supporting neighbourhood transformation appear less aggressive and to hide some of the negative consequences often resulting from gentrification. Tom Slater (2006) has examined the literature on social mixing and argues that the displacing effects of gentrification have become hidden within rhetoric of inclusiveness (p. 243). Wacquant (2008a) extends the argument a little farther to conclude that the promotion of social mixing represents the close relationship between city rulers and urban policy, whereby both are part of a broad exercise of making poor people invisible from valorized space (p. 199). For both of these urban scholars, the literature on gentrification has gone from examining its displacing effects to a celebration of middle-class preference of location and the assumed benefits of their presence (Slater, 2006, p. 740).

The ugly, displacing effects of gentrification have been softened in the urban literature and in public discourse with terms such as urban renaissance, urban renewal, and urban revitalization (Lees, 2008, p. 2452). Using such terms in place of “gentrification” makes the displacing process more palatable and attaches to it a positive slant. Even the word “gentrification” itself has shed its negative connotation. It is often heard in conversations shared amongst politicians, real-estate agents, planners, and the general public about how much a neighbourhood is changing for the better.

Municipalities, through adopted official government policy, sidestep the negative consequences associated with the gentrification process by glorifying the social mixing of

supposedly differing groups of people with promises of increasing social capital and social cohesion (Lees, 2008, p. 2450) and the idea that the integration of middle-class people, along with their values, will somehow ameliorate the lives of the poor. This, the revanchist case for gentrification, however, is based largely upon false assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that poor households are unhappy with their community. Secondly, it assumes that poor people desire the presence of affluent neighbours. Thirdly, it assumes that poor people will embrace middle-class values and reap rewards from the presence of their new, more affluent neighbours (by means of the famous “trickle-down effect”). Lastly, and of particular importance to Alexandra Park’s redevelopment, these policies assume that the existing population of residents is fragmented, fractured, and unorganized, thus lacking in social cohesiveness and social capital. These assumptions are often incorrect mostly because they come from outsider perspectives and represent top-down approaches to remedy inaccurately perceived problems, while largely ignoring the problems as perceived by the residents themselves. As discussed above, however, these assumptions must precede redevelopment (by way of place-making) for it to be deemed necessary and, therefore, legitimate.

After researching the outcomes of social mix urban policy implementation in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands, Loretta Lees (2008) has come to the conclusion that these planned socially mixed redevelopments actually produce results contradictory to their policy claims. In reality, social mixing has neither led to the trickling down of benefits, nor has it facilitated transference of values from the affluent residents to the low-income tenants. It has, conversely, led to social segregation and polarization (Lees, 2008, p. 2457).

Often, as in the case of Regent Park's redevelopment, residents who are displaced throughout the stages of redevelopment are relegated to other low-income and segregated neighbourhoods where they must adapt to new environments, new neighbours, new amenities and services, only to have to uproot their families again when they are able to return to their original neighbourhood. In Regent Park's redevelopment, public housing residents were given the right-of-first-refusal with respect to returning to the newly renovated units. However, this did not ensure that they would be returning to their original unit in the same location and with the same neighbours. Temporarily displaced residents, therefore, do not always exercise this "right". Even more disruptive, displacing, and revanchist in nature is a situation where not all of the public housing units are replaced on site. This is also the case for Regent Park's redevelopment. Although units must be replaced, they can be replaced elsewhere within an arbitrarily agreed upon distance from the original neighbourhood. This is the most permanently displacing consequence of redevelopment in Toronto, whereby public housing residents gain absolutely nothing positive from the redevelopment of their neighbourhood - a neighbourhood in which they can no longer call home.

In the case of Alexandra Park's redevelopment, the zero displacement guiding principle will at least protect residents from large-scale temporary or permanent relocation. However, without adding to the public housing stock, this somewhat more progressive approach to redevelopment will still dilute the concentration and representation of the low-income residents in the neighbourhood, thus polarizing the community by creating a community of haves and have-nots. The close spatial proximity of poor and affluent neighbours will reaffirm the social and financial polarization on a daily basis, because the public housing buildings will be segregated on site. According to Smith, living in proximity to people of a different economic

class may actually reduce the social capital of the neighbourhood (as cited in Lees, 2008, p. 2461). Prejudices and stereotypes can often be perpetuated when people who are not normally associated with one another are forced to live near each other. Cheshire states that, “People’s welfare does not depend on their own income as much as their income relative to their people’s income living near to them” (Ibid).

As discussed earlier, the failure of public policy to equitably address the concerns of low-income households is partly due to the fact that these theories tend to be one-sided, only examining the experiences of the gentry while ignoring the experiences and perspectives of the poor and potentially displaced (Slater, 2006, pp. 742, 743; Lees, 2008, p. 2459). Even giving consideration to the mandatory public participation processes that are in place in Toronto regarding land-use changes, I am not convinced that the concerns of public housing residents are typically high on the public policy agenda regarding redevelopment. This skepticism of municipal politics regarding inclusion is inherent in Walker and Carter’s (2010) reasoning who state, “It is unusual to see active government intervention to improve areas of the city with the current residents in mind” (p. 351), leading one to consider participation exercises to be more token in nature than influential.

Even if planned mixed-income redevelopments are to be accepted as necessary, one must be aware that there is never a quantitative account establishing what the perfect mix is or what exactly should be mixed (Lees, 2008, pp. 2461, 2462). Considering the demographic statistics of Alexandra Park discussed in Chapter One, it is evident that low-income communities are already diverse and mixed. Economic diversity is currently a reality within Alexandra Park’s population, which is comprised of both low-wage and precarious members of the working class, and unemployed and welfare-dependent residents more or less permanently excluded from the labour

market. They can also be places that foster and respect the neighbourly transactions and sharing of resources that is considered to be an indicator of the level of social capital within a neighbourhood. As discussed above, however, policy-makers who focus solely on the negative aspects of public housing neighbourhoods often ignore this type of diversity, whether intentionally or not. Either way, it seems, then, that only certain types of mixing fit the mixed redevelopment formula. The right type of mix appears to be one where homeowners (middle-class or otherwise) are provided appropriate housing forms in low-income neighbourhoods that are not protected from intensification with restrictive zoning by-laws akin to those governing low-density neighbourhoods composed of single-family dwellings. Largely inhabited by visible minorities, new immigrants, and low-income households, public housing neighbourhoods like Alexandra Park provide the richest ingredients for the gentrification recipe. These groups tend to be the least politically mobile and, as a result, the least likely and able to collectively protect themselves from unwanted change. In this context, it is easier to assert the dominance of exchange value over use value in land development.

### Housing Demand

The rise in households without children and single-person households, especially in Toronto where condominiums make up the majority of housing starts, has created a situation where more housing options offer small, conveniently located options catering to a low-maintenance lifestyle (Townshend & Walker, 2010, p. 144). This is obviously a demand side argument for this particular form of housing. According to David Ley's (1986) demand side explanation of gentrification, culture and consumption are the driving forces of socio-spatial

organization. Ley's argument identifies the increasing role of culture, amenity and proximity in determining land values and uses (p. 524).

This contrasting theory of gentrification focuses on the role of compact form and scarcity of undeveloped land within Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods in giving rise to the struggle over people's claim to urban space and habitation. Spatial proximity increases demand for space in the city, which also leads to increases in property values (Filion & Bunting, 2010, p. 7). This is a neo-classical theory of gentrification. It combines scarcity of supply with the demand of the middle-class citizenry for downtown location. As land becomes less available for development, it becomes more expensive. High gas prices, congested highways, and the resulting long commutes for suburbanites have been partly responsible for the increased demand for urban living (Wasserman & Clair, 2010, p. 5). Skaburskis and Moos (2010) follow this line of argumentation and state:

The return of higher-income households to the inner city is perhaps the most important change in the structure of cities in the last half century due to their values that translate into political lobbying for infrastructure and cultural facilities, which, when provided, further increase the value of inner-city land. (p. 236)

Class-based sociological theories of gentrification also emphasize the role of demand in gentrification. They focus however on the collective, socio-cultural role of particular segments of the middle-class in the gentrification process. Hume notes that as a group, middle-class households are attracted to the diversity and affordability of less affluent downtown neighbourhoods, which exude more inspiration, compared to the equally affordable, yet supposedly homogenous suburbs (as cited in Slater, 2004, p. 312). It is this homeowner-initiated gentrification process that Jon Caulfield argued was a collective middle-class rejection of "the



dominant ideals of suburbia, breaking free from “a routine of placeless space and monofunctional instrumentality” (Ibid, p. 305).

Gentrification understood in this manner places individual and social choice at the heart of the theory. Admittedly, it would be short-sighted to not consider the housing and lifestyle demands of citizens for central city living in any discussion of neighbourhood transformation and debate over the causes of gentrification. However, in the case of public housing redevelopment, one must look at the institutions and policies that can produce the appropriate housing supply in a context where private property interests are weak, restricted, or absent.

Land-use designations supported by zoning restrictions within the Toronto Official Plan facilitate large-scale gentrification in certain neighbourhoods by allowing for growth, intensification, and diverse forms and tenures of housing such as multi-unit apartment buildings, while limiting forms other than single-family dwellings in other neighbourhoods. These “protected” neighbourhoods only allow for small-scale gradual gentrification implementing the traditional approach of individual homeowners fixing up their properties one at a time. Adding to Lees’ (2008) acknowledgement that there never seems to be any indication of what the perfect mix should be in a planned mixed-income redevelopment is the fact that certain neighbourhoods are protected by official policy from being mixed through large-scale change or redevelopment. If mixed-income neighbourhoods produce economic diversity, and healthy and stable communities, then why, as Kipfer and Petrunia (2009) have questioned in their critique on Regent Park’s redevelopment, does the onus of mixing only fall upon communities lacking in middle-class presence, such as public housing (p. 124)?

However convincing demand-side arguments are, this new-found interest in central city space means nothing without the supply of housing forms to accommodate those who are

physically and financially mobile, choose to live downtown, wait to marry, are not opposed to divorce, and have lower than average sized households (Peck, 2005, pp. 745, 746). Hackworth and Smith (2001) observed that, “Overall, economic forces driving gentrification seem to have eclipsed cultural factors” (p. 468). The supply in one particular form of housing – condominiums – is therefore consistent with the shift from a city fostering industrial supply to the city centre as a place that supplies lifestyle services such as culture and entertainment (Filion & Bunting, 2010, p. 11) attractive to “the aspirations of a large proportion of the population for a more urbane lifestyle” (Ibid, p. 34).

This change in city structure is completely evident in public housing redevelopments that are financed primarily by selling land to private interests. Privatization becomes the mechanism through which a housing supply for gentrification is created. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the accommodation of a majority of homeowners not only changes resident proportions from financially homogeneous communities to mixed-income neighbourhoods, but also has the potential to transform the supply of services as demands change. As more affluent households become the new majority, services catering to nearby residents will also need to either adapt, transform, or completely change to meet new demands. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Alexandra Park’s residents have come to rely on the many community services available in the area, and these service providers have tailored their programs to best support the existing community – a community made up of low-income, predominantly visible minority households. Amenity provision will likely change, as well, as retail services seeking high profit margins begin to cater to those with more disposable income. This is a part of the gentrification process - commercial gentrification - that does not protect residents from displacement as neighbourhoods become too expensive for many to reside.

The demand side explanation of land transformation and gentrification discussed briefly above does not relate well to public housing redevelopment. This explanation is based solely on consumer and social choice. It does not consider the power of the overarching institutions that continue to segregate space along ethno-racial and financial divides. It also fails to account for the dominant form of housing that is being supplied in redevelopment projects and the failure to supply any more much needed affordable rental units within the redevelopment formula. Unlike the image of gentrification being initiated by homeowners who fix up their properties one at a time, large-scale gentrification in the form of public housing redevelopment is faster, drastic, and intentional. It is completely supply-oriented and this supply is facilitated through government policy. Public housing redevelopment is, therefore, much more akin to the supply-oriented theory of gentrification, as opposed to demand-sided and neo-classical explanations. It can be conceptualised as an example of municipally-managed gentrification.

#### Housing Tenure: Favouring Property Ownership

“Nick Blomley argues that our system of property ownership can seem definitive and even natural whereas, in fact, it is made possible by a regulatory system that favours property owners” (as cited in Skaburskis & Moos, 2010, pp. 228-230). Mortgage lending institutions have created financial schemes to facilitate homeownership, which comes with enhanced rights, potential wealth accumulation, and privileges that are not available to renters who are automatically disadvantaged purely because of their tenure (Ibid, p.232). The federal government, through its control of interest rates, economic policy, control over housing demand related to immigration, and legislation over lending practices has great influence in the housing

sector (Walker & Carter, 2010, p. 344). The choices of intervention, however, are one-sided favouring homeownership.

