The struggle to belong
*Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.*

Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

Negotiating social mix in Toronto’s first public housing redevelopment: Community development, cohesion, and criminalization in Don Mount Court/Rivertowne

Martine August*

Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011
Session: 10.1 Negotiating Social Mix in Global Cities

*Trudeau Foundation Scholar, PhD Candidate
Department of Geography & Program in Planning
University of Toronto
Sidney Smith Hall, 100 St. George St., Office 5047
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3G3
martine.august@utoronto.ca
Abstract

Modelled after the HOPE VI program, Canada’s first socially-mixed public housing redevelopment in Toronto’s Don Mount Court/Rivertowne community is almost complete. The project involved the demolition and on-site replacement of 252 subsidized units, the addition of 187 new condo townhouses, and a neo-traditional re-design featuring new streets and a new park. This paper explores how tenants returning to the subsidized housing, new condo residents, and neighbours in the nearby gentrifying community that surrounds the project have experienced and negotiated the area’s new “social mix.” While mixed-income redevelopment is premised on the assumption that wealthy neighbours will use their superior political influence and social capital to benefit the poor and improve neighbourhood services, this paper finds that the most politically-active non-tenants mobilized their efforts to the detriment of tenant safety and quality of life. Based on participant observation, this paper covers three stories that unfolded during the hot summer of 2010, when mixed-income residents were brought together to build community and promote inclusion. First, the paper describes power dynamics at meetings, in which non-tenants (largely white males) dominated and controlled the proceedings, submerging the voices of tenants (all of whom were women of colour). Second, it shows how non-tenants successfully mounted a campaign to ramp up policing and increase control and surveillance over tenant bodies and spaces, exacerbating problems of youth harassment and racial profiling, and creating deep divisions in the community. Third, it follows struggles over defining the “proper” use of space in the community. I conclude that the efforts of a dedicated community development worker provided more benefits to low-income tenants than did socially-mixed interactions.
Introduction

In the summer of 2007, residents from the former Don Mount Court social housing community began returning to “Rivertowne,” Canada’s first socially-mixed public housing redevelopment. The project involved the demolition and on-site replacement of all 252 public housing units, and the addition of 187 new townhouse condominiums, a new park, new streets, and an updated neo-traditional re-design. This paper explores how tenants returning to subsidized housing, new owners in condos, and neighbours in the surrounding gentrifying community have experienced and negotiated the area’s new “social mix.”

One of the most compelling justifications for socially-mixed public housing redevelopment is that it promises to improve the lives of low income tenants. By mixing low-income residents with wealthier neighbours, redevelopment promises to undo the effects of isolation and poverty concentration (Wilson 1987) by increasing social capital, enhancing access to quality social networks, and exposing tenants to middle-class “role models” and norms of behaviour. While these justifications have been critiqued (e.g. Crump 2002, Bennett & Reed 1999; Goetz 2000), they remain persuasive to policy makers and the general public. After two decades of HOPE VI, however, empirical evidence on the experience of cross-class interactions suggests that “mixed” communities may not be that inclusive. Many studies reveal that tenants encounter a restrictive and controlling environment, governed by strict use-of-space rules. At one HOPE VI site, tenants were discouraged from hanging out on stoops because it was understood as “Hispanic cultural practice” that made white newcomers nervous (Graves 2010). Elsewhere, Tach (2009) found that tenants were required to keep out of sight: staying off stoops, out of common spaces, and using only private yards. Policing and increased surveillance of tenants were also reported in several studies (Tach 2010; Clark 2002; Joseph 2011).

While “interaction” rarely happens in mixed-income housing (e.g. Buron et al. 2002), relationships that do occur between groups are often marked by resentment (Sullivan & Leitz 2008); “deep divides” (Fraser & Kick 2007); our outright antagonism. In a mixed Tampa community, Greenbaum et al. (2008) found that higher-income neighbours “expressed aversion” to interaction with tenants, and tried to remove the poor using a “nuisance abatement” ordinance. Tach (2010) found that “newcomers did not provide the key social benefits predicted by theories of mixed-income development” (270). Indeed, why would we expect them to? In the first place, the affluent (generally speaking) are not known for being community oriented or sociable at the neighbourhood level — so it is strange to

---

1 A program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) was created in 1992 to deal with “distressed public housing” in the United States. HOPE VI funds on-site mixed-income redevelopment and off-site dispersal via “Housing Choice” vouchers to achieve poverty deconcentration in public housing communities.

