

# Bringing HOPE to Portland



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## **Abstract**

In 1992 Congress established the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program commonly referred to as HOPE VI. Stated goals of the HOPE VI program are to demolish, rehabilitate and revitalize some of the most distressed public housing projects in the nation. The HOPE VI program is the latest federal attempt to solve some of the problems associated with low-income public housing. These problems include, but are not limited to, public housing units in disrepair, concentrated poverty, neighborhood blight and gang and drug related activity.

This paper provides a history of both federal low-income housing policy and local low-income housing policy in Portland, Oregon. The paper then examines the HOPE VI program and analyzes whether the criticisms of the federal HOPE VI program apply to Portland's completed HOPE VI project, New Columbia.

“Bringing HOPE to Portland,” a terminal project prepared by Chloe Bickle-Eldridge in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Community and Regional Planning degree in the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management. This project has been approved and accepted by:

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

In 1992 Congress established the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program- commonly referred to as HOPE VI. The stated goals of the HOPE VI program were to demolish, rehabilitate and revitalize some of the nation's most distressed public housing projects. The HOPE VI program represents the federal government's new approach to the provision of low- income public housing. The program aims to not only physically transform public housing buildings, but also to transform the social and economic structure of public housing and solve some of the problems associated with the provision of low-income public housing. These problems include, but are not limited to, public housing units in disrepair, concentrated poverty, neighborhood blight and gang and drug related activity.

The history of federal housing policy is relatively short and begins in earnest in 1937 during the Great Depression. In 1941, the City of Portland became a provider of low- income, public housing when World War II defense workers streamed into the city. For the last seventy years, both the federal government and the City of Portland have wrestled with the task of providing low income public housing. Mistakes were made along the way and important lessons learned. Understanding the history of both Portland's and the federal governments' low income public housing policy is key to understanding the current debate over HOPE VI.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold. First, the literature review examines federal public housing policy from 1937 to the present. The literature review also introduces the HOPE VI program and provides a discussion of the successes and criticisms of the program. The case study on the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) follows the time line of the literature review and explores local public housing policy in Portland, Oregon leading up to HAP receiving a HOPE VI grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The analysis chapter applies the criticisms of HOPE VI addressed in the literature review to Portland's HOPE VI project. The analysis answers the following question: Do the broadly accepted criticisms of the national HOPE VI program apply to Columbia Villa?

The final chapter in the paper is a reflection on what has been learned from looking at the history of federal low-income public housing policy and Portland's history of providing low income public housing. This section also discusses the role strong leadership and innovation at Portland's Housing Authority played in the successful implementation of HAP's HOPE VI grant.

Throughout the paper are photos of several HOPE VI sites including Portland's Columbia Villa and New Columbia. Photo credits can be found at the end of the paper following the bibliography.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodology**

Information for this paper was collected through a review of the history of federal and Portland specific housing policy. The literature review provides information on historic federal public housing policy as well as information relating to current federal housing policy and evaluations that are specific to the HOPE VI program. Additional information for the paper was gathered from case studies of specific HOPE VI sites, government reports and transcripts of testimony to Congress by staff from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and local Public Housing Authorities (PHA) from HOPE VI sites.

Information specific to the Housing Authority of Portland HOPE VI site, Columbia Villa, was gathered from local newspaper articles from the Oregonian and Portland Tribune, HAP publications and internal memos, and a forthcoming independent academic evaluation. Additional information about the specifics about Portland's HOPE VI project was obtained through an interview with John Keating from HAP and email communication with Dr Karen Gibson from Portland State University.

John Keating has been with HAP for over twenty years and has first hand knowledge and experience with HOPE VI as it applies to Columbia Villa. Keating is HAPs Assistant Director of Community Support Services and was a key figure in both applying for and

implementing the HOPE VI grant for Columbia Villa. He is part of the team working on Humboldt Gardens, the second HOPE VI project for HAP, which is under way at this time. Questions from my interview with Mr. Keating can be found in the appendix section.

An email exchange with Associate Professor Dr Karen Gibson from the Nohad A. Toulon School of Urban Planning at Portland State University provided confirmation of my hypothesis that the four national criticisms of the HOPE VI program described in the literature review do not apply to New Columbia. Dr Gibson also provided a copy of her forthcoming paper, *The Relocation of the Columbia Villa Community: Views from Residents*, which is scheduled for publication in the Journal of Planning Education. Dr Gibson is currently on sabbatical and was unavailable for an interview. However, both my email exchange with her and access to her paper on the relocation of Columbia Villa Residents provided valuable information for this paper.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter provides information on the evolution of public housing in the United States leading up to the creation and implementation of the HOPE VI program. It also provides the reader with an explanation of the HOPE VI program including a discussion of some of the nationally recognized successes and criticisms of the program. The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with a foundation for understanding the issues surrounding the debate over public housing and how that debate applies to this paper's analysis of the HOPE VI funded New Columbia Housing Project in Portland, Oregon.

The HOPE VI affordable housing program is a departure from the status quo; instead of focusing on increasing the amount of affordable housing stock, the program's intent was to raise both the physical and social design standards of low income housing. While housing quality had become less of a problem for most Americans over the course of the twentieth century, the reverse had occurred in public housing. Thousands of public housing units in major cities, many built in the 1940s, had within five decades become worse than the slums they replaced (Holtzman, 2007). HOPE VI is an ambitious approach to building new low income public housing in mixed-income communities. The great hope of the program is to create communities of mixed-income development located at or near the urban core that provide an assortment of market-rate and below-market housing for sale or rent, and offer amenities such as parks and play areas,

community centers, and recreational facilities. These developments seek to preserve the advantages of urban multiculturalism and proximity, retaining the cop-on-the-beat appeal of urban neighborhood life and fostering interaction among residents of diverse economic backgrounds (Sweazey and Gross, 1997).

### **Background**

In order to understand the crisis in public housing that led to the creation of the HOPE VI program, it is helpful to look at the evolution and provision of low income public housing in the United States. What follows is a brief overview of seventy years of federal public housing policy and legislation.

Affordable public housing and federal and local government's role in providing affordable public housing has long been a topic of debate. For over one hundred years elected officials have grappled with the problem of how to house the nation's urban poor. Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, philanthropists and moral reformers were instrumental in clearing urban slums in industrial cities and passing new tenement laws and convincing landlords to build and maintain improved housing (Smith, 2006 and Varady, Prieser and Russell, 1998). The passage of tenement laws affirmed the role of local government in providing and setting standards for housing for the poor. "In part, this sentiment is driven by the fundamental federalist principle that in certain matters, local government is the best level at which to determine and implement policy since it can be more responsive than the federal government to specific concerns" (Smith, 2006).

The Great Depression of the 1930's created a favorable climate for federal intervention in the housing industry (Varady et al, 1998). Legislation, such as the Wallace-Steagall Housing Act of 1937<sup>1</sup>, allowed “government to fund, build, and own homes to rent to its



**Figure 1:** The Iberville Projects in New Orleans were the first low income public housing projects built as a result of the Wallace-Steagall Housing Act of 1937.

poor citizens. This act was pitched as a way not only to improve abhorrent living conditions but also to stimulate the economy by creating jobs in construction and related industries” (Smith, 2006). Even though the creation of thousands of newly constructed housing units in numerous cities presented huge economic promise for the country, some members of Congress and the

housing industry were deeply concerned that the federal government was overreaching its role and on a slippery slope to socialism (Smith, 2006).

The monumental National Housing Act (NHA) of 1934 is a predecessor to the Wallace-Steagall Act of 1937 and is considered by scholars to be the “heart of modern housing policy” (Smith, 2006, Varady et al, 1998). The NHA created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). With the FHA, the federal government could now underwrite and insure mortgages and this enabled more families to purchase homes; less money was required to be paid upfront by the homebuyer and lenders felt secure in loaning more

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<sup>1</sup> The Wallace-Steagall Housing Act of 1937 is also commonly referred to as the Wagner Bill.

money because the loans were backed by the federal government (Smith, 2006 and Bratt, 1989). While this legislation also stimulated the economy, it also created the modern “two-tiered housing system of housing policy- a means tested program that directly produced public housing for poor people to rent and a targeted program that indirectly produced private housing for middle income families to buy” (Smith, 2006). These two policies have for the last seventy years been instrumental in shaping not only the urban landscape, creating a nation of home owners but also have determined where poor people live (Smith, 2006, Varady et al, 1998 and Goetz, 2003).

World War II caused a hiatus in low-income housing program (Varady et al, 1998). The program was restarted in 1949 with the passage of the Housing Act of 1949. “Reflecting mainstream reformist thought and the demands of the real estate industry, the 1949 law



**Figure 2:** Pueblo del Rio, Los Angeles. Built in 1940, this public housing complex featured a sandbox and large sliding glass door to the social hall.

renewed the war against the slum through provisions for slum clearance and new construction, under the rubric of urban redevelopment” (Varady et al, 1998).