Currently in Canada, 68% of privately occupied homes are owned (Ibid, p. 343). For Skaburskis and Moos (2010), this “tenure favouritism” calls into question both the government’s respect for democratic rights, where the ability to own property is unequally available to all, and the role of public policy in addressing, and possibly ameliorating this inequity (p. 232). Not everyone has the right and the means to own private property, which makes property rights (a benchmark of both capitalism and neo-liberalism) exclusionary by nature.

Layton notes that in the years between 1989 and 1993, rental-housing construction represented 27% of all new housing in Ontario, falling dramatically to 2% in 1999 (as cited in Silver, 2011, p. 37), forcing many low-income households to rely on public housing to find affordable housing (Ibid). This is in part because, in Canada, much like the United States, current neo-liberal housing policies build on a longer history of market-biased housing provision (Harris, 2000, p. 457), where individual homeownership is equated with the ideal of attaining the “American Dream” (Ibid, p. 462). Replacing redistributive policies geared towards offsetting inequities and the promotion of welfare with neo-liberal policies supportive of private property, citizens are left completely responsible for their housing situations regardless of the fact that not everyone has the same resources, nor does everyone face the same structural obstacles in life. Neo-liberal housing policies, therefore, ignore the fact that not everyone begins from the same starting point. Renters do not fit into the housing dream, and for many, in Toronto, securing affordable housing is more of a nightmare without the protective policies enjoyed by homeowners.

## Condominiums

One must be aware of the surge in condominium construction in downtown Toronto to fully appreciate the favouritism inherent in housing supply. Toronto is in the throes of a full-throttle condominium boom and has been ever since the end of the property slump in the mid-1990s (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009, p. 144). Understanding that the increase in the proportion of small households can account partly for the increased demand for city centre living (Skaburskis & Moos, 2010, p. 238), attention must be focused on government selection in intervention, manifested in adopted policies that allow for and enable the supply of particular forms of housing, while ignoring the housing needs of many. While Grant and Filion (2010) agree that “the forms reflect market forces at work, they occur because government policies have made space for them” (p. 317) and because little was done to ensure varying size in condominium units built in Toronto, the city’s social diversity has been threatened (Ibid, p. 315).

Many households simply cannot physically fit into one- and two-bedroom condominium units, further supporting the argument that supply must precede demand in housing provision and that supply will dictate who can and cannot live in certain neighbourhoods. In this sense, the condominium boom represents government-initiated gentrification. Other than the private supply of finances to cover costs associated with building condominiums, governments have facilitated the rest of the procedures necessary for gentrification to occur. Municipal zoning amendments, Official Plan amendments, tall buildings guidelines, urban design guidelines, water and sewage infrastructure provision, provincial condominium legislature and growth directives, and federal homeownership incentives have all aided the condominium boom and its dominance over other forms of housing.

Hwang further warns that condominium towers catering to the lifestyles of single people and couples without children from higher incomes have created “vertical gated communities” (as cited in Bain, 2010, p. 267) where outsiders are not able to penetrate physically, financially, or socially. This is of particular importance in public housing redevelopments where public land will become privately owned, and as such, not equally accessible to everyone. For Alexandra Park residents who have grown accustomed to being neighbourly within a tight-knit community, the private demarcation of condominium space will represent a completely new spatial organization to what they are used to. The segregation of public and private spaces on site will further reinforce this distinction.

The decade following the adoption of legislation to permit condominium living in the 1970s led to this form of tenure becoming the dominant form of intensified residential development (Grant & Filion, 2010, p. 309), followed by massive condominium development at the turn of the century (Ibid, p. 314). The dominating condominium construction in the inner city has had a perverse effect on housing affordability, whereby the passing of provincial condominium legislation has required rental-housing developers to compete with condominium developers for land use (Hulchanski, 2005, p. 6). Although adding to the overall housing stock, condominiums are not a plausible housing option for poor households. Low-income households simply cannot afford neither the most modest down payment nor the monthly mortgage costs and utility expenses associated with homeownership.

Low-income households are defined as having one half of the median annual income in their census metropolitan area, adjusted for family size (Statistics Canada, 2004, n.p.). The low-income threshold for a family consisting of two adults and two children in Toronto is \$36,500.00 (Ibid). Sadly, this calculation is set for a family consisting of two parents and two children and is

based on gross household income. What is more disturbing is that for housing to be considered adequate, one bedroom for the parents to share and one bedroom for each of the two children (if they are not of the same gender) must be provided. A family of four would thus require a three-bedroom unit. As explained in Chapter One, housing is considered to be affordable if it consumes 30% or less of a household's gross income (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2011, n.p.). In this scenario, a family of four would be required to find a three-bedroom condominium in Toronto for \$10,950.00 per year (\$912.50 per month). This would, of course, have to include maintenance fees and utilities in addition to the mortgage cost. Even with federal government incentives, such as zero down payments and sub-prime interest rates, the monthly fees are simply too steep for low-income families to afford, creating a daunting exercise in family budgeting for even the lower income segment of the middle-class.

In addition to their high costs related to purchasing and maintaining, condominiums also create even more competition amongst social classes for the existing affordable units (Carter & Polevychok, 2004, p. 38), especially in low-income neighbourhoods where they have diluted the proportion of supplied rental units. Ironically, "having permitted ground-oriented condominium development originally as a way to address the need for more affordable housing for Canadians, governments now find themselves unable to prevent an urban form that generates some serious social and spatial concerns" (Grant & Fillion, 2010, p. 320).

Condominium units have contributed to the increase in homeownership while the proportion of renters has dropped, contributing to the meager supply of affordable rental options, low vacancy rates (Walker & Carter, 2010, p. 343) and long waiting lists for subsidized housing. This drop in representation of renters in purpose-built rental buildings further dilutes their collectivity, and tears at the cohesion of the neighbourhood by spreading out friends and culture

(Wacquant, 2008b, p. 101), which could further reduce their already minimal political mobility. In Regent Park, like many other redevelopment projects, the addition of units in the form of condominiums translates into homeowners forming a new majority in neighborhoods that were once dominated by lower income households (Silver, 2011, p. 66), perhaps reducing the funding that was once allocated to neighbourhoods once dominated by low-income households (Ibid, pp. 79-80).

### Housing, Health, and Homelessness

It would be short-sighted to discuss housing provision failures and gentrification without a brief discussion about health and homelessness. One's housing situation has a profound influence on all other aspects of one's life. Housing stability and proper health are inseparable, and the provision of adequate housing will help to ameliorate seemingly unrelated problems associated with housing security. This is important to consider in Alexandra Park's redevelopment, which fails to create additional affordable social housing. Many housing advocates insist that poverty reduction strategies, coupled with the supply of housing targeted at low-income families are necessary in ending homelessness. Indeed, this is the "Housing First" model of combating homelessness that the City of Toronto (mirrored on US policy) has adopted. Before moving to the case study in the next chapter, it is essential to consider the most devastating consequence of failure to provide housing for all members of society - homelessness.

Failure of government intervention in the private housing market represents a lack of concern for the health of a large group of Canadians who, for many reasons out of their control, are not able to financially compete in a housing market favouring ownership. With evidence of the correlation between housing, homelessness, and health, it can be suggested that providing



adequate housing will help to reduce long-term health problems associated with and compounded by a lack of housing (Carter & Polevychok, 2004, pp. 14-16). “Housing is such a central part of people’s ability to enjoy quality of life that it is no wonder that having, or not having adequate and affordable housing is linked to outcomes in health policy, educational attainment, and employment” (Walker & Carter, 2010, p. 344).

Currently in Canada, many low-income households are forced to make unhealthy compromises between adequate housing security and the many other necessities of life such as food, clothing, and transportation. This is a reality in public housing neighbourhoods such as Alexandra Park, where many residents spend more than 30% of their income on housing, leaving little money for other essentials, and the fact that many residents rely on food banks and other social services. Again, housing provision and the problems arising from inequitable access to adequate housing both arise from, and can be mitigated by, government choice in intervention. Understanding that it can cost up to five times the amount of money to accommodate and treat people in emergency homeless shelters than to house them De Jong questions the intentions of decision-makers in creating policies that ultimately determine access to adequate and affordable housing (as cited in Walker & Carter, 2010, p. 347).

Bourne and Walks (2010) consider homelessness to be “perhaps the most visible expression of extreme poverty and of growing social inequality in urban Canada. It is very much related to how the poor are taken care of and how income is redistributed within the welfare state...” (p. 435). It is interesting to note the parallel between the retraction from federal government provision of social housing and the rise in the number of homeless people in Canada. Both changes occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when neo-liberal policies began to replace protective policies focused on welfare and redistribution. Along with access to

employment, income, and forms of economic development, homelessness is an issue relative to both the affordability of housing as well as to the government policies that deal with the production of both private and social housing (Ibid, pp. 435-436).

Now that municipally-managed gentrification and mixed-income neighbourhood planning have been discussed, and the link between affordable housing provision and homelessness has been made, it is clear that government intervention, through policy, has long-reaching influence on the spatial organization and health of a municipality's citizenry. With the help of the concentrated poverty thesis (which is often articulated through racialized "territorial stigmatization"), followed by exercising control over the form of housing supply, and implementing policies supporting growth and intensification, municipalities are able to transform low-income neighbourhoods into middle-class neighbourhoods, thereby generating revenue in the form of property taxes while diluting (and hiding) the concentration of poor people. All of this is done using language that dodges any thought of gentrification, because it is presented as being in the best interests of everyone, thereby producing little opposition (even from residents).

In the next chapter, I analyze the Alexandra Park redevelopment process to argue that it represents yet another example of government-initiated gentrification, funded exclusively by private interests and legitimized by fiscal austerity with the main purpose of reclaiming prime downtown real estate.

### Chapter Three Alexandra Park

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the explanations and causes of neighbourhood gentrification in general, and its relationship to public housing redevelopment by place-making (stigmatization) and breaking up concentrations of poverty (assumed causes of social pathologies). The political reasoning supporting public housing redevelopment justified on the assumed, yet empirically unfounded, merits of social mix was introduced and examined. In this chapter, I analyze the proposed redevelopment of the public housing neighbourhood of Alexandra Park as a case study to provide a concrete example of the politics involved in balancing differing interests that lead to decisions regarding redevelopment. As such, I will consider the reasons why public housing redevelopment occurs, why it is administered in the manner in which it is, who supports such redevelopment and who stands to benefit or lose from privately funded public housing redevelopment. To provide insight into the reasons why public housing neighbourhoods are on the radar for redevelopment, I discuss systemic forces related to liberal democracy and the rise of neo-liberalism. More specifically, I discuss how public housing redevelopment has been shaped by the devolution of services from upper levels of government to municipalities, and why fiscally strained municipalities have responded to (and subsequently benefited from) such downloading exercises by embracing the private provision of historically public services, including public housing.

#### The Beginning of the Planning Process

In the fall of 2007, a Visioning Committee was formed to discuss the potential for redevelopment in Alexandra Park (TCH, 2009, p. 1). This committee includes residents of

Alexandra Park and members of the Atkinson Housing Cooperative, the Alexandra Park Residents Association, Councillor Adam Vaughan, Toronto District School Board Trustee Chris Bolton, City of Toronto's Social Development, Finance and Administration Department, the Cooperative Housing Federation of Toronto, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, and TCH (Ibid). The community visioning process established 10 guiding principles that would inform the Master Plan (Toronto Community Housing, 2011b, p. 18). These guiding principles are: zero displacement, providing good housing, providing more than housing, planning together first, minimizing disruption, protecting tenants' rights, developing connections, ensuring participation, nurturing a clean, green environment, and enhancing opportunities.

In December 2008, TCH's Board of Directors created a list of five "priority communities" from an earlier 13-site Asset Revitalization Program. According to TCH (2009), "Alexandra Park was one of five sites given the go-ahead to proceed towards planning approvals" (p. 1). In May 2009, TCH issued a request for proposals from planning consultants to spearhead Alexandra Park's conceived redevelopment. Four out of eight responding consultants were selected for interviews conducted by TCH's Development, Finance and Community Health Divisions. Urban Strategies was the successful consulting firm (Ibid, p. 2).

Urban Strategies' mandate for Alexandra Park's redevelopment was two-fold. First, they created a "Development and Business Plan to achieve community revitalization" (Ibid, p. 3.). After the Development and Business Plan was completed and evaluated by TCH, they decided to proceed with planning applications (Official Plan and zoning amendments), which were prepared by Urban Strategies (Ibid).

