Public Housing in Chicago, USA

A Focus on Problems and Solutions in Design, Pattern and Practice

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Ever since the housing shortage in the early part of the 20th century, the United States has faced challenges in providing homes for all of its citizens. Throughout the 1940's and early 1950's local housing authorities scrambled to create a prototype for the perfect Public Housing plan. Due to economic and political pressures, most of the designs were finalized as vertical skyscrapers placed in the outskirts of a city, or in an already dilapidated area. Years later we can see that a large part of these projects have become crime-ridden, decrepit, and stigmatized as areas of danger and distaste. Many scholars attribute the architecture and design of these projects for their failure. My paper will examine the validity of this idea and provide evidence for how the architecture and design played only a minor part in the downfall of these projects. Other factors include the basic lack of funding for maintenance of the buildings, the economic climate of the times, the homogeneity of the residents, and most importantly, almost no social outlets for the youth of these projects. To prove these causes, I have analyzed the life, death, and rebirth of two Public Housing projects in Chicago built during the 1950s.

One might argue abstractly about the fundamental deficiencies of the tower-in-the-park as a form [of] urban housing and urban design: the lack of public space and street life; the lack of connection between mothers in the tower and children playing fifteen floors below; the inhuman scale and isolation from the fabric of the city that this design produced. All these are true but, I would maintain, largely irrelevant to the real crisis of Public Housing.¹

- Robert Fishman

¹ Fishman, Robert, Rethinking Public Housing, pg. 4.
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New Rochelle, NY - You have given me an insight into a true clash of urban-suburban space and have made me a passionate Growth & Structure of Cities programmer. Your Public Housing Projects and citizen population have inspired me to write this paper; ‘I love my block.’
Why did many of the Public Housing projects built in the middle of the twentieth century in America fail? A project has failed when it is has become so decrepit that it is more cost-effective and socially acceptable to tear it down than to try and rehabilitate it. A project has failed when it is transformed into an anchor of poverty and crime, inhibiting its residents from the pursuit of a healthy life – from childhood through middle and later in life.

Many people attribute this perception of ‘failure’ to the architecture and design approved and promoted by Public Housing officials. But as you imagine dark, bruised brick, monolithic high-rise structures, don’t be so quick to blame it all on the architects. My research will show how these projects did not fail solely based on their design. Moreover, these attempts at providing housing for America’s underprivileged did not succeed, in the long run, due to additional factors including basic lack of funding for maintenance of the buildings, the economic climate of the times, the homogeneity of the residents and surrounding neighborhoods, and most importantly, almost no social outlets for the youth of these projects.
This supposition is proven by observing the lifespan of two different American Public Housing projects. With the aim of reducing the number of variables to reach a conclusion on this subject, this paper will be focusing on two projects built during the same time in the same location. The two housing projects are the Governor Henry Homer Homes and the Archer Courts, both constructed during the 1950s in Chicago, Illinois. Using these case studies as examples of failed projects, an insight is gained as to where these projects went astray. This insight will be found by following the projects’ process, starting with the initial planning phases and continuing to the ultimate downfall and re-development processes.

I will first give a brief historical background about the birth of Public Housing in the U.S. Then I will focus on Chicago and analyze the political climate of the times. This serves as an investigation into how the Chicago Housing Authority was influenced in its decision making. Analyzing the birth of these projects will help rationalize where and how they were built. Then I will examine the physical aspect of the problem by moving to the architect’s methods and intentions behind the architecture and design of these previously mentioned projects. The architects and planners of these projects believed that a certain design could overcome the political, social and economical downfalls of the projects’ surroundings. Could a physical solution be implemented to solve a social problem?
Finally, I will examine different efforts to revitalize and repair the physical and social damage produced by these large-scale Chicago projects. Scrutinizing the planner’s thinking once again by examining the methods and backgrounds of these transformations will give light to new answers in tackling the housing problem. This will support my conclusion by using these projects as models of what went wrong and, furthermore, how city planners are now trying to correct the mistakes in planning and design that were made almost sixty years ago.

What were the architects and city planners thinking during the concept and design process of these housing projects? A 1951 article from the *Journal of Architecture* reflected this concern and accurately questioned where the country was going with this critical issue, “But what is the solution to today’s pressing problem of housing our crowded city populations... should it be in row houses or vertical elevator buildings?”¹ This is an example of a source I will be using to support my argument. Articles such as this are critical in helping us understand what architects and city planners were thinking when they designed these projects. Why did they reason that their design would succeed? What pertinent aspects of the project did they include and exclude when planning? These are only some of the questions that require answers in order to understand the overwhelming problem of why most of these projects “failed.”

The analysis of the Public Housing stock of a certain place and time requires a look into the process that led to the formation of this housing. Public Housing in the United States emerged during the early part of the twentieth century. As part of President Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ to combat the Depression, Congress passed the Wagner-Steagle Housing Act of 1937. This act created the United States Housing Authority, now called the Department of Housing and Urban Development or HUD. The new United States Housing Authority provided funding to local Public Housing Authorities across the country. The initiatives, ownership and operation of the housing projects, however, were the responsibility of local agencies appointed by local officials.\(^2\) Across the country areas deemed ‘slums’ were eradicated and new homes were erected.

One decade later, in 1948, the same problems were unfortunately still visible in many large U.S. cities. Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey of Minneapolis stated in a radio address “What’s wrong with our cities? Slums, rotten broken-down

areas, are the ulcers which may develop into the cancer that will consume the physical and economic structure of the industrial city. Slum areas are extravagances that eat up our revenues and destroy our strength...Either we lick the slums or the slums will destroy the city.”

Local concern was particularly evident, and the federal government, through Title II of the 1949 Housing Act, provided the legal basis and financial backing for clearing slums and replacing them with Public Housing.

The sociologist Phillip Hauser affirmed that “Our slums [have] become a matter of national and international disgrace and also a matter of national politics.” The issue was rapidly becoming a major national problem. At the height of the building boom, U.S. News & World Report in 1957 reported that 142 “slum-clearance projects” were under way across the nation. These endeavors would cost $42 million in public funds and $2 billion in private funding. In addition, 300 more projects were planned.

