

Executive Summary

Based on an analysis of the physical and social conditions of the Boulevard Homes housing development, the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) engaged a variety of local stakeholders, including residents of the development, in deciding whether to rehabilitate all or part of the development or to raze it and build anew. Given significant building deficiencies, deteriorated mechanical and electrical systems, major site deficiencies, and the concentration of poverty, the CHA Board of Commissioners decided to raze the development and totally redevelop the site.

To help fund this redevelopment, in November 2009 the CHA applied for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOPE VI grant. On May 26, 2010 the CHA received notification that it had been awarded \$20,900,000 to redevelop Boulevard Homes. With these and other funds, the CHA developed a detailed redevelopment plan, relocated the tenants to other housing, and demolished the original development. At the time of this interim report, Laurel Street Residential has broken ground on The Retreat at Renaissance, a multi-story building for the elderly, and Laurel Street Residential has been awarded tax credits for the Phase 1 development of the family component, the Residences at Renaissance.

The purpose of this report is to provide an interim assessment of the Boulevard Homes redevelopment project. More specifically, the report:

- describes the original Boulevard Homes development and the process of creating the redevelopment plan;
- details the tenant relocation process and tenant views on the assistance offered;
- presents data describing the impacts of relocation on the original tenants;
- provides a description of the services provided to assist tenants in qualifying to move back into the new development; and
- presents baseline data on the neighborhoods surrounding the Boulevard Homes site, which will be used to assess the impacts of the redevelopment on the surrounding community.

I. Boulevard Homes and the Redevelopment Plan

Boulevard Homes was completed in 1970 on a 34-acre site, 4.5 miles west of Uptown Charlotte. The development consisted of 121 buildings, which contained 300 housing units and one stand-alone building that housed the Property Management Office. By 2007, the development had significant physical problems and high rates of crime and poverty. In 2010, the median income of Boulevard Homes households was \$14,076, substantially below the city's median income of \$52,148. A full 93 percent of Boulevard Homes residents received food stamps. The high school dropout rate was 14.3 percent, compared to the city's rate of 5.1 percent, and the percent of births to adolescents was 21.6 percent, compared to the city's rate of 6.4 percent. Clearly, this was a socially distressed community.

Redevelopment planning began in 2007 after an internal analysis identified Boulevard Homes as having the greatest physical and social problems among all of the CHA's developments. Five meetings were held with key stakeholders before the HOPE VI Notice of Funding Availability was released. After its release in 2009, a series of additional meetings were held to solicit input on the redevelopment, the relocation process, and community and supportive services plans.

The approved amended redevelopment plan included the construction of 334 on-site units and an additional 625 off-site units. All 334 on-site units will be under the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program with 145 units designated as public housing, 43 units designated as project based Section 8, and 60 market rate family units. The remaining 86 units will be for seniors and families under 60 percent of local Adjusted Median Income (AMI). The redevelopment plan also called for an "educational campus," which was to include an early childhood development center, a new public K-8 school, and community college classes to be held in the newly developed community center. Lack of public funding for the elementary school has led the CHA to include a charter school in its stead.

II. The Relocation Process and Outcomes

Planning for the relocation of Boulevard Homes residents preceded the HOPE VI application. The CHA applied to HUD for permission to demolish the development in 2008 and received demolition approval on July 24, 2009. At that time, 283 of the 300 Boulevard Homes units were occupied. The CHA's relocation plan called for those residents to be provided with a range of choices as to the type and location of relocation housing, and for the CHA's relocation counselors to provide residents with information about housing opportunities in areas of lower-minority concentration.

Two housing options were available to residents: (1) move to another public housing development, or (2) move to a privately-owned unit with the assistance of a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV). The CHA relocation counselors discussed this choice with each family, emphasizing the additional responsibilities involved in opting for the voucher. Once that choice was made, the counselors assisted households in finding a new home. City Dive, a faith-based, nonprofit social-service organization, provided on-site pre-relocation training to assist Boulevard Homes residents in transitioning from public to private housing. Residents who completed a specified set of three City Dive classes were matched with a mentor who provided social support before, during, and after the relocation. Finally, the CHA hired the nonprofit Youth Homes, Inc., which later merged with Children's Home Society (CHS), to provide community and supportive services to all residents of Boulevard Homes. Each resident was assigned a CHS case manager who began meeting with them to assess their general needs, assist them in setting personal goals, and connect them to the services required to achieve those goals. In general, these organizations worked very well together, although there seemed to be some initial communication problems between case management staff and CHA relocation counselors.

By May 2011, the CHA had identified and tracked 286 former Boulevard Homes families. Of the 286, 283 were the heads of household living in the Boulevard Homes when the CHA received permission to demolish the development. Of the remaining three, one was a head of household who moved to Boulevard Homes after the demolition was approved, and an additional two households were created from the division of extended family households. Of the 286 households in the CHA system in May 2011, 182 (64 percent) relocated to privately owned homes with the assistance of

an HCV, while 69 (24 percent) relocated to one of CHA's other public housing developments. Of the remaining 35 households, 30 had been evicted for lease violations between the time the demolition plan was approved and the time the relocation was completed, three were in temporary housing awaiting HCVs (which they received in August 2011), and two had passed away. Of those who opted for HCVs, the largest number found housing in the same ZIP code as Boulevard Homes, while those who opted to move to other public housing communities were most likely to move to the CHA's Southside Homes development.

Based on results from a survey of the relocated tenants, the most frequently identified reasons for relocating with a HCV were to have more choice about where they lived and have more opportunity to improve themselves. The most frequently identified reason for moving to another CHA development was that they felt comfortable living in CHA housing. Elderly or disabled residents—who were more likely than non-elderly, non-disabled residents to move to Section 9 housing—were also more likely to indicate feeling comfortable in CHA housing; non-elderly, non-disabled residents were more likely to cite a desire for more independence, and were more likely to use an HCV.

A very high percentage of tenants expressed satisfaction with relocation services. Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they "were satisfied" with the relocation services. Participants were also asked if they had worked with each of the three groups involved in assisting residents—relocation counselors, HCV counselors, and City Dive instructors—and if so, how helpful these counselors were. Overall, at least 91 percent reported that each of the groups was either very or somewhat helpful.

Participants were also asked how much they knew about the character of their neighborhood before they relocated. Twenty-eight percent reported "knowing a lot" and an additional 50 percent reported knowing "some" or "a little," while 22 percent reported knowing "nothing" about the area before relocating. When asked if they remembered relocation counselors talking with them about the potential benefits of moving to mixed-income or mixed-race areas, 56 percent of the respondents said they did. A follow-up question asked respondents if they had moved to a mixed-income or mixed-race area, and 74 percent said they had. As might be expected, those moving

with HCVs were more likely to report moving to a mixed area compared to those who moved to other CHA housing developments.

III. Changes in Neighborhood Conditions Pre- and Post-Relocation

As of the fall of 2012, 235 of the 286 Boulevard Homes families remained with the CHA, either in public housing or in private housing with the assistance of an HCV. These families were located in 73 different Charlotte neighborhoods. A comparison of the characteristics of the Boulevard Homes neighborhood with the relocation neighborhoods indicates that the relocation neighborhoods tended to be better on most, but not all, indicators of neighborhood conditions. The relocation neighborhoods were more racially diverse and had lower percentages of single-parent families. They also had higher rates of homeownership and employment, and lower rates of families on public assistance and births to adolescents. The relocation neighborhoods also had substantially lower high school dropout rates and a higher percentage of children performing at or above grade level. Access to retail services was also better and the percentage of housing code violations was lower in the relocation neighborhoods.

The rates of violent crimes were lower in relocation neighborhoods, but they had higher rates of juvenile and property crimes and poorer access to public transportation compared to the Boulevard Homes neighborhood.

IV. Resident Perception of Their New Homes and Neighborhoods

Resident responses to the baseline and interim surveys indicate that respondents are generally happy with the results of the relocation. In response to an open-ended question on the good things about moving from Boulevard Homes, respondents frequently mentioned living in a better quality house or neighborhood, and living in a safer area. Respondents also mentioned reduced crime, improved privacy, better neighbors, a chance for greater self-improvement, and better schools.

In response to a similar question on the bad things about moving from Boulevard Homes, the two most frequently mentioned items were “nothing” and that they miss the people or the social support in Boulevard Homes. Having to pay utility

bills was also a frequently mentioned bad thing for those who moved with an HCV even though the need to pay utility bills was discussed in the City Dive pre-relocation training.

As illustrated by the survey results presented below, large percentages of the respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with their new homes and neighborhoods.

- Eighty-four percent of respondents stated that their new home was either “much better” (66 percent) or “somewhat better” (17 percent) than their Boulevard Homes units. Sixty-nine percent of residents who moved with the assistance of HCVs said their new homes were “much better” while 51 percent of those who moved to other Section 9 units felt similarly.
- Very high percentages of both those who moved into private housing with the assistance of an HCV (88 percent) and those who moved to Section 9 housing (83 percent) were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their new homes. Only two percent of HCV residents were “very dissatisfied,” while 13 percent of Section 9 residents were “very dissatisfied.”
- On average, respondents had 33 percent fewer complaints about the physical aspects of their homes after their move from Boulevard Homes.
- When comparing their current neighborhood to their neighborhood at Boulevard Homes, 60 percent of HCV residents rated their new neighborhood as “much better” while a somewhat smaller 45 percent of Section 9 residents rated their new neighborhood as “much better.”
- The number of respondents who said they felt “very safe” in their neighborhoods increased by 285 percent between when they lived in Boulevard Homes (a change from just 13 percent to 50 percent) and the time of the interim survey. HCV residents were three times more likely to report feeling “very safe” than their Section 9 counterparts.
- On average, residents report a 59 percent decrease in complaints about neighborhood crime. Those who moved to Section 9 developments were more likely to complain that drug use and groups of people just hanging out were a “big problem” compared to HCV residents. HCV residents, however, were more

likely to rate violent crimes (people being attacked, sexual assault, or shootings) as a “big problem.”

Survey respondents also expressed high levels of satisfaction with CHA management. The survey asked respondents to rate how satisfied they are with housing authority rules and their interactions with CHA staff. Although HCV respondents expressed higher levels of satisfaction with both the rules and housing authority staff, both groups indicated high levels of satisfaction. For instance, 92 percent of HCV respondents and 88 percent of Section 9 respondents were “very” or “somewhat satisfied” with the way they are treated by housing authority staff.

There were very few differences between the baseline and interim surveys in parents' assessments of how their children were doing in school. Households with children reported little movement in school performance between the baseline and interim surveys. When asked how their oldest child was doing in school, 55 percent of parents stated that their oldest child was doing “excellent” in school in both the baseline and interim surveys; see Table IV O). Of parents whose children switched to new schools as a result of their family's relocation, 58 percent of parents indicated that their child was adjusting “very well” to the new school, 39 percent stated that their child was doing “just OK,” and only one parent was worried that their child was not adjusting well to their new school.

Turning to the issue of mental and social health, the survey results indicated that depression scores decreased by six percent between the baseline and interim surveys. Forty-two heads of house showed signs of depression at the time of the baseline survey, compared to 36 at the time of the interim survey. There was also a one percent increase in respondents' social capital scores, which indicates a slight increase in their level of social support. This increase may be due to Boulevard Homes residents maintaining their social connections after their move, moving to neighborhoods where families and friends reside, or both.

Turning to employment, of people who were out of work, more survey respondents reported looking for work at the time of the second survey compared to the first (43 percent vs. 35 percent). Insufficient education, a lack of transportation,

discrimination by employers, and having a criminal record were identified as the main impediments to finding work among non-disabled, non-elderly respondents.

Although HCV participants are more satisfied with their new living arrangements, the survey results indicated that they are experiencing more financial stress than their Section 9 counterparts. Thirty-four percent of HCV participants indicated that they had received a notice warning that their water, gas, or electricity would be shut off for nonpayment. Ten percent indicated that one or more of their utilities had, in fact, been shut off. There was also an increase in food insecurity between the baseline and interim surveys; 68 percent of respondents in the baseline survey indicated they “often” or “sometimes” worried that their food would run out, whereas 73 percent expressed similar worries in the interim survey. HCV participants were more likely to report food insecurity than those living in Section 9 apartments.

V. Community and Supportive Services

One of the primary objectives of the Boulevard Homes HOPE VI project is to assist relocated households to meet the criteria for moving back to the redeveloped community. To achieve that objective, the CHA contracted with Youth Homes, Inc., a nonprofit social services agency that later merged with Children's Home Society (CHS), to provide case managers who meet with the relocated households on a regular basis. CHS assists the relocated households in developing a plan for moving toward self-sufficiency and supports them in implementing that plan. At the beginning of the program, there were 12 case managers, three supervisors and a program coordinator involved in the provision of case management services. The caseload per case manager was between 18 and 22 households.

Though the CHS caseworkers were well-educated, experienced and worked with a variety of client populations, including low-income populations, none that we interviewed had experience working with public housing residents, and few had experience with in-home client visits. In interviews, CHS supervisors, who were hired at the same time as the case managers, expressed frustration over the lack of time they had to develop training manuals before the case managers began meeting with clients. For their part, the case managers reported that they would have liked more training

about how to work with residents who have lived in public housing all of their lives. They felt unprepared to deal with residents who lacked motivation to work towards self-sufficiency. The case managers also felt that their roles, responsibilities, and expectations had not been clearly defined early on in the process. These issues were addressed through the hiring of a CHA staff member dedicated to facilitating better communication and coordination with CHS staff. The CHA also developed a more refined tracking system with better metrics to gauge self-sufficiency progress, which helped to clarify the CHA's expectations. Despite the early lack of clarity, the case managers and supervisors were enthusiastic about the program. They expressed positive attitudes and a strong commitment to helping the families achieve self-sufficiency.

Case management from CHS began in February 2010. The early months were devoted to making contact with clients and conducting introductory needs assessments. By October 2010, when case management was fully operational, 209 of the then 252 former Boulevard Homes families were active in case management. By September 2012, 200 of the then 225 eligible families from Boulevard Homes were active in case management from CHS.¹ This represents an increase in the percentage of families actively receiving case management, from 83 percent in October 2010 to 89 percent in September 2012. Over that period of time, the rate of senior and disabled households active in case management increased while the rate among other households declined.

Although the frequency of contact varied greatly from client to client, the average number of home visits made by case managers to non-elderly, non-disabled households averaged 1.66 per month, compared to 1.25 visits per month to senior or disabled households. Case managers typically spent about one hour with clients during each home visit. In addition, case managers had between 1.07 and 2.9 phone conversations per household per month.

The case managers identified several substantial barriers to self-sufficiency among their clients. Because the majority of Boulevard Homes residents do not own cars, transportation is one of the biggest challenges to self-sufficiency. Dependency on public transportation greatly limits job-seeking activities and the areas in which they can work. Case managers also mentioned that many Boulevard Homes residents have

not graduated from high school and some have marginal literacy skills, which limits their ability to search for and secure jobs. Similarly, placement testing for GED courses revealed very low education levels among former Boulevard Homes residents, thereby extending the time needed for them to complete GEDs and find employment. The high cost and limited subsidies for child care were also identified as major obstacles to finding and maintaining employment, although CHS has worked with the CHA to increase the rate of child care subsidies provided from \$300 to \$500 per child per month. Case managers also identified “the mindset” of tenants as a significant barrier to self-sufficiency. They attributed this to inter-generational poverty resulting in a lack of motivation and confidence on the part of residents.

Interviews with both CHS case managers and CHA staff suggest several organizational and administrative challenges. Communication between CHS staff and CHA relocation counselors was identified as a problem. There seems to have been some confusion as to whose role it was to assist residents in finding a new home. Furthermore, CHS staff found the initial client monitoring system to be vague and confusing. CHA staff responded by improving the metrics and service plans used to monitor and track clients’ progress. CHS’s budget reduction in April 2012, while expected, led to internal reorganization and staff attrition. These staff changes, at times, negatively affected staff morale at CHS.

An analysis of the “End of Month” data collected by CHS case managers indicates that, between October 2010 and September 2012, client utilization of services varied greatly. Although many clients have taken advantage of transportation assistance (for a total of 805 monthly assistance packages handed out, or 33.5 per month) and attended a variety of workshops (total attendance of 595, or 24.8 per month), few have enrolled in or completed some of the most critical support programs. According to the “End of Month” data, only 28 clients enrolled in employment preparation programs, only 18 have enrolled in child care assistance programs, and only 19 have either been referred to or enrolled in substance abuse programs. There have, however, been a large number of enrollments in mental health programs (170). The development of CHA’s Center for Employment Services Center in January 2011, which established formal partnerships with job training and education agencies, may

help to increase the number of relocated households involved in job training programs in the future.

An analysis of the “End of Month” data from October 2010 through September 2012, the period of full case management, shows an increase in employment for non-elderly, non-disabled clients working with case managers. Over this time period there was a 29 percent increase in the number of non-disabled, non-elderly clients working. Moreover, the consistency of work effort increased. By September 2012, a large majority of active non-disabled, non-elderly workers (53 of 56, or 95 percent) were meeting the Moving Forward work requirement of 15 hours a week, while a smaller majority of active clients were meeting the HOPE VI requirement of 30 hours per week (29 of 56, or 52 percent).

VI. Economic Conditions Surrounding the Boulevard Homes Site

The redevelopment of Boulevard Homes may have important impacts on the surrounding area. At the time of this report, Boulevard Homes has been razed, but the construction of the new Retreat at Renaissance development for seniors is just beginning. Thus, it is too soon to expect that the redevelopment project will have positive impacts on the surrounding area. To prepare for that analysis, however, this report gathers baseline data on (1) business activity, (2) mortgage lending, and (3) housing and property characteristics. In order to gauge the impacts of the redevelopment on the surrounding area, our final report will compare these baseline measures to the latest available information.

Data on business activity in the Boulevard Homes area come from the National Establishment Time Series (NETS) database. For the purposes of this analysis, we have extracted three business indicators for each of the three census tracts adjacent to the Boulevard Homes site: total number of businesses; total estimated sales; and total number of employees. We present these data at three points in time—2000, 2005, and 2010—in order to establish a pre-redevelopment trend. Those data indicate increases in the number of businesses in all three census tracts and increases in estimated sales and employment in two of the three tracts.

Data on mortgage lending in the surrounding area come from the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) database. Not surprising given the mortgage crisis,

they show a dramatic decline in the number of loan applications from 2006 to 2011 for both the county and for a one-mile radius around the Boulevard Homes site. Data on the mortgage approval and denial rates, however, show no clear trend over the six-year period.

Data on housing and property characteristics in the surrounding area comes from both the American Community Survey and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Quality of Life Data Base. Those data show that the two census tracts surrounding the Boulevard Homes site have considerably lower homeownership rates, median housing values, rents, real estate taxes, and higher housing vacancy rates compared to the country as a whole. In the final report we will be looking at the extent to which those differences change.

Finally, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County data indicate that there is considerable variation in housing and property characteristics, such as average tax values of single-family units and the change in residential property values, among the three neighborhoods surrounding the redevelopment site. In our final report we will assess how those indicators have changed over time and how they compare to the city as a whole.

Recommendations

Overall, the relocation process went quite smoothly. Large percentages of the tenants were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they received from CHA staff and contractors. Yet, improvements can always be made. Based on interviews with those involved in the relocation, we offer the following recommendations if similar projects are undertaken in the future:

- undertake more outreach to landlords to encourage them to participate in the HCV program;
- conduct more careful screening of tenants interested in utilizing an HCV; and
- provide tenants with more information on the characteristics of the neighborhoods surrounding properties in the HCV program;

Based on analysis of case management data, strides have been made in moving the non-elderly, non-disabled relocated households who are participating in case management toward economic independence. Yet we found that a substantial number of relocated households have not increased their work hours, and a relatively small number of clients had enrolled in education and job training programs.

Based on these findings we offer the following recommendations:

- The case managers and supervisors hired to assist residents in achieving economic self-sufficiency should have prior experience assisting public housing residents set and achieve self-sufficiency goals. Moreover, the supervisors should be brought on several months in advance of the case workers to develop training programs that cover how to work with long-term residents of public housing who have lived in persistent and intergenerational poverty. This training should include how to address the clients' "mindsets," low education levels, illiteracy, substance abuse, and mental health problems.
- The roles, responsibilities, expectations, and program goals should be clearly communicated and understood by the case management staff before case management begins. In addition, more frequent communication between contractors and CHA staff—such as regularly scheduled check-in calls or progress meetings—should result in improved relocation services, client tracking and reporting, and client progress toward self-sufficiency.
- The relatively small number of clients enrolled in job training and education programs needs to be addressed. Case managers need to encourage clients to pursue job training and education opportunities. The CHA's Employment Training Center could help case managers in finding education and training opportunities for the relocated households.
- The adequacy of child care and transportation assistance for attending these programs should also be assessed. Given that almost all non-elderly/non-disabled households have children, affordable child care is necessary for them to enroll in education and job training programs and to look for employment. Many of the current child care subsidy programs only kick in after residents have found employment. Total reliance on public transit also constrains the job

searches and employment opportunities of residents. The CHA might consider ways to provide an alternative to public transit that promotes greater mobility flexibility.

Finally, we recommend that the CHA explore a different model for assisting families in moving toward economic self-sufficiency. Family Independence Initiative (FII) programs have been developed in several demonstration cities and have shown significant progress in short timeframes. These programs rely less heavily on case managers and more on families to develop their own self-sufficiency plans and track their own progress, thereby providing families with more control and flexibility in how to achieve self-sufficiency. These types of programs can also be more cost-effective.