During the consultation process, five proposed options for redevelopment were created through a collaboration of the Visioning Committee and Urban Strategies. They ranged from not redeveloping, to partially redeveloping (only on surface parking lots), to focusing solely on the repair of the community centre, to focusing only on the Dundas Street West frontages, and finally to a complete redevelopment of the built form. The complete redevelopment option would involve the demolition and rebuilding of the Atkinson Housing Cooperative's apartment building and townhouses, and the Alexandra Park Community Centre combined with the refurbishment of the remaining three TCH apartment buildings. These five options were presented to the larger Alexandra Park community at a redevelopment options workshop in December 2009. Following more than 30 meetings and workshops, and three surveys held to gather resident input (TCH, 2011 a, p. 1), the complete redevelopment option was chosen by the Visioning Committee in early 2011 to be the Master Plan for Alexandra Park's redevelopment

Councillor Vaughan has expressed a preference for a more "surgical" approach to redevelopment than was executed in Regent Park's redevelopment "with the revitalization taking advantage of surface parking lots and involving limited demolition" (TCH, 2009, p. 4). In fact, building solely on parking lots and then using the proceeds from the sale of the parking lots' land to repair the community centre was one of the ideas considered at the December 2009 options workshop noted above. This option falls between the no redevelopment option and the complete redevelopment option. However, because "people leaned towards change and wanted change [the community began to] wonder: 'do we want a neighbourhood that is [only] half built or half fixed'?" (Personal communication, January 31, 2012). According to this same TCH employee, who is involved with the redevelopment, it was this kind of community awareness and vision that led to the submitted redevelopment Master Plan, where residents (represented by the

Visioning Committee) thought, “If we are going to do this, let’s do it all” (personal communication, January 31, 2012) instead of implementing a more piecemeal approach to redevelopment.

### The Redevelopment Proposal

On March 11, 2011, TCH applied to the City of Toronto for an Official Plan amendment and a Zoning By-law amendment for the land containing the Alexandra Park Apartments and the Atkinson Housing Cooperative. This proposal calls for a zoning and designation change from Residential to Retail/Residential to allow for mixed-use operations, and for increased height and density. The 18-acre site slated for redevelopment currently contains 806 rental units. A majority of these units are located in four apartment buildings, while 263 of the units are in low-rise townhouse form. A community centre that is literally sinking into the ground and a bustling daycare make up the remainder of the built form in the Alexandra Park neighbourhood.

The proposal entails the demolition of 333 existing townhouse and apartment units and the renovation of the 473 remaining apartment units, differentiating this redevelopment from other TCH redevelopments, such as Regent Park, Don Mount Court, and Lawrence Heights, which fully demolished the entire built form and temporarily displaced all of the residents. In some instances (resulting from the failure to replace public housing units on site), residents suffered permanent displacement. The planning application fees, building permit fees, and parkland dedication requirements normally associated with redevelopment will be waived because of a 2000 City Council decision to exempt non-profit housing from such requirements (City of Toronto, 2011a, p. 11). To cover the costs of these renovations and upgrades, the City of Toronto will sell off parcels of the land to a private developer, which has yet to be announced, to

build 1540 market-priced condominiums to be added to the neighbourhood to be sold in the private market throughout the phasing of the redevelopment.

TCH submitted their Planning Rationale and Housing Issues Report in early March 2011. On May 17, 2011, City of Toronto Council voted 39-0 in favour of the proposed redevelopment of Alexandra Park (City of Toronto, 2011c, n.p.), indicating that the City of Toronto has increased their support for privately funded public housing redevelopments since the days of Regent Park, when at least one councillor voiced opposition (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009, p. 129). TCH submitted a revised Recommended Master Plan requesting an Official Plan amendment and rezoning approval to the City of Toronto on February 7, 2012. At the time of writing this paper, approval of this revised Master Plan has yet to be granted.

#### Legitimizing Redevelopment: Physical Repair and Social Behaviour

The existing problems cited by the City of Toronto and TCH are typical of other redevelopments that focused on the concentrated poverty thesis as discussed in the previous chapter. The stigmatizing language used in Alexandra Park's case discusses physical and social isolation from the surrounding community, poor demarcation of public space, dangerous and unwelcoming physical design, old and deteriorating buildings, and poor general design. Like other public housing redevelopment justifications, these physical design attributes are portrayed as encouraging criminal behaviour and, therefore, in need of repair. For Kipfer and Petrunia (2009), design is an integral component of government-initiated gentrification (p. 124). It is also part of the place-making process that precedes gentrification. Relating the physical to the social is based on the assumption that the built form dictates behaviour. In the case of public housing projects, such as Alexandra Park, this assumption rings loudly. Discussing the built form in

Alexandra Park, TCH (2011b) notes that, “There is a lack of passive surveillance or ‘eyes on the street’ that traditionally makes a community feel safe and discourages anti-social behaviour” (p. 11).

TCH considers its role in neighbourhood revitalization projects as being “committed to delivering quality housing that improves the lives of residents and communities. Our goal is to help create strong neighbourhoods where every tenant is connected to opportunities to succeed” (TCH, 2012b, n.p.). Regarding the production of mixed-tenure, mixed-income redevelopments, TCH claims, “Adding market units to these neighbourhoods creates mixed-income communities. Revitalization can attract investment in the form of new or improved amenities like schools, parks and improved transit” (Ibid). TCH has definitely embraced the social mix strategy of redevelopment discussed in the previous chapter and has reproduced this strategy (with limited variations) in other redevelopments since Regent Park’s. As they are the largest provider of public housing in Toronto and own a vast amount of prime land, TCH wields a large amount of influence over municipal development in general, public housing neighbourhood redevelopment in particular and thus the housing security of many.

At a community consultation meeting held at Theatre Passe Muraille on June 27, 2011 to discuss redevelopment, justifications to redevelop Alexandra Park continued to be voiced. Adding to the stigmatizing concentrations of poverty justifications, and the isolated built form encouraging negative social behaviour rationale, Councillor Vaughan also discussed the potential for redevelopment to address the long waiting lists for subsidized housing in Toronto, to maintain a strong sense of community, to bring in new commercial opportunities, and to execute a community-based planning process encouraging resident input and participation (City of Toronto, 2012b, p. 1).



Although this project has definitely deployed a comprehensive planning process that encourages community input (which I will analyze in the public participation section) and will unquestionably attract commercial interests due to its prime location, it is not yet clear how Alexandra Park's redevelopment will be able to ameliorate the long waiting lists discussed by Councillor Vaughan. So far, there are no plans to build more social housing units to add to its current stock – only the renovation or replacement of existing subsidized rental units, thus creating a gentrified urban landscape that will be dominated by middle-class households.

At this same June 27, 2011 community meeting, Councillor Vaughan did, however, reiterate that not a single unit of affordable housing would be lost in the redevelopment. Perhaps this was brought up as a way to “sell” redevelopment to the tenants, because in Toronto, affordable rental units are protected in Toronto's Official Plan under Section 3.2.1.6, where they must be replaced if demolished, and Section 111 of the City of Toronto Act and Municipal Act Chapter 667, which prohibits the demolition of rental units without a permit. These protective policies, therefore, are not particular only to Alexandra Park and although they will both protect and maintain the inadequate rental stock in Toronto, this redevelopment will not add to Toronto's affordable housing stock.

These legislated housing policies are definitely protective, and somewhat progressive, yet they will need to be re-examined and possibly reformed to address the reality that, today, a large number of Torontonians do not have access to adequate and affordable housing. Furthermore, how can a city expect to grow if it is not creating opportunities to expand its rental-housing portfolio? Where are people expected to live? Although not the case for Alexandra Park's redevelopment (due to the zero displacement principle), one must remain aware that in Toronto replacement units do not have to be offered within the existing neighbourhood, so long as they

are available within the surrounding community. As I discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Regent Park's redevelopment is planned to result in the loss of 600 on-site replaced public housing units (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009, p. 123). Whether public housing residents are displaced, scattered, or diluted, gentrification will certainly ensue under such redevelopment formulas.

When professionally involved interviewees from TCH and the City of Toronto were questioned about why the Alexandra Park redevelopment would not add to the social housing stock in Toronto, they gave two reasons. The first reason was money: the financial constraints faced by TCH, which has a backlog of over \$6,000,000 needed for capital repairs. The second reason offered by TCH employees and City of Toronto staff interviewed is a direct result of the first: lack of monetary incentives for developers to build purpose-built rentals targeted at low-income households. Developers enjoy a larger and quicker return on their initial investment with the supply of private-sale units over rental units (especially at or below market rents). Hulchanski (2005) has written extensively on the subject of housing construction and concludes that in the absence of legislative mandates to require or provide incentives for builders to include affordable housing units in all new developments, developers will continue to build units at market rate to ensure a profit (p. 3). While, in Toronto, continual condominium construction highlights the city's partial preference for this form of housing provision, attention must be directed to the process that has led to municipalities assuming responsibility for housing provision in the first place, as well as the federal government's selective intervention and support of homeownership.

Relating to the case study, those professionally involved with the redevelopment were completely aware of the affordable rental crisis in Toronto. Those who were interviewed discussed openly the need for more public housing units as they articulated repeatedly the long

waiting lists for subsidized housing in Toronto. During an interview at one of TCH's offices, one employee explained, "It would make sense to build more social [housing] units because of the long waiting lists and the co-op would be interested in generating more income as well" (personal communication, February 6, 2012). This TCH employee explained further that the spatial concerns of the residents to keep the density down reduced the financial feasibility of increasing the current number of public housing units, stating, "One of the goals was to reproduce as many townhouses as possible because many of the tenants wanted to keep that form" (personal communication, February 6, 2012).

Within TCH's recommended Master Plan, all four- and five-bedroom townhouse units will be replaced in the same form, yet approximately half of the 159 three-bedroom townhouses will be replaced in apartment form. Not surprisingly, further inquiry revealed that it was not only the residents who were concerned with the proposed heights and density resulting from Alexandra Park's redevelopment. In fact, one TCH employee stated that, "People don't want it to be like St. Jamestown<sup>2</sup> with too many towers and City Planning does not want too much height and density throughout the whole site" (personal communication, February 6, 2012). Interestingly, TCH's redevelopment plan for Alexandra Park will more than double the current population (from 2500 to beyond 5000) and increase the number of units from 806 to over 1500 once the redevelopment is complete, making for a much more densely-populated and intensified neighbourhood. Clearly, city planners and city councillors have differing opinions about what responsible planning should look like physically. Even more obvious is the accepted idea that density is acceptable so long as it is not made up of concentrations of poor people.

Councillor Vaughan remains optimistic about the potential for Alexandra Park's redevelopment to offset some of the stagnation that has materialized in the construction of social

housing and in purpose-built rentals. In an interview, he explained his vision for the future of the neighbourhood and his focus on long-term measures of adding social housing units to the neighbourhood by using resources gained from commercial revenues to purchase private units over time with the goal of a one-to-one ratio of private-market units to social housing units (personal communication, January 31, 2012). Although sound in principle, it is difficult to conceive a situation where a one-to-one ratio could be financially possible under current circumstances, when the only scheme entertained (and previously executed) by TCH to maintain the public housing stock is to create a situation in which this stock is reduced to a small minority in order to financially maintain its buildings and operations. Otherwise, alternatives to this formula for redevelopment would have been sought, presented, considered, and possibly implemented. From the empirical research to date, no such alternatives have been offered. It is my opinion that a one-to-one ratio of public units to private units is not a goal of redevelopment. It is unrealistic and, therefore, should be indicated as such. Although justified as offering many benefits to the community, the goal of the redevelopment is to capitalize on the neighbourhood's prime location.

In contrast to the quick redevelopment process adopted in Regent Park, the long-term phasing of Alexandra Park's redevelopment is what Jim Silver (2011) articulates in his book *Good Places To Live: Poverty and Public Housing in Canada*. In this book, Silver (2011) argues that solutions to the problems of neighbourhood poverty must be addressed using a long-term approach simply because the institutions that have created segregated neighbourhoods of poverty have been in place for a long time. Therefore, there are no quick fixes. Silver (2011) advocates for re-building from within and focusing on community strengths as indicated by the residents,

as opposed to concentrating on the weaknesses as highlighted by outside decision-makers and perpetuated by the media, and academic and popular discourse.

There is, however, another way to interpret the long-term phasing of Alexandra Park's redevelopment in contrast to that which Silver alludes: From an economic perspective, the long-term phasing of the project will allow for continuous land valorization, assuming that poverty value continues to rise and downtown land becomes consistently more expensive to purchase. The long-term phasing (legitimized as the result of the zero displacement principle), therefore, stands to financially benefit TCH, the developer, and the City of Toronto. Again, the exchange value of land outweighs its use value.

### Density and Intensification

Increasing density in a neighbourhood often yields resistance from residents. Residents, especially homeowners, generally want their neighbourhoods to remain stable. They resist change. This resistance represents a large part of the politics involved in planning decisions, where opposing interests meet and results are negotiated. However, where growth occurs in Ontario is neither up for negotiation (it is provincially legislated in The Places to Grow Act), nor is it spread out evenly throughout the urban fabric, or throughout the entire province. Municipal Official Plans must conform to upper-level government legislation and implement policies consistent with the goals of the province. As discussed in Chapter Two, Toronto's Official Plan, which predates provincial planning legislation, emits discriminating undertones by directing growth to certain residential neighbourhoods while protecting others from such growth. Relating to housing, the Toronto Official Plan clearly indicates which neighbourhoods will absorb growth through intensification measures, and which ones will remain stable. Neighbourhoods that will

intensify include low-income neighbourhoods such as Alexandra Park, Regent Park, Lawrence Heights, and St. Jamestown. These are neighbourhoods that are already quite dense in relation to those designated as stable neighbourhoods (already protected by exclusionary zoning that only allows for single-family dwellings on larger individual lots), house a large number of newcomers and visible minorities, and are thereby racialized and stigmatized as places where social pathologies run rampant and are in need of being “normalized”.