2 Tach (2010) found that public housing residents were much more involved in community organizing and social activities than homeowners, and reported that according to Oliver (1988) and Wellman (1999), those with higher incomes have fewer localized social ties. Defilippis (2010) also asks: “if people who are affluent in the U.S. are struggling with social disconnectedness in the suburbs, why are people concerned with low
pin hopes for building community on them. Secondly, as Defilippis (2001) notes, the types of networks and social capital that provide competitive advantages to the wealthy lose their edge when shared. Rather than foster inclusion, he argues that the wealthy seek “class- and race-based social and geographic exclusion” precisely to protect their affluence (790).

The belief that higher-income newcomers will use their superior political clout and influence, to fight for neighbourhood improvements for all residents is similarly flawed. It problematically assumes that the political interests of the wealthy will align, rather than conflict with those of the poor, and ignores the very unequal power relationships at play. As Defilippis notes, “certain shared social networks are in greater positions of power than others, and they therefore yield much more substantial returns to their members when those networks are engaged in social or political conflict” (791). If their interests collide, we can expect that the power and influence of the wealthy would be used in ways that disadvantage tenants (see also: August & Walks forthcoming). Indeed, scholars need look no further than gentrification literature (especially Atkinson 2004) for evidence that the poor do not tend to benefit from the influx of wealthier, private-market residents into their communities.

This paper finds that the most politically active non-tenants who engaged in neighbourhood affairs promoted agendas that were not in the interests of public housing residents, and used their influence and power to the detriment of tenant safety and quality of life. This paper covers four stories that unfolded during the hot summer of 2010, when mixed-income residents were brought together to build community and promote inclusion in Rivertowne. After describing the power dynamics that played out during meetings, I look at how non-tenants successfully mounted a campaign to ramp up policing and increase control and surveillance over tenant bodies and spaces, exacerbating problems of youth harassment and racial profiling, and creating deep divisions in the community. Next, I follow debates and struggles over the “proper” use of public space in the community. I conclude that community development efforts in Don Mount Court provided more benefits to low-income tenants than did socially-mixed interactions.

**Public Housing Redevelopment in Don Mount Court**

Don Mount Court was one of the last public housing communities built via Canada’s slum clearance and urban renewal program, and the first to be transformed into a socially-mixed community. In 2002, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), which manages social housing in Toronto discovered serious structural damage in buildings. Realizing that it would need to be vacated for repair, TCHC saw an opportunity to bring Don Mount in line with contemporary planning wisdom, replacing the modernist post-war public housing with a mixed-income, New-Urbanist-style community. While costlier than simple repair, TCHC argued that it was worth the extra cost to “regenerate” the site, “normalize” the community, and provide a “better environment” for tenants (TCHC 2002a: income areas emphasizing the importance of social connections and networks as a way of moving low income people and communities out of poverty?” (p. 782).
TCHC also recognized the area’s real estate potential. Arguing that “the full development potential” of the site was not being “utilized,” market units were proposed to “recover development value of the land not required for replacement units” (Ibid: 10). The location of Don Mount Court in the rapidly gentrifying South Riverdale area has made market-driven redevelopment possible, and the mixed-income transformation of the area’s distinctive public housing community will likely in turn facilitate the extension and intensification of gentrification in South Riverdale.

While “social mix” was a goal of planners, condos and public units are separated on-site in the redevelopment. Condos are exclusively in the north-west corner, and most front onto internal, pedestrian-only pathways (Figure 1). One block of condo townhouses on Munro faces public housing across the street, and condo residents must enter a public housing courtyard to access their parking garage. Opportunities for casual social contact are, however, minimized by design.