The government’s reaction was slow and did not provide the massive support necessary to completely re-examine the housing crisis and move forward with a solution. The housing demand remained high from 1929 to 1945, yet a shortage of capital had resulted in a deterioration of the urban housing

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3 Humphrey, Hubert H., “What’s wrong with our cities?” The American City, Ed. 63 pg. 68.
stock and a need for new construction.\textsuperscript{7} To make matters worse, after the end of World War II, reunited families needed new homes, which put even more stress on the housing market. At the same time, the fate of post-war American cities seemed to be waning. This contributed to a severe housing shortage during the early 1950’s. New construction after the war was not keeping pace with population growth and the formation of new households.\textsuperscript{8}

One critical result of this housing shortage, (as well as crime, poor quality of public schools, and physical deterioration of some inner city neighborhoods), in the cities was ‘white flight.’ This meant that white middle class families fled many inner cities in search of affordable housing in the suburbs. Furthermore, a simultaneous reverse migration of low-income, African-American families fled into the city setting the stage for the transformation of these neighborhoods into expanding slums and the creation of dense areas of poverty. The private market was not responding through economic development of these neighborhoods; the government had to act quickly.

Moreover, city officials were receiving pressure from downtown business owners and commercial planners. Residential blight in downtown commercial areas posed serious difficulties for them. In a survey of the mayors of 900 cities conducted in 1955 by Richard Wood & Company, 47 percent ranked

\textsuperscript{7} Beauregard, pg. 142.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, pg. 144.
“preservation of downtown commercial property values” as one of their most urgent problems.9

By the early 1950’s, local housing authorities across the country were forced to make decisions regarding an affordable, utilitarian design for new housing projects. The design and construction of these housing units had to be cost-efficient, and had to accommodate a massive population of citizens in need. Housing became an important and controversial subject. In the end, due to social, economic and political reasons (discussed later), most projects turned to modernism in pattern and constructed large scale high-rise units. The result of this massive construction phase was that as these new apartment complexes were being erected, a poor, mostly African-American population became highly concentrated in very small, densely populated urban areas.

The designs of a few early high-rise homes seemed to work on paper and appeared to be revolutionary in their attempt to address the housing shortage among a poor, urban population. Almost all of them were successful in providing homes for the poverty-stricken immediately after their completion. However, with the passage of time, almost all of these projects have become a disaster for the people for whom they were intended.

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To assess the influence of architecture and design on the residents of the Chicago Public Housing Projects, we must look at the background of why and how these projects were created. One can then see why these high-rise projects were built and what social and economic issues were relevant during that time. The City of Chicago reflected the post-war trend of housing shortage and slum formation seen across America during the 1940’s. The historical context in which the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) developed its Public Housing complexes after World War II included planning restrictions, political pressures and bureaucratic incentives. Main planning motives in Chicago included the desirability of rebuilding the city’s slums. Chicago progressives stated that large plots of land surrounding the central business district were “blighted” and beyond saving. Influenced by downtown business executives, they agreed that these areas would need radical immediate transformation and large-scale rebuilding to rescue the city of Chicago from stagnation (See Figure 1).\(^\text{10}\) The

CHA would assume responsibility in this rejuvenation of Chicago’s inner-city slums.

Two additional influences shaped the planning of Chicago’s postwar projects. These were the price of land and the timeframe in which these projects needed to be built. First, due
Figure 1 Types of Planning Areas in Chicago, 1942 (source: Hunt)
to the high property value of urban land and the perpetual housing shortage, planners proposed that new projects should be built at a high density level. The Master Plan of Residential Land Use of Chicago from 1945 read; “The Chicago Plan Commission’s 1943 master plan envisioned 50,000 people per square mile on rebuilt land, a Figure on par with its overcrowded slums.”

This meant that the impoverished dense surroundings these poor were trying to escape from would be the same in their new homes. Were these projects destined to fail because of pre-determined poor planning?

The second planning influence was due to an increased level of urgency for action with the result that planners pushed for large-scale projects with thousands of units. In 1945 the Chicago Housing Authority’s first Executive Secretary, Elizabeth Wood, who served from 1934 to 1954, gave a landmark speech. Wood argued that “rebuilding must be bold and comprehensive-or it is useless and wasted.”

Slum clearance became the CHA’s primary mission, and large-scale redevelopment became its answer. The massive size of projects such as Cabrini-Green (3,600 units), the ABLA complex (700 units) and the Wells group (3,500 units) was the answer in the minds of CHA leaders.

11 Chicago Plan Commission, Master Plan of Residential Land Use of Chicago; CHA Executive Elizabeth Wood to Alderman George Kells. 1945.
Political pressures due to racial tensions of the times also played an important role in determining the outcome of the Chicago housing projects. The massive migration of African Americans escaping the “Jim Crow South” strained post-war relations in Northern cities. Residential boundaries were segregated and the black population of Chicago increased from 278,000 African Americans in 1940 to 913,000 in 1960. This put tremendous pressure on the housing markets. Author Arnold Hirsch, in his book on race and housing in Chicago, writes, “Panic peddling, white flight and racial transition were the postwar norm in most South and West Side neighborhoods as working- and middle-class African Americans desperately sought relief from overcrowded prewar ghettos.”

Neighborhood leaders rejected the idea of building Public Housing in the white areas, even after 1946 when the CHA announced it would integrate further projects. This made it almost impossible for the CHA to build in desirable areas and in effect created large pockets of neighborhoods with a concentration of a homogeneous race and class. However, as leaders in white communities refused to support the construction of these public homes, a 1956 Chicago Tribune article describes how “The aldermen in the black neighborhoods embraced Public Housing as a vast improvement over slum

\[14\] Ibid, pg. 2.
conditions.” Therefore, in the eyes of the poor these projects were originally popular and considered successful. This was because upon completion these buildings were far nicer than the situations that these families were escaping.

Unfortunately, the potential solution to the housing crisis became polarized based on race in the bureaucracy of the Chicago City Council. Consequently, the CHA could not plan for projects to be placed on vacant land in outlying white neighborhoods, nor could it be a force for residential integration. Discussing this topic, Jane Jacobs states in her book, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, that “Quicker than the eye can see, the city as an organism has disappeared. It becomes, in theory, a static collection of sites for planting these sorted-out sets of statistics.”

This ‘static collection’ became so segregated that the CHA was eventually taken to federal court in the landmark case of Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority. In its decision, from 1995, the CHA had violated the U.S. Constitution by locating Public Housing in predominantly black neighborhoods and by refusing blacks admission to developments in white communities. This

obscene isolation policy was just one more barrier the residents of these projects had to overcome. The design of a building could not, once again, change the fact that a huge concentration of poverty was being formed.

The final issue that influenced city officials at the time was the source of funding. Under the 1937 Housing Act, 90 percent of all costs—site clearance, design, and construction—were covered by the federal government, while cities had to meet the remaining 10 percent. Therefore even though the City of Chicago could rely on Federal assistance for the project, it still had to agree on the specific details of the project to make up the 10% difference.

All of these issues led decision makers to a vertical building plan solution when designing prototype apartment complexes for the City of Chicago. In a letter to the Chairman of the City Council Housing Committee in 1945, Elizabeth Wood wrote that “The use of these elevator structures gives us wide-open spaces, larger playgrounds, and a general effect of a park that will not be possible if the land were developed as three-story walk-ups.” Her outlook on the situation would soon change.

As a result of this court case, the CHA was taken over by the federal government until years later.

21 CHA Files, “City Council Folder” September 21, 1945
The result of these political, economic and social hurdles was the construction of massive projects such as the Robert Taylor homes. The 95-acre site was located on State Street in the south side of Chicago. The State Street corridor developed into two miles of little besides Public Housing. Furthermore, there are almost no stores, few businesses, and even less trees. The projects on State Street are isolated demographically as well. More than 91 percent of its residents are black. Vince Lane, chairman of the CHA from 1988 to the federal takeover in 1995, speaks about the social and physical problem in the original Chicago projects: “If the Ku Klux Klan had set out to destroy black people, they couldn’t have done a better, more systematic job of it than this combination we have of welfare and Public Housing… We need the right role models to compete with the gangs and drug dealers.”

With the cheap construction restrictions and early direct concentration of poverty, the building design proves to play a small role in the destiny of these projects. What were the planners and architects going to do in trying to salvage these seemingly impossible endeavors to house the city’s impoverished?

Architects and planners had to start thinking of imaginative ways to make the high-rise project succeed. Although there are no records explicitly stating this, these high-rise projects seemed to be extensively influenced by Le Corbusier and his ideals of the ‘towers in the park.’ Architects and city planners also looked to other professionals from the architecture and design community for an answer in rationalizing the vertical building trend.

Although by this time the plan was almost thirty years old, architect Le Corbusier’s “Plan Voisin Pour Paris” (See Figure 2) seemed like a plausible model for large-scale, inner-city housing projects. Translated from French as, “The Neighborhood Plan for Paris,” this controversial concept called for the demolition of an area in the center of Paris near the Seine River. In this location would be the construction of 18 massive skyscrapers, each capable of housing 10,000 to 50,000 people. There would be a maximum allowed population of 1,200 people per square acre. Le Corbusier’s theory was that by building vertically, there would emerge more room for parks and open space. He writes,
in his essay *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning*, "But here, at the foot of the first skyscraper, we have not the meager shaft of sunlight which so faintly

**Figure 2** Plan Voison for Paris by Le Corbusier (source: Le Corbusier)
illuminates the dismal streets of New York, but an immensity of space. The whole city is a Park.”

Inherent in this concept, is the idea that design should attempt to overcome nature.

In an article discussing the benefits of high-rise housing from the 1950s, architectural journalist Douglas Haskell argues that high-rises are beneficial to children’s growth because they provide large amounts of open space. “In the minds of the idealists, row housing = grass. In point of fact, today’s city densities mean that the best way for many a city child to get to the grass may be to live in the sky.”

He also mentions that in order to achieve success with the elevator-type project there are four major requirements; they are imaginative planning

and design, imaginative use of the grounds, imaginative administration, and leadership. These four issues will be discussed in detail when focusing on specific projects. Haskell failed to realize that the most important aspect of the planning process was not the building’s design, but rather the implementation of social crutches for its residents and its neighbors.

Although most of these high-rise projects were demolished, at the time they were introduced they seemed very progressive and innovative. Architect and engineer Julian Whittlesy praised the Chicago Housing Authority in a 1951 edition of the architectural journal Progressive Architecture. An excerpt reads:

“Since 1947 I have watched the development of a particular group of plans shaping up in Chicago and now feel that more of the profession should know of them and how they came about. I was particularly impressed by the way Chicago went about its work... A series of progressively interesting plans was generated, as though by chain reaction... culminating with the Archer Courts.”

This article reflects the feeling of support among many professionals in architecture and planning that their ideas were going to succeed and become models for the rest of the country.

An article in another architectural magazine from the early 1950’s also praised the Chicago initiatives. “Not just one, but all four of the newest Chicago Housing Authority apartment projects have ‘sidewalks in the sky.’ These are

simply outdoor hallways, widened giving every apartment an exterior door.”\textsuperscript{26}

These ‘sidewalks in the sky’ serve as open air porches and playgrounds on the apartment level. This was a major breakthrough that was first tested out in one of the aforementioned projects, The Archer Courts (See Figure 3).

The Archer Courts Project was designed by Everett F. Quinn & Associates in 1951. The project was intended for 148 families. The site plan included two seven story buildings 125 feet away from each other (See Figure 20).\textsuperscript{27} The master site plan of 5.31 acres included a baseball field, a playground and a park. This site would also provide the least net density per person compared to similar projects to date.\textsuperscript{28} According to a comparative data spreadsheet distributed by the Chicago Housing Authority, the Archer Courts project had a net density of

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\textsuperscript{26} Architectural Forum, January 1952 Pg. 105.
\textsuperscript{27} See page 51 for Figure 20
\textsuperscript{28} Whittlesey, pg. 67.
Figure 4 Comparative data for five Chicago high-rise projects (source: Whittlesey)
Figure 5 Section elevation of Archer Courts building (source: Verona)
94.5 persons per acre. That is a low figure compared to other projects of the
time, for example, 204.8 persons per acre at the nearby Dearborn Homes in
Chicago (See Figure 4).

The design of the buildings was deemed as advancement in theory
because the ground floor was arranged like typical row-houses (See Figure 5).
There was also a consideration of outdoor space in the design of upper level
(non ground floor) units. Each row house on the ground floor had a front and
back entrance. The floors above swung out in a cantilever on both sides about 5
feet in order to provide some shelter for the ground floor homes. The typical plan
above the ground floors was gallery-access. This meant that there was an open
air entrance on one side of the building to each apartment, rather than having
a hallway in the middle of the building and entrances on both sides of the
hallway. (See Figure 6) In theory this could be used as a balcony. It could also
prevent crimes and break-ins because the entrances to the apartments were
exposed. Also, small children could use this as a play area; it was supposed to
be safe and a parent was always in close proximity to their child.

Another design element first proposed in the Archer Courts was to
prepare for the changing family structure that would occupy each apartment.
It was projected that residents were going to be seeking one-room apartments.
In 1951, there were 12.6 million people in the U.S. 65 years old or older. To meet
this anticipated need, Archer Courts was planned so that apartments could be
broken up into one-room units with very little structural work. Two-room units were designed to be altered into two singles with shared bath and kitchen. Larger apartments could also be subdivided (See Figure 7).  

Finally, elevator entrances were set apart from the building in an accessible one-story unit housing the office, laundry, tenant’s activity room and bicycle storage. These types of design philosophies were standard for the CHA’s building policy from 1948 and 1950 which they called the “experimental phase of high-rise design.”  

There were four other projects similar to the Archer Courts being built at the same time, named after their funding sources.  

Attempts at social design innovations such as the preparedness for elderly residents are as far as an architect can go in providing smart spaces for residents. The idea of a sidewalk in the sky works on paper yet lacks a certainty that it will be implemented properly. Originally, these corridors could very well serve as a space for children to play (See Figure 6). Even so, crime and physical deterioration of these corridors soon made it an intimidating setting for children to play in. (See Figure 15)

29 Architectural Forum, January 1952. pg. 106.
30 Hunt, Bradford D. Understanding Chicago’s High-Rise Public Housing Disaster pg. 6.
31 These other four projects are Loomis Courts, Ogden Courts, Harrison Courts and Maplewood Courts.
32 See page 40 for Figure 15
Figure 6 ‘Sidewalks in the Sky,’ outdoor entrances. (source: Haskell)
If these projects were originally working, as the City Aldermen claimed, where did these projects go astray? The Archer Courts construction finished in 1952 and as tenants moved in doubts started to grow about their value – not only in the City of Chicago but also in the Federal Government in Washington, DC (where the funding was coming from). In 1950, a bulletin from the PHA deemed high-rises as a “least desirable” form of Public Housing. The bulletin reads:

The grave and serious problem incident to the rearing of children in such [high-rise] housing are too well known to warrant any comment, nor are the management difficulties which go with such projects subject to any complete remedy. All of these disadvantages are so great and so thoroughly understood that local housing authorities familiar with the problem would counsel this type of housing only because local conditions enforce it as the only solution for a specific neighborhood. In those localities where

33 Hunt, Bradford D. Understanding Chicago’s High-Rise Public Housing Disaster pg. 7.
the cost of land would make other types prohibitive in total development cost, such housing is virtually the only solution.\textsuperscript{34}

Although it was an easy answer for saving property and money, there were also many critics of the high-rise building scheme at the time. Eugene Raskin, an architect and teacher at Columbia University’s School of Architecture condemned the new projects: “This is a machine-for-living with vengeance.” The projects, he believed, were neither human nor urban, and undermined the variety, contrast, and freedom that characterized good city life.\textsuperscript{35}

Although once in favor of the high-rise building model, opponents to the high-rise movement also included Elizabeth Wood.\textsuperscript{36} Wood was among the first to analyze the elevator-type project. In a 1952 magazine article, Wood made a case for the low-rise or row-house projects by discussing how “one designs good living space for families with regard for functions other than just cooking, eating, bathing and sleeping. These other important functions relate in general to social, recreational, physical and creative activities.” Wood suggests that the design of a home must also consider the space inside, as well as outside the home. “The

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\textsuperscript{34} Public Housing Administration, Low Rent Public Housing: Planning, Design, and Construction for Economy” December 1950
\textsuperscript{36} Recall Wood’s argument in favor of the high-rise projects earlier discussed.
\end{flushright}
row-house solution is simple and natural. The indoor-outdoor activity takes place close to where the mother is at work.”\(^{37}\)

With significant problems in existing high-rises readily apparent, the CHA in 1955 made a dramatic change in its design program. It proposed developing its next wave of projects in the low rise design as four-story buildings.\(^{38}\) The CHA presented their idea to the Federal Government, which had the final say on designs. After much delay, government officials replied that the plans were too expensive; each apartment would cost over $20,000 to build at a time when a new house in the suburbs could be purchased for around $15,000.\(^{39}\) For years, the CHA tried to convince federal officials of the need for approval of low-rise designs, but in the end the officials said the cost was just too expensive.\(^{40}\) Therefore, the CHA was forced to continue designing high-rise buildings.

The new wave of high-rise construction did not use any of the so-called ‘new dimensions of housing design’ seen in the Archer Courts. Completed in 1957, the Governor Henry Horner Homes\(^{41}\) were located on the near west side of Chicago near the United Center, a major Chicago sports arena (See Figure 8).

\(^{38}\) CHA annual report, 1955; CHA to Public Housing Administration Commissioner Charles Slusser. February 5, 1959.
\(^{39}\) Hunt, Bradford D. Understanding Chicago’s High-Rise Public Housing Disaster pg. 8.
\(^{40}\) Report of the Special Committee to the Commissioners of the CHA on the Subject of Project Illinois 2-34. Chicago Development Dispute. August 3, 1959.
\(^{41}\) Gov. Henry Homer served as the governor of Illinois during the Great Depression from 1933 to 1940. He died in office.
The development contained sixteen high-rises, ranging from seven to fifteen stories. The plan stretched for eight blocks. The apartment buildings were one block wide, leaving little room for experimentation in the placement of the buildings. They were located on each side of the city blocks, creating a corridor in between for basketball courts, playgrounds and parking lots.42

Because the CHA could not obtain as much funding as they requested from federal sources, the materials and some design elements used for the buildings were cost-based rather than utility and functional based. This was one major deficiency in the process. There were no lobbies, only ‘breezeways.’ During the harsh winters, the elevator cables froze. The trash chutes located in each building were designed too narrow to handle the huge amount of garbage produced by residents. There were also insufficient overhead lighting installations and wall outlets in each unit. Furthermore, the most perverse part of this poorly designed building was

Figure 8 The Henry Homer Homes, low center of the image, seen in the shadows of the Chicago skyline. The United Center is in the right hand side of the image. (source: Popkin)
that the medicine cabinet in each apartment was connected to the medicine cabinet in the adjacent apartment.

In 1955 as construction neared its end, a group of Soviet housing officials visited the Homer Homes. The Russians were “Appalled that the walls in the apartments were of cinder block...‘We would be thrown off our jobs in Moscow if we left unfinished walls like this,’ I. K. Kozvilia, minister of city and urban construction in the Soviet Union, told local reporters.” In 1968 the federal report on Public Housing described the Henry Homer Homes and other Chicago projects as “remindful of gigantic filing cabinets with separate cubicles for each human household.” The problem here is exposed as poor construction and inadequate building materials, not only poor design.

The Archer Courts and The Homer Homes have very different design philosophies and master plans. Contrasting the development of the two projects will help evaluate the impact of the design of the buildings on the lives of its residents. Are all of these design issues relevant? Can the planners of Archer Courts overcome the social and economic distresses of the surroundings by innovations such as ‘sidewalks in the sky’? Wouldn’t the construction of low-rise building have been just as poor due to the economic restrictions given by the federal government? Envision a large maze of decrepit row houses. It seems as

43Ibid. Pg. 22.
44Ibid. Pg. 23.
the downfall of the high-rise could just as easily have been a downfall of the row-house.
In Jane Jacob’s book on American cities, she also discusses how the housing crisis was merely an income crisis. “Perfectly ordinary housing needs can be provided for almost anybody by private enterprise. What is peculiar about these people is merely that they cannot pay for it.” The income crisis that Jacobs speaks of is proven by “Moynihan Report.” The Moynihan Report was published in 1965. The report, written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and colleagues in the U.S. Labor Department, documents this income crisis in the inner city, “Emphasizing the way black male unemployment and underemployment were separating the black experience from the rest of the prospering metropolis.” The Moynihan Report reads: “The fundamental, overwhelming fact is that Negro unemployment, with the exception of a few years during World War II and the Korean War, has continued at disaster levels for 35 years.” This is something

46 Fishman, Robert, Rethinking Public Housing, pg. 2.
Note: I discovered this quote in the previously cited Robert Fishman article “Rethinking Public Housing”
that could not be repaired by housing design and became an inherent problem in the inner city across America. This made it hard for the families to use Public Housing as a stepping stone, as there were many residents without jobs.

Even though the building was constructed as a strictly cost-efficient project and had an outwardly poor design, the residents who first moved in were actually pleased, which reflected their state of desperation. A book titled There Are No Children Here documents the lives of two real children growing up in the Henry Horner Homes in the late 1980’s. The author, Alex Kotlowitz, followed the two boys around every day for almost three years in the late 1980s. The true-life account has a passage that portrays the memories of the mother of the children. She describes her experience moving in to the Homes in October of 1956:

LaJoe, [the mother], and her siblings were bubbling with joy at the sight of their new home. It was, after all, considerably prettier and warmer than the flat they’d left behind... [The children] ran in to the building. [The father] and his wife could only smile at the children’s excitement...

...The freshly painted walls shone a glistening white; even the brown linoleum floors had a luster to them.\(^{48}\)

In the early years, the children at Henry Horner Homes had social and other child friendly activities in which to spend their free time. There were community programs such as Girl Scouts and Building Organizations that held

\(^{48}\) Kotlowitz, Alex, There Are No Children Here, Anchor Books, NY, 1991. Pg. 23.
dances and provided roller skating facilities in the basement. The playground boasted swings and a jungle gym. There was also a baseball diamond that included grass which was regularly mowed. A Boys Club privileged the community with a gym and an Olympic-size indoor swimming pool. These social diversions kept the children busy, safe, and passionate about participating in a positive activity right in their own neighborhood. There is no architectural design that could have provided a parallel support system for the youth of this development. Tenants were also busy as they suddenly became the objects of competition among politicians. Politicians and senators would visit the complex on occasion.49.

Another positive account of the Henry Homer Homes comes from Nelvia Brady. Brady lived in the Homes as a child until 1960. “When I grew up, Public Housing was not housing of the last resort. It was housing that was valued and respected by both the tenants and the management.”

This encouraging community setting could only last for so long. Brady continues, “But over the years, like everything in the cities, I could see the decline.”50 This decline can be attributed to economic barriers such as the income crisis previously discussed. As well as the Housing Authority stopping their screening process and allowing a broader population access to the Homes. By

49 Kotlowitz, pg. 25.
the 1970’s, the housing authority ran out of money for basic repair needs, such as paint for the apartments. “The cinder block walls became permanently smudged and dirty. The building’s bricks faded. The windows had collected too heavy a coat of grime to reflect much of anything.”

The mother illustrates how her experience had changed at the Homes since her arrival:

When I got my apartment I thought this is what it was meant to be... I never looked any further than here. It wasn’t like it is now. The grass was greener. We had light poles on the front of the building. We had little yellow flowers. We had it all. I really thought this was it. And I never knew, until I lost it all, that it wasn’t.

Once a place that was supposed to be a stepping stone and provide alternatives to what had become decrepit living conditions, now the Public Housing property became an anchor of affliction. As the author Robert Fishman writes, “Poverty was nothing new; what was new was the increasing isolation of the black urban poor from the prosperity that was lifting the rest of society.”

The loss of funding was a result of a number of issues. One reason was a flee of working-class residents from Public Housing in the 1960’s. Another issue was that the demand for these social services was so high because of enormous

51 Kotlowitz, pg. 24.
52 Fishman, Robert, Rethinking Public Housing, pg. 2.
numbers of children living in these projects – who needed specialized social service support.

By the late 1960s, the private housing market softened and working-class families living in Public Housing had new housing opportunities. However, as the working-class left, an even more concentrated group of poverty stricken families and children was created. Additionally, families with no jobs moved in to replace vacant apartments. The median CHA family income in 1946 was just under $10,000. In 1968 income reached over $12,000. After the time when the working-class fled, the median family income fell drastically to just over $4,000 (See Figure 9). This break out of working-class families directly affected the budget crisis in which the CHA suddenly found itself. Due to a law created in 1937, the CHA depended on income from tenant rents for its maintenance budget. Therefore, as the median income of the tenants fell, so did the CHA’s resources. Some working-class residents, due to a rule created in the 1930s, were even asked to leave because their incomes had grown too high. Ironically, as the CHA needed money the most to provide for its poorest residents, there was no supply of available funding.

53 The value for the money in these statistics are adjusted for inflation and measured at the value of 1984 dollars. Hunt, Bradford D. Understanding Chicago’s High-Rise Public Housing Disaster pg. 12.
54 Ibid, pg. 12.
Given a housing Authority almost totally dependent upon rent from its tenants and a tenant population with very low incomes, too low to pay economic rents, either the Housing Authority must go bankrupt or the tenants must pay a very large share of their income for rent.  

To make matters worse, the percentage of children at the Homer Homes and other projects across the city grew rapidly. The average neighborhood in Chicago in 1960 had about two adults for every one minor, and no area had more youths than adults, except in Public Housing developments. In fact, by 1965 there was an inversion of that statistic; Public Housing complexes in Chicago averaged about two minors to one adult (See Figure 10).

Consequently, the destructive impulses of the youth were often directed on the buildings themselves. Playgrounds, public libraries, programs like the Boys Scouts and local parks became overcrowded (See Figure 11). This also occurred in local public schools. Furthermore, local gangs often recruited youths to do their dirty work. An excerpt from the Kotlowitz book mentioned before conveys this idea. One of the main characters, Lafeyette, is eleven at the time. Lafeyette shares his feelings on gangs as he walks with a group of friends to

57 Hunt, Bradford D. Understanding Chicago’s High-Rise Public Housing Disaster pg. 13.
**Figure 9** CHA Median Family Income, 1946-1984 (source: Hunt)

**Figure 20** A Concentration of Youth: A Comparison (source: Hunt)
one of the few good neighborhood basketball courts for the four thousand children of the Henry Homer Homes (there were six thousand residents total):

‘I don’t wanna play ball with them,’ referring to the children by the jungle gym. ‘They might try to make me join a gang... When you first join you think it’s good. They’ll buy you what want. You have to do anything they tell you to do. If they tell you to kill somebody, you have to do that...’ The only way to make it out of Homer was ‘to try to make as little friends as possible.’

This was a real question that the kids across the project fields had to face and very serious crimes arose out of the youth’s commitment to gangs. Another part of the true-life story describes how one of Lafeyette’s 14 year old friend allegedly shot and killed an older man a half block north of Lafeyette’s building. The crime spiraled out of control and by the summer of 1987 alone, there were approximately 40 violent crimes reported for every 1000 people, a rate nearly twice that of Chicago’s average. Eventually, the crime became so horrid in the Homer Homes that the dominant authorities became the gangs.” The Blackstone Rangers have been there for more than 30 years. The gangs engage in regular and constant warfare for control of the drug and vice trades.

58 These are the statistics of the crimes reported, there could be many more never reported. 
They are armed with pistols, rifles, automatic weapons and occasional grenades. Firefights may erupt at anytime.”

An effort to combat this gang violence and drug epidemic was a daunting task for the CHA. Anti-drug initiatives, sweeps, security guards, in-house police, and tenant patrols all faced challenges. Years of neglect, intense violence, powerful gangs, and skeptical residents were all barriers for ending the drugs and violence. For example, a program implemented by the CHA called “Operation Clean Sweeps” only occurred once a year for three years, from 1991 to 1993. Even attempts at creating drug and alcohol help centers failed had no sustained impact on crime and gang activity because of how it was so engrained in the buildings social structure. Residents reported that the sweeps had improved conditions in the short-run, but improvements quickly disappeared without any follow-up.

An effect of this violence at the Horner Homes, and other Chicago projects, was that no basic amenities were nearby. “The neighborhood had become a black hole... There were no banks, no public libraries, no movie theatres, no skating rinks, no bowling alleys...According to a 1980 profile of the neighborhood, 60,110 people lived there, 88 percent of them African-American,

46 percent of them below the poverty line... Where there used to be thirteen social services, now there were only three.”

The lack of funding due to the movement of working-class residents led to the horrible lack of maintenance and the absence of any CHA sponsored social services. With the superfluous amount of youths on the premises with nowhere to turn to for escape, the onset of gangs forms. Drugs and crime begin to rule the Projects. This triggers the deficiency of basic community amenities such as a local supermarket. At this point in time, the design of the sky-scraper buildings proves to have a minute influence on the fate of projects.

The Henry Homer Homes in the early 1990s was a truly dismal site. Filthy grounds, disgusting buildings, and a tenant population overwhelmed by drug trafficking and violent crime were all common place. By the end of the decade however, the Homer site was a community in transition. In 1996, the first buildings of the Henry Homer Homes were torn down as a part of a city wide movement to revamp all of the troubled Public Housing sites. By 1999, all of the buildings on the site were torn down (See Figure 12).

Even the well-designed Archer Courts eventually fell victim to trouble. As previously discussed, Archer Courts opened in 1951 in an area of dilapidated warehouses and intended for residents displaced by the construction of the

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62 Kotlowitz, Pg. 22.
expressways. By 1990, the basic mechanical systems were broken routinely, rats roam the corridors, and elevators were constantly broken and unlocked stairwells served as crack dens. Katrina Herring, president of the Archer Courts Tenants Association, whom lived there since 1990, said that the Chicago Housing Authority had let the property deteriorate. “When a window was broken, they’d just glue it shut... And without good security, it was too unsafe even on a hot summer day to sit outside on the corridor.” These are the same corridors that were supposed to act as the ‘sidewalks in the sky’ to provide a place where small children could play and residents could receive a breeze of fresh air (See Figure 13). A change needed to be implemented, the CHA stepped in.

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64 From the article by Blair Gwenda
Figure 12 A rear entrance to a Henry Horner building (source: Popkin)
Figure 13 (top) Children at the Robert Taylor Homes play outside. (bottom) Children line up to enter the elevator at the Henry Homer Homes. (source: Hunt)
Figure 14 A building on the site of the Henry Horner Homes before its demolition (1999) (Source: Fishman)
Figure 15 Children play in the ‘sidewalks in the sky,’ now captivated by a chain link fence.

(Source: Fishman)
The City of Chicago is still feeling the impact of the failure of these two housing projects; an urgent attempt to mend the results of failed construction is now a major priority. For the past decade, the CHA has pursued a policy of tearing down dilapidated projects and replacing them with mixed-income neighborhoods. These two aforementioned projects are being transformed differently. In order to assess the solutions to the Public Housing crisis in Chicago, an examination is necessary of the new approach of the Chicago Housing Authority and the proposals under consideration at one of the projects. We can also look at how the second project is being renovated by a private investor.

Under the plan, cleverly touted as “CHANGE,” the CHA will attempt to improve the appearance, quality and culture of Public Housing in Chicago. The following is posted on their website as an overview of the objectives:

It is positive change that will reinvent Public Housing in Chicago. The Plan was developed with input from the CHA’s Central Advisory Council, which consists of elected resident leaders, and the City of Chicago. The Plan was approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in February, 2000.
The Plan represents the largest reconstruction of Public Housing in the nation’s history. Under the Plan, the CHA seeks to:

- Renew the physical structure of CHA properties
- Promote self-sufficiency for Public Housing residents
- Reform administration of the CHA

The Henry Homer Homes are part of this massive plan for improvement. In a six-year effort, the Habitat Company, a court-appointed recipient of CHA funds, is tearing down 466 units in several high-rise buildings and replacing them with the same number of two and three-flat buildings on the same site. One half of the future residents of the new project will be original Homer residents. The other half will receive Section 8 vouchers to find housing elsewhere. The development will be paid for by a variety of sources (See Figure 14).

The architecture firm spearheading the project is Solomon Cordwell Buenz & Associates (SCB). In 1997, SCB re-planned the original site as blocks of attached townhouses and flats. The townhouses are brick with pre-cast lintels and bands across the facades with an irregular rhythm of roof gables (See Figure 15). “We chose forms, shapes and fenestration from existing neighborhood buildings and translated that into a 1997 design,” notes SCB Executive Vice President Thomas Humes. This attempt to follow local design is integral in reducing the feeling of exclusion in these large-scale projects.

68 Ibid. pg. 1.
Another crucial part of the new project is that the new residents will include an array of incomes (See Figures 16, 17):

Figure 16 Financing the Henry Homer re-construction (source: theCHA.org)
Horner Phase II redevelopment will be constructed in three stages and will consist of 764 new on-site units. Of this number, 271 units will be reserved for Public Housing; 132 reserved for affordable housing tenants; and 360 units reserved for market-rate residents. About 465 of these units will be rental units while 299 units will be ‘for sale’ units. Phase 2A, a low-rise rental building, closed in December of 2002. This phase includes 155 new rental units, 87 of which are Public Housing units, offered in three- and four-story buildings, with 31 and 37 units available to affordable and market-rate residents.69

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The mixed-income building trend was originally popularized by the CHA. Prior to the federal takeover and his resignation as Chairman, Vincent Lane created this policy which he called Mixed-Income New Communities Strategy. Lane created the program specifically to break down concentrations of poverty in Public Housing and alleviate the impact of social isolation has on the lives of its residents.70

This integration of residents incomes allows a diversity of social practices and diminishes a feeling that the residents of Public Housing are ostracized on the outskirts of the town in a dilapidated neighborhood. This feeling is further transformed when the negative stigma surrounding the projects is removed and basic amenities follow as store-owners feel comfortable moving their businesses to these new neighborhoods. Furthermore, the new mixed-income setting is accompanied by new requirements that the residents must meet to stay in the community. These criteria often include credit history and criminal background checks, drug testing, housekeeping or home visits, and an evaluation of a resident’s employment and economic self-sufficiency record. These measures will help prevent the community from becoming crime-ridden and un-maintained as well as moving towards self-sufficient house-holds.

70 Schill, Pg. 148.
There are also educational benefits to mixed-income housing. Sociologist James Coleman, in his essay titled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, describes how educational researchers have consistently found that the socioeconomic status of a school’s pupil population is the primary factor related to academic performance.\(^{71}\) Both academic performance and life opportunities of low-income pupils improve dramatically when they are moved from schools whose students are primarily low-income to schools with economic integration.\(^{72}\) Market rate residents will be encouraged by benefits such as tax exceptions as incentives to move to these neighborhoods.

In addition to the change in the CHA requirements, they will also provide a range of social services for neighborhood use. These services include partnerships with city organizations such as the Chicago Department of Human Services. This group has administered the CHA’s “Service Connector Program,” which provides guidance to residents seeking employment, substance-abuse counseling and other resources that promote personal growth.\(^{73}\)

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Figure 18 Rendering of Homer Homes Phase II (source: theCHA.org)

Figure 19 Mixed Income Projected Plan (source: theCHA.org)
Another service offered as a benefit for the residents of Public Housing is the Central Advisory Council (CAC), the representative body for Chicago’s Public Housing residents. The CAC consists of the Local Advisory Council presidents of each Public Housing development. Its mission is to provide a means through which residents’ concerns and interests are expressed and addressed.\(^{74}\)

These types of social improvements that the planners are now making are much more relevant than any new dimension in design. No building can be designed to coerce a sense of neighborhood identity or belonging. Social programs are needed to compliment the economic disadvantage the children in these projects are raised with. Moreover, programs for adults in the neighborhoods are also important.

The Archer Courts housing development is being renovated differently, by private enterprises, yet it is still using the same philosophy as the CHA in its new Plan for Transformation. The private developer, the Chicago Community Development Corporation (CCDC), bought Archer Courts in 1999 from the CHA

\(^{74}\) Ibid. Pg. 1.
for $650,000 and commissioned Landon Bone Baker Architects (LBB) to undertake a complete renovation of the 147-unit complex.\textsuperscript{75}

With the Archer Courts, the goal of the CCDC was not only to preserve the original building, but also to redevelop the surrounding property. The fact that CCDC decided to keep the original high-rise building is a testament to how the high-rise architecture of the building was considered acceptable and not the focus of project failure. After buying and renovating the existing buildings, the CCDC set out to build forty-three townhouses on an empty portion of the property.\textsuperscript{76} These town-homes would be sold at market-rate, and five to families with incomes below 80\% of the area median income, creating another mixed-income community.\textsuperscript{77}

The new site plan (See Figure 18) will also offer a set of social outlets for its residents and the neighborhood. One of the social services offered at the site is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Neighborhood Networks (NN) initiative. The center opened in 1996 and includes state of the art computer hardware provided by Hewlet-Packard\textsuperscript{78}. The center also offers job training, computer skills training, internet access and other technological services.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. Pg. 1.
\textsuperscript{78} Hewlet-Packard is one of the world’s largest electronic and information technology companies.
amenities for the residents of the development. A wellness center was also erected, operated by staff and volunteers from a nearby hospital. This small clinic provides health screening and education to the neighborhood residents.\(^79\)

The most notable part of the renovation that was performed at Archer Courts, however, was the replacement of the chain link fence that had been erected on all the outdoor corridors.\(^80\) The chain linked fence was replaced by a fluid glass curtain wall stretching from the top to the bottom of the building (See Figure 19). This transformation actually won national acclaim as it received a Richard H. Driehaus Foundation award for excellence in community design and an American Institute of Architects Distinguished Building Citation of Merit. Mr. Fusco, one of the founders of the CCDC, stated "The idea was to make Archer Courts a good neighbor."\(^81\)

During the renovation process, an architect visited every single apartment to consider specific changes. "After you see maybe a third of them, you have a feeling for what's typical," the architect explained in a newspaper article about the projects, "But when you go through every unit, you get a real study of the character of the people... It gives them a sense of ownership and

\(^79\) Ibid. Pg. 1.
\(^80\) These are the outdoor corridors intended to be 'sidewalks in the sky' that have previously been discussed.
empowerment.” This was a great way for the architects to discover the most important voices in the renovation process. These people were not those funding the project, or local politicians, but residents who actually lived there. The sidewalk in the sky has been resurrected and the residents are very satisfied. The residents have also overcome a fear that they were going to be displaced, which was a major concern for some of them. “We were scared,” said Ms. Herring, “We didn’t know if we would have to move, if the buildings would close.” Mr. Fusco, in spite of this, signed an agreement promising no one would be displaced.  

The renovation was even approved by local store owners, many of whom had complained of the previous era known for a high crime rate. “I objected violently [to] the renovation,” said Raymond Lee, head of Chinatown Chamber of Commerce during the renovation. Yet now Mr. Lee is “Happy with it, I don’t hear anything now about purses getting snatched or people getting knocked over,” he stated in a 2003 New York Times article about the renovation. This feeling of security could be attributed to the new security measures taken with the renovation and the addition of a new fence to control access to the property.

82 Ibid. Pg. 1.
83 Ibid. Pg. 3.
"When you can turn an average-looking building into something that looks good, that creates a domino effect. You never would have had folks willing to pay up to $350,000 for town-housed in the shadow of Archer Courts if it wasn’t renovated,” stated a deputy commissioner of the Chicago Department of Housing. Finally, one of the residents who has lived there for six years stated that the renovation had been life-changing. “I feel good coming home from work now because I see what I’m working for... Even the children act differently now, they want to help take care of where they live. Instead of dropping something on the ground, they walk over and put it in the trash. We’re not in the slums anymore.”

All of these testimonials serve to exemplify and support the argument that a high-rise building can actually succeed if complimented by the right amenities, services, and security measures. Although both projects have been renovated through different means, one by private developers, and the other by the City of Chicago, they have many common connections. That is, they both have incorporated a

85 Ibid. Pg. 2.
86 Ibid. Pg. 1.
Figure 20 (top) New site plan for Archer Courts from 1999. (bottom) Original site plan from 1951 (source: top, Verona; bottom, Haskell)
Figure 21 Photographs of the old (bottom left) and new façade on the Archer Courts buildings.

(source: Verona)
cross section of incomes, new social programs and renovation of or new community center buildings. All of these new amenities have proven to contribute to the positive transformation of the lives of the residents of these buildings and surrounding neighborhoods.

This type of revitalization project, in which a high-rise complex is replaced by low-rise structures, has come under scrutiny. Criticism arises because of the possibility that residents will be displaced because there are less units being rebuilt than were destroyed. In an interview in 1997, the secretary of HUD at the time, Henry Cisneros, was asked about the HOPE VI program and the paradox that comes along with it. Architecture Magazine asks; “While HUD is tearing down 100,000 of the worst units, only 40,000 or so are being replaced. Where will the displaced tenants live?” Mr. Cisneros responds:

No tenant is being displaced by the redesign of Public Housing, HOPE VI, or any other effort...Tenants who relocate receive housing vouchers, and HUD will provide them with rental assistance wherever they choose to live. I also need to point out that a very large portion, perhaps the majority, of the units we’re demolishing are vacant and uninhabitable.87

Nevertheless, problems still arise in such cities like Newark, New Jersey, and now in New Orleans, Louisiana, where the redevelopment of Public Housing

87 Architecture Magazine, Interview; Housing Maverick, August, 1997, Pg. 47.
directly affects the image of a city in transition. In these situations, many residents feel pushed out and unwelcome. These cases are unique, and should be examined in a different light than the two projects described in this paper. However, some of the concerns were still raised as seen in the Archer Courts transformation.

This fear was also evident in the Henry Homer Homes. By 1998, the neighborhood was still in the midst of a transformation process, as there was still one building remaining from the old Homer site. A survey was taken to assess the early stages of the Homer Revitalization Initiative. One hundred and sixty new town-homes were completed, with 98 occupied, one half with former Homer residents. A majority of Homer residents (59%) said they believed the town-homes were only for higher-income people. Furthermore, 39% believed that the neighborhood was becoming unaffordable for some residents, and only 39% expected to live in the neighborhood five years from now.88

If the problems are beyond the physical design of these communities, than a process where not all of the residents are going to be able to stay in these new communities is, unfortunately, a direct result. However, they are not

88 Popkin, Pg. 132.
being forgotten, each one receives vouchers and CHA-sponsored help programs to find new homes.89

89 theCHA.org. Pg. 1.
Time and time again architects and planners attempted to design the perfect building to serve the needs of the Nation’s poor. What they were missing in their philosophies was that the building design and implementation of modern thought via architecture was going to have little effect on the resident’s lives.

The new program, created as a solution to perceived failed projects, by the Chicago Housing Authority should be a model for housing authorities across the country. The architecture of the buildings has proven to have only a small affect on the perceived failure of the aforementioned projects. Due to the poor construction, social and economic atmosphere, and the homogeneity of these projects, I have shown how they would not have succeeded even if they were originally built as low rise projects.

The original architects and planners of the 1950’s where faced with bureaucratic obstacles and economic restraints. They employed modern schools of thought in an effort to resolve a social problem with a physical solution. Although their attempts were logical at the time, there were too many obstacles preventing a successful outcome for these projects. The poor construction of buildings led to deterioration of the walls, foundations and
infrastructure. Basic elements of the buildings failed and the lack of public funding led to the impossibility of maintaining these buildings properly. At the same time, playgrounds became obscenely overcrowded and there was no outlet, recreation or employment, for the youth population of the residents to turn to. Drug and crime problems spiraled out of control. This culminated in to the engrained physical destruction of the buildings and the social destruction of the surrounding environment.

With the correct building approach, the proper materials, and programs for youth, Public Housing projects – either high-rise or low-rise is able to be successful. The high-rise plan supported by the private investors works because the architects included resident input, asking each resident what they wanted to see in the new plan. Furthermore, they used durable materials, took security into consideration, and provided services for the residents that were easily accessible and funded properly. Finally, a community that embodies a mixed-income resident scheme is crucial for the success in these projects. With this system, children have better opportunities through a diverse school population, businesses feel comfortable moving in the neighborhood, the construction of the property is at a higher quality, and the negative stigma surrounding the projects is removed. If a new development is replacing an old one, some displacement of residents, unfortunately, is a sacrifice that is part of the process of rehabilitating a decrepit site.
LaJoe, the mother from the book There Are No Children Here, recalled how beautiful her first day in the Henry Homer Homes was. Years later, it turned into a disaster for her and her family. Only time can tell if this mixed income scheme will prevent these projects from being destroyed, as they were in the past. It is, ultimately, the responsibility of the residents to work together and provide a healthy environment for themselves and their children; something that cannot be teased out by clever building design. The dilemma is beyond the bricks and water; architecture, in and of itself, does not create, or solve, social problems.
Architecture Magazine, Interview; Housing Maverick, August, 1997, Pg. 47.


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