Density is necessary to accommodate growth, and growth is seen as a measure of success for cities. Growth in the form of homeownership is the preferred type of growth in most capitalist cities, more so than private rental buildings and public housing. Homeownership, as opposed to public housing, generates revenue for municipalities in the form of property taxes. Also, since homeowners generally make twice the income of renters in Canada (City of Toronto, 2009, pp. 3-12, 3-13), they have more money to spend on amenities and services. Homeowners, therefore, have more economically to offer cities and are, as such, preferred over renters. Those involved with land development such as property investors, insurance and real estate agents, property lawyers, architects, contractors, and unions have, “nourished a mentality that growth and development were positive city attributes” (Lightbody, 2006, pp. 335, 336). Their business success depends upon growth via land sale transactions, property insurance, and construction.

Some urban policy-makers and researchers praise new urbanism for its compact built form and its mixed-use, mixed-income, and mixed-tenure attributes. They associate new urbanism with promising-sounding attributes: increased social cohesion and social capital within neighbourhoods, financial trickle-down effects from more to less financially advantaged households, reduced automobile use, and increased citizen safety related to the “eyes on the street” theory. Those in support of new urbanism avoid negative-sounding words, such as

gentrification and displacement. Furthermore, cities often choose inclusive language to market themselves as diverse world-class cities, attempting to attract more growth. Florida argues that mixing people from differing incomes, cultures, and lifestyles in a compact built form ripe with amenity is said to attract the right type of people to the city (as cited in Peck, 2005, p. 743). Like place-making, attracting new blood to the city will hopefully offset the supposed pathologies in low-income neighbourhoods or simply increase the tax-base (Lees, 2008, p. 2454). Both of these justifications were made in the Alexandra Park case. Its location will make it easy to not only attract developers, but also those who will enjoy owning a small piece of land in such a desirable neighbourhood.

As mentioned above, there are negative consequences arising from the implementation of growth-promoting policies. Generous and redistributive social policies that could attract poor people to the city were replaced with policies favouring private development on the assumption that they would drain the public purse and scare away investment (Mossberger, 2009, p. 41). Focusing predominantly on growth leaves the protective redistributive policies behind, and as a result, those that rely on such policies. Skaburskis and Moos (2010) claim that, “Instead of investing in social infrastructure promoting the development of stable neighbourhoods, the new policies harness the growth-generating potential of real estate markets by providing the type of infrastructure that enhances the value of land and location” (p. 240).

Part of this infrastructure is housing in the form of condominiums. This is where the central downtown location of Alexandra Park and its proposed supply of privately owned condominiums become salient points of inquiry. As discussed earlier, the addition of these units will dilute the current form of tenure – subsidized rental housing - from 100% to a mere 30%, resulting in much more valuable land and a smaller proportion of representation in the

neighbourhood for those who rent. These renters are the same people who already feel disconnected from politics and as a result tend to not be politically inclined to object to decisions that may pose negative consequences. Although Alexandra Park residents are quite active in their community, redevelopment will reduce their representation to approximately 50% of its current composition. The value of the land, measured solely by its exchange value, appears to be a fruit that can only be enjoyed by some – the new condominium owners, while the existing renters continue to unequivocally absorb the negative side effects of growth. Cost-cutting and the privatization of traditionally public services has led some scholars to suggest that the pursuit of economic growth is neither good for social policy and the redistribution of wealth (Lightbody, 2006, p. 129), nor do such measures meet the needs of low-income households (Silver, 2011, p.122).

Research by Skaburskis and Moos (2010) illustrates that low-income households neither enjoy the fruits of growth-generating policies (p. 240) nor benefit from the drive for global city competitiveness (Wacquant, 2008b, p. 264). The existing residents of Alexandra Park will absorb growth, but will not reap the benefits of such growth simply because they do not own their homes. The benefits associated with living in newly constructed or newly renovated units pales in comparison to what residents stand to lose from a new majority of homeowners diluting their collective representation. This has led some to argue growth-oriented municipal regimes to be in opposition to community interests, where they both create the problems they have to deal with later while restricting the resources that are available to potentially alleviate the same problems (Rabrenovic, 2009, p. 244). So why are cities so intent on intensification, density, and growth, and what does fostering growth have to do with public housing and its redevelopment?



## Devolution and Privatization

To better understand why density in the form of private home ownership is currently deemed necessary in the redevelopment of Alexandra Park, a brief history of the Canadian experience of social housing provision and its retraction is pertinent. The largest amount of construction of new social housing occurred in the years between 1970 and 1974 when Canada was considered to be a leader in government-led social housing (DeJong, 2000, n.p.). However, throughout the 1980s, the federal conservatives slowly began to retract from building social housing and by 1993, in the midst of an economic recession, federal funding for new social housing in Canada had ceased (Hulchanski, 2004, p. 185). This was a direct result of neo-liberal policy restructuring in Canada, which involved policy reform supporting the retraction of government intervention in redistributive policies, a scaling back of social services, and a reliance upon the financially secure private enterprise and private markets to cover managerial costs, facilitating the privatization of services once considered public (Filion & Bunting, 2010, p. 29). Federal funding for social housing never returned to the same level. The provinces were left to pick up the pieces and sometimes further downloaded the housing provision responsibilities on to fiscally strained municipal governments. In 2000, the Ontario government legislated the Social Housing Reform Act, which downloaded social housing responsibility to 47 municipal housing agencies (Souza & Quarter, 2005, p. 426). TCH is one such housing agency.

This devolution of service provision, inherent in the reduction of transfers from upper levels of government, has created a situation where municipalities, relying solely on property taxes and user fees for revenue, are now expected to cover all costs from the downloaded services. Recognizing that this was financially impossible, municipalities have had to come up with new schemes to cover the new costs of operation. This involves cities competing for global

recognition in an attempt to attract and sustain growth, and being managed in a business-like fashion. The new way to manage these entrepreneurial cities involves paying market prices for services, centralizing financial controls, cutbacks and privatization with the goal of boosting a city's competitive edge (Kipfer & Keil, 2002, p. 236-237).

In this scenario, key municipal interests have actually benefited from service downloading and have indicated the pursuit of growth to be the remedy to financial austerity. Municipalities now capitalize on their financial constraints by expressing a need to rely on private interests to make up for their shortcomings. Regarding redevelopments such as Alexandra Park, municipal reliance on the private housing market will benefit the City of Toronto by expanding its tax-base, while at the same time hide (by way of displacement or dilution) the “undeserving poor” who create a housing need rather than generate revenue. There are clear winners and losers associated with the pursuit of growth that relies upon private interests. The ratio of rental to owner-occupied units projected for Alexandra Park hammers home the fact that the City of Toronto, acting out of profit-maximizing interest, have chosen to increase their proportion of homeowners.

Neo-liberal policy restructuring and the related devolution of housing responsibility to municipalities has fostered a situation in which local governments have been pressured to adopt market-friendly policies in order to attract the attention of investors (Lightbody, 2006, p. 541). As a result, in the last 20 to 30 years, very little public housing has been supplied. In fact social housing currently only makes up 5% of the total housing stock in Canada, thereby representing the smallest social housing percentage of Western societies next to the United States (Walker & Carter, 2010, p. 344). This devolution of housing responsibility did not happen unintentionally. It

was clearly a decision of the federal government. Skaburskis and Moos (2010) point out the following:

The role of government is highlighted by Charles Schultze's (1977: 30) bold assertion that the free market is 'made by government': landownership and its transactions are possible only within the protective environment formed by government and [f]airness issues are raised when the market brings changes that hurt the more vulnerable populations by forcing them to move or by reducing the supply of lower-priced housing. (p. 228)

In this sense, government is both judge and jury. They set the ground rules for housing supply and are also able to decide which type of housing will be supported and subsidized. Assisted by an inflated real-estate market, large-scale developer interests, and racialized class polarization in the labour market, an argument can be made that capitalist governments have created the affordable housing shortage in Canada. Governments have implemented neo-liberal policies supporting market reliance and, therefore, produced a situation where municipalities have had to turn to private interests to cover newly adopted responsibilities. Unfortunately, as evidenced by this housing shortage, the private market does not protect all interests.

This thought is particularly relevant to redevelopment schemes of today, such as the one proposed for Alexandra Park, where government policy has enabled the private sector to make decisions regarding the fate of public assets. Much like the opportunity of elected officials to push for their own agendas, regardless of whether or not the public's interests are being respected, private interests will naturally protect themselves first and foremost. Given that the private sector is not bound to political or democratic processes and need not concern itself with decisions affecting re-election, the likelihood of self-preservation is high.

Understanding that increased federal and provincial government intervention in rental housing and social housing is necessary to improve the housing situation for low-income

households who are inherently vulnerable in the private market, attention must be turned towards the type and degree of residual government intervention that exists today. With no new public housing, and very little cooperative housing being built, government assistance in low-income housing has been reduced to rent-geared-to-income subsidies funded through the Ontario Works program. In this formula, tenants such as those in Alexandra Park must allocate a proportion of their income to rent while the government picks up the remainder. This type of intervention forces recipients to continually justify compliance by reporting any change in income, and does not leave enough for families to adequately survive. As income increases, the amount of subsidy decreases.

As I discussed in Chapter One of this paper, all households in Alexandra Park rely on government intervention in the form of rent-geared-to-income housing subsidies. No one is paying market-priced rent and nobody is covering the full cost of the below-market rents. Unfortunately, with rent-geared-to-income assistance systems, those whose financial situation improves to a level where they can afford the full rent, must leave to make room for the next household on the long waiting list for subsidized housing. Under this current type of housing intervention, neighbourhoods such as Alexandra Park will remain areas of concentrated poverty because only poor people who are shackled to the meager assistance are permitted to reside. If it is built on the stigmata of concentrated poverty, place-making (as discussed in Chapter Two) can enable gentrification. In a sense, federal and provincial government downloading has created a situation where the predominant (common-sense) approach to fix the accepted problems of neighbourhoods like Alexandra Park is to rely on private-market investment. It can, therefore, be concluded that this type of residual government intervention is regressive, inadequate, short-term, fails to address the root causes of poverty, and is inferior to the intervention that has been

offered to homeowners who enjoy low interest rates, and zero down payments. Furthermore, in ascribing to this redevelopment approach, gentrification (hidden in softer language) appears necessary and is thereby sure to occur.

As for utilizing private investment to finance the redevelopment of the public land containing Alexandra Park, one TCH employee spoke of the potential of the private investment to offset the need to use “any public dollars for this redevelopment. [The] proceeds go right to Alex Park, not a general fund like the Good Repair Fund. The project is self-contained” (personal communication, January 31, 2012). This is the reality. It is the only way available to address the necessary capital repairs for public housing in a context of downloading. There are no other sources of funding available, leaving TCH to re-invent the Regent Park model of redevelopment in Alexandra Park with minor variations. The larger picture problem with self-financed redevelopments of public housing free of government intervention is, therefore, perpetuated in Alexandra Park. This reality is well understood by another TCH employee whom, when interviewed, discussed the current reliance on privately funded redevelopments and stated, “There are no more government subsidies and programs available to build new social housing units. People have to understand that we need the new builds to pay for the redevelopment of the social housing” (personal communication, February 6, 2012).

This lack of upper-level government intervention in public housing provision appears to have become the new normal as evidenced in respondent complacency. TCH, the City of Toronto, city planners, and Councillor Vaughan all have come to accept downloading as an inevitable reality. The need for the large number of private-market units was explained in an interview with a TCH employee who justified the dominance of private unit density by stating:

[It will allow TCH to] make sure there will enough money to address each [existing] building whether replaced or refurbished. [The project] needed more

market units to make this happen after a business case was undertaken. Now we can do more substantial renovations [to the social housing buildings in Alexandra Park]. (Personal communication, January 31, 2012)

The reality of federal government's retraction from housing responsibility resounded clearly throughout all interviews with TCH employees, City of Toronto staff, and professionals involved with the redevelopment alike. Taken from a growth-oriented economic perspective, cities such as Toronto are able to capitalize on their newly acquired housing responsibility by simply explaining that market-produced density is needed for the provision of affordable housing. In this scenario, much like revanchist-style gentrification, adequate housing for the poor depends on the presence and higher proportion of the middle-class. According to the same TCH employee interviewed above, the private units' price point will be relative to the price of the private units in the surrounding neighbourhood (personal communication, January 31, 2012), which will be obtainable only by the lower-earning segment of middle-class and higher. Downloading has thus created a situation where municipalities are able to justify adding density to already densely populated neighbourhoods, and favouring homeownership over renting. This "tenure favouritism" inherent in Alexandra Park's redevelopment will not only dilute the proportion of public housing tenants, but will also prevent most new low-income households from purchasing private units.

Councillor Vaughan remained as complacent as other professionals interviewed regarding the manner in which investment will occur. Reiterating that more than half of the land will remain publicly owned, Vaughan states that, "[Private investment] is critical to bring returns" (personal communication, January 31, 2012). The other half of the land, however, will now be privately owned, which is a devastating price to pay just to fix up a few buildings that will do nothing to alleviate the long waiting list for affordable housing. Half the land will no

longer be public, and once public assets become private, they are forever at the mercy of the market and given a price relative to the going rate, like all other commodities (Silver, 2011, p. 106). Furthermore, as noted earlier in this paper, those inhabiting the private half of the land will represent a majority of the total population and almost double the number of units. Assuming that this new majority will have different desires, needs, and lifestyles than the veteran tenants, they will require different services. If these services are priced according to the consumption tastes and patterns of the majority, the potential for a community of haves and have-nots is very real. Guiding principles of zero displacement and resident-led planning processes will not protect the housing tenure of those who spend the majority of their income on rent if they cannot afford life's other necessities. In this situation, residents may feel pressure to relocate to other less expensive neighbourhoods. This perhaps is the intention.

Kevin Lee, the Executive Director of the Scadding Court Community Centre, offered a contrasting viewpoint regarding TCH's formula of using private investment to pay for Alexandra Park's redevelopment:

The problem with the redevelopment thing is that they've done Regent Park and I think, without even fully evaluating and looking what the outcomes are, because they are still doing it, I think without hard evidence, they are taking that model and saying well that's it, it's the God's all and be all, you know, and it works. Or that we hypothesize that it works because we are able to get the financing. (Personal communication, February 17, 2012)

The success of Regent Park's redevelopment is definitely open for interpretation. TCH considers the redevelopment to be a great example of a mixed-income community, even though a large number of Regent Park's public housing units were lost in the redevelopment. Planners consider it a success because of its design improvements and its unquestioned potential to reduce assumed pathologies. Others, however, consider it to have resulted in a polarized community of rich

homeowners and poor renters. Either way, there have not been alternative options offered as ways to redevelop Alexandra Park other than the sale of parcels of its prime land to private interests. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the “business as usual” option of not redeveloping was not really an option, as the residents had already pinpointed the need to repair the sinking and over-used community centre, indicating that at least some minimal redevelopment was necessary. Interestingly, TCH (2011b) also indicates that, “The mounting maintenance needs [of the community centre] are [considered] a significant burden for TCH and Atkinson Co-op” (p. 8). Obviously, the repair of the community centre is not solely in the interests of residents.

Also discussed in the previous chapter, TCH is setting the blueprint for urban redevelopment in Toronto simply because of their vast amounts of land. From interviews with TCH employees and urban planners alike, there appears to be a sense that no one is really questioning this formula for redevelopment. When the evidence of the segregating and displacing effects of mixed-income redevelopments was presented, some professional participants that were interviewed expressed signs of disbelief and surprise. They were also at a loss for offering alternative methods of redevelopment within a context of downloading. Very few of the professional participants appeared to be aware of the potentially displacing and gentrifying aspects of such redevelopments, as they pointed to the residual policy of right-of-first-refusal as protection from gentrification. What does this really suggest about a resident-led planning process when the same housing provider that is supposed to be protecting and improving the lives of its residents is creating situations that do the complete opposite?

Realistically, most homeowners moving to the area will not become fans of public housing once they live there. Their future majority presence will hardly enhance the strong sense of community that currently exists amongst residents. Even TCH employee Leslie Gash



expressed concern in the June 27th community consultation meeting at Theatre Passe Muraille that mixing existing renters and new owners may dilute the desire and capacity of the existing residents to maintain their sense of solidarity (City of Toronto, 2012b, p. 6). I will now analyze this sense of solidarity, manifested in Alexandra Park's main guiding principle of zero displacement of its tenants.

### Zero Displacement

The overarching goal of zero displacement and the consequent extended duration of the redevelopment do represent the power of collective action. This goal also differentiates this redevelopment project from other TCH redevelopments, such as Regent Park. A TCH employee stated in an interview that, "Because of the co-op, [the] zero displacement [guiding principle] is way more important in Alexandra Park than any of the other projects. [Zero displacement] is necessary for the integrity of the community" (personal communication, February 6, 2012). According to TCH (2011b), "It was clear during community meetings that resident support for redevelopment of the Site would be contingent on ensuring zero displacement" (p. 18). Community integrity has always been strong in Alexandra Park. In fact, in 1969, this public housing neighbourhood was the first of its kind in Canada to form a residents association to collectively represent the ideas and concerns of its residents (Souza & Quarter, 2005, p. 427).

Compared to the relocation process TCH implemented in Regent Park, which was interpreted by one tenant as an exercise to deter residents from returning (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009, p. 124), zero displacement represents a progressive move to protect residents and respect their concerns about permanent or temporary relocation. It also meshes well with, and gives rise to the other nine guiding principles created in the early stages of the community consultation

process: providing good housing, providing more than housing, planning together first, minimizing disruption, protecting tenants' rights, developing connections, ensuring participation, nurturing a clean, green environment, and enhancing opportunities.

It is worth noting that these principles were modeled on other redevelopment principles established in Regent Park and Lawrence Heights, and adjusted to incorporate community priorities relevant to Alexandra Park (TCH, 2011b, p. 18). More noteworthy for this paper is that the Visioning Committee, which was formed to represent all interests, created these principles. The Committee included representatives from the Atkinson Housing Cooperative and the Alexandra Park Residents Association. Also part of the Committee, however, are Councillor Vaughan, TCH representatives, and City of Toronto representatives – all of whom stand to benefit from Alexandra Park's redevelopment. We must also remain aware that the long process (legitimized as protecting residents from displacement) allows for continual land valorization as the neighbourhood gradually becomes gentrified.

Zero displacement is justified as a way to allow residents to remain up to date and involved at all stages of the redevelopment process, because they will be living in it. This may, however, create havoc in residents' everyday lives. In fact, one city planner alluded to the fact that residents may not be fully aware of the reality that they will be living in a construction zone for the next 15 to 20 years. In this scenario, zero displacement is not as attractive in practice as it is in theory. Regardless, it does protect residents from immediate displacement – a protection that was not offered in earlier TCH redevelopments. In an interview, a TCH employee mentioned that many lessons were learned from other TCH redevelopments and the insight gained is being used to improve the redevelopment of Alexandra Park (personal communication, February 6, 2012).

Assuming that averting displacement and relocation is a result of the power of collectivity and the political mobilizing capacity that can be achieved in numbers and representation, it is imperative to understand why this guiding principle carries such weight. Without the Atkinson Housing Cooperative and the Alexandra Park Residents' Association, it is unlikely that zero displacement would have even been considered. The conversion to a cooperative model of social housing thus changed the parameters of redevelopment planning. In the eyes of planners and housing officials, cooperative housing members are likely considered to be more "deserving" than public housing tenants and, therefore, their desire to remain in the neighbourhood is respected. However, the Housing Issues Report submitted to the City of Toronto by TCH (2011a) states clearly that, "A tenant choosing to move out of Alexandra Park will be advised of their potential loss of eligibility for an RGI [rent-geared-to-income] subsidy and will forfeit their right to return to Alexandra Park following redevelopment" (p. 5). This suggests that anyone (whether housing cooperative member or public housing tenant) who cannot tolerate the continuous construction over the next 15 years sacrifices his/her chances of residing in the redeveloped Alexandra Park. I explore the differentiation within the resident population in the next section, which examines the public participation process and the limits of opposition to the project.

## Public Participation

Public participation can range from merely going through the democratic motions of consulting citizens while largely ignoring their input to a situation where typically unheard groups actually influence decisions in a partnership scenario. For Arnstein (1969), the continuum begins with "Non Participation" whereby through "Manipulation" and "Therapy",

“powerholders” are enabled to “educate” or “cure” the participants (p. 217). “Tokenism” happens further along the continuum where “Informing”, “Consulting”, and “Placation” occurs, but participants are not guaranteed that their views will influence change, reserving those with power the right to make final decisions (Ibid). It is not until citizens begin to share power that they begin to increase their “decision-making clout”. For example, “Partnership” allows them to “negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional powerholders” (Ibid). Finally, with “Delegated Power” and “Citizen Control”, powerless citizens are able to “obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power” (Ibid).

On the surface, the early stages of the redevelopment process in Alexandra Park justify a positive evaluation of resident participation. TCH, the City of Toronto, and Councillor Vaughan all have heralded Alexandra Park’s redevelopment as a resident-led planning process fully promoting the redevelopment process in this light. This support is easily found throughout their websites and documents, and was reiterated during interviews with staff from the aforementioned institutions. In an interview, one TCH employee explained that, “Residents have not only been encouraged to participate [in the planning process], they have led the process” (personal communication, January 31, 2012). Another TCH employee celebrates the initiatives taken to involve residents in the planning process in an interview and explained, “We have tried to get people involved. [We have] hired community animators, [placed] flyers [on doorsteps], knocked on doors, [administered] surveys, and [hired] translators” (personal communication, February 6, 2012). TCH (2009) indicates that the purpose of the 2007 creation of the Visioning Committee was to gather information regarding residents’ “concerns and priorities” (p. 2) regarding living in Alexandra Park and an attempt to provide guidance and resident representation to the project (personal communication, January 31, 2012). The Atkinson Housing

Cooperative's presence in Alexandra Park (translating into a collective voice for the residents as well as offering protection in numbers) is also documented throughout the City of Toronto's and TCH's websites and documents. An interviewed TCH employee noted, "The co-op is a big help in governance over the plans and communicating to their members. Members place trust in the co-op board. [It's] not just TCH coming in and imposing ideas. It is working things out with the board as a partner" (personal communication, January 31, 2012).

Adding to the many public consultation meetings held to discuss redevelopment plans was the initiation of a Muslim moms focus group. This group was set up at a community member's request to mobilize this group of residents who were not comfortable with voicing their opinions and concerns at the larger working group meetings (personal communication, February 6, 2012). Their main concern was about how to integrate incoming residents and veteran tenants, two groups with different means and interests. They thought that conflict could result from an influx of more financially secure residents into a low-income neighbourhood. In an interview, a TCH employee reiterated integration concerns held by the Muslim moms group and explained, "Some kids [would be] wearing \$300.00 sneakers while others shop at Zeller's" (personal communication, February 6, 2012).

In a 2007 precursor to redevelopment, the Visioning Committee sent out a questionnaire to residents to gauge resident satisfaction in Alexandra Park. Between this time and 2011, TCH held 35 formal community meetings and approximately an additional 30 informal meetings (personal communication, January 31, 2011). The infrastructure for resident input has certainly been provided, but who is taking advantage of these opportunities to be heard? Regarding the diversity of those that attend the meetings, one TCH employee affirmed in an interview that, "There is a core group [of people at the meetings]. However, [at] every meeting there will be a

few different people. We rely on them [the core group] to bring home messages and news to the people they are representing” (personal communication, February 6, 2012). Scadding Court’s Executive Director was less convinced about differentiated representation and offered, in an interview, a contrasting opinion of the diversity of the residents involved in the public participation planning process by stating:

I think in any community, there are constituencies that are more vocal than others. I think these are the ones who are coming out. There’s a large proportion of the community that are aware of what is going on but I don’t know how significantly engaged they are in the decision-making process. It’s basically, you know, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, you know. (Kevin Lee, personal communication, February 17, 2012)

By this, Kevin Lee suggests that even within the democratic nature of the planning process, not all interests and concerns are voiced, which is not unlike the larger democratic process in Canadian politics.

It is important to note that in the Alexandra Park redevelopment, the stakes are not the same for all residents. Some tenants are encouraged to become involved more than others in the participation process. Regarding the right-of-first-refusal policy of redevelopment, a seniority list will be created for Alexandra Park. According to TCH (2011a), “When the new units are ready for occupancy, eligible tenants/[co-op] members will select their preferred unit based on seniority” (p. 5). Those who have lived in the neighbourhood the longest will, therefore, most likely support redevelopment. They will have first choice in unit selection based on unit type. A TCH employee reiterated that support for redevelopment is based upon length of tenure. In general, the longer-term tenants are in favour of redevelopment while the newer tenants remain skeptical (personal communication, February 6, 2012). However, one 23 year-old, life-long resident is quoted in a *Globe and Mail* article, stating, “I don’t think it is for us. I don’t think they

want to hurt us. But the area's been needing help all along and I've seen what kind of help comes. Now all of a sudden we have a whole army coming to help us" (Grant, April 24, 2010). This quote signals apprehensions that a complete redevelopment may be too grand of a project for some residents to endure, indicating that not all long-term tenants support a redevelopment project of such magnitude.

In an interview at Metro Hall, a Housing Development Officer in the Affordable Housing Office of the City of Toronto commented on the support/opposition debate within the current tenant composition in Alexandra Park wherein she explained that certain households would indeed suffer a loss in unit size after redevelopment because the units will be "right-sized" to reflect up-to-date household composition (Sarah Power, personal communication, February 3, 2012). In contrast to those with first choice of unit selection, tenants considered to be "overhoused" will receive smaller units likely affecting their engagement in the public planning process. Even among tenants, not everyone stands to gain or lose the same from redevelopment, nor is everyone equally supportive. Furthermore, disengagement from the participation process and/or indifference to the project should not be likened to support for redevelopment.

This process of inclusion in decision-making assumes that all citizens exercise their democratic rights. The reality is that "very serious cultural, philosophical, and procedural limitations restrict the capacity of individual citizen-amateurs to become involved directly in a continuous and effective fashion" (Lightbody, 2006, p.111). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two, neighbourhoods with large numbers of newcomers tend not to feel connected to proposed agendas (Ibid, p. 197). Alexandra Park represents such a neighbourhood of newcomers who may not feel connected to larger political agendas. As we know from Chapter One, a large majority of residents are immigrants. Arnstein (1969) discusses resident participation in what she

calls “ghetto neighborhoods” and concludes, “Residents are increasingly unhappy about the number of times per week they are surveyed about their problems and hopes” (p. 219) suggesting that some may have grown tired of “being involved” and chose not to exercise their democratic rights.

The measures taken to ensure inclusiveness in the planning of Alexandra Park’s redevelopment are certainly commendable. TCH has gone to great lengths to involve as many residents as possible. There have been many community meetings, the creation of a Visioning Committee with wide representation from various involved interests, interpreters used to ensure inclusiveness, newsletters in various languages to relay information, and community-building exercises such as a barbeque to launch the beginning of the resident-led planning process. However, after scratching the surface, it is apparent that the City of Toronto (who owns the land), TCH (who owns and operates the buildings that will either be replaced or refurbished), the Atkinson Housing Cooperative (who is interested in expanding its presence as all new potential Alexandra Park residents must agree to become co-op members), and the developer (who will sell private units) all stand to benefit tremendously from the sale of the land for redevelopment. Therefore, one must be conscious of the participation process and, more importantly, the impact of the recommendations of the residents on TCH’s agenda as well as Urban Strategies’ plans, which as noted above, had already been conceived without input from residents not acting on boards or committees.

At best, it appears that Alexandra Park’s residents have climbed to the “Placation” rung on Arnstein’s ladder. At this stage, “a few handpicked ‘worthy’ poor” are placed on committees to exercise minimal influence over decisions but are mainly there to serve as “tokens” (Ibid, p. 220). The residents’ preferences for townhouse form, remaining on site throughout



redevelopment, the selection of options for redevelopment (after they had been already been created), keeping the public housing units close together on site, having the neighbourhood connect in a north-south manner from Kensington Market to Queen Street West (as opposed to an earlier proposed east-west connection), and keeping the heights and densities of the new buildings low have been incorporated into the redevelopment plans. For the most part, these plan components will serve the tenants well. However, as indicated throughout this paper, it is not only the tenants who will benefit from these changes, and because more powerful interests are involved, the residents have been given a “peripheral role of watchdog and, ultimately, the ‘rubber stamp’ of the plan generated” and, therefore, “are once again being planned for” (Ibid, p. 221).

#### Integration, Physical Design, and Micro-Segregation

Accepting the assumed, yet disputed, benefits of the mixed-income theory of redevelopment, the proposed redevelopment of Alexandra Park, like other planned mixed-income redevelopments, will offer an integration of market-priced condominiums and social housing - integrated on site, yet segregated from each other. TCH and the Atkinson Housing Cooperative will join with at least one more governing body: a condominium board. TCH sees integration in a positive light and their representatives believe that maintenance and operating duties can be shared amongst the private units and the public units. In an interview, a TCH employee explained that, “Because of close proximity between public and private buildings, there is opportunity for joint operation agreements [such as property] maintenance...no rich brother – poor brother [situation]” (personal communication, January 31, 2012). However, within the buildings, there will be no mixing of private and social units. The social units and the

private units will be physically separated. In interviews, TCH employees suggested that mixed buildings are impossible to manage and operate. I am not convinced that this segregation is a measure only to facilitate property management. In Regent Park, neither TCH nor developers support complete integration.

According to the TCH representatives whom I interviewed, the outside and inside finishes of the buildings and units will be identical for both the market units and the new social units because of the fact that both types will be built by the same developer. One TCH employee explained in an interview, “Tenants are tired of their buildings looking like government housing...and [being] stigmatized [by it]” (personal communication, January 31, 2012), suggesting that residents are aware of the stigma attached to their neighbourhood. Perhaps they are merely repeating what they hear from outside decision-makers, considering that the physical state of the built form has been used as a justification for redevelopment to offset larger social pathologies. Public housing residents often perpetuate the same stereotypes that have stigmatized their own living situations.

Regarding the state of the TCH buildings, one must keep in mind that the majority of the built form in Alexandra Park is only a little over 40 years old. A 2007 building condition assessment revealed that the Queen Vanauley Apartment, and the Alexandra Park Apartments at 91 Augusta Avenue and 73-75 Augusta Square to be in “good condition”, while the Atkinson Housing Cooperative buildings were deemed to be in “fair condition” (TCH, 2011b, p. 7). This means that redevelopment will ensure new buildings for the cooperative members, while only refurbishing the buildings for the public housing tenants. According to TCH (2011b), “The limited differentiation in form, material and colour convey the feel of a purpose-built public housing ‘project’ quite distinct from its varied Victorian context” (p. 7). Reiterating TCH’s

mandate to provide good quality housing for their residents, one TCH employee interviewed stated:

Having both the social and market buildings similar in appearance is a good thing. [We] want people to have pride of ownership. In Regent [Park] you can't tell which is social housing, which isn't. Quality materials and finishes are equally as important for TCH as they are for the residents. Because we own these buildings, we are interested in finishes that will be durable. We don't want to have to be replacing [the] floors in three years. [Therefore], we are targeting LEED Gold on [the] rentals and at least [LEED] certification on the market buildings. (Personal communication, February 6, 2012)

In an interview, Scadding Court's Executive Director was not convinced of TCH's ability to create a truly mixed community and was skeptical of their intentions to use similar materials for both the condominiums and the public housing. He stated:

I've got a major beef in terms of TCH's redevelopment strategy. It is still ghettoization. If you look at the plans, one tower is going to be for the haves, this tower is going to be for the have-nots. I find it hard to believe that both are going to have fireplaces, Bosch appliances and granite countertops. TCH sees their population as who they are [now] and that they could never, you know, get out of that, you know, treadmill. If you believe that, then yes, you [TCH] can continue doing what they are doing now. But, if you don't believe that then you should be looking at, if you really believe in free enterprise and capitalism and all of that, then they should be figuring out a model in how to convert social housing into private housing and have the people that are in social housing become the owners. The Board [TCH] is made up of business people, capitalists and all of that. I think that they need to be challenged. If you really think that that is the case, then why are you doing it [the redevelopment] in this way? (Kevin Lee, personal communication, February 17, 2012)

Kevin Lee goes on to explain:

They [the veteran and new residents] are not going to mix because right from the start the philosophy is not to mix them. Even though you are right across the street you are still living in one building where all your neighbours are poor and across the street you are living in a building where all of your neighbours are rich. You cannot philosophically maintain the same divisions and then try to articulate afterwards to say that it's a mixed community. (Kevin Lee, personal communication, February 17, 2012)

This is an important point that questions the whole premise of mixed-income redevelopments. If mixing is the solution to problems associated with areas of concentrated poverty, then should not mixing occur within buildings as well? Should not amenity and open space be shared amongst all residents (both existing and new)? This will not be the case. In fact, TCH's (2011b) Planning Rationale states, "The distinction of private and public space is often unclear in Alexandra Park" (Ibid, p. 9), and how the redevelopment will "knit the Atkinson Co-op / Alexandra Park residents back into the surrounding community (Ibid, p. 19) and how "all new units will face onto a public street, public landscaped open space, or privately owned mews, reinforcing the distinction between public and private space and providing the passive surveillance that is lacking today" (Ibid, p. 20). Physical re-design reintroduces forms of physical separation that belie principles of social mixing.

Whether one agrees with TCH and its employees' views, or the view of the Executive Director of the neighbouring Scadding Court Community Centre, integration raises a contentious issue both for redevelopments in general and Alexandra Park in particular. Just as some argue that there should not be a clear demarcation of the haves and the have-nots, some scholars argue that integrating market and non-market housing units in the same form and style only masks the economic, social, and political disparities that are hidden behind the generic walls of residents' homes (Duke, 2009, p. 112).

In the case of Alexandra Park's redevelopment, "the design and construction of the Atkinson/TCH and market units will be indistinguishable" (TCH, 2011a, p. 1). The Atkinson Housing Cooperative will remain in the centre of the site near the proposed public park and will be insulated from the market units on the periphery of the land. TCH justifies this spatial demarcation as being in the interest of the current residents' desire to maintain the solidarity of

the community (TCH, 2011b, p. 25; TCH employee, personal communication February 6, 2012). It does not, however, fit well with the whole idea of mixing and integration. Judging by the placement of buildings in the plans, this insulation from the busier streets can be interpreted as a way to further hide the social housing units, and their inhabitants, out of sight behind the market units and retail proposed to be situated along the major streets. As it is now, the portion of Dundas Street West in which the low-rise townhouses of Alexandra Park are situated makes for a gloomy and uninviting streetscape that is highly visible to passers-by. Tucking the public housing behind the condominiums and retail storefronts that will frame the new neighbourhood will address this aesthetic “blemish” along the south side of Dundas Street West, further hiding the public housing and its tenants, thus creating a landscape that is more aesthetically pleasing for its new inhabitants, visitors, and potential investors.

By “normalizing” the area through the re-introduction of through streets and the demarcation of public and private space it becomes apparent that true integration is not a goal, and that the simple physical planning of the built form has assumed the complex task of fixing entrenched social problems. According to TCH (2011b), “These physical and visual disconnections from the City’s urban fabric have created a sense of isolation, segregating the community from its context and potentially impairing social connections” (p. 44). This certainly does not conform to what the residents say about the “social connectivity” of Alexandra Park.

In addition to highlighting how the proposed built form reintroduces physical segregation, interviewee Kevin Lee raised the issue of a possibility of homeownership for existing tenants. First, regarding homeownership potential, TCH’s Lisette Zuniga stated affordable home ownership programs are subject to both provincial and federal funding (City of Toronto, 2011b, p. 6). In an interview, another TCH employee stated:

There are ideas but not plans [regarding affordable home ownership options for the current residents of Alexandra Park and] we would like to have these services in place now [because] ownership educational sessions will help people to better understand mortgages, budgeting, down payments, etc. [However, ownership] programs must be available first for ownership options to take root. (Personal communication, February 6, 2012)

Sadly, yet not surprisingly, there are no such provincially or federally funded programs in place. As stated by TCH (2011a), “If the opportunity for the development of affordable rental or affordable home ownership arises, tenants will be informed of and supported on the application process” (p. 6). Councillor Vaughan does, however, see hope for the future in terms of residents purchasing condominium units. Vaughan notes that, “[It] is a highly educated population in Alexandra Park. A lot [of residents] are in their 20s and will be graduating in the next few years, and [will] be looking to purchase homes (personal communication, January 31, 2012).

Judging by the fact that all households are subsidized on a rent-geared-to-income basis and the mathematical conclusions I made in Chapter Two regarding affordable housing, it is unlikely that many tenants in Alexandra Park could purchase units. Even with Options for Homes, which is “a private Toronto-based non-profit organization started in 1992 that has created a unique approach to developing more affordable housing without the need for government assistance...purchasers must provide at least a downpayment of 5%...[and] are expected to secure the construction financing from a conventional loan source” (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2012, n.p.). Furthermore, the fact that TCH is waiting for affordable ownership options to “arise” instead of actively pursuing affordable ownership options draws their commitment into question.

## Location, Location, Location

If the analysis is correct that land valorization is the prime mover in the redevelopment process, further consequences will follow. Davidson (2008) discusses “pro-social-mix policy agendas” that “promise a win-win scenario” for both the existing tenants and the incoming residents (p. 2388). Davidson differentiates “indirect” types of displacement from the “immediate prospect of people being forced from their homes to make way for wealthier residents” and how these types of displacement are “often [a] neglected and undertheorised set of complex and interrelated displacement processes” (Ibid). One of such “processes” is the transformation of resources and services in a neighbourhood where “local shops and services change and meeting-places disappear” (Ibid, p. 2392), creating a situation where existing residents are disassociated from their sense of place. This has particular relevance in Alexandra Park’s redevelopment, which (upheld by the zero displacement guiding principle) only serves to protect residents from direct displacement. The Scadding Court Community Centre’s Executive Director anticipates that residential gentrification will result in commercial gentrification in Alexandra Park and alter the retail environment to the detriment of existing residents:

As a community gentrifies, then you start getting [like] food stores like Longo’s (expensive chain of grocery stores) [which] help to further nudge the disenfranchised even further. The losers are going to be the [existing] community. Ok, and the reason I’m saying the loser is going to be the whole [existing] community is [because] we keep re-gentrifying and I am looking at the examples of other locations where gentrification [has] happened and then the services have to transform with it. As you are shifting the community, then I think at the end of the day, this whole community loses. This applies to rich people too. If rich people abandon Forrest Hill, Forest Hill is going to change. (Kevin Lee, personal communication, February 17, 2012)

For Davidson (2008), gentrification is “temporal” and the long-term effects of it “may result in once-welcoming residents being eventually forced from their homes and/or their family and

friends being unable to live in the area” (p. 2390). Whitson and MacIntosh argue that massive redevelopment projects often mean that poor people are forced to move to locations far from the services, employment, and social supports that they have become accustomed to, while others who hold out must learn to survive in a neighbourhood where services and amenities have transformed to meet the needs of a new population with different consumption demands (as cited in Lightbody, 2006, p. 523).

Alexandra Park is situated on a prime piece of land that is well serviced. The location of the site and its access to services are two positive attributes of Alexandra Park, as reported by residents (Sidhu, 2008. p. 14). TCH is fully aware of the financial potential of this asset. In an interview, a TCH employee noted the following:

[The central downtown location of Alexandra Park] makes it the best TCH site of all and, therefore, very easy to attract investment dollars. [Being near] Kensington [Market], Chinatown and Queen Street West is an ideal place for young people to want to buy a condo [and this has] helped to push the Alexandra Park redevelopment to the top of [TCH’s] list. Other neighbourhoods such as Jane and Finch have poorer physical conditions [than Alexandra Park] but [are] not as easy to attract investment because of their location. We can look at what we can do to these sites now so that we’re ready so whether we do re-zonings or something in order to be prepared for that time when, hopefully, developers are going, “Yes, we want to work at Jane and Finch”. (Personal communication, February 6, 2012)

This quote makes it clear why Alexandra Park is being redeveloped. It is situated on a piece of land which is desirable not only to long-standing residents but also, and most crucially, outsiders with the desire to live in such a centrally located neighbourhood and can afford 5% down-payments, and those who stand to profit the most from the sale of it. These are the private investors, TCH, and the City of Toronto. From this perspective, razing public housing neighbourhoods is less a response to the problems within them and more a project to valorize



land and implement the agenda of neo-liberal governments, which are prepared to rearrange the lives of public housing tenants in the interest of the more affluent (Silver, 2011, p. 12).

## Chapter 4 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to understand the reasons why public housing neighbourhoods are being redeveloped in Toronto. Alexandra Park was chosen as a case study because it is the latest neighbourhood in TCH's portfolio of public housing neighbourhoods being primed for redevelopment. This particular redevelopment made for an interesting case study because of its unique and yet to be tested progressive approach to redevelopment compared to prior TCH projects, which is based upon 2 of its 10 guiding principles of zero displacement, and encouraging a resident-led planning process. As argued throughout this paper, however, the principles guiding redevelopment in Alexandra Park will neither offer residents long-term protection from displacement nor is it a viable redevelopment goal.

The idea of a redeveloped Alexandra Park was introduced by a progressive councillor and an involved group of residents accustomed to transformations in the governance structure of their neighbourhood. However, without the high exchange value of its prime downtown location, private investment in this economically underutilized neighbourhood is unlikely. Aided by the territorial stigmatization of the neighbourhood and the racialization of its residents, place-making has enabled the common-sense approach to redevelopment in Alexandra Park legitimized by the concentrations of poverty thesis. It is my position that the existing residents of Alexandra Park will not reap the assumed, yet unfounded, benefits commonly associated with socially mixing economically polarized groups of citizens. Redevelopment, instead, will lead to revalorized land that generates revenue in the form of property taxes, and a micro-segregated neighbourhood threatened by long-term gentrification processes related to increasing property values and consequent service transformations. In this last section of the paper, I will return to the research questions proposed in the introduction. As such, I will

reiterate who is pushing for redevelopment, whose interests are dominant, and who are the winners and losers associated with redevelopment. I will also address why it is being redeveloped, why in this privately financed manner, and why now. I will conclude with an ideological suggestion for policy to return to its protective and redistributive role, such that place-based solutions need not be relied upon to address larger structural causes of poverty, followed by some concrete suggestions to redevelop public housing neighbourhoods (within a context of service downloading) in a manner that better protects the marginalized populations that call neighbourhoods like Alexandra Park home.

On the surface, the redevelopment of Alexandra Park represents good planning in that it has harnessed the aspirations of the residents, invoked a lengthy public participant process, facilitated the input of residents, and permitted alterations to the conceived plans created by Urban Strategies. On the other hand, as I have shown, the resident-led process and the infrastructure for resident participation that was provided to produce perceived benefits to residents will actually benefit outsiders on a much grander scale. In this sense, the public participation process was more of a “window-dressing ritual” where, in the end, the residents’ only role was to “rubberstamp” decisions made by outsiders (Arnstein, 1969, pp. 219, 221). Professionals dominated even the Visioning Committee put in place by TCH to facilitate representation along with a few handpicked residents who (because of their positions on either the Atkinson Housing Cooperative Board or the Alexandra Park Residents’ Association) are already active in community affairs and, therefore, likely to be involved in a project of such magnitude.

In the end, Alexandra Park’s redevelopment will only maintain the status quo of relying on private interests to redevelop a public asset. It is a simple place-based solution to the

concentrated poverty that has resulted from forces so complex they could never be addressed by the mere supply of 1500 condominium units as justified by mixed-income theory. This redevelopment neither adds to the public housing stock, nor challenges the downloading of services to municipalities. It will thus perpetuate the subservience of municipal governments to higher orders of government.

Without addressing the root causes of poverty that have led to neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty, the Alexandra Park redevelopment still remains only a symptomatic, placed-based approach to addressing its “problems”. This is largely because residents are held responsible for their lot in life without consideration for the forces that have led to their inequitable situation. Firstly, labour-market restructuring decreased the number of moderate-waged manufacturing jobs and encouraged part-time casual employment without employment benefits, such as sick time, vacation, and employment insurance. Furthermore, racial discrimination in hiring practices has led to racialized Ontarians being hired less and paid less (when they do secure employment) than their non-racialized counterparts.

Secondly, land-rent dynamics and government-initiated gentrification have relegated certain populations to low-income neighbourhoods. In entrepreneurially managed cities, exchange value is favoured over use value, and private homeownership is accordingly preferred over other types of tenure (rental, public, and cooperative). Therefore, the current use of land will always be measured against its highest potential use, and when the gap between current use value and potential use value becomes wide enough, those that can afford the inflated value will win the location battle over land, forcing those who cannot out of contention.

Finally, the federal and provincial governments’ adoption of neo-liberal policies has also helped to produce concentrations of poverty as the more protective, social, and redistributive

policies have been left behind for policies focused solely on economic growth. The retraction of government intervention, scaling back of social services, and reliance upon private enterprise and private market (Filion & Bunting, 2010, p. 29) is a means to “free business from government-imposed constraints in order to improve their profitability” (Silver, 2011, p. 40). Profit-maximization is the order of the day, not protection and redistribution.

The Alexandra Park redevelopment is thus very similar to previous TCH redevelopments. Even within a zero displacement framework, TCH’s reliance upon private investment negates the long-term tenure protection of its public housing residents. This is partly due to the actual dilution and the on-site segregation of low-income household proportion within the redevelopment, and partly due to the potential transformation and/or complete change of services and amenities in the area to keep up with the demands of Alexandra Park’s new “diverse” demographic. The Alexandra Park redevelopment is, therefore, an example of government-led gentrification. In other words, it is an attempt made by a financially strapped city to generate revenue by supplying an urbane neighbourhood sure to attract economically mobile citizens who can afford the high cost of homeownership in downtown Toronto’s currently inflated real-estate market.

Policy has a profound and varying impact on all citizens. Policy decisions will always reward certain groups at the expense of others. This is the political nature of policy in our structurally unequal society. TCH is supportive of redevelopment because it will receive newly constructed and/or newly renovated buildings for its tenants. Otherwise left to its own financial devices in a context of downloaded service provision, the costly capital repairs would not be possible.

The city councillor representing the neighbourhood is in favour of redevelopment. The fact that he gathered enough support to put Alexandra Park at the top of the list for redevelopment puts him in a position to have his name associated with the transformation of the neighbourhood. If considered to be a success and promoted as such, his involvement will advance his political career. Although initiated by a progressive councillor, it is important to note that Alexandra Park would not have even made the redevelopment list if not for its prime location and related exchange value.

The City of Toronto will benefit because they will have transformed the neighbourhood from an area that costs money to one that generates revenue in the form of property tax, and will reap the reward of land transfer taxes as units are bought and sold. Furthermore, the City will be able to use this redevelopment to re-brand the neighbourhood in true place-making fashion. The re-branding of the neighbourhood is much bigger than the Alexandra Park community. On April 22, 2009, the City of Toronto released a Streetscape Study and Implementation Plan for Dundas Street West between University Avenue and Bathurst Street that “highlights the potential for this area to develop into a creative corridor, therefore, warranting extensive streetscape upgrades” (TCH, 2011b, p. 15). This is serious foreshadowing of change to come. Related to streetscapes and upgrades, the businesses in the area will win out, so long as they are able to adapt to the demands of the new tenants who will likely have more disposable income to spend in the area than those on fixed incomes.

For the private sector of housing provision, investment in Alexandra Park only makes sense. It is a well-serviced location that does not require extensive infrastructure expansion. The neighbourhood is situated in an area of Toronto that is already built up, can handle the increased density, and is desirable to condominium owners due to its proximity to trendy Queen Street

West and Kensington Market. Assuming that none of these attractive real estate attributes change over the next few years, it will be an easy task to attract buyers to move into the redeveloped neighbourhood.

Those involved within the real estate industry will benefit from all of the ensuing property transactions that will take place as units change ownership. Agents facilitating the buying and selling of condominium units will have over 1500 new units to work with, and because they work on commission, higher prices of land associated with gentrification translates into more profit for agents. Of course, property lawyers prefer homeownership to its current dominance of rental tenure, because they are paid to facilitate the transactions. Assuming there will be no steep downturn in the real-estate market, the private development company, who has yet to be named, will benefit from redevelopment, because they will be selling units at inflated downtown market prices, thus potentially creating a large return on their initial investment. Builders and construction workers will also enjoy labour opportunities created by the supply of various forms of housing and retail in the new Alexandra Park.

Those who are able to afford to purchase the condominium units will be happy, because they will have a desirable address in the city centre, and existing homeowners in the surrounding area will likely see their property values rise resulting from neighbourhood “upgrading”. Alexandra Park tenants and Atkinson Housing Cooperative members that are able to remain in the neighbourhood (and who support redevelopment) will benefit by receiving newly renovated units.

As discussed in the previous chapter, however, not all tenants will be affected by redevelopment in the same manner. Some may simply not want change of any sort. Others may support redevelopment but not under the proposed manner. Others’ support will be varied due to

seniority. As such, longer-term tenants will enjoy first choice of units, while newer tenants will have to take what is left over. “Over-housed” households will also lose out, because redevelopment will ensure all households are “right-sized”, thereby reducing unit size to accommodate current household composition. Those who cannot tolerate the continuous construction and subsequently choose to relocate will suffer because they “will forfeit their right to return to Alexandra Park following redevelopment” (TCH, 2011a, p. 5). Finally, those unable to remain in the neighbourhood because of increased standards of living and associated costs, and those on the long waiting list for subsidized housing, however, will not benefit at all from Alexandra Park’s redevelopment. It appears then that, politically, the benefits of redevelopment to outsiders outweigh the costs accrued by the majority of residents. It is quite clear why residents show varying degrees of support for a project that is considered to be resident-led and in their best interests.

The main reason why Alexandra Park is being redeveloped is unquestionably related to economics. From the perspective of the municipality, the land is too valuable to leave in its current use. Its potential exchange value is too high to be ignored. This sets up the perfect situation for gentrification. Assuming that the real-estate (condominium) boom continues in Toronto and Alexandra Park’s geographical location continues to remain prime (due to its proximity to the central business district, Kensington Market, and Queen Street West), the profit margins are quite high for those who stand to benefit from the land valorization. The political will of the councillor, the concentration of poverty theory thesis, and the need to repair some of the units are merely secondary factors facilitating the gentrification of the neighbourhood. Again, it is its prime location that brought Alexandra Park to the top of TCH’s list, from which it was absent originally.



Alexandra Park is being redeveloped in the manner proposed, because other TCH redevelopments, such as Regent Park, have been celebrated as successful planning endeavors. Some policy-makers, academics, the public, and even residents themselves have accepted that physical planning produces social behaviour. This rationale was used in the postwar urban renewal period that cleared slums and placed poor people into isolated and segregated public housing projects as an attempt to re-dress their squalor-like living conditions and their perceived homogeneity and assumed shared pathologies. Residents buy into the concentrated poverty thesis and, as a result, think that by physically altering the design of the built form they will be alleviated from the associated perils of poverty. The unquestioned belief that breaking apart concentrations of poverty justifies redevelopment helps explain the minimal opposition by residents. As such, it has become common sense to redevelop public housing.

As noted in Chapter Three, success is measured subjectively. Powerful decision-makers, such as TCH, the City of Toronto, City Planners, and the developer consider Regent Park a success, which explains the similar redevelopment of Alexandra Park (with a few modifications). The negative consequences of mixed-income community redevelopments are misunderstood, ignored, or severely downplayed by decision-makers and, therefore, the Regent Park formula is being implemented, regardless of the many positive attributes associated with life in today's Alexandra Park. As highlighted by residents themselves, these positive attributes include the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the residents, the sense of community where everyone knows each other, the relatively small size of the neighbourhood, the resident-led character of decision-making embodied by the Alexandra Park Residents Association and the Atkinson Housing Cooperative Board, the relatively good condition of the built form, and the fact that a majority of residents enjoy living in the neighbourhood and foresee living in Alexandra Park for a long time

to come. In the eyes of the residents, these positive attributes outweigh some negative aspects, like poor physical design of the built form, a sinking community centre, some petty crime, and marginal disrepair of the buildings. Consequently, as I discussed in Chapter Two, place-making exercises concentrate on outsiders' negative portrayals and perceptions of neighbourhood life in an effort to make change appear necessary for the benefit of all.

Chapter Two also discussed the link between gentrification and its implications for the equitable provision of affordable housing for low-income households. Social policy must return to critically examining the displacing effects of gentrification and social mixing to ensure fair access to safe, adequate, and affordable housing (Slater, 2006, pp. 752-753). In this sense, the public must be informed of the inequitable consequences of redevelopment based upon economic diversity, such that the common-sense view of breaking up low-income neighbourhoods becomes less common. Left to the private market in a capitalist economy, only housing decisions that ensure profits (and as in the case of Alexandra Park's redevelopment where no alternatives have been entertained) will be considered, forcing many households either to stay put and become comparatively poorer, or pick up and move to less expensive areas farther from the city centre and the life they have grown accustomed to living. This is a concern that must be considered in all public housing redevelopments based on the largely unquestioned mixed-income planning principle.

According to Hulchanski (2005), "Canada is able to build safe and affordable housing appropriate to the needs of all its households. That is, there are no physical, institutional, or financial impediments, no shortage of building supplies, construction workers, or mortgage financing to supply adequate housing for all" (p. 1). In fact, there was a time, about 30 years ago, when federal government intervention in public housing was strong and adequate. Interestingly,

however, at the same time that public housing investment subsided, the homeless population in Canada began to grow and diversify. Returning to an active federal-provincial role in social housing provision is crucial when considering alternatives to existing public housing redevelopment strategies that act merely as a band-aid solution, addressing only the symptoms of poverty and never the root causes.

## Alternatives

What alternatives are available for cities, at the very least, to maintain the expensive social housing stock? Without federal and provincial government investment in this particular sector of the housing market, TCH's hands are restricted. The Social Housing Reform Act has downloaded all public housing responsibility into the hands of inadequately funded service providers across Ontario. Alternatives to TCH's formula are few and far between. TCH is merely capitalizing on the positive attributes of the Alexandra Park neighbourhood, such as the ready-to-go infrastructure and its proximity to desirable amenities, and perhaps wants to strike while interest in development is high and before critiques of mixed-income neighbourhoods become louder.

The downloading of responsibility for public housing provision that has resulted from years of neo-liberal policies has left the City of Toronto and its public housing service provider, TCH, with limited options to address the necessary maintenance costs of aging properties, let alone the reduction of waiting lists for social housing. Downloading, however, is a result of federal and provincial housing policy and, as mentioned throughout this paper, does not address the structural forces manifested in policies that have created these neighbourhoods. According to Wacquant (2008b), "These widely dispossessed zones of relegation are first and foremost

creatures of state policies in matters of housing, urban development and regional planning [and] their possible dispersion or rebuilding, just like that of their emergence and consolidation, is eminently a political question” (p. 272). Considered in this manner, public housing redevelopments involve a balancing of interests, and as discussed throughout this paper, the political balancing of interests will produce both winners and losers. Winners and losers will not always be easy to determine. Sometimes those with the most to lose will be portrayed as benefiting the most and, as discussed in the previous chapter, participation in the planning process is not an accurate measurement of support. To pursue equity in access to housing provision, policy-makers (as representatives for the public) must be aware of how policy can negatively affect marginalized people and, therefore, be in a better position to advocate for reform.

Like affordable housing, new public housing can also be built, but its responsibility needs to be put back on the federal government’s agenda. According to Walks (2010), soft services such as social services should not hinge on property tax revenue, but should be funded through income tax, while efforts must be made to counter the racialized poverty that is increasing in large Canadian cities such that, “the right to the city, and full participation in society” can be implemented (p. 186). In this sense, reforms must occur in official public policy and government spending such that public housing construction becomes uploaded to senior level government to ensure its continued sustenance. This would of course require government to move away from neo-liberalism and towards more egalitarian and redistributive policies. Money from taxation could then be redistributed in a more equitable fashion, which would mean fewer tax cuts and even tax increases for upper-class citizens and business, while increasing welfare and minimum wage baselines (Ibid).

Even within a context of downloading, municipal governments could contribute by encouraging the integration of public housing into new developments by offering incentives to developers. Fees could be waived for developments that maintain or add affordable units. More progressive steps could be taken that require the mandatory inclusion of a percentage of such units into all new developments. Loosening zoning restrictions to allow for diverse housing forms in areas that are considered stable, and as such are protected from intensification (such that the onus of mixing does not fall solely on low-income neighbourhoods) could also help to improve the housing options for low-income households. Section 37 benefits currently do not have to be used on site and can be used elsewhere, so long as it is for a relatable purpose. Reforms in the calculation and dispersal of Section 37 benefits accrued by the City due to height and density allowances (above and beyond what the zoning dictates) could also be used for public housing maintenance and creation. This would be a more equitable use of Section 37 funds compared to other commonly found uses like public art installations. As it stands, TCH and the City of Toronto could have better leveraged Alexandra Park's prime location to ensure a much more progressive redevelopment than currently offered.

The private sector can also play an important redistributive role through increased wages and salaries and investment towards manufacturing, utilities, and transportation industries in order to create sustainable jobs instead of investing in non-productive industries that rely on foreign production (Ibid). This would offset some of the employment stagnation suffered by the racialized Ontarians who are both overrepresented in the manufacturing sector of the labour market and overrepresented in low-income neighbourhoods in general and public housing in particular.

For Stone (2009), it is more important to focus inquiry from below. To ask who is governed, how they are governed, and what measures are being taken to seriously include their perceptions, is more important than to ask who is doing the governing, which only leads to hunting for powerful elites (p. 269). A major component of building within or from the bottom up is to ensure that residents are able to improve their situations, and when they do, they do not have to leave the community, because they no longer qualify for rent-geared-to-income units (Silver, 2011, p. 134). This, after all, is the cooperative housing model, which results in a more organic mix of income levels.

Silver (2011) argues that public investment must focus on the priorities of existing residents: resource centres, adult education facilities, and childcare facilities (p. 13). It should minimize what Social Development Plans tend to focus on: reorganize services to attract higher income residents (Ibid, pp. 80-81). Otherwise, simply adding more affluent neighbours into public housing neighbourhoods will not produce any benefits for the veteran tenants (Ibid, p. 75). Sadly, this is the most heavily implemented formula for redevelopment of public housing neighbourhoods and it is being perpetuated in Alexandra Park.

Scadding Court's Executive Director offered an alternative to the selling of a public asset like prime land to cover the municipal service cost of redevelopment when he suggested the following:

What we've got to do in terms of our redevelopment is the notion of, you know, how do we convert city assets, you know, into something that can be sustainable but also within the political climate that we are in because there is no interest in investment in social infrastructure right now. I mean [with] all three levels of government, social infrastructure is the last man in the line, you know. So confronted with that [situation], then the issue becomes, "How does a community organization respond to the structural deficit of governments, you know, and the lack of foresight?" I think it's a lack of foresight in terms of dismissing the necessity for social infrastructure. You need it in order to have healthy

communities and vibrant communities. It doesn't have to cost millions of dollars in order for things to happen. Out front of Dundas [Street West] there are containers for vendors. We are trying to convert underused city assets to make them useful. The underutilized asset that I am talking about is the sidewalk. We thought, let's get some containers and rent them out for as little as \$10.00 a day so newcomers, young people, and existing businesses can start an enterprise to make some money to feed their family, connect with the community and so forth. That was the idea behind the marketplace. (Kevin Lee, personal communication, February 17, 2012)

Much like Jim Silver's (2011) argument to strengthen public housing communities by focusing on strengths and not weaknesses, this argument suggests community building or social development from within and not from a top-down outsiders' perspective. The vendors to which this interviewee is referring are residents of the area who utilize public space to sell goods in a marketplace setting.

Kevin Lee's reference to social infrastructure also raises an important issue in Alexandra Park's redevelopment. A Social Development Plan for Alexandra Park's redevelopment has yet to materialize. In fact, according to one TCH employee who was interviewed, this plan has recently been dropped from the City's list requirements for projects of such magnitude. In this light, the place of current residents in the redeveloped neighbourhood is unclear. The community is expected to absorb a population of people with completely different lifestyles and accept minority status in the neighbourhood without a plan to provide community building. It appears that the Alexandra Park community does not require any more community development skills than they already have, which is indicative of their strong sense of solidarity. What is more likely is that integration and mixing is not really the long-term goal of such a vision for Alexandra Park.

Wacquant's (2008b) comparison of federal government intervention in France and lack thereof in the United States reveals the fact that strong redistributive policies aimed at mitigating

the negative consequences unevenly felt by the poor have been able to offset some of the racialized poverty resulting from neo-liberal policy (p. 5). Criminalizing and punishing the urban poor for the problems they face do nothing to address the root causes of poverty (Ibid, p. 7). From this perspective, in Canada, decision-makers perpetuate policies that are inherently inequitable. Within a downloading context, residual redistributive welfare intervention in the form of meager rent-geared-to-income subsidies, and placed-based solutions are implemented as inadequate poverty reduction strategies. Policies promoting private-market housing provision are supported knowing full well that this market does not fulfill the housing needs of all citizens.

In Canada, homeownership is equated with “the good life” and policies facilitating this type of tenure are perpetuated. The acceptance of mixed-income redevelopment policy as being the only remedy for perceived public housing blight, and blaming residents for their own misfortune are common amongst politicians, the media, and the general public. This sets up a situation where relying on the influx of a more affluent population to make life better for low-income neighbourhood residents is justified as a way to address problems that are common in poor neighbourhoods but caused by wider forces.

### Final Thoughts

The political nature of policy in our structurally unequal society produces winners and losers. The problem arises when one group always ends up on the short end of the policy stick. At this point, one has to question which group or groups is involved in policy creation, who benefits from the implementation of certain policies, who is left out of policy circles or obstructed from the decision-making process, and who, as a result, loses from policy implementation. Often, it is difficult to determine the winners and losers. Often, those with the



most to lose from policy decisions are either left out from discussions, weakly represented, or when represented, as in the case of Alexandra Park's residents, are portrayed as the main beneficiaries.

It was the intent of this paper to determine the reasons why public housing redevelopments employ a mixed-income strategy. For this purpose, those who stand to benefit most from such an undertaking were identified in order to reveal the true intent of redevelopment and why it is necessary. Overall, this redevelopment is merely a place-based attempt to dilute a concentration of poverty, and, therefore, does not address the root causes that have homogenized poor and racialized minorities, and relegated them to segregated districts of the Toronto landscape. Unfortunately, for Alexandra Park's residents, the somewhat more progressive approach to retain tenants' residency benefits only some residents, and represents only a small proportion of residual gratification, compared to outside interests who stand to benefit economically much more from the resident-led and zero displacement approach to redevelopment in Alexandra Park.

## Notes

1. Jane and Finch is an area in the northwest portion of Toronto. The name represents the major intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West. The media has deemed this area to be one of the highest crime areas of Toronto. As such, it is common to hear reports of gun-related violence in and around the Jane and Finch neighbourhood.

2. St. Jamestown is a low-income neighbourhood in Toronto considered one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in Canada. The neighbourhood was built in the mid-20th century using the “Towers in the Park” planning style and was originally built to house a mix of working-class and middle-class residents. It is now a low-income neighbourhood with a large number of immigrants and visible minorities. Interestingly, a developer proposes to add 1800 condominium units adjacent to this already densely populated neighbourhood.

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