Figure 1: LEFT: Condo units largely front on to pedestrian-only lanes, and are segregated in to one corner of the site; RIGHT: Condos on right side (with white square paneling) face public housing on left side of Munro Street.

Findings: Experiencing Social Mix in Rivertowne

As the first redevelopment of its kind in Canada, there is pressure on the TCHC to ‘get it right’ in Don Mount Court. For this reason, the Housing Corporation funded a two-year Community Development position to foster social inclusion in “Rivertowne” and build community between the three core constituencies in the area: subsidized tenants, condo

---

3 Redevelopment was achieved via public-private partnership, with development overseen by a arms-length corporation operating within TCHC (the Don Mount Development Corporation, or DMCDC), and carried out by developer Intracorp-Marion Hill, selected via an RFP process.

4 This position was co-funded by the Metcalf Foundation (a charitable organization) and TCHC’s Social Investment fund, which provides $1 Million annually to “actively engage tenants in decision making and in supporting the building of strong, healthy communities” (TCHC 2010, p. 18).

5 While the renaming of the community, from Don Mount Court to Rivertowne has been somewhat contentious, most people cited in this paper called it Rivertowne. Throughout the paper, I use whatever term participants chose to use.
residents, and Hamilton Street homeowners (who share a back alley with one of the newly-created streets in the redeveloped community). A community developer was hired in late 2009, and she began her efforts by bringing residents together for a visioning retreat. Out of this a steering committee and five “action teams” were created: focusing on participant-identified issues of youth, seniors, training, environment, and crime prevention and safety. She started a newsletter, organized countless events, won grants for community programs, created professional-training opportunities for youth, built relationships, and put hours into the administrative and door-knocking activities that community development work requires. The importance of this work and its impact on tenants is revisited in the conclusion.

This research is based on participant observation between April 2010 and May 2011 at community events and meetings, which drew participants from public and private housing with an intention to build bridges and foster interaction. I draw my findings from detailed notes taken and observations made at over 20 community meetings and events (primarily during the summer of 2010), and also from interviews with several key stakeholders, conversations with community members, and my inclusion on very active email exchanges circulated to those involved in meetings.

**Power Dynamics & the Marginalization of Tenant Voices**

Early in the process of meeting, a clear dynamic was struck between tenants, condo residents, and homeowners on Hamilton Street. Despite being a numerical minority at most meetings, non-tenants dominated the meetings using subtle and explicit techniques, and were able to shape both the content and outcomes of the interaction process. Subtle practices of taking control involved setting agendas, chairing meetings, and insisting on adhering to the formal agenda. While they were made aware that a goal of mixed-income interaction was to build skills among tenants (such as taking minutes and chairing), non-tenants were quick to take charge. Prior to the second Crime Prevention and Safety Action Team (CPSAT) meeting, a homeowner from Hamilton Street prepared his own agenda (without being asked to by the group) and circulated it on an email list. The agenda and discussion thread that followed were inaccessible to tenants, who were largely without internet access. This agenda prioritized homeowner concerns (policing and security), and declared that several tenant-articulated safety issues were “out of the scope” of CPSAT. As a result, security concerns of Hamilton Street residents dominated the meeting. The agenda format itself, which prioritized “identifying problems” and “reporting incidents,” set a negative and accusatory tone for the committee and led to discomfort for many of the tenants involved.

Unequal power dynamics emerged along lines of class, race, and gender. A trend emerged in which white male non-tenants would silence and dismiss the concerns of tenant participants, all of whom were women of colour. This was often done by insisting on adhering to the agenda when the conversation steered away from non-tenant priorities. A woman defending youth

---

6 Non-tenants frequently volunteered to chair meetings, or simply took on the role of the chair when a meeting began.
(who had been characterized as threatening) was swiftly cut off by a Hamilton Street resident who said: “right now we’re identifying problems, solutions are later in the agenda.” On another occasion, a TCHC staff member (also defending youth) was interrupted by a white male condo resident, who declared: “it’s time to move the agenda along.” Soon after, this resident interrupted a group of women (as they discussed building productive relationships with youth), asserting: “we should move to the ‘actions’ part of the agenda.” Despite their desire for tenants to follow the agenda, non-tenants consistently displayed a sense of entitlement to speak up on any topic, at any point in the meeting. Recognizing the dynamic created by this agenda format, a female TCHC staff member recommended a less formal structure. She was cut off sharply by a condo owner who advocated a “corporate agenda template.” Her further attempts were thwarted by repeated interruptions from a homeowner insisting that the meeting start by “covering action items” on the existing agenda.

Non-tenants dominated meetings in non-subtle ways as well: by interrupting, shouting over others, and causing a scene. On countless occasions, tenants and staff were abruptly and rudely interrupted by non-tenants, who talked or shouted over them. Tenants who tried to present alternative viewpoints or defend against non-tenant accusations were immediately interrupted and shouted down, often by more than one person – a dynamic that did not play out in the reverse direction. This made it not only uncomfortable, but also practically difficult for tenants to give input. As a result, many women stopped participating in meetings. One tenant put it bluntly: “a lot of [tenants] feel like they don’t want to come out to these meetings because Hamilton street residents are always the ones taking over.”

It was clear that many non-tenants had no appetite for compromise, and assumed that their priorities should trump those of the tenants. The contributions from a few key Hamilton Street residents were particularly damaging to the process. One homeowner caused a scene, shouting and threatening to leave because an agenda did not prioritize “those issues that are nearest and dearest to the people on Hamilton Street.” Another used threats to advance his priorities, warning that if a particular issue didn’t go his way: “it might cause a riot” and “an ugly confrontation may ensue.” Quite unfortunately, there was no mechanism at meetings to counter-balance or challenge these power dynamics. Commitment to “inclusiveness” in the process meant that even damaging, poisonous, and uncompromisingly anti-tenant contributions were consistently permitted. While all opinions were treated as ‘equal,’ the reality of inequality in the community and at meetings meant that in practice, tenant

---

7 Even non-political interventions made by racialized female tenants were dismissed by white male non-tenants. For example, when one tenant suggested a tree be trimmed to expose an obscured streetlight (during a discussion about streetlights), she was told: “that’s for later in the meeting.” At different points in the same meeting, a condo owner seated near a female tenant shot down two suggestions which she quietly raised (for camping as a possible youth field trip, and to provide exercise equipment for youth) preventing them from being heard by the larger group.

8 He also threw a sacred Coast Salish talking stick (to be held by whomever was speaking) across the table, deeply disrespecting the process. Incidentally, the stick had been brought in specifically to create a more respectful environment for people in the room, after a tense previous meeting.
perspectives and priorities were drowned out by non-tenant voices and agendas, which were often explicitly antagonistic towards them.

Non-tenants occasionally mobilized their influence and power to help tenants, but only when tenant goals did not conflict with their own. Some positive examples of interaction included an offer by a condo resident to help draft a petition for more TCHC meeting space; the circulation by a condo resident of a “how to chair meetings” document; and encouragement for tenants to pressure political representatives for better space, lighting, and funding (for security cameras). One condo resident challenged TCHC to properly landscape tenant lawns (which were still graveled-over, although condo units had been grassed and planted (See Figure 1)). A few key non-tenants have also remained involved in meetings, even after the divisive events of the summer of 2010, and their efforts have contributed to civil cross-class interactions, and productive community engagement. The most noteworthy actions of non-tenants, however, was their wielding of power and influence in ways that had a direct an negative impact on tenant lives, as the following sections describe.

**The Rise of Policing, Securitization, & Heightened Surveillance and Control**

The main outcome of non-tenant (and particularly Hamilton Street resident) involvement was to mobilize their power to enhance surveillance and control over tenants; criminalize youth; and increase security and policing in the area. These efforts created deep divides and culminated in the traumatizing police assault of two youth in the community. This section follows the activities of the CPSAT from April 2010 until its disbandment four months later.

By the second meeting of the CPSAT (April 27), a clear difference had emerged between the safety concerns of tenants and non-tenants. While tenants were concerned about children getting hit by speeding cars, the dangers of living near an active construction site, non-residents using drugs in stairwells, and youth harassment by police; non-tenants were primarily concerned about protecting themselves from tenants and tenant youth, whom they viewed as threatening. The agenda for the April 27 meeting (drafted by a Hamilton Street resident), focused on strengthening connections with TCHC staff, TCHC security, and Toronto police; and enhancing surveillance and control of tenants by: logging “incidents” more effectively, installing security cameras, installing “no loitering/trespassing” signs, and clearly labeling tenant apartments to assist in identifying “problem units” to police. The safety concerns of tenants were sidelined at this meeting and throughout the summer, while non-tenant objectives were deliberately campaigned for and achieved.

---

9 The condo resident drew on social inclusion goals of redevelopment, arguing that: “the concept was for this to be inclusive, why does the community housing not have landscaping?” At a later meeting, the resident brought the issue up again, noting that: “it defeats the purpose, in terms of housing inequality.”

10 For example, one condo owner volunteered to help at a “Ladies Spa Day” for tenants. Another condo resident helped organize a community clean-up, volunteered to help with script-writing for a youth-led theatre walk, and hosted a “container gardening” workshop. A Hamilton Street resident who is still involved has conducted a volunteer survey and gives productive community-oriented input at meetings.
The goal to connect with TCHC staff and security was achieved by the next meeting, which was attended by a TCHC Manager and a TCHC Security Constable. The Manager agreed to install the no trespassing/loitering signs “so that we can charge people,” and agreed to put address numbers on the backs of Munro street townhouses so that Hamilton homeowners across the alley could more easily identify units when calling police or security. Two weeks later, the goal to strengthen ties with police was achieved, with a guest visit from a constable. At these meetings, staff and police provided detailed instructions on how to more effectively call in and report incidents, work towards eviction, and increase policing. The TCHC manager encouraged non-tenants to call in “incidents” because “we use these reports to go to the tenant-landlord board” to evict.11 The police officer advised that: “tribunal takes it more seriously if multiple people come out, it is important for surrounding residents to support TCHC when they move to evict.” Another staffer added: “it is important to make this person’s life as uncomfortable as possible … call us to make a report.”12 In addition to aiding evictions, residents were promised that more calls would mean more policing. The constable explained it clearly: “anything, any criminal activity, please call. We do keep stats. We also use it as a tool to go to City Council and the police services board to request more officers to our division. If we can prove our calls to service are going up, even if crime is not going up, we can say: we need more officers.” Residents were informed that high call volume would also prioritize Rivertowne for TCHC Security patrols.

As summer wore on, the impacts of the deliberate reporting campaign by non-tenants bore fruit, and the area was designated as a priority for security and police. Police harassment of youth, already a problem at the beginning of the summer, was aggressively ramped up. A sharp divide grew between tenants and non-tenants at meetings, during which the latter openly devised strategies to more effectively target and criminalize tenant youth; increase surveillance over tenant bodies and spaces, and arrange eviction of their neighbours. This divide was exacerbated by the emergence of exclusionary communication networks inaccessible to tenants. To share information, both Hamilton Street and condo residents created private online forums called “basecamp.”13 While non-tenants controlled decisions affecting TCHC tenants and property, tenants were not granted a reciprocal opportunity to weigh in (or defend themselves) on these forums. This secretive and exclusive realm of communication, created in the words of one tenant, “a bad atmosphere.”

11 The types of “incidents” that non-tenants usually cited referred to groups of young men socializing out-of-doors. As described below, youth (particularly young black men) were criminalized over the course of the summer, and their presence in public or private space was discursively constructed as “delinquent.”

12 Given that TCHC is an enormous organization (the biggest landlord in Canada, managing 58,000 units), it is not surprising that there are varying attitudes and approaches to tenants among staff. While the Manager discussed above focused heavily on evictions, one staff member who worked closer to the front line, and was well-liked and trusted by tenants, articulated that “we’re not in the business of evictions” and made it clear that the agency preferred to take other steps before moving to evict.

13 Non-tenants used basecamp to circulate information about “incidents” and crime in the community, which most likely had the effect of spreading fear among residents and exaggerating the number of crimes in the community.
The main safety “problem” constructed by non-tenants in Rivertowne centred on youth. By repeating a discourse about “gangs of unknown youth” “congregating” on TCHC property, non-tenants succeeded in criminalizing young (black) people, and normalizing the expectation that youth simply should not be permitted to occupy outdoor space. Youth were commonly referred to as “gangs,” accused of being “intimidating” and “glaring” at non-tenants, and were consistently presented as “unknown,” or “not appearing to live here.” While race was rarely mentioned, the youth were coded as black: with references to “rap music” and accusatory comments that they were “well-dressed” and driving “SUVs”.14 In their study of Chicago, Wilson & Grammenos (2005) identified a “poignant rhetorical tactic to promote gentrification in ascendant neoliberal times: a virulent, spatially infused attack on youth bodies that denigrates neighbourhood social character” (297). This rhetoric “disparaged resident identities” to denigrate poor areas, and focused on coding youth bodies to justify middle class take-over. Focusing on baggy pants, fancy sneakers, and jewelry, descriptions of youth in their study accused them of being “intimidating” and “gang members.” In Rivertowne, a remarkably similar discourse emerged, and as in Chicago “the use of space and symbol made common imaginings of kids a powerful politics” (306). The “issue” of youth socializing outdoors became a focal point in the campaign to increase policing and to securitize the space.

Tenants did their best to challenge this discourse, asking “is it illegal for kids to sit on a stoop, talking and socializing?” and: “why are adults afraid of kids? Why are you calling them “gangs?” A TCHC security constable cut through the rhetoric, noting that “I got a call last summer about black youths getting out of their vehicles and selling drugs [he laughed at this]… I know these people, they’re being stereotyped, that’s the type of calls we’re getting.” Contributions from the police only added to the racist anti-youth rhetoric, blaming kids for playing into stereotypes, and intimating that they were at fault for the prejudice and ignorance of others. When a tenant asked “Is it such a negative thing for kids to be hanging out?” the constable responded: “if the odd one pulled up their pants, it wouldn’t be a bad thing either,” and he criticized “kids” (race unspecified) for “emulating rappers” and thus “stigmatizing themselves.”

By early June, racially-targeted police harassment was creating a dangerous environment for Rivertowne youth. Tenants described how young boys were being harassed daily, whether walking on the street or sitting on their steps. Many pointed out that black youth were disproportionately hassled, and described incidents in which kids were constantly questioned (‘where are you going?’ ‘where do you live?’), asked to empty their pockets, asked for ID, and told to line up against the wall to be searched. Non-tenant CPSAT members tended to dismiss or downplay these interventions,15 and went forward with a police-led “Safety-Audit

---

14 One “incident” report dated April 29 2010, 4:45pm read: “nine well-dressed black youths, ages 16 to mid-20s get out of multiple vehicles … loud music starts playing from the trunk … youth start drinking on TCHC property (parking spaces) … passing a joint around…”

15 Various non-tenant members (all of whom were white) piped up at the June 9 CPSAT meeting to argue that the police activity was neither unusual nor racially-motivated. One condo owner argued that “my kids were once scooped up by the cops, it’s not about racial profiling or specific to this area.” Another condo
Walk” (on June 8 2010) through the area. Many women (whose children had been victimized by police), were in tears after hearing the constable denigrate their community, and did not join the walk. Divisions were further underlined when the constable and a parade of white non-tenants walked by and completely ignored the angry words of a black public housing resident, who shouted at them from her back step. Her objection, as it turned out, was to racially targeted police harassment in the area. Her neighbour agreed, and explained that living in Rivertowne involved experiencing and coping with racism every day.

By the next day, several tenants had resigned from CPSAT. A remaining tenant told people she planned to give up also because her safety was at risk: “instead of making things peaceful, this is creating anger. Instead of being friendly, it’s going the opposite way. It is getting stressful.” After several interruptions, she continued:

Lots of people I know are angry, because condo and Hamilton people are creating an atmosphere – there’s lots of pressure, the police are coming in here and picking on [people] because they’re sitting on their stairs. I live it, I can tell, it is bad, it is bad … the more people you bring over here to sit and talk safety, the worse it will get – it’s like bringing over enemies.

Non-tenants finally recognized their responsibility for the situation when a woman in the room told of a boy who was stopped by police on his way home from school, and when he didn’t speak (because he was deaf) the police smashed his face against the hood of their car. A homeowner realized out loud: “this is happening because we’re calling too much.”

At the next CPSAT meeting, the group voted to disband. The effects of the campaign to increase surveillance and policing continued, however, and on August 11 2010, two youth were beaten up by police, shocking the tenant community. In September, a still-unsafe environment was described by teen girls who gathered to discuss safety issues. The girls reported frequently being stopped, questioned, asked for I.D., and generally harassed.

Saddled with a problem not of their making, tenants were left to undo the damages of the most active non-tenant CPSAT members, and work towards making their community safe from police. Rivertowne youth themselves took the lead on this, organizing a delegation to

16 In addition to creating an unsafe environment for young people, adult tenants were increasingly viewed with suspicion for being involved with the CPSAT committee. Tenants explained that attending makes people look “like a rat”, because the committee ‘points out problem houses, focuses on negativity, and pins all the problems on tenants.’ One tenant participant reported that her bike tires had been slashed.

17 It is important to emphasize that not all non-tenant members were equally focused on criminalizing youth and stepping-up policing. However, the trend cannot be ignored that of those who chose to be involved, the most vigorously and aggressively active were involved for this purpose. While many non-tenants may hold progressive or open-minded perspectives about living near low-income housing, such perspectives were under-represented, or overshadowed by the aggressive and dominating approach taken by those who ended up driving the agenda.
meet with police and ask them to scale down patrolling and harassment in the area, and proposing a meeting with police to share a meal and build understanding.

**Struggles over Meanings and Use of Space**

A major community conflict arose over differing expectations for the “proper” use of space, focusing on the alley between Munro and Hamilton Streets. Struggles over how to represent space, according to Harvey (1993) “are as fiercely fought and as fundamental to the activities of place construction as bricks and mortar” (p. 23). In Rivertowne, homeowners fought strenuously to frame the alley as a place for cars and parking, and to naturalize their vision of what constituted “inappropriate” use.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 2:** The alley between TCHC Munro St. townhouses (left) and Hamilton Street back yards and fences (right).

In the alley, the Hamilton Street residents’ back fences are across the lane from a strip of parking and yard space behind TCHC Munro Street townhouses (Figure 2). In the densely redeveloped community, this is one of the few outdoor spaces available for tenants and their children. The alley emerged as a contentious space early in the summer, frequently identified by homeowners as a meeting spot for “gangs” of youth. In late-June, it was proposed as a site for a community BBQ to “reclaim” space from “anti-social behaviour;” and in July, three small plots of land in it were identified as potential sites for a community garden. Hamilton Street residents opposed these activities throughout the summer, and discursively

---

18 The choice of the alley for this event was due to its particularly contentious status in the community. Funding for the event was made available by the TCHC’s “Reclaiming Outdoor Space” program, an initiative intended to improve tenant quality of life in outdoor spaces (and promote ‘positive loitering’ to dissuade bad behaviour.
constructed the alley as a space for cars and not people. One homeowner asserted: “it’s a road and a parking lot. It is for cars. Hamilton residents don’t want any activities there that give people the idea to use the space for anything but driving cars and parking.” Others declared that “it is high volume,” “intended for vehicular traffic,” and that the presence of people would create a “dangerous,” and “awkward juxtaposition between people and cars.”

Discursively representing the alley as a place for cars permitted homeowners to expand their definition of “deviant users” from groups of racialized young men “making noise”, to include any tenants at all. They simply asserted that children should not be permitted in the space, lamenting: “it’s difficult enough to back out of my driveway with kids playing,” and stating: “the alley is being used far too much as an inappropriate play space.” One homeowner opposed the BBQ because “it will raise the very unfortunate expectation among TCHC residents that it’s OK to use these areas for community events and socializing generally.” Through repetition, homeowners asserted that tenants simply should not be in the alley, even if playing or gardening. According to one, the ‘problem’ was that: “community garden means ‘community’ comes and uses it.” Homeowner opposition succeeded in burying the community garden idea, and it was decided that the plots would simply be landscaped. Hamilton residents insisted that landscaping must dissuade use. One noted: “I’m concerned that grass and fence will create a playpen and result in the parking area becoming a play area.” Another suggested: “thorny plants could be put in to prevent people from walking around in areas and using the spaces.”

Hamilton residents clearly did not want to see any tenants (racialized groups of youth most of all) in the space behind their back fences. A tenant teenager summarized the social atmosphere, articulating non-tenant fears bluntly: “people call the police every time they see black people outside.” Another woman criticized the homeowner demands: “it’s not about [tenant youth] making noise … it’s their presence.” Indeed, Hamilton residents wanted tenants either out of sight or out of the community (as was revealed by their enthusiasm for eviction, discussed earlier). In his discussion of homelessness in the U.S., Mitchell (2003) argued that “anti-loitering” laws targeting public space “annihilate space by law:” making it illegal for people without private homes to be anywhere. While less severe, homeowner efforts to undermine tenant rights to space in their community similarly circumscribed the places where tenants and their children could be: to sit, socialize, play, or simply live. By framing the alley as a place that tenants should not use, homeowners asserted that their “right” not to be made uncomfortable, afraid, or irritated by the sights and sounds of tenants, ought to be elevated above the right of tenants to use the space behind their

---

19 These discussions took place primarily at a very heated and acrimonious community meeting on Community Gardening (July 7, 2010). The idea had been hatched by a few tenants, condo residents, staff from a local agency, and staff from TCHC. At the meetings, the aggressive tactics of Hamilton Street residents led to one participant leaving in tears. In addition to thwarting the plans for a community garden, Hamilton residents successfully kept the “Reclaiming Outdoor Space” activity out of the alley. Instead of holding the event there, a Hamilton resident actually suggested a “police-led walkabout” as an acceptable use of the alley space. As the previous section described, this event did take place, and the experience was not positive for tenants and deepened community divisions.
homes. To enforce their asserted rights to control this space and prevent its use by residents (black youth in particular), Hamilton residents also mobilized to increase repressive police and security patrols in the area, as described in the previous section.

People on the Streets: The Paradoxes of Design

Cresswell (1996) has argued that struggles over the use of space tend to focus narrowly on particular places while ignoring their broader context. In Don Mount Court, the battle over the alley ignored major shortcomings in the quality of housing and urban design resulting directly from redevelopment. When youth were criticized for being outdoors, tenants frequently identified these broader issues. One explained: “kids have no space in their house, they have to go outside. It’s too hot.” Another added: “the reason people have been hanging out and listening to music outside is that it is too hot in our apartments.” With higher-density townhouses, smaller units, no air conditioning, tiny front yards, and no park (still under construction after three years), there really was nowhere for kids to go. In fact, the new design of the community forced residents to socialize on the streets. One tenant explained how the former Don Mount had enclosed courtyards for people to hang out, but: “now they have to be out there on the streets.” Discussing safety, a group of girls lamented how design affected their privacy. Speaking over each other, they described the issues:

Nobody gets along because of the way it is set up. No one is satisfied with where they live, they can’t have any privacy/No one here keeps to themselves, they’re always in people’s business/In the old Don Mount, there were no cops, no gun talk, people got along. Now they made it public streets and the cops are always coming here/It is so cramped, there is no privacy, people are watching you all the time/I hate it here now.”

Quite ironically, an explicit design goal and key justification for redevelopment was to enhance safety by ensuring that people would be on the streets. TCHC’s goal was to “create a sight plan and building form that normalizes the community … including re-introducing streets … [and] minimizing common outdoor elements and spaces that contribute to a sