

Silver Medal Winner
High Point Redevelopment Project
West Seattle, Washington



This is an excerpt from:

Building Sustainable Neighborhoods

THE 2007 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2002104398
ISBN: 1-890286-07-9

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COVER PHOTOS: Olin Partnership, Jim Brozek, Seattle Housing Authority, Arrowstreet Inc., Alberto Vecerka/Estó



High Point Redevelopment At-A-Glance

WHAT IS HIGH POINT?

- ❖ Replacement of a 716-unit low-income housing project from the 1940s with a phased development consisting of 1,600 units of mixed-income housing, amenities, and services in a 120-acre planned community including:
 - 600 subsidized rental units (*344 completed in Phase 1*)
 - 100 market-rate rental units
 - 665 market-rate houses for sale (*237 completed in Phase 1*)
 - 235 senior units
 - substantial open space – parks, trails, etc.
 - amenities including a community center, library and health clinic;
- ❖ A Hope VI project developed by the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) using a variety of financing sources, including sale of land to private developers;
- ❖ A project reflecting a multi-layered public agenda and a clear set of core values that include social equity, economic justice, and environmental stewardship;
- ❖ A public/private partnership built around concern for an engaged community, a healthy environment, and quality design (*see Figure 1*);

- ❖ An exemplary application of green or sustainable design to a building type – and at a scale – where it has had only limited exposure.

PROJECT GOALS

- ❖ To replace a decrepit public housing project, plagued by social and economic problems, with a healthy, ecologically-sound, and economically-balanced community.
- ❖ To provide one-for-one replacement for low-income, public housing units (though not all will be on site), offering the opportunity to live in the new development to as many original residents as possible.
- ❖ To integrate market-rate and low-income units and make them virtually indistinguishable from each other.
- ❖ To provide a full array of services addressing resident needs.
- ❖ To implement a state-of-the-art “natural drainage system” in order to capture rainwater runoff and improve the water quality in an adjacent watershed and salmon spawning stream.
- ❖ To engage the community (both prior residents and broader constituencies) in planning, design and management.
- ❖ To physically integrate the redevelopment project with its broader community, including drawing neighboring residents onto the site.

Project Chronology

1942 High Point built as affordable public housing for wartime workers at Boeing and other defense plants. Over many years, the project experienced physical deterioration and considerable social disintegration.

1950s Converted to SHA public housing.

1997-2006 Redevelopment of Rainier Vista and New Holly, two other Hope VI housing projects in Seattle, which provided valuable experience for High Point.

2000 Initiation of planning and design.

2001–2003 Tenants move out of Phase I.

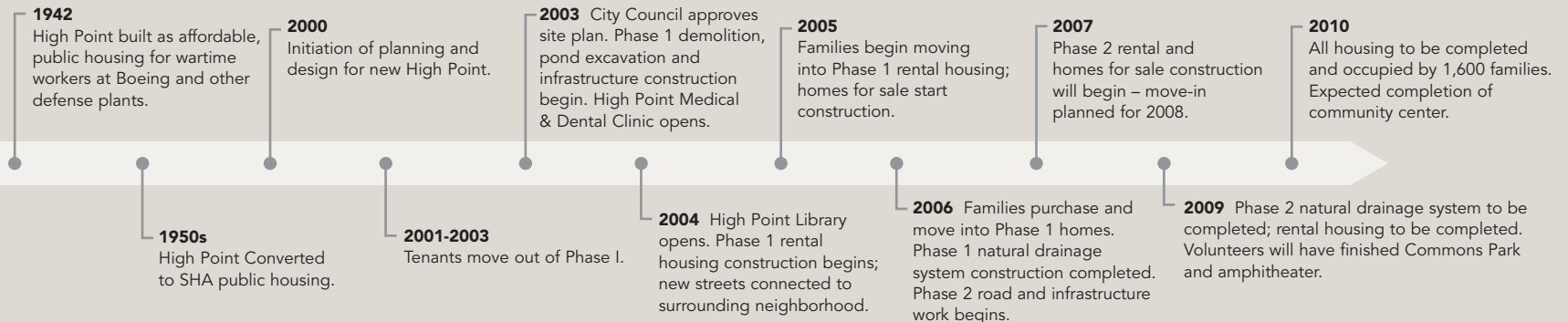
2001 Preliminary Master Plan; environmental review process begins.

2002 Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements released. Library and health clinic sites cleared.

2003 City Council approves site plan. Phase 1 demolition, detention pond excavation, and infrastructure construction begin. High Point Medical & Dental Clinic opens.

2004 High Point Library opens. Phase 1 rental housing construction begins; new streets connected to surrounding neighborhood.

2005 Families begin moving into Phase 1 rental housing; homes for sale start construction.



2006 Elizabeth House (*senior housing*) opens under the auspices of Providence Senior and Community Services. Families purchase and move into Phase 1 homes. Phase 1 natural drainage system construction completed. Phase 2 road and infrastructure work begins.

2007 Phase 2 rental and homes for sale construction begin – move-in planned for 2008.

2009 All of High Point to be reconnected to West Seattle; Phase 2 natural drainage system to be completed; rental housing to be completed. Volunteers will have finished Commons Park and amphitheater.

2010 All housing to be completed and occupied by 1,600 families. Expected completion of community center.

KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

Seattle Housing Authority:

TOM PHILLIPS, Senior Development Program Manager
 TOM TIERNEY, Executive Director
 AL LEVINE, Deputy Executive Director
 ANN-MARIE LINDBOE, Director of Housing Finance
 WILLARD BROWN, Property Management Administrator
 BRIAN SULLIVAN, Architect and Development Program Manager
 (formerly with Mithun, the lead design firm for the project)
 GEORGE NEMETH, Housing Developer

Government, Designers and Community:

HON. NORMAN RICE, former Mayor of Seattle and consultant to the SHA
 DIANE SUGIMURA, Director, Seattle Department of Planning and Design
 PEG STAEHEL, principal of SvR Design, site design
 KOLLIN MIN, Enterprise Foundation, Senior Program Director, Western Region
 DANA BOURLAND, Enterprise Foundation, Director, Green Communities
 MICHAEL ALFORD, Partner, Saltaire Homes, LLP (private builder)
 JOHN FOX, Director, Seattle Displacement Coalition

Program Providers:

MARK OKAZAKI, ED, Neighborhood House
 RAY LI, Development Consultant, Neighborhood House
 MILENKO MATANOVIC, ED, Pomegranate Center; contract provider of community art programs
 JAMES KRIEGER, MD, MPH, Seattle and King County Public Health
 STEVE DASCHLE, ED, Southwest Youth & Family Services
 THERESE JENSEN, Housing Director, Providence/Elizabeth House (senior housing)

Residents:

Residents of Elizabeth House (seniors) – and other renters:
 Sandy Trent, Joyce Williams, Jackie Houston, Charlotte Hank and Presalynn, and Khatsini Simani
 Roger and Sandy Milnes and Fred Choi, homeowners

Project Description



West Seattle street near High Point.

High Point is located in West Seattle, relatively close to downtown (ten to fifteen minutes by car). West Seattle forms a peninsula running north-south, separated from the mainland by water at the northerly end (closer to downtown) and reached from there by a bridge. The west edge faces the Puget Sound, and the views make it more desirable and costly than other parts of the neighborhood. The main north-south artery, 35th Ave SW, serves as a kind of social divider between the more upscale west and the more working-class east. The project site is close to the bridge but faces east generally in the direction of Boeing Field and the industrial lowlands – which are not visible from the site; High Point, one of the highest points in Seattle, at an elevation of about 500 feet above sea level, enjoys spectacular views of downtown and Elliot Bay.

In the early 1940s, the hundred-acre-plus site was developed as public housing by the government. The buildings were simple, one- and two-story apartment dwellings and were rented mainly to Boeing and other defense industry workers. It was developed at a low density (about seven units per acre), with substantial green space and many trees (of which quite a few mature specimens have been preserved and integrated into the new site plan).

In the 1950s, project stewardship shifted to the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA). According to tenants who had lived there over a

long period, while the resident families may have been low-income, it was still a “decent” place to live and raise a family into the 1960s and 1970s. This was reported to have changed greatly in the 1980s with the advent of crack cocaine and the high level of gang activity and drug dealing, with its attendant violence, including shootings and murders. People were afraid to go out at night, and non-residents were afraid to drive into the complex, in part because the street pattern was confusing and discontinuous with the surrounding neighborhood. The disconnection and discontinuity heightened High Point’s identity as a “project.”

It was also reported that High Point had been substantially cleaned up, through more aggressive management, prior to its redevelopment. Even so, it was still isolated and stigmatized relative to the surrounding neighborhood. Children would ask their friends to drop them off on the periphery rather than having them see where they lived. By the time families were being relocated from High Point to make way for the redevelopment, a survey by researchers from the University of Washington (Kleit, et al., 2004) found that residents perceived that “drug activity and people being attacked or robbed were problems,” as well as “cars parked inappropriately and trash in the streets and on lawns.” Despite these problems, “Overall, residents were moderately satisfied with High Point as a place to live.”

URBAN AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The typical economic profile for SHA tenants, which holds for High Point residents both before and after redevelopment, shows a median income of \$11,300 and a median income of \$8,300, well below 30% of the area median, with many as low as 17% of median income.

High Point is very diverse, racially and ethnically. In 2002, the racial profile for High Point tenants (head of household) was about 13% white, 34% African or African-American, 37% Asian or Asian-American, 6% Hispanic, and 4% Native American. At High Point, a very high percentage of residents are also non-English speakers. Languages include Vietnamese, Cambodian, Spanish, and East African languages such as Somali, Tigrinya, and Amharic (it is important to note that the SHA has hired on-site staff who speak these languages). Table 1, shows High Point’s pre-redevelopment demographics.



Left: High Point resident.
Right: High Point children at play.

TABLE 1 HIGH POINT DEMOGRAPHICS - 2002

Population sample:	665
Gender: Female	72%
Family Composition	
Single women with children	43%
Two adults with children	24%
Single adult	16%
Senior with no children	8%
Multiple adults	5%
Single male with children	4%
Race and ethnicity	
Black	19%
Mixed race/ethnicity	6%
American Indian	4%
Caucasian	13%
Asian/Pacific Islander	37%
African	15%
Hispanic	6%
Poverty status – % of median income	
At or below 30%	85%
At or below 50%	99%
Mean Age, years	45

Source: Kleit and Manzo, 2002

PLANNING AND DESIGN

Planning and Development Process – Participation and Community-Building

In undertaking this Hope VI project, the SHA and its consultant team conducted what was, by all accounts, an extensive program of community and tenant involvement. The process relied on “mutual education” of the designers and residents, rather than simply presenting proposed plans or designs for resident review and approval. Thus, the agency and its architects and planners discussed issues and options with residents, showing many types of open spaces, street patterns, housing designs, and possible locations for community facilities. A “visual preference survey” showed images of houses or streets (or particular features) to participants so that they could express their preferences. About 300 surveys were returned from a mailing of 3,000. Perhaps not surprisingly, more traditional house forms were preferred by residents over “avant-garde” designs, though we were told this is not always the case for other groups of respondents (see section on design, below).

They also ran a series of workshops with the residents, who were able to take the graphic examples home for further consideration and discussion at subsequent workshops. A resident design committee met with the architects and planners every two weeks for

about four months, and there were many other larger meetings, for a total of more than 50. Reportedly, there was much effective discussion about what residents liked and why. The residents participated actively, and the meetings also served as a source of community-building. As a result, there was substantial “buy-in” and no organized resistance to the redevelopment. A resident said, “they listened to what we had to say” (from *The Diaries of High Point* DVD). A local social service provider who took part in these meetings described them as “culturally competent,” employing translators as needed to ensure that the many non-English speakers could participate. He also felt that the SHA and design team effectively responded to resident and neighbor concerns.

Involvement in the planning process was supplemented by a program of participatory, community-based art projects supported and directed by the Pomegranate Center, under contract to the SHA. Under executive director Milenko Matanovic, the center’s art projects at High Point included a decorative fence around the community garden, painted by residents, and a pavilion in the garden with carved and painted columns using vegetable themes; a small shelter near the garden with an interesting roof design, utilizing the trunks of trees that had to be cut from the site; and a number of sculptures mostly based on a twisted, columnar theme – all designed and made with resident input and labor. Sculptural cast concrete splash-blocks under the downspouts of homes, and decorative patterns in the sidewalk, were led by artist Bruce Myers. In addition to their aesthetic function, these projects were intended to contribute to building a sense of community among residents.



Left to right: Community garden entrance; Detail of community garden entrance; Community garden fence.



Site Planning

Key goals for the site master plan included safety, reintegration with the surrounding neighborhood, reconnection with the natural environment (including the adjacent watershed), and dealing effectively with the site's topography (which falls substantially from south to north and also across the site from west to east). As the lead designer, Brian Sullivan, put it, they wanted to “reconnect to the Zen of the site” – to harmonize with its essence and spirit – not simply to address the obvious technical planning challenges. Examples of this would be optimizing the views and retaining and respecting as many mature trees as possible.

The existing circulation pattern, with many curving and discontinuous streets, was confusing, resulting in difficulties with orientation and wayfinding; it was also largely disconnected from the street pattern of the surrounding neighborhood. The new plan, while keeping some of the original streets, links much more closely to the surrounding streets. In addition, services and attractions, such as Commons Park and the planned community center, are located close to the edge of the site in order to be very accessible to the neighborhood. The new library and health clinic are on 35th Street

and form a link between old and new. The strategy of attracting people from the area seems already to be working, at least to some extent, as demonstrated by a group of residents from both areas who meet regularly for exercise walks. It is likely that the connections will grow when Commons Park and the community center are complete, as they are likely to draw more people from the surrounding neighborhoods. A senior housing project (Elizabeth House), operated by a local faith-based group, is also located near Commons Park and the other services.

There was significant attention to **open space** planning, with more than twenty acres dedicated to parks, playgrounds, and other landscaped areas (such as parkway strips and swales – see the description below of the natural drainage system). There is a carefully-planned hierarchy of open spaces with more major parks (three spread through the entire development, including Commons Park and the areas above and close to the retention pond), neighborhood parks (every two blocks – with some play equipment and/or seating), and pocket parks (every block but without equipment). Every dwelling also has some private open space such as a small yard, typically at

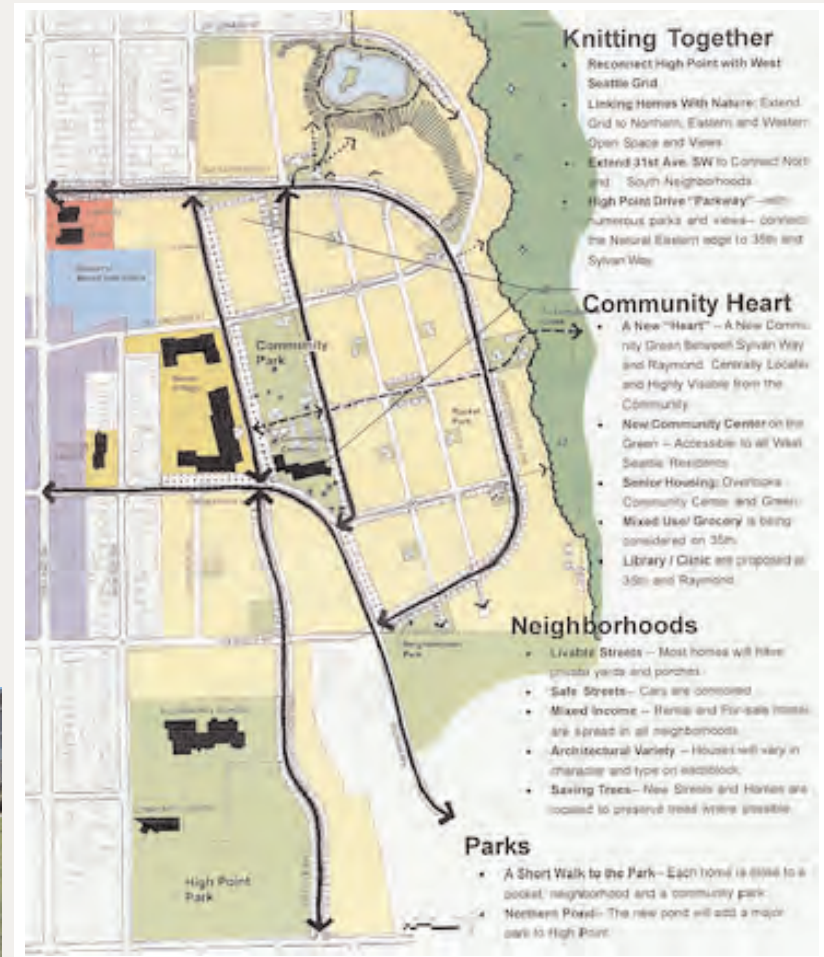
Left to right: Brian Sullivan, SHA; New Public Library at edge of project; Art carving near pond.

the back of the house and always visible from the kitchen, so that children can be observed. View corridors were retained, especially toward the north where one sees Elliot Bay and downtown, mostly from common spaces (though some houses also have panoramic views).

Designers described how the site plan follows New Urbanism principles in that the streets are conceived of as “livable” and intended for cars and people to coexist. Except for the more major thoroughfares, streets are quite narrow and have parking on one side only – often restricting vehicles to the equivalent of a single lane (so that oncoming cars must wait and allow each other to pass). There are also alleys behind some of the houses with outdoor parking, and relatively few garages. Traffic circles at many intersections reduce speeds and provide traffic calming, and the water-collecting swales along sidewalks also serve to buffer pedestrian areas from vehicular traffic.



Left: High Point pedestrian street.
 Right: Retention pond with housing at edge.



Concept Plan: Seattle Housing Authority.

Design

Housing design was also informed by the principles of New Urbanism. Most houses have porches – to support interaction and help build community – and they show signs of this kind of activity, such as in the way many have chairs or sofas on them as well as other items that indicate their use (places to leave shoes; bicycles, etc.). The houses’ scale and materials contribute to them “looking like houses.” They are two to three stories tall, have pitched roofs, siding that looks like clapboards (and can be vinyl or Hardee board), and incorporate trim (usually white) and wood fences. The color palette was controlled, but there is quite a broad range of colors, many of which are quite intense or saturated.

The units were designed to provide adequate, livable spaces. Townhouses are 18 feet wide, and all rooms were tested by the

designers for “furnishability.” For example, although there are varied bedroom sizes, even the smallest can accommodate a bunk bed and not require it to be placed against a window. There is usually at least some separation between living and dining areas.

Strategies were employed to achieve variety in the visual design. There is a mix of types of dwellings, including free-standing houses, duplexes, and quads, and a variety of roof treatments. The three-dimensional volumes are somewhat varied, and the forms move in and out in plan. Most units are designed to accommodate families and range from one to five bedrooms, with three being the most common. Though there are 27 designs, there is still a certain uniformity of appearance, which could either be praised for achieving a consistent and unified look or criticized for being somewhat repetitive, depending on how one feels about it.

A great deal of attention was also paid to **landscape** design. Use of grass is rather limited (though it grows with little irrigation in this region) and tends to be located mostly where children could be expected to play. The first half of the intended 2,500 new trees have been planted and about 150 mature trees were retained. They represent a wide variety of species and many have signs identifying them. Some signs even indicate their very high appraised replacement values (e.g., “Sitka Spruce – value \$15,000”). There is very substantial planting in the swales, much of it in native species, but often in



Left: High Point single family home.
Right: Low income rentals.

“patches” rather than naturalized (see the section on the natural drainage system, below). The quality of street furniture and lighting is also very high.

Energy Efficiency/Green Building Initiatives

Another key driver of the design is a strong commitment to energy efficiency and green building practices. These issues permeate both building and site design (for the site, the natural drainage system is the main feature). This is one of the nation’s largest “green” public housing projects, with the greatest number of Energy-Star certified houses in the country. This level of sustainability in low-income housing is unusual and should provide savings to residents in lower utility bills. Additional incentives are in place to encourage tenants to practice energy saving behaviors and further lower their expenses.

The houses are constructed to “Built Green” standards. Built Green is a local environmentally-friendly residential building program developed in partnership with King County and other agencies. Based on a builder’s submission, Built Green will certify that the home has received a 1- through 5-star rating. The structures in High Point typically received at least a 3.5-star rating and some are higher (anything above 1 star exceeds mandatory requirements). Typical features are added insulation, tankless water heaters, non-off-gassing and/or recycled materials, special ventilation, and energy-efficient appliances, lighting and heating systems.



Natural Drainage System

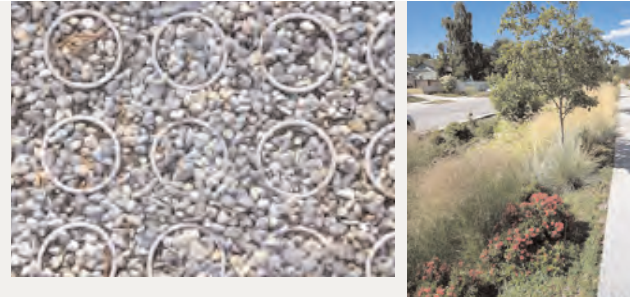
In addition to a general commitment to environmentally-friendly design, this site raised special concerns about drainage. It borders and drains into the Longfellow Creek watershed, Seattle’s most significant salmon-spawning stream. High Point has a substantial impact on the creek, accounting for about 10% of the runoff into it. There was also a general interest in natural drainage systems on the part of the city, making this site an obvious candidate for their first trial application.

The components of the system work together to maximize the percolation into the ground of rainfall and other runoff. The water

Clockwise from top left: Stormwater retention pond; For Sale housing; Typical swale; Mature tree at High Point; typical swale.

is also naturally filtered through gravel and earth, then retained prior to being released off the site. One component of the system is porous surfaces – which may be landscaped or paved with materials that allow the water to percolate rather than run off. Several types of porous paving are used, including an asphalt-based system applied on certain streets and sidewalks (the first public street to use such a system in Seattle), as well as gravel beds and pavers set in gravel with spaces between them.

Water that does run off the remaining impervious surfaces mostly finds its way into a series of drainage swales which line one side of every street. The swales are six or more feet wide and a foot or two deep and are “constructed” to both allow percolation into the soil beneath them (via a gravel substrate and soil which does not over-compact) and also to slow the rate at which water runs down them due to their gradual slope and small “dams,” which hold back some of the water. The swales are landscaped with low vegetation and are designed to be able to be crossed frequently to and from the street. To make them easier to traverse, the SHA had to negotiate (with the transportation authority) permission to use non-standard curb heights (5 inches rather than 6 inches), to help reduce their depth and steepness. Runoff eventually finds its way to a large retention pond, which is treated as an open space amenity for the northern part of the site, and only after a final settling and natural filtration is it released into the watershed.



Based on one winter’s experience, the system is reported to be working well. November 2006 was said to have been the wettest month on record — and yet no surface water left the site. The pavement and absorption systems were said to have performed as intended, meeting the objective of filtering and absorbing rain water as well as a natural pasture would.

For-Sale Housing

The lead design firm for the SHA (Mithun) also worked for some of the private developers. They conducted focus groups with real estate agents and prospective buyers to better understand customer needs for market-rate housing. By and large, buyers tend to be young couples and families or empty-nesters. Many are from West Seattle or are people from more distant suburbs who want to be closer to downtown. Some consciously choose to be “pioneers” and find the mixed income levels and ethnic groups – as well as the green features – to be attractive aspects of the development. One of the most striking features of the end result is that it is very difficult to tell the difference between the rental and owner-occupied housing – and this was appreciated by both groups.

Left: Porous pavement detail.

Right: Swale adjacent to sidewalk.

Even in a softening market, sales seem to be strong. About 75% of Phase 1 had been sold at the time of the site visit, and some of the builders plan to participate in Phase 2. The marketing and graphic design for the project was coordinated by the SHA, and there are many tastefully-designed signs on and off of the site. They are visually coordinated, thoughtfully placed, and offer substantive facts about amenities as well as sales information. The marketing budget appears to have been substantial.

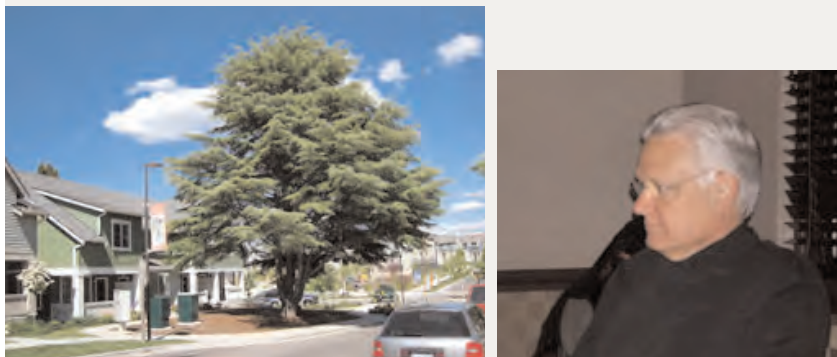
A retired couple indicated that they were drawn by the mix of cultures and the liveliness of having kids in the neighborhood. A younger couple said that they had been living in West Seattle and their previous knowledge of High Point was of a place you wouldn't go to "unless you were looking for something that had been stolen from you." Even so, they visited High Point at the suggestion of a real estate agent and, while they viewed the "social experiment" as a bit of a risk, they decided it would work well for them. Both parties noted that the purchase price offered great value for the money compared to a new house in another, probably not as well-located, community, or a much smaller unit closer to downtown. They reported that resale values had risen about 25% over what they had paid a year before – which reinforced for them that the experiment was showing signs of success.

There seem to be social connections developing between owners and renters. The older couple reported that they are meeting their neighbors through common interests, like pets, involvement in the neighborhood and open space associations, as well as at a neighborhood party. They know and socialize with the renters who border their backyard and report that you can't tell who lives where or earns what – and can't assume that you could tell who rents by race or ethnicity. They find that "everyone is 'over the top' friendly." Tom Phillips, the SHA project manager for High Point, has "voted with his feet" and purchased a house there.



Clockwise from top left: High Point walking group; High Point playground user; Typical High Point street; Tom Phillips, SHA Project Manager and High Point resident.

One of the private developers, Michael Alford of Saltaire Homes, is close to completion on 27 townhouse units. Of these, 14 were finished and 10 sold at the time of our interview. Homes were selling for \$425,000, compared to an anticipated price of \$370,000. For this price, one gets a three-story, three-bedroom plus bonus room, 1,800-square-foot house with detached single garage. The rising prices and good absorption rates suggested to him that the market was still strong and that High Point was very attractive to private buyers, reinforcing what we had heard from homeowners. His buyers are mostly singles or younger couples (largely without children) who don't want a condo and don't mind stairs. In terms of design, he was comfortable with the New Urbanist and energy-efficiency requirements and hired the master plan architect (Mithun) to design his project. His overall experience was very positive and he will be participating in Phase 2.



Left: Mature tree at High Point.
Right: Tom Tierney, SHA Executive Director.

THE SEATTLE HOUSING AUTHORITY

Core Values

The agency and its leaders were motivated by a set of core values which provided the context for the project. These values were initially articulated by former Mayor Norm Rice, who served as a consultant to the agency. They include social equity, economic justice, and environmental quality. As played out in the redevelopment of High Point, these values generated respect for the original residents and their needs, a participatory process that engaged them and the surrounding community, and a sensitivity to environmental and ecological issues. The social goal was nothing less than the transformation of a distressed area into a “neighborhood of choice” where anyone might choose to live – not an isolated place of last resort.

Organization and Leadership

This project clearly benefited from strong leadership and the overall soundness of the SHA. Unlike many other large urban housing authorities, the SHA is financially and managerially viable, which may explain why it has been so successful in obtaining four Hope VI grants. Director Tom Tierney had a considerable history with the city, having directed the planning and budget office under former Mayor Norm Rice. He has assembled a competent, experienced management team who spoke impressively about the guiding principles and their execution in practice.



The agency also had the benefit of learning a great deal from two prior Hope VI projects, Holly Park and Rainier Vista. Even though these projects were not completed before High Point began, they gave the agency experience with the planning, financing, and management of mixed-income, mixed rental and for sale housing development at a scale similar to High Point.

Management and Services

Willard Brown, SHA's property management administrator for this and all their Hope VI projects noted the special challenges that these projects face, including tenant selection, provision of social services, staffing of the management team, and maintenance procedures.

There was a one-and-a-half year preparation process for tenant transition into the Phase 1 homes. One aspect of the change involved moving from HUD rules to those that govern IRS tax credit projects

regarding tenant qualification (for instance, students and transient households were no longer permitted). While it was understood that there would not be enough units to accommodate all qualified residents in the new project, priority was given, in order, to seniors, families with children under six, the disabled, and working families. The priorities were set by the tenants themselves. Those not able to be accommodated in Phase 1 will have another chance in Phase 2 if they want to move back. Residents not placed at High Point were said to have been offered other locations or Section 8 vouchers. According to the SHA, 505 of the original 716 households chose to continue living in some form of publicly-subsidized housing – and of those 505, about 180 households live at the new High Point. (See the discussion below about the displacement question.)

One of the main social service goals at High Point is to encourage tenant self-sufficiency, by providing an “opportunity to succeed.” In fact, it is a requirement that tenants participate in a program to advance them in this direction, including developing a “life plan.” For this particular mix of residents, key issues are employment and mastering English as a second language. Services offered on site at High Point include ESL and citizenship classes, which are reported to be continuously full. Job referrals are also provided. Assistance and advice are offered for managing income and avoiding expenditures that will be overly burdensome (such as buying a high-maintenance, older car). For tenants with health-related issues or disabilities,

expectations are reduced and help is offered for getting needed services and support. There are extensive health-assistance and monitoring programs, including walking groups, a community clinic, and others (see next section). The SHA will also adjust a tenant's rent if they unexpectedly lose a job.

In addition, SHA has hired several staff who are residents of High Point public housing, which helps them meet HUD Section 3 requirements to offer employment opportunities to tenants. They have structured their hiring to include speakers of each of the main languages represented at High Point. Current on-site staff include a property manager, a lead maintenance person (two more will be added with Phase 2), and a community builder (who organizes activities, meetings and newsletters for High Point and performs outreach to the surrounding community, strengthening those links). Residents were also hired for construction jobs, which required extensive negotiations with local unions and the creation of specially-defined job categories.

Maintenance at High Point poses certain new challenges, including keeping the site green (both visually and ecologically), managing the natural drainage system, and repairing new types of energy-efficient appliances. These services are subject to bidding, and SHA (or its maintenance arm) must compete and win in order to become the provider for the site.



The thoughtfulness and comprehensiveness of the SHA management program and services was impressive to HUD, which has encouraged many visits to SHA's Hope VI projects from other housing authorities – such as Chicago and Portland. SHA offers technical assistance to these agencies.

Other non-profits, including some with long histories at the site, offer services at High Point. The High Point community center was founded to work with new immigrants, though it is now a large and diversified social service provider. It does or will offer grant-supported safety net services, self-sufficiency, community-building, and health-related services. It is also the lead agency for the planned neighborhood center, where services will be focused. The 18,500-square-foot neighborhood center has received commitments for about 70% of its almost \$10 million budget from sources including the SHA and the Gates Foundation. In keeping with the rest of the development, it will be environmentally friendly, so that the building itself can form the basis for environmental awareness classes and

Resident gardener at community garden.

activities. The park, known as the Commons, will include a small amphitheatre for performances, and is expected to be completed in 2008. The neighborhood center is scheduled to open in 2010.

Another provider with a history at the site is Southwest Youth & Family Services, which offers mental health and educational services to High Point residents. The director had taken part in the project's advisory committee and commented that the redeveloped High Point would have a very beneficial impact on West Seattle, predicting that the surrounding community will "welcome back High Point as a source of pride."

HEALTH PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH

A number of leading-edge public health initiatives are under way at High Point. A great deal of attention has been paid to the health needs of residents and the provision of a healthy environment. In addition to the projects described below, a new health clinic was built on the cusp between High Point and the rest of the neighborhood.

Dr. Jim Krieger, a public health physician and epidemiologist with Seattle Public Health and the University of Washington, who is responsible for services and studies at High Point, pointed out two major foci for their work related to local health problems—an epidemic of obesity and a significant increase in the number of asthma cases.

The issue of obesity is being addressed as part of a "Healthy Community" plan, which permeates both the design of the neighborhood environment and its social or activity patterns. The idea is to encourage people to walk more – both as part of their normal daily transportation and as a structured activity. Thus, High Point is laid out to encourage walking by creating both dedicated and shared paths that connect to walking trails through the adjacent watershed. They publish a walking map and provide strategically placed kiosks along the way. There are also walking programs organized by Neighborhood House. In addition to providing exercise, these groups give people the opportunity to meet their neighbors and help to establish a sense of community. Finally, NIH has provided funding to evaluate the program's impacts, which will focus on perceptions of the built environment (including perceived safety) and health outcomes.

The other major health initiative relates to combating asthma, which occurs as the result of a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental triggers – such as molds, dust mites, cockroaches, rats, and cigarette smoke. Many residents at the old High Point experienced an environment that included some or many of these irritants, exacerbated by dampness, old carpeting, and the like. Again, the approach to this issue addressed both environmental and operational facets and went well beyond the generally-improved conditions provided by any new construction in its 35



new “Breathe Easy” homes. The approximately \$6,000-per-unit added cost of construction for these special units provides hardwood floors, low-VOC products, extra insulation at the foundations, special kitchen appliances, and an upgraded HVAC system that provides one-half air change per hour.

These homes were created and are being evaluated with the support of a partnership among the SHA, HUD (healthy homes program), NIH (environmental justice program), Seattle Public Health, the University of Washington, and Neighborhood House. Twenty-five more Breathe Easy homes will be built in Phase 2 with the added support of the Enterprise Foundation. The tenant selection process and evaluation research design was based on a set of criteria including low-income, a child with moderately severe asthma, and willingness to make a commitment to refrain from smoking in the house, to not have furry pets, and to perform or allow regular

cleaning and maintenance. The children will be (or have been) tracked for a year prior to move-in and then monitored afterwards. There is a waiting list for the Breathe Easy houses that are being built in Phase 2.

OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

There is an elementary school adjacent to the site, but it has a rather poor reputation. Many High Point parents chose to have their children attend other public schools, in spite of long bus rides. Whether the school will improve or not is unknown, but it is unfortunate (and beyond the SHA’s control) that this important service is less than outstanding, since a good school on site would undoubtedly make High Point that much more attractive to families with young children.

There was also a great deal of concern, particularly on the part of some of the older tenants, about the need for a closer supermarket. There is a convenience market within a block of the site, but the nearest supermarket requires a car or bus ride. The SHA wanted to attract a supermarket and offered a site on 35th Ave SW. But the fact that there is already a market a short drive away, together with the overall high density of markets in the area, has precluded the economic viability of having one closer.

Left: Location of future amphitheater and Park.
Right: Looking toward downtown.

THE DISPLACEMENT QUESTION

Because Hope VI projects replace dilapidated public housing with mixed-income units, some residents are inevitably “displaced” – that is, forced to move out of the units they have occupied – at least temporarily. Key questions include: What happens to displaced residents? What choices are they presented? Are they allowed or encouraged to move into the newly-created replacement units, if they wish to? Are low-income units removed from the housing stock? There is wide a variety of opinions on this subject, including those of the SHA, housing researchers from the University of Washington, and the local Displacement Coalition.

The SHA notes that one-for-one replacement of lost housing units is their goal, even though it is not required by Hope VI. Replacements, they add, might not be within the project where units are lost, but could be handled system-wide, with new units or Section 8 housing vouchers. Since High Point is being done in two phases, about half the tenants were allowed to remain on site and were then given the highest priority to move into Phase 1, if desired, before their units were demolished. As mentioned above, 180 original tenants took advantage of this option. Tenants who had to move out of the first phase were also given a high priority and opportunity to move back to High Point, but by then (several years later) they had lost track of some, and many others were either settled into new and satisfactory housing or did not want to move

again. SHA offered substantial relocation assistance, and a total of 505 of the original 716 households have been accommodated in some form of publicly-assisted housing.

Kleit and Manzo (2002), housing researchers from the University of Washington, interviewed about 200 households at High Point prior to any relocations. They wanted to understand the issues, choices, and experiences of these tenants. Among their findings were that “concerns about residents’ relocation experiences are as important to the program’s success as how the redeveloped site works when it is complete,” and “those who eventually left High Point were more likely to have smaller families, be younger, and have had an initial desire to move.” In other words, it’s harder for older and larger households to move. In addition, the authors point out, because SHA was redeveloping three Hope VI sites simultaneously, the supply of affordable housing was affected – at least temporarily – and this impacted options for relocation, especially for larger households.

A divergent perspective is held by John Fox of the Seattle Displacement Coalition. He argues that High Point and the other Hope VI projects have resulted in a net loss of about 1,000 affordable housing units, with High Point accounting for roughly one third of the loss. He feels that the redevelopment could have been done very differently, retaining and refurbishing many of the pre-existing units, keeping

more of the mature trees (he claims that only about one in six was kept), and infilling with some new, market-rate housing. He prepared a photo presentation showing Cabrini Green in Chicago as an “appropriate” candidate for Hope VI redevelopment and contrasting it with the relatively attractive, low density of other Seattle projects that Fox likened to High Point. He also maintains that SHA claims units as replacement housing that would have been built anyway, and that the very substantial resources these projects absorbed were taken away from other potential projects that would have added low-cost housing.

The SHA strongly disagrees with Fox’s assertions. First, they report that not only were all units replaced one-for-one with actual built units with street addresses (425 of these are on-site and the rest off-site), but also an additional 307 Section 8 vouchers were obtained directly as a result of the project, resulting in a net gain of 43% in low-income housing opportunities. They also argue about the loss of trees, pointing out that there was a very substantial effort to save “significant” trees (about 110 of 200 were saved) and that there will be a net gain of about 1,800 trees after Phase 2 is completed.

FINANCES

Project Development

Project finances are complex and sophisticated and utilized many sources. The finance director for the SHA described the effort needed to put the package together as being like forcing “a basketball through a garden hose.” The level of competence and sophistication of the financing is demonstrated by the fact that a number of other housing authorities and non-profits have sought Seattle’s advice and assistance.

Contributing greatly to their efforts was the fact that SHA has a good record of financial stability and is experienced with Hope VI requirements – lowering the perceived risks for investor participation. Seattle also has a history of passing levies for affordable housing, which it has done four times in the past 25 years. In terms of attracting private financing, the principal draw is the offer of bonds with a 4% tax credit as well as depreciation and other write-offs.

Among the sources of development capital were \$32 million in variable-interest bonds, of which about one third were converted to a fixed-rate loan. Hope VI provided funding of about \$6 million, and there was a federal contribution to the SHA for capital projects at High Point.

TABLE 2 USES OF FUNDS – PHASE 1
PUBLICLY DEVELOPED UNITS

PREDEVELOPMENT	
Staff & Overhead	\$645,985
Contract Services	\$389,286
Total Predevelopment	\$1,035,271
HARD CONSTRUCTION COST	
Off-Site	\$1,291,931
Building Structure	\$27,793,806
General Contractor Fees	\$1,095,138
Construction Contingency	\$1,679,789
Bond Requirements	\$144,935
Tenant Improvements	\$2,341,680
Plaza Improvements	\$1,800,000
Public Art	\$24,185
Total Hard Construction Costs	\$36,171,464
SOFT COST	
Acquisition Cost	\$1,764
Architecture and Engineering	\$2,819,787
Permits, Fees & Taxes	\$773,218
Development Staff/Operating	\$2,840,686
Developer Fee	\$2,555,299
Utility Hookups	\$600,000
Environmental Remediation	\$188,680
Legal, Insurance & Other	\$744,031
Contingency	\$630,144
Bike Facility Soft Cost	\$262,968
Total Soft Costs	\$11,416,577

TABLE 2 USES OF FUNDS – *continued*

INTEREST AND FEES	
Construction Interest	\$2,671,049
City Section 108	\$150,000
NCBDC	\$76,285
Unity Council	\$172,868
Bond Issuance Cost	\$790,490
Reserves and Lease-up	\$323,600
Total Interest and Fees	\$4,184,292
BRIDGE LOANS	
Unity Council Bridge Loan	\$911,830
NCBDC	\$750,000
Total Bridge Loans	\$1,661,830
TOTAL USES OF FUNDS	\$54,469,434
Cost per unit	\$158,341
SURPLUS	\$1,942,738

The open feeling of High Point, combined with desirability of the location near downtown, and the buoyant local housing market gave the SHA an unusual opportunity to garner income for the project by creating and selling valuable building sites to the private sector. These sales provided a significant portion of the funding needed for infrastructure and helped to pay for the construction of subsidized units (over \$14 million was received in Phase 1). In Phase 1, single-family lots were sold to private developers for about \$130,000 each (townhouse lots went for about \$75,000); in Phase 2, prices will be closer to \$140,000 for single family lots and \$85,000 for townhouses.

The SHA is also building in mechanisms for splitting any windfall profits if prices rise above expected levels. By contrast, lots were provided to non-profits like Habitat for Humanity for only \$45,000.

The capital costs for the project are shown below in Table 2. Uses of funds for the first 344 publicly-developed units (in Phase 1) are illustrated in the table, while the sources totaled \$56,412,172. A separate table (Table 3) shows the permanent financing that was put into place.

TABLE 3 PERMANENT FINANCING

Tax Exempt First Mortgage	\$ 10,600,000
HOPE VI funds (SHA Loan #1)	\$ 8,500,000
WA Trust Fund	\$ 2,000,000
Healthy Homes (part of SHA Loan #2)	\$ 185,000
Seattle Public Utilities (part of SHA Loan #2)	\$ 742,500
Proceeds from For-Sale (part of SHA Loan #2)	\$ 14,284,113
Interest Income	\$ 135,586
Deferred Developer Fee	\$ 2,963,736
GP Capital	\$ 100
LP Capital	\$ 27,181,493
Total	\$ 66,592,528

IMPACTS

The redevelopment of High Point is already having significant impacts in a number of ways:

- The old public housing project has been bulldozed and half rebuilt, with the second half underway.
- The site is being treated as a “green” zone, with great attention to the environmental impacts of the buildings and landscape.
- Many former tenants are already living in new homes, all of which are energy-efficient and some of which provide improved air quality for asthma sufferers.

- It has already succeeded, at least to some extent, as a mixed-income community where low-income tenants mix socially with middle-income owners. Likely, as more people move in and there are more community activities, there will be a higher level of social interaction.
- The project may be considered a model for Hope VI – in its “greenness,” its lack of displacement and loss of low-income housing, its effective management and maintenance program, and its financing (a number of other housing authorities have visited and received technical assistance from the SHA).
- High Point also provided the occasion for diverse governmental agencies to push their own envelopes in terms of cooperating and being flexible to achieve important goals, such as the natural drainage system, which involved the housing authority, the city Departments of Planning & Development and Transportation, as well as Seattle Public Works. Participants described their working together as a “new model for cooperation among agencies.”
- One special feature of High Point that will not be replicable everywhere is the ability to sell off surplus land (without sacrificing project densities), which results from a combination of the low density of the original project, the desirability of the location, and the high value of land in Seattle’s strong housing market.

Assessing Project Success

SUCCESS IN MEETING PROJECT GOALS

1. To replace a decrepit public housing project, plagued by social and economic problems, with a healthy, ecologically-sound and economically-balanced community.

The new development emphasizes both physical and social health, is very ecological, and effectively integrates people from a variety of social/ethnic backgrounds and economic levels.

2. To provide one-for-one replacement for low-income, public housing units (though not all will be on site), offering the opportunity to live in the new development to as many original residents as possible.

While some local housing activists question their performance in this area, the SHA makes a convincing case for having achieved this goal.

3. To integrate market-rate and low-income units and make them indistinguishable from each other.

Renters, owners, and outsiders have difficulty telling which units are market-rate and which low-income.

4. To provide a full array of services addressing resident needs.

Some services are in place (health clinic, library, senior programs, walking groups, community newsletters and activities, other social service supports), and some will be expanded or more convenient when the community center opens in Phase 2.

5. To implement a state-of-the-art “natural drainage system” in order to improve the water quality in an adjacent watershed and salmon spawning stream.

The natural drainage system is in place and is reported to be functioning effectively. It worked very well in the extremely wet winter of 2006.

6. To engage the community (both prior residents and broader constituencies) in planning, design, and management.

The project planning entailed an exemplary process of community involvement, which appears to continue into the operations and management phases.

7. To physically integrate the redevelopment project with its broader community, including drawing neighboring residents onto the site.

The street pattern is reintegrated with the surrounding neighborhood, and key community facilities are located on or near the edge of the site (existing library and health clinic; planned community center and Commons Park), making them convenient both to High Point

and its neighbors. Other amenities, including walking paths (and the organized groups that use them), draw and unite both groups.

SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Selection Committee was impressed by the participatory process and level of civic engagement undertaken by the Seattle Housing Authority in creating High Point. This process assumed particular importance since a central goal for High Point was to connect it to the surrounding neighborhood by continuing the local street pattern through the project, and creating new public open spaces which were open to neighborhood residents. The dialogue with neighboring residents helped establish these priorities, and ultimately helped reverse the former isolation of the project.

In recreating High Point as a mixed income neighborhood of market and subsidized housing, the SHA went farther than required (by Hope VI rules) in providing 1:1 replacement of low-income units while also providing a good mix of racial and ethnic groups.

The Selection Committee also commended the project for combining Hope VI goals with major environmental goals including reclamation of rain water through its extensive system of porous paving, swales and a catchment pond, which also serves as an amenity for High Point Residents. They noted, as well, the use of environmentally

friendly materials in the building and operation of High Point, and the High Point organic gardening project which involves people from throughout High Point in the production and nurturing of their own food.

The Committee raised some questions about whether the densities achieved at High Point were adequate for an urban area, although the importance of lower densities for the long-term success of mixed-income housing was noted. Similarly, although outside the purview of the project, it was felt that interventions to strengthen the adjacent school would have strengthened the attractiveness of the project to families with young children.

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