The majority of public housing that was constructed during the 1930’s and 1940’s was for poor, working families (Curley, 2005 and Goetz, 2003). In order to get federal funding for public housing, local governments needed to create Public Housing Administrations (PHA). These PHAs became the receivers of federal funds to “construct, manage and

operate public housing” (Goetz, 2003). This local autonomy created two conditions in the location of public housing. Local governments could simply opt not to have a PHA and thus not have a subsidized program at all. This option was practiced in many suburban areas. “Most suburbs avoided public housing by simply never creating local housing authorities (McDonnell, 1997). Secondly, local control determined where public housing was located and this contributed to geographical concentrations of the poor (Goetz, 2003 and Smith, 2006). The 1949 Housing Act created the one-for one replacement rule by mandating that one unit of new housing to be built for every one unit of dilapidated housing eliminated through slum clearance. Hirsch (1996) states that this coupling of public housing and slum clearance ensured that new housing would be built in areas already characterized by high poverty and minority concentrations- leading to the creation of a federally sponsored second ghetto. The result was that for the nearly 700,000 public housing units built before the civil rights laws of the 1960’s, there was no consideration of antidiscrimination as a principle of policy or desegregation as an objective when these original public housing projects were built (Goetz, 2003).

While there was a one-for-one replacement requirement as part of the 1949 Housing Act, the supply of affordable housing continued to fall short of demand in most major cities (Smith, 2006). “Whether due to political will, racial discrimination or just sheer refusal to build public housing, new construction never kept up with demolition” (Smith, 2006). The Housing Act of 1954 sought to address the above problem by focusing on urban renewal that sought to conserve and rehabilitate “urban slums and blight” instead of

engaging in slum clearance. It is argued by Smith (2006) that “urban renewal offered cities a means to preserve poor neighborhoods without forcing the occupants out.” In other words, not only could urban renewal potentially improve poor housing conditions, it also had the potential to keep poor people from moving into other neighborhoods and thus reinforcing concentrations of minority and poor populations in neighborhoods that continued to decline.

An additional legacy of the 1949 Housing Act was the construction of new high-rise public housing units. High-rise units were considered to be modern and were inspired by Swiss-born modernist

architect Le Corbusier’s airy visions of towers rising out of vast expanses of grass and greenery (Varady et al, 1998 and McIlwain, 2006). While local housing



**Figure 3:** Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago, IL (1963).

officials saw the high-rise as modern structures that would transform the urban landscape, they also erroneously believed that these buildings would be cheaper to construct and would house more families on less land than the traditional low-rise public housing units that were built during the 1930’s and 1940’s. This would leave more vacant land around the high-rise units for open space and parks for residents. However, in the end this new design of public housing “created not only islands for the poor, but visible beacons of

poverty in many cities at a time when cities were losing their middle class. As a result, public housing did not appear to produce the positive results proclaimed by urban renewal policy” (Smith, 2006).

In the 1960’s, architects of low-income housing projects began to reject the high-rise and in 1968 a presidential commission condemned high-rise public housing units. While there were still some high-rise public housing units being built, the majority of public housing constructed in the late 1960’s and 1970’s mixed row houses with towers or courts of low-rise buildings. These new designs (or you could argue a return to the past) were better able to incorporate public housing into the surrounding neighborhood, making it indistinguishable from housing for the middle-class and connected low-income residents to the surrounding community instead of isolating them in high-rises (Varady et al, 1998, Goetz, 2003 and Smith, 2006).

Also beginning in the 1960’s was a policy shift in public housing. Government officials and housing advocates looked to new programs that provided direct and indirect subsidies to private developers of new and rehabilitated low-income housing (Varady et al, 1998). Federal policies such as the Section 221 (d) (3) program of 1961 and the Section 236 program of 1968 allowed lenders to negotiate loans for low-income housing mortgages that had below current market interest rates (Varady et al, 1998). Unfortunately, while these policies enabled the creation of thousands of new low-income housing units to be built quickly, the nonprofits that were largely the ones building these units suffered from

limited knowledge and experience on how to construct and maintain low-income housing. As a result, some projects fell into default or disrepair. These failures were publicized in the local media and made not only the nonprofit look bad but also the federal government who had created the policies (Smith, 2006).

In 1973, President Richard Nixon, citing soaring costs and as a cost cutting strategy, placed a moratorium on all federal funding for housing programs (Varady et al 1998 and Bratt, 1986). Findings from the Experimental Housing Allowance Program and a subsequent evaluation indicated that future low-income housing assistance should be made in the form of subsidized rental certificates to be used to rent existing private rental housing (Bratt, 1986). What followed was the passage of the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act. Section 8 of the 1974 act, “created a complicated set of subsidies and tax incentives for constructing, rehabilitating and maintaining building with low-income rental units” (Varady et al, 1998 and Bratt 1989) and represented a new way of delivering subsidized housing that relied on individual tenants and the market to achieve dispersal (Goetz, 2003 and Bratt, 1989)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The Section 8 rent subsidy serves as a guarantee to both qualified low-income tenants and landlords that the federal government will subsidize rent owed. Section 8 voucher approved housing is required to meet certain quality standards and has a reasonable monthly rent. Section 8 vouchers can be used when a family moves as long as they still qualify for public assistance. According to Hays (1985) and Listokin (1991), in the 1980's, the Reagan administration promoted Section 8 rental vouchers for tenants as a housing program that would avoid spending public monies on construction of low-income housing.



## HOPE VI

The latest chapter in the long saga of the provision of low-income housing in the United States began in 1989 when Congress formed the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (the Commission). The Commission was charged with “proposing a national action plan to eradicate severely distressed public housing by the year 2000 (GAO, 2003). In 1992, the Commission released a report that among other things identified that 6 percent (approximately 86,000 units) of the nation’s current public housing stock was severely distressed.<sup>3</sup> The Commission’s report recognized that there was a critical need for a “paradigm shift in public housing” (Curley, 2005). “Although



**Figure 4:** The epitome of severely distressed public housing, Washington DC’s, Wheeler Creek Estates was a 1997 HOPE VI grant recipient. At the time of the award, the housing project was largely vacant and uninhabitable.

the Commission report did not identify any specific areas as severely distressed, it recommended that funds be made available to address distressed conditions and that these funds be added to the amounts traditionally appropriated for modernizing public housing” (GAO, 1998). Again, while the Commission did not identify which sites they considered “severely distressed,” it was understood that the sites most in need of federal help were the geographically and socially isolated large high rise and

barracks style projects located adjacent to freeways, industrial developments or simply “away” from other residential neighborhoods (Naparstek, Freis, Kingsley, Dooley and

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<sup>3</sup> Severely distressed public housing units were characterized as physically deteriorated and uninhabitable, had inadequate or fragmented services, institutional abandonment, high levels of poverty, and located in neighborhoods as blighted as themselves (GAO, 2003, Curley, 2005, Smith, 2006).

Lewis, 2000). The Commission recommended to Congress that they “fund a 10-year effort at \$750 million a year” (Popkin, Katz, Cunningham, Brown, Gustafson and Turner, 2004). The Commission also “recommended increased funding for support services to residents of severely distressed public housing, resident participation in revitalization efforts and revitalization consistent with any occurring in surrounding neighborhoods” (GAO, 2003).

In response to the Commission’s report, Congress in 1992 established the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program- commonly referred to as HOPE VI<sup>4</sup>. HUD was appointed the programs administrator. The legislative goals of the HOPE VI program were to:

- Improve the living environment for public housing residents of severely distressed public housing through the demolition, rehabilitation, reconfiguration and replacement of obsolete public housing;
- Revitalize sites on which such public housing is located and contributing to the improvement of the surrounding neighborhood;
- Provide housing that will avoid or decrease the concentration of very low-income families;
- Build sustainable communities.

(HOPE VI: Building Communities Transforming Lives, 1999)

HOPE VI is a competitive grant program under which PHAs apply to HUD for funding to redevelop or demolish public housing sites. Between 1992 and 2002, HUD allocated over \$5 billion to 196 HOPE VI sites around the nation (Curley, 2005). Program guidelines required that eighty percent of allocated HOPE VI funds be spent by the local

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<sup>4</sup> HOPE is an acronym for Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere. Initially enacted in 1990, it consisted of three homeownership programs (HOPE I-III), a program that combined housing vouchers with support services to help frail elders live independently (HOPE IV), and a job training program for youth called Youthbuild (HOPE V) (Curley, 2005)

PHA on capital costs for physical improvements, certificates for replacement housing (generally section 8 vouchers), management improvements for the reconstructed development and planning and technical assistance. The remaining twenty percent was allocated for community service programs, supportive services, job training, economic development costs and services related to education and employment (Varady et al, 1998).

The HOPE VI program is the “paradigm shift” that was recommended by the Commission in 1992. The goal of the program was to not only physically transform public housing buildings, but also to transform the social and economic structure of public housing by creating mixed-income communities where low-income public housing residents would live among higher income families who pay market-rate rents. By doing this, HOPE VI differs from previous policies by attempting to revitalize the public housing community itself, rather than strictly dispersing residents into different communities (Curley, 2005; Smith, 2006; Varady, 1998; GAO, 2003; and Holtzman, 2007).

### **Success for HOPE VI**

***“I believe HOPE VI has had great success all over the country and that we need to replicate the successes in new public housing sites. All HOPE VI projects have succeeded in creating a new and improved physical infrastructure for public housing, but some projects have been more successful than others at creating a new social infrastructure. A renewed and refreshed HOPE VI should try to replicate the successes we’ve seen, where there was enormous community investment in the project.” Carole Galante, President of Bridge Housing Corp, one of the nation’s largest developers of affordable housing, (Kreisler, 2005)***

The HOPE VI program has received praise from the public, private and nonprofit sectors. The program recognizes the negative effects that earlier housing policies had on concentrating extremely poor residents in disadvantaged public housing developments and neighborhoods and has created a new approach to public housing. As Renee Glover, executive director of the Atlanta Housing Authority said before Congress in 2005, “without exaggeration, the HOPE VI demonstration program is the most important urban revitalization effort that America has undertaken” (McIlwain, 2006). What began as a redevelopment and community building program has evolved into a more ambitious effort to build economically integrated communities and give existing residents more choice in the private housing market (Naparstek et al, 2000). Additionally, HOPE VI considered more than simply housing needs by providing funds for social services that were designed to help residents move towards self-sufficiency. These programs included but are not limited to job training, child care, education and case management (Curley, 2005 and HOPE VI: Building Communities, Transforming Lives, 1999).

“The legacy of the HOPE VI program is extremely impressive, representing a true paradigm shift that extends well beyond the public housing arena” (Smirniotopoulos, 2001). Across the nation, in large cities that had experienced decade’s long population loss to the suburbs, HOPE VI projects have created demand for residential and mixed-use developments in the urban inner core. Prior to HOPE VI funding in these areas, private developers, investors and lenders viewed these areas as too risky for investment (Smirniotopoulos, 2001 and HOPE VI: Building Communities Transforming Lives,

1999). For example, the Columbus, Ohio PHA used its HOPE VI grant to attract crucial city infrastructure investments to the surrounding area. As a result, a paint manufacturer with a plant located near the HOPE VI site chose to spend \$32 million to upgrade its existing facility instead of moving to the suburbs (HOPE VI: Building Communities Transforming Lives, 1999).

Additionally, an interim assessment of thirteen HOPE VI sites by ABT Associates found that key indicators of well-being improved faster in HOPE VI census sites than in their cities as a whole (Holin, Buron, Locke and Cortes, 2003). The same study found that seventy percent of surrounding residents said that the neighborhood was a better place to live after HOPE VI (Holin et al, 2003). A Housing Research Foundation study found that eight deteriorating public housing projects contributed significantly to the decline of the surrounding neighborhood and HOPE VI by its very nature helped reduce their blighting impacts (Zielenbach, 2002). “In Chicago, residents who relocated for HOPE VI redevelopment experienced improvements in mental health, which could have positive effects on employment and self-sufficiency in the long run” (Popkin and Cunningham, 2002). Residents using vouchers report that they now live in better housing in safer neighborhoods (Buron, Popkin, Levy, Harris and Khadduri, 2002). Sixty three percent of families surveyed report that their new housing is in good or excellent condition and eighty five percent report that their new housing is in the same or better condition as their original public housing unit (Popkin, 2002). Also, most residents report that their neighborhoods are less poor.

The program has sparked important innovations in design, management and financing (Popkin et al, 2004) and has also accomplished its most basic goal-the demolition of tens of thousands of severely distressed housing units that were replaced with new, high-



**Figure 5:** Washington DC's Wheeler Creek HOPE VI Housing Development today.

quality housing.

Finally, the HOPE VI program has garnered praise for its insistence on participatory community planning as the foundation for program development. HUD guidance states that “residents should be included in all

phases of HOPE VI development and encourages grantees to communicate, consult and collaborate with affected residents and the broader community through resident councils, consultative groups, newsletters and resident surveys” (GAO, 2003). Resident participation is particularly important during efforts to transform public housing properties into mixed-income communities, because it gives residents a stake in their new communities (Suchman, 1996). While HUD and local PHAs recognize the importance in providing public housing residents with the opportunity to be stakeholders in the process, there has been variety in the level of resident participation at HOPE VI sites. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **Criticism of HOPE VI**

The HOPE VI program is not without its critics. In June, 2002 a report titled *False HOPE: a Critical Assessment of the HOPE VI Public Housing Redevelopment Program* (False HOPE) prepared by the National Housing Law Project, the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, Sherwood Research Associates and Everywhere and Now Public Housing Residents Organizing Nationally Together, the following criticisms of the HOPE VI program were presented:

- HOPE VI worsens acute affordable housing needs
- There are few meaningful opportunities for resident participation in HOPE VI
- There is a lack of data on HOPE VI outcomes
- The majority of public housing families are excluded from HOPE VI opportunities (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002)

The criticisms presented in False Hope are reflected in other evaluations and research papers of the program to date. What follows is an overview of the findings that have led to criticisms of the program.

### **HOPE VI worsens acute affordable housing needs**

*Public Housing is an extremely valuable resource because it is housing that is guaranteed to be affordable to families at a wide range of incomes. This includes families with the lowest incomes, who are not directly under other federal housing programs. Public housing is guaranteed in nearly all situations, rents are set at a level equal to thirty percent of an eligible family's household income (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002).*

Overall, there is a deficit of affordable housing in the United States. More than a million families remain on waiting lists for public housing units, and many PHAs have closed their lists to new applicants. By HUD's own estimate, 5.3 million Americans have

unassisted worst case housing needs and “for every one person that receives assistance, there are four or five more who qualify but we don’t have the resources to meet those needs” (Pitcoff, 1999). According to HUD, in 1999, there were 70 units of affordable housing available for every 100 very low income<sup>5</sup> renter households. For extremely low income<sup>6</sup> renter households, the situation was even worse; there were only 40 units of affordable and available housing (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002).

Prior to 1996, federal law prohibited public housing authorities from demolishing any public housing units unless they could be replaced (Wright, 2006). In 1996 Congress suspended the one-for-one replacement rule. Considered to be the largest impediment to implementing HOPE VI, without the one-for-one replacement rule, PHAs were only required to “demonstrate to HUD that the units were obsolete and not cost-effective in order to demolish them” (Wright, 2006). The following is an example of how the elimination of the one-for-one rule is negatively impacting the supply of affordable housing in Chicago, Illinois. The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) is in year seven of its ten year redevelopment plan that is funded in part by HOPE VI. The CHA plan calls for the demolition of its entire stock of 22,000 high rise public housing units. The CHA plans to replace the demolished units, however as of September, 2005 “demolition has far outpaced new construction and rehabilitation. CHA has demolished 18,997 units” (Wilen and Nayak, 2006). In contrast, as of September 2005, CHA has constructed or

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<sup>5</sup> According to federal definitions, very low income refers to households with incomes at or below fifty percent of the median income of households in their geographic area- “area median income” (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Households at or below thirty percent of AMI (False HOPE, 2002).



rehabilitated only 1,937 units in mixed-income communities of the 6,219 units scheduled. Additionally, by 2009 only fifty one percent of the total units of newly constructed mixed-income units are scheduled for completion (Wilens and Nayak, 2006). The problem is not isolated to Chicago. As of 2005, 57,772 public housing units have been demolished, while only 23,109 units have been rehabilitated or newly constructed nationwide (Curley, 2005). In total, of the 95, 100 replacement units to be built using HOPE VI funds, only 48,800 will be public housing units (Cunningham, 2004).

In short, the HOPE VI program has directly resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of units of guaranteed affordable housing that is desperately needed by families suffering from a severe shortage of affordable housing (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002).

**There are few meaningful opportunities for resident participation in HOPE VI**

*Full resident involvement and community input are crucial elements of the HOPE VI program. The spirit of the HOPE VI program is one of full consultation and collaboration among the Grantee, affected residents and the broader community (Naparstek et al, 2000)*

*HUD's refusal to issue formal regulations has frustrated public participation in the HOPE VI program. A lack of regulations has meant that there has been a lack of clear rules for the program. This lack of rules has impeded public understanding of the way in which the program operates and has shielded HUD and PHAs from accountability for their activities under HOPE VI (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002)*

According to a November 2003 GAO report titled *HOPE VI Residents Issues and Changes in Neighborhoods Surrounding Grant Sites*, “the amount and type of resident participation has varied at 1996 sites” (GAO, 2003). The report further states that HUD

“has provided guidance on resident involvement in its NOFAs<sup>7</sup> and grant agreements and on its Web site” (GAO, 2003) and that 1996 grantees have taken steps, both informally and formally, to ensure that residents are participants in the process. This includes soliciting input, holding informational meetings and involving residents in major decisions (GAO, 2003). However, although “grantees are required to solicit and consider input from residents, the guidance makes it clear that the grantees have the final decision-making authority” (GAO, 2003).

Critics of HOPE VI argue that because there is a lack of formal HOPE VI regulations on resident participation, individual sites have had considerable latitude in defining it (Popkin et al, 2004). The problem is further complicated by divisions within the residents; resident leadership may sign off on a plan that other residents may not support (Popkin et al, 2004). Researchers and evaluators who have looked at the issue of resident participation at HOPE VI sites have concluded that in order for resident involvement to be more effective, HUD must set clear, consistent guidelines, include a broad range of residents and give actual substance to its endorsement of resident and community participation in HOPE VI (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002; Popkin et al, 2004; GAO, 2003; and Goetz, 2003).

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<sup>7</sup> To select housing authorities for participation in the HOPE VI program, HUD publishes a notice of funding availability (NOFA) setting forth the program’s current requirements and available funds. Housing authorities then prepare applications from which HUD selects those that best satisfy the notice’s requirements and sign grant agreements that, in the absence of regulations, serve as contracts with the housing authorities (GAO, 1998).

### **There is a lack of data on HOPE VI outcomes**

***“HUD publishes quite a bit of information concerning HOPE VI expenditures, but very little to no public information about original residents’ and service providers’ perceptions of HOPE VI services. Additionally, no agency has yet published information on a national scale that describes the paths of relocated residents or their views on the relocation process” (Moschetti, 2003-2007)***

Evaluation of HOPE VI has been difficult due to several factors. The primary reason is that HUD has not carried out a single, comprehensive evaluation that would- or could examine all aspects of the program (Popkin et al, 2004). This is largely due to the reality that, since 1992, the program has experienced changes in legislation, regulation, implementation and practice. Furthermore, not all HOPE VI sites are alike- local PHAs have tremendous latitude in how they choose to design and implement their local HOPE VI initiatives. Also, the program has been shaped more through implementation than by enactment. Results from the few evaluations that have been done indicate mixed results about the effectiveness of the program.

In 1999, Congress commissioned two systematic, multi-city studies, the *HOPE VI Panel Study*<sup>8</sup> (panel study) and the *HOPE VI Resident Tracking Survey*<sup>9</sup> (resident tracking survey), to determine how the HOPE VI program has affected the lives of original HOPE

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<sup>8</sup> The panel study focuses on tracking the living conditions and well-being of residents. The five sites included in the study were purposively selected to represent a range of HOPE VI programs. The sites are Shore Park/Shore Terrace (Atlantic City, NJ); Ida B. Wells Homes/ Wells Extension/ Madden Park Homes (Chicago, IL); Few Gardens (Durham, NC); Easter Hill (Richmond, CA); and East Capitol Dwellings (Washington, D.C.) (Popkin et al, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> The resident tracking study also focuses on the living conditions and well-being of former residents of eight properties in early 2001-between two and seven years after the housing authority received a HOPE VI grant. The eight sites are Quigg Newton (Denver, CO); Archbishop Walsh (Newark, NJ); John Hays Homes (Springfield, IL); Hayes Valley (San Francisco, CA); Cotter and Lang Homes (Louisville, KY); Connie Chambers (Tucson, AZ); Christopher Columbus Homes (Paterson, NJ); and Edwin Coming (Albany, NY) (Buron et al, 2002).

VI residents (Popkin, 2006). The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) has provided Congress with three reports- *Public Housing: Status of the HOPE VI Demonstration Program* (1997), *HOPE VI: Progress and Problems in Revitalizing Distressed Public Housing* (1998) and *Public Housing: HOPE VI Resident Issues and Changes in Neighborhoods Surrounding Grant Sites*. Finally, HUD has published three major reports<sup>10</sup> - *An Historical and Baseline Assessment of HOPE VI*<sup>11</sup>, *HOPE VI: Community Building Makes a Difference*<sup>12</sup>, and *HOPE VI and Section 8: Spatial Patterns in Relocation*<sup>13</sup>.

The reports listed do provide valuable information about HOPE VI projects. However, none of the reports are sufficiently comprehensive and either provide detailed case studies of a few projects (*panel study, resident tracking study, Community Building and Baseline Assessment*) or provide a general overview of certain aspects of the program (GAO reports) (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002). The Community Building and Baseline Assessment studies also tended to focus more on the physical redevelopment of the sites and less on collecting data on original residents and their outcomes (Curley, 2005). Between these two types of studies there has been a great deal of overlap of reporting on a small number of the total HOPE VI sites and is likely that “these reports do not provide a representative picture of the program” (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002). More studies are needed that explore the actual impact of HOPE VI on the lives

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<sup>10</sup> Of the three HUD commissioned reports, only one HOPE VI: Community Building Makes a Difference has been made widely available on HUD’s website (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> This report was prepared for HUD by Fosburg, Popkin and Locke, 1996

<sup>12</sup> This report was prepared for HUD by Naparstek et al, 2000

<sup>13</sup> This report was prepared for HUD by Kingsley, Johnson and Pettit, 2001

of original residents or the low-income residents that currently reside in HOPE VI communities to determine whether the potential positive effects of the program are threatened by potentially negative effects (Curley, 2005).

In addition to the lack of comprehensive evaluations on the program, HUD continues to share little information about the program. While HUD does collect a great deal of information on each HOPE VI site, it has withheld a great deal of this data from the public. Furthermore, While HUD is required to provide annual reports that contain a range of financial and funding data on the program on the HOPE VI program to Congress, there is no indication that these reports have ever been written (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002). If they do exist, these annual reports, which would contain valuable financial information about the program and would be useful in program evaluation, are not on HUD's website (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002).

In 1998 the GAO concluded that "it may not be possible to establish HOPE VI- wide measures that would be applicable to all programs. We {GAO} agree that the HOPE VI sites are unique and that the program should not be constrained in ways that would inhibit creativity. Yet even though the needs of the communities and the residents may vary by site, the types of community and support service programs offered at the sites we visited (e.g. day care, after-school care, equivalency degree, job training and job placement programs) were consistent enough to allow the collection of national data on the outcomes of these programs" (GAO, 1998).

**The majority of public housing families are excluded from HOPE VI opportunities**

*The findings from the first phase of research raise critical questions about whether the transformation of public housing will achieve its potential as a powerful force for improving the lives of low-income families. As developments are destroyed, the residents are displaced and face an uncertain future. Only a small proportion of original residents have been able to move to the new mixed-income housing on the HOPE VI site, while a substantial proportion- about half- have moved to other public housing developments (Popkin, 2006).*

*While the first purpose set forth under the HOPE VI statute is to “improve the living environment for public housing residents of severely distressed public housing project,” HOPE VI is doing little to improve the lives of the majority of public housing families it affects (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002)*

Low original resident return rates is perhaps one of the most widespread criticisms of the HOPE VI program- the very people that the program was created to help are excluded from returning to live at rehabilitated HOPE VI sites. HUD itself found that only “2,568 (11.4 percent) of the total 22,500 displaced public housing residents were slated for re-occupancy in HOPE VI sites after redevelopment (GAO, 1998). While HUD recognizes that residents do not always return to HOPE VI sites, HUD’s stated reason for this is that residents simply “choose” not to return (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002).

However, HUD has yet to recognize that low rates of original resident return is largely due to a significant decrease of affordable housing available at revitalized sites and stricter move-back criteria such as employment requirements and background or credit checks that make original residents ineligible (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002, Popkin, 2006, Popkin et al, 2004, Goetz, 2003 and Curley, 2005). In addition, new tenant

selection procedures allow housing authorities to give preference to working and higher income residents (Curley, 2005).<sup>14</sup>

In order to fully understand low resident return rates, it is important to look at where HOPE VI site original residents go when their community is selected for demolition or rehabilitation. As completely new communities are built at HOPE VI grant sites, original residents have to be relocated. Typical relocation services include assistance in finding a new public housing unit or a section 8 unit and moving services. A small number of original residents choose to leave public housing with no assistance from their local PHA (Curley, 2005). The majority of relocated families- forty nine percent- move to other public housing sites (HOPE VI: Building Communities, Transforming Lives, 1999). As a result, poverty at the original HOPE VI site is deconcentrated only to be reconcentrated to other public housing sites that will not be beneficiaries of HOPE VI funding (Curley, 2005).

A smaller percentage of dislocated residents are offered section 8 vouchers to obtain housing in the private market. In tight rental markets, residents have a hard time finding landlords in good neighborhoods that will accept section 8 vouchers (Popkin et al, 2004). Additionally, there has been opposition by communities fearful that public housing

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<sup>14</sup> According to the GAO (2003), “HUD guidance states that grantees must collaborate with residents and other stakeholders to establish criteria that residents must meet in order to return to the site. At some sites residents are not guaranteed that they will automatically return to the site.” Many dislocated residents were unaware when they moved out that they were not guaranteed right of return and if they did apply to return to the revitalized site would be subject to strict criteria that applied only to the revitalized site and not to all of the local PHAs public housing.

residents will bring into their neighborhoods crime and social problems (Lenz and Coles, 1999). Finally, discrimination against minorities and families with children and the negative stigma attached to being a former public housing resident also affects relocatees' ability to secure a unit with a voucher (Popkin and Cunningham, 1999). Studies on resident relocation experiences have found that residents make relocation decisions based on "significant misinformation about section 8 procedures, HOPE VI move-back criteria and availability of relocation services" (Smith, 2002). Other studies indicate that relocation services are inadequate for especially hard to house families such as those with many children, are multigenerational, and/or have problems with domestic violence, substance abuse, disabilities and experience chronic health problems (Popkin et al, 2002). These residents may face increased housing instability and even homelessness as a result of not being able to find suitable housing in the private market using a voucher.

While the evidence suggests that relocation can be a positive or negative experience for families, it is clear that local PHAs must provide residents with relocation services that are more comprehensive and include effective case management and follow-up services for former residents, especially those with multiple risk factors (Popkin, 2002).

According to the panel study, the majority of relocated residents (seventy percent) indicated that they would like to return to their rebuilt HOPE VI site (Popkin, 2006). However, GAO data on 165 HOPE VI grantees suggest that rates of return will vary by site and will likely remain below fifty percent (Popkin et al, 2004). Developments that



remained one hundred percent public housing have higher return rates while new mixed-income sites have smaller return rates. The GAO reports that forty HOPE VI sites expect return rates of 25 percent while thirty one sites expect 75 percent or more to return (GAO, 2003). These findings could indicate that some residents who would like to return are not able to. The reasons for this disparity between the desire to return and the inability to do so could be related to (1) a reduction in the number of public housing units at the revitalized site or (2) the inability of original residents to meet the PHAs new move-back screening criteria. Furthermore, evidence to date suggests that while some residents who relocate using vouchers may have improved outcomes, the majority of displaced residents either move to other public housing projects thus reconcentrating poverty or struggle in the private housing market. “Families who end up relocating to other public housing developments or to other extremely poor, distressed and racially segregated communities with or without vouchers are the families likely to fare the worst” (Curley, 2005). However, for families who had enough guidance and information to make informed decisions when they relocated and were able to relocate to better housing and better neighborhoods, not being able to return to is not necessarily a bad outcome (Curley, 2005). The lesson to be learned is that residents, especially those considered hard-to-house, need extra attention and guidance before and during relocation and every resident relocated should be given the opportunity to return to their original HOPE VI site.

## Conclusion

Today HOPE VI faces an uncertain future. For the past several years, President George W Bush's Administration has drastically or completely cut funding to the \$574 million program. This year the presidents' budget once again called for the elimination of funding, arguing that the program has completed its objective of demolishing 100,000 severely distressed housing units and is no longer needed

(<http://national.unitedway.org/files/pdf/07budgetsummary.pdf>, accessed April 26, 2007).

In an effort to once again restore funding to the program, on March 8, 2007 Senator Barbara Mikulski introduced Senate Bill *S. 829: To reauthorize the HOPE VI program for revitalization of severely distressed public housing and for other purposes*

(<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s110-829>, accessed April 26, 2007).

The bill has not yet been voted on. However, since 2002 Congress has annually voted to continue funding the HOPE VI program.

Regardless of whether the program continues to be funded or not, HOPE VI is not the final chapter in public housing policy. There will always be a need for safe, decent and affordable housing for the most extremely low income citizens of this nation and a need for programs to fund and stimulate the creation of this housing. It is by examining the history of housing policy in the United States that we are able to learn what policies and programs have been effective or not effective in building and maintaining public housing stock. The next section provides an overview of the history of the Housing Authority of Portland and low income housing policy in Portland, Oregon.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Case Study: Low-Income Housing in Portland, Oregon: A History of the Housing Authority of Portland**

In October 2002, HOPE VI funding provided the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) with the opportunity to rehabilitate Columbia Villa (the new development is called New Columbia), its largest and oldest public housing development. To understand how the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) designed and implemented its HOPE VI project for Columbia Villa, it is important to understand how the agency has been shaped by its nearly seventy year history of providing affordable, low-income housing in Portland.

When HUD awarded a HOPE VI grant to HAP for Columbia Villa it was a 462 unit, World War II era public housing project located on 82 acres in North Portland. The “villa” (as it was commonly called) was the state’s largest public housing development and was home to 382 ethnically and racially diverse families. “The villa was the most diverse community in the state of Oregon, with fourteen different languages spoken” (Gibson, forthcoming). Compared to Portland and the rest of Oregon, Columbia Villa’s population was diverse; thirty seven percent of residents were non-Hispanic white, about thirty three percent were black, sixteen percent were Hispanic, twelve percent were Asian and one percent was American Indian, Pacific Islander, Alaskan (Gibson, forthcoming). In contrast, the City of Portland, in 2003, was four fifths non-Hispanic white ([http://www.pdx.edu/media/p/r/prc\\_2003\\_Pop\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pdx.edu/media/p/r/prc_2003_Pop_Report.pdf), accessed April 20, 2007).

Originally built in 1942 to house World War II workers and their families flooding into Portland from across the nation, Columbia Villa’s original 400 permanent housing units<sup>15</sup> (62 units were added to the original site later) were largely single family or duplex, one-



Figures 6 and 7: Columbia Villa. 1942.



and two-story units designed to appeal to blue collar families. There was plenty of open space, “curvilinear” streets and an abundance of trees and greenery (Sanders, 1991). Prominent public housing advocate Catherine Bauer visited the villa in 1944 and noted that the development was

“one of the very best in the country” (Oregonian, 1944).

Columbia Villa was just one of dozens of public housing projects HAP was building in the early

1940’s to accommodate the thousands of new arrivals looking for work in the shipyards. By 1944, HAP had built enough temporary and permanent public housing units to house over 72,000 people or one sixth of the population of metropolitan Portland (Sanders, 1991). The sheer magnitude of providing housing to so many in such a short time period presented immediate and long-lasting problems for HAP. In the rush to build housing, two significant themes emerged that would be left to future generations to confront:

shoddy housing construction and the ghettoization of North Portland. “Neither problem

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<sup>15</sup> Of the 72,000 housing units built by HAP in the early 1940’s, only Columbia Villa and Dekum Homes were intended to be permanent housing for the poor after the war (Gibson, forthcoming).

was caused by HAP, but both would plague the agency in years to come” (Sanders, 1991)<sup>16</sup>.

At the end of the war, HAP began the process of dismantling its temporary housing projects and relocating residents. Relocation of residents into permanent housing would plague HAP throughout the 1950's. It is during this decade that HAP participated in the national trend of urban renewal and slum clearance. In 1952, HAP confined development of future permanent low-rent housing to North and inner Northeast Portland. Unlike Columbia Villa, which had been and still was largely populated by white families, temporary public housing had been largely populated by black families. The result was that as the temporary housing units were torn down, the displaced families (who were mostly black) moved to new public housing units that were located primarily in inner North and Northeast Portland<sup>17</sup>. During this time, Columbia Villa, with a long waiting list and low vacancy rate, stayed primarily white (Sanders, 1991).

Tension between HAP and the African American community came to a head in 1961 when HAP proposed a new housing development in the inner North Portland Albina neighborhood. The African American community strongly opposed the plan arguing that it would “perpetuate an already existing ghetto and encourage segregation” (Sanders, 1991). For the rest of the 60's, HAP would experience growing anger and opposition

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<sup>16</sup> It must be noted that most public housing was concentrated in North Portland because of the availability of land that was in close proximity to the shipyards themselves (Sanders, 1991).

<sup>17</sup>In 1950 more than fifty percent of Portland's African-American population lived in two census tracts (22 and 23) in the Albina neighborhood ([http://www.pdc.us/pdf/about/urban\\_renewal\\_history.pdf](http://www.pdc.us/pdf/about/urban_renewal_history.pdf), accessed May 8, 2007).

from the African American community over its housing policies. Several government studies to examine HAPs housing policies were done. The results of these studies cleared HAP of charges of racial discrimination in housing policy. However, the Board and staff from HAP chose to confront racial problems in public housing and emerged from this period a stronger public agency that was more sensitive to civil rights issues (Sanders, 1991). In one housing project, Iris Court<sup>18</sup>, HAP appointed a special committee to develop among other things a movie about living together. “This was the beginning of a concentrated effort by HAP’s Board and management to solve the racial problems which had troubled it since the end of World War II” (Sanders, 1991). The active role HAP took in addressing racial problems in its housing developments provided the foundation to deal with future crime and drug problems that would erupt in the 80’s in Columbia Villa.

To better understand the difficulties faced by HAP in the 1970s and 1980s, it is helpful to take another look at federal housing policies during this same time that drastically cut funding to local housing authorities. As mentioned previously, in 1973, President Richard Nixon, citing soaring costs and as a cost cutting strategy, placed a moratorium on all federal funding for housing programs (Varady et al 1998 and Bratt, 1986). Another legacy of Nixon’s federal housing policy was the change in regulations “that required PHAs to adopt federal preferences in admission requirements so that they were serving only the poorest tenants” (Popkin, Buron, Levy and Cunningham, 2000). Other federal housing policies, such as the Brooke Amendments of 1969 and 1970, further

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<sup>18</sup> Iris Court during the 60’s had 54 residents; forty were white and fourteen were African American (Sanders, 1991).

concentrated very poor and distressed households in public housing by limiting tenant payments for rents to twenty five percent of income. This made public housing affordable to very low income families but also “increased housing authorities’ dependence on the federal government for operating subsidies” (Popkin et al, 2000), while at the same time eliminating ceiling rents. “Without a ceiling, some of the higher-income families eligible for public housing had to pay above market rates to live in public housing, thus making it less attractive to them” (Popkin et al, 2000). The result was that by 1991, almost one-fifth of public housing tenants had incomes that were less than ten percent of the local median (Popkin et al, 2000).

The loss of higher rent paying families and decreases in federal monetary aid was devastating to HAP and especially Columbia Villa. Once the shining beacon of the right



way to do public housing, by the mid 1970s, the “villa” had acquired a stigma in the public eye. An article in the Oregonian newspaper characterized it as having an outdated, “institutional” look (Hobart, 1976).



By the late 1970’s, HAP was in serious financial trouble. A review of the agency’s budget for the years 1973-1977 showed that

**Figures 8 and 9:** Columbia Villa circa late 1970’s

“tenant services had been cut by sixty three

percent, protective services by fifty one percent, and non-routine maintenance by sixty one percent” (Sanders, 1991). One third of the 1978 operating budget had been cut “without a foreseeable remedy for two years” (Sanders, 1991). As a result, HAPs reserves had “shrunk to almost five percent, far below the thirty percent HUD then considered the platform below which a housing authority was a financially troubled agency” (Sanders, 1991). While HAP was having trouble maintaining its aging public housing stock, white flight out of the core of the city created an even less diverse ethnic makeup in north and northeast Portland while at the same time diversifying the racial makeup of Columbia Villa as more African Americans and other minorities moved in as whites moved out.

The 1980’s proved to be a pivotal decade for HAP. New leadership at the housing authority recognized that federal support for housing would likely not be coming back and that there was a need to find ways to meet client needs “whenever possible by means outside of HUD constraints” (Sanders, 1991). This decision led to a five year plan that was internally focused and provided a set of policy statements that the HAP Board and staff used as goals for planning. These goals were:

- To increase visibility of HAP services;
  - To expand HAP’s contacts and increase HAP’s cooperative efforts;
  - To maintain a commitment to low income housing and increase development efforts to expand HAP’s role in meeting the needs of other people whose needs were currently unmet by other private and public groups
  - To interact with the social service community more aggressively to assist residents in getting their needs met;
  - To continue improving current operations
- (Sanders, 1991)



HAPs five year strategic planning paid off and by 1982 the agency was declared financially stable and in 1986 was given “decontrol status”<sup>19</sup> (Sanders, 1991). By 1988 HAPs internal financial structure had been rehabilitated and the agency then moved to reconfirm its commitment to its external customers who, according to Executive Director Don Clark, were all interrelated.

***“Our strength is in our relationships, Clark stated. The more we are able to include residents, other agencies and community groups as partners, the stronger we become. We need to develop dynamic new ways of relating with residents and other key customers of our services-ways of including, not excluding them. And we have to make them recognize this new relationship and participate in it” (Sanders, 1991)***

Clark’s commitment to community building would be tested soon after he made this statement when Joseph ‘Ray Ray’ Winston, Portland’s first drive by shooting victim, was killed at Columbia Villa (Gibson, forthcoming). By 1988, the epidemic of gangs, violence and crack cocaine had invaded inner North and Northeast Portland and by that summer, Columbia Villa had become “almost literally a war zone, torn apart by gang activity, drug dealing and violence. Columbia Villa was a neighborhood with intense problems, but left isolated and alone to cope with them (Sanders, 1991). The response to the violence was swift when the city, HAP, community groups and residents came together to create a strategy that included community policing, rigorous enforcement of leasing and trespassing policies and comprehensive social services. The strategy was successful and by 1994 “HAP received HUD’s best practices award for reducing drug-related crime by 75 percent” (Gibson, forthcoming). While peace and stability returned to

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<sup>19</sup> “Decontrol status” is granted by HUD to PHAs that achieve the highest standards of financial stability. PHAs with this status have greater freedom in running their financial affairs (Sanders, 1991).

the “villa,” it could not so easily shake the perception that it was still a haven of crime, illicit activity and drug use.

Though financially stable, by 2001 HAP was struggling to fund the continuous repairs that were needed at the “villa;” “repeated maintenance problems with the sixty-year-old



**Figures 10 and 11:** Columbia Villa, September, 2003.

housing, combined with decades long reduction of HUD funding, influenced HAP’s decision to take advantage of the opportunity presented through the HOPE VI revitalization program” (Gibson, forthcoming). According to Howard Shapiro, then chairman of the Housing Authority’s Board, Columbia Villa had become “an island of dormitory-style buildings falling into disrepair with almost a moat around it” (Robben, 2003). The idea was to tear that wall down so that at the end of the day, there wouldn’t be McMansions or ghettos but a more

balanced community that was truly, truly representative of North Portland (Robben, 2003).

While the last seven decades have been filled with financial and social, internal and external challenges, HAP has remained a committed leader among the nations PHAs to not only provide quality and safe low-income housing but also to create communities of



**Figure 12:** The demolition of Columbia Villa.

caring neighbors. Once again HAP would be tested when it received a HOPE VI grant. Uncertainty for HAP and the residents plagued the project. Would HAP repeat the same mistakes made by so many other housing authorities? Would existing residents benefit? Do the same criticisms

leveled against HOPE VI in general apply to New Columbia?

The next chapter of this paper revisits the four widely accepted criticisms previously discussed in the literature review: (1) HOPE VI worsens acute affordable housing needs; (2) there are few meaningful opportunities for resident participation in HOPE VI; (3) there is a lack of data on HOPE VI outcomes; and (4) the majority of public housing families are excluded from HOPE VI opportunities (National Housing Law Project et al, 2002). Using information gathered from the literature available on Columbia Villa and my interview with John Keating and email exchange with Dr Gibson, I analyze whether (1) these criticisms apply to Columbia Villa and (2) answer the question of why or why not.

## Chapter 5

### **Analysis: Bringing HOPE to Portland**

“The HAP board and staff were keenly aware of the well-documented issues and problems other PHAs had experienced” (HAP, 2004) with HOPE VI. According to John Keating, HAPs Assistant Director of Community Services, “we were well aware of the criticisms of earlier HOPE VI projects and used those criticisms as a road map of how to do it right” (Keating interview, May 16, 2007). As a result, criticisms of the HOPE VI program discussed in chapter two simply do not apply to New Columbia (Gibson, email correspondence). This chapter tells the story of how HAP created an implementation plan for the New Columbia project that **(1) included residents in all planning stages of the project, (2) compiled data on and evaluated resident outcomes, (3) increased the overall number of low income units and (4) did not exclude public housing families from returning.**

This is done by testing whether the four widely accepted and well-documented criticisms of the HOPE VI program apply to Columbia Villa. My analysis is based on information obtained through research on the history of federal public housing policy and Portland’s Housing Authority, a review of current evaluations and government documents relating to the HOPE VI program and HOPE VI sites including Columbia Villa, email communication with Dr Gibson, an in-person interview with John Keating. I also was given access to HAP’s annual report to the Housing Authority Board. This document included memos from HAP’s Executive Director, Steve Rudman. Among these memos

are notices of awards received by HAP for New Columbia including one given by the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME) for its commitment to assure “contracting and workforce diversity on construction projects”(HAP, 2007). Additional information was gathered from reading newspaper articles appearing in both the *Oregonian* and *Portland Tribune*.

**Criticism of HOPE VI:** There are few meaningful opportunities for resident participation in HOPE VI

***Response: The HAP Board and Executive Team made a commitment that if HAP was awarded a grant, they would work in partnership with residents to make the relocation process as smooth as possible***



**Figure 13:** The Columbia Villa HOPE VI Resident Relocation Team.

Resident relocation is one of the biggest challenges facing most HOPE VI sites and one where resident participation can be most helpful. HAP faced the challenge of relocating all of Columbia Villas residents because all 462 units were slated for demolition<sup>20</sup>. Every household would have to be

relocated to Section 8 housing or other public housing

projects<sup>21</sup> and HUD required that HAP prepare a Resident Relocation Plan. As

participants in the formulating this plan, HAP wanted its residents to become well-

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<sup>20</sup> The original plan for demolition and rebuilding was scheduled to be staggered and some residents would have to be relocated to section 8 or other public housing. However as the project progressed it became clear that HAPs phased resident relocation plan was in conflict with the developer’s plans. As a result, HAP had to relocate all families from the villa in three months.

<sup>21</sup> Residents also had the choice to leave public housing and look for housing in the private market without assistance.

informed stakeholders in the HOPE VI relocation process. In order to learn more about the process and experiences of other residents that had experienced relocation, HAP funded several resident tours of the Seattle Housing Authority's New Holly HOPE VI site. HAP also paid for officers of the Columbia Villa resident association to attend a national conference to learn more about HOPE VI. In addition, HAP staff sought input from all residents by "walking the streets" soliciting resident input and spent several Saturdays surveying households (HAP, 2004). HAP's efforts paid off; before the project began, ninety percent of the "villas" households had been visited by HAP personnel and those households had the opportunity to ask questions and provide HAP staff with valuable input (HAP, 2004). HAP also established an eighteen member Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to "serve as the primary conduit for community input into the HOPE VI plan" (HAP, 2004). CAC decided to appoint a fifteen member Relocation Task Force (RTF) because of the scope and importance of relocation to the overall HOPE VI project. Several CAC members served on the RTF committee thus ensuring that CAC was "in the loop" on issues surrounding resident relocation. Both the CAC and the RTF were composed of a wide variety of stakeholders that included HAP employees, residents of Columbia Villa, social service providers, public school representatives, tenant advocates and neighbors from the surrounding community (Keating, May 16, 2007).

HAP also created the position of resident/community liaison and hired a Columbia Villa resident to fill it (HAP, 2004). According to Leslie Esinga, the resident/community liaison, "distrust of the government, distrust of the track record tallied up by other HOPE

VI sites and distrust of the Housing Authority- those were my hurdles. Essential to executing a plan of action was to instill the residents' trust in our words" (HAP, 2004). Today Esinga is working as one of two HAP community builders at New Columbia. Essentially, the community builders are there to "connect the dots between residents, HAP and multiple social service agencies and play an important role in both resident and public relations" (Keating, May 16, 2007).

HAP was able to gain the trust of residents by including them in all phases of planning, implementing a relocation plan supported by residents, soliciting input from all residents and hiring a resident from Columbia Villa to serve as resident/community liaison.

Resident participation did not end with completion of the project. According to John



**Figure 14:** New Columbia resident meeting

Keating, the long term success of New Columbia hinges on HAP's ability to create an environment that encourages active and ongoing resident participation. Since May of 2005, HAP has been holding "town hall" style meetings to help build community between returning residents and those

new to the site (Gibson, forthcoming). Without involved residents who have a sense of ownership of their neighborhood, problems that do arise will be much more difficult to solve (Keating, May 16, 2007).

**Criticism of HOPE VI:** There is a lack of data on HOPE VI outcomes

***Response: HAP committed its evaluation resources to answering the hard questions from a customer perspective. These evaluations will be made up of both data and individual stories that will tell the HOPE VI story through the experiences of residents.***

HAP as a later recipient of HOPE VI funds took advantage of the opportunity to learn from PHAs of earlier HOPE VI award sites. One of the criticisms most often leveled is that there is a lack of evaluation and data on HOPE VI outcomes. HAP anticipated that the community would have questions at the end of the HOPE VI project that would relate to resident experience at all phases of the project. In order to answer those questions, HAP hired Dr. Karen Gibson from Portland State University's Center for Urban Studies, to monitor and assess the following components the project: relocation, housing stability, community supportive services (CSS) and re-occupancy (HAP, 2004 and Gibson, forthcoming). The goal of the evaluation is to answer "12 hard questions that may be of concern to the local community" (Gibson and Detweiler, 2004). The 12 hard questions that HAP was interested in answering were:

1. Will residents really get to come back at the completion of redevelopment? If not, why?
2. Are residents who wish to return to New Columbia able to maintain stable housing throughout the redevelopment process?
3. Is housing less stable for residents who use Section 8 vouchers? If so, why?
4. What assistance was provided to support families with Section 8 vouchers?
5. Did residents feel they had a sufficient number of locations to choose from during the relocation process?
6. Were Relocation and CSS staffs helpful? Knowledgeable?
7. How long did it take residents to feel connected to their new communities?
8. If residents wished to relocate within North Portland, were they able to? If not, why not and how have residents adapted to their new neighborhood?
9. What part of town did residents move to and how satisfied are they with their new location?



10. How long did it take for residents' children to adjust to their new schools?
  11. What do residents miss most about Columbia Villa?
  12. What effect did participating/not participating in the GOALS Program have?
- (HAP, 2004)

In order to determine answers to those questions, Gibson interviewed HAP staff, residents and project affiliates and conducted three resident mail surveys; one in the fall of 2003 and two in the spring and fall of 2004 (Gibson and Detweiller, 2004). In a forthcoming paper, Dr Gibson provides analysis on outcomes of resident relocation from Columbia Villa and gives answers to the above questions. One aspect of the project that is a subject of further evaluation is determining why fewer residents returned to New Columbia than were expected. This aspect of the project will be discussed later in this chapter.

The evaluation done by Dr Gibson has provided HAP and the local community with answers to some of those 12 hard questions. HAP realized that with a project of this size and scope, there was the potential for mistakes to be made. In order to learn from those mistakes or determine how some aspect of the project may have been done better, HAP early on brought in an outside evaluator. While results of the evaluation show that relocation was a positive experience for the majority of households, what is also shown is that there were the problems that arose when those in extreme poverty are separated from support networks (Gibson, forthcoming). "This evaluation," says Keating, "and more evaluations like this one help HAP and the residents that are our customers. Overall, we {HAP} did a good job, but your best lessons most often come from where you fell short.

We have another HOPE VI project underway now and we are applying lessons learned from New Columbia to that project” (Keating, May 16, 2007).

### **Criticism of HOPE VI: HOPE VI worsens acute affordable housing needs**

***Response: New Columbia increased the overall amount of affordable housing stock.***

When HAP was awarded the HOPE VI grant, 382 of Columbia Villa’s 462 housing units



**Figure 15:** Higher density housing at New Columbia

were occupied. As noted, the entire development was demolished to make way for 854 brand new public, affordable and market rate housing units. Of the 232 housing units for sale, 39 are designated “affordable” and have income restrictions. Of the units for rent, 297 are

designated public housing, 73 are Section 8, 66 are available to senior citizens and 184 are available to households earning less than 60% of the Area Median Income

(<http://www.hapdx.org/newcolumbia/rentals.html>, accessed May 20, 2007). In addition,

HAP built 92 public housing units off-site to “help lessen concentrations of public housing and make sure that there is no net loss of public housing in the city”

(<http://www.hapdx.org/newcolumbia/pdfs/NCfactsheet.pdf>, accessed May 20, 2007).

Policies at various levels of city and regional government supported (or it could be said demanded) that New Columbia increase the number of affordable housing units. When

HAP received the HOPE VI grant from HUD, the City of Portland had recently revised its subdivision code. This new code required a greater density of housing units per acre than was previously required<sup>22</sup>. The increased density of housing units at New Columbia also supports Metro's Regional Housing Goals by increasing the supply of affordable housing in the region and offering a diverse range of housing types within the region and cities in the Urban Growth Boundary (Regional Housing Choice Implementation Strategy, 2006).

**Criticism of HOPE VI:** The majority of public housing families are excluded from HOPE VI opportunities

***Response: Every family that was relocated during construction was guaranteed the right to return to live at New Columbia<sup>23</sup>.***

In May, 2005, residents began returning home. Columbia Villa was renamed New Columbia. As of December, 2006, all residents who wanted to return had done so. Initial surveys indicated that forty seven percent of residents planned on returning to New Columbia, thirty eight percent were undecided and sixteen percent indicated they would not be returning (Gibson, forthcoming). In the end only 109 families (or about thirty percent) returned to New Columbia. This number was lower than HAP expected, but still was fifty percent higher than the national average of twenty percent (Gibson, forthcoming and Keating, May 16, 2007).

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<sup>22</sup> According to Keating, while the city would have liked to see a total of 1200 units built at New Columbia, this was not an economically feasible option. The original site plan was for 852 replacement houses. This is close to the minimum density required by the city for 82 acres of land.

<sup>23</sup> This right of return was guaranteed to residents unless they had been convicted during the relocation period of a crime that is considered a violation of the public housing lease and ground for eviction from public housing and returning residents had to agree to follow community rules that applied to all housing types, including those for sale (<http://www.hapdx.org/newcolumbia/pdfs/relocation.pdf>, last accessed May 20, 2007).

Results from a new survey conducted by Dr Gibson are being studied to determine why residents chose not to return. Initial indications are that the majority of those that chose not to return were “either satisfied with their new location, did not want to move again, or both” (Gibson, forthcoming). Four percent of households were evicted from public housing during the relocation process or shortly after moving back to New Columbia for lease violations. In addition, several families have moved back to New Columbia as homeowners; either by purchasing one of the affordable housing units or participating in Habitat for Humanity’s homeownership program.

While the rate of return was lower than expected for New Columbia, what is important is that the choice not to return was overwhelmingly a choice. Original residents, unless convicted of a crime, all were guaranteed a housing unit at New Columbia. High rates of satisfaction with their new location and/or not wanting to move again were the main reasons behind the decision not to return. This indicates that HAP staff did a good job in finding residents housing they could feel comfortable in during the relocation process and did not make residents feel that they were not welcome to come back at the end of construction.

It is also worth noting in this section that during relocation, HAP implemented a CSS program that was “designed to help people improve the quality of their lives and to increase their skills to lead to greater self-sufficiency” (HAP, 2004). HAP recognized early on that the CSS program would not be successful unless households had a sense of

housing stability during relocation. Many families were unaware of the higher cost associated with living in Section 8 housing versus the cost of public housing. In order to ensure families succeeded during relocation, HAP hired a Housing Stability Specialist who would administer the \$20,000 reserve fund to cover resident emergencies such as unanticipated high utility costs. HAP also hired a School Stability Specialist to help families make a “smooth transition into their children’s new school” (HAP, 2004). Both of these positions and the reserve fund was paid for out of HOPE VI grant funds.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis, using a variety of sources, indicates that HAP took the criticisms of the HOPE VI program and used them as a “roadmap” to design and implement their own program. By doing this, HAP understood the criticisms of HOPE VI early on and was able to mitigate those criticisms so that they simply did not apply to New Columbia.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Conclusion**

In April, 2006 when I first began thinking of a topic for my exit project, I researched several topics relating to low income housing policy. One of the first topics that held my attention was the HOPE VI program. In researching HOPE VI, I discovered that Portland, Oregon had a recently completed HOPE VI project, New Columbia. In researching both HOPE VI and New Columbia what immediately struck me was that the well-known and accepted national criticisms of the HOPE VI program simply did not apply to New Columbia. That led me to wonder why? Answering that question has been the foundation of this paper.

In order to understand HOPE VI, I looked at the seventy year history of federal public housing policy that led to the creation of the HOPE VI program. Understanding the history of federal public housing policy provided the foundation I needed to understand why HOPE VI was considered a “paradigm shift” federal public housing policy.

Once I began looking at Portland’s experience with HOPE VI, I wondered why Portland’s experience with HOPE VI had been so different. I hypothesized that this is because of the unique character of Portland’s Housing Authority. In the course of working on this paper I researched the history of HAP, and discovered that the agency has a long history of responsiveness to both internal and external customers, willingness

to confront challenges and strong leadership. That the New Columbia project can be viewed as a successful HOPE VI project is due to (1) the diligence and commitment of those working for the agency now and (2) the foundation of excellence that has been established over the agency's nearly seventy year history.

### **Strong Leadership**

Over the years, HAP has had a history of strong executive directors and Board members. The strength of leadership helped HAP confront charges of racism in the 1960s, fiscal challenges in the 1970's and violence, gang activity and drug use in the 1980s. Strong leadership in the late 1980s and into the 1990s pushed the agency to rebuild its internal structure. This enabled it to then look outside itself and coordinate and collaborate with other government agencies, nonprofits and for profit businesses.

This history of strong leadership was crucial to successful implementation of HAPs HOPE VI grant. *“Without a doubt, the success of New Columbia can be attributed to the {HAP} staff. These are dedicated people. That dedication is supported from the very top- an executive director- that trusts the staff. Also, we have had great leadership through the years- that has formed our basic core value to treat people and the community well. It is natural for us to do things according to the “core values” (Keating, May16, 2007).*

### **Innovation**

The City of Portland has long been viewed as an innovator in land use planning and the environment. What is less well known is that HAP is also an innovator in the realm of public housing. Long before the HOPE VI program called for creating partnerships to leverage and raise funds for public housing, HAP was doing just that. In the 1980s, HAPs then Executive Director Don Clark recognized that in order to survive ongoing federal funding cuts, HAP would need to reach out and establish partnerships with multiple groups. Establishing relationships with public housing residents, neighbors, community leaders, nonprofits, other city and county agencies, section 8 landlords, housing advocates and for profits was vitally important to HAPs success. In 2002 when HAP received its HOPE VI grant, the agency had a twenty plus year history of working with those very groups that were necessary to implement the HOPE VI grant.

### **New Columbia Today**

On Thursday, May 10, 2007, the *in Portland* section of the Oregonian newspaper featured New Columbia on the cover with the headline *New Troubles at New Columbia* (Beaven, 2007). The article highlighted recent racial tensions between Hispanic and African American youths. This tension stems from incidents that have occurred in McCoy Park which is located in the very center of the 82 acre development. The city and HAP have responded swiftly to the situation in New Columbia. “Failure is not an option here,” says John Canda of Portland Mayor Tom Potter’s Office (Beaven, 2007).



HAP Executive Director Steve Rudman also knows that failure is not an option and recognizes that HAP “might have been a bit too optimistic, a bit too unrealistic” (Beaven, 2007) about New Columbia. Portland Police initially wanted police officers in New Columbia when the development opened. However, HAP was resistant. According to Rudman, “We should have, from the beginning worked with the community policing office” (Beaven, 2007). Adds Rudman, HAP “did not plan adequate police presence because it didn’t expect violent crime in a neighborhood with both private homes and public housing” (Beaven, 2007). HAP’s Keating also notes that the decision not to have a community policing presence in New Columbia from the beginning was a mistake. “We truly believed that it would not be necessary, which was a mistake” (Keating, May 16, 2007).

However, the situation is not all bad for New Columbia. Market rate homes are selling briskly bringing a new type of resident into New Columbia. Recently HAP was named Public Agency of the Year by the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (HAP, 2007). The award recognizes HAP for its commitment to assure “contracting and workforce diversity on construction projects. Certainly it is a reflection of the successes at New Columbia, where we exceeded our aspirational goals of both fronts” (HAP, 2007). New Columbia also received the top award from the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services in the community revitalization category (HAP, 2007).

When I asked John Keating what HAP has learned from the New Columbia project, he was quiet for a few minutes. *“What I learned is that things you never thought of were the problems- like having a park in the center of the development with a basketball court. Who knew that would create so many problems. We should have separated renters and home owners. It would have made the development easier to manage. We should have had stricter move back requirements for original residents. But the most important thing I learned is that this development worked and will continue to work because of the people- the residents and the staff. There is buy-in here. We all fought hard to make this project a success. We will still fight. We, the staff and the residents, wanted, still want, to make New Columbia a place to be proud of”* (Keating, May 16, 2007). I have no doubt, based on the history of HAP, that New Columbia will be a place to be proud of and will overcome the problems it is currently facing. It has a long history of doing just that.

## **Appendix**

May 16, 2007

Interview with John Keating, HAP Assistant Director, Community Support Services.

### **Questions:**

1. How many units does New Columbia have?
2. How many original households returned to New Columbia?
3. In the 1950's, New Columbia was predominantly white. What happened between 1950 and 1990's that changed the makeup?
4. How/Why did HAP decide to almost double the number of housing units?
5. HAP actively involved residents in the relocation phase. Were residents involved in the design phase of the project?
6. How does HAP involve the residents now?
7. Is there still a resident/ Community Liaison?
8. What did HAP learn from the process?
9. Do you think that HAP already was set up to succeed with New Columbia because of earlier leadership decisions that recognized the need to find ways to meet client's needs "whenever possible by means outside of HUD constraints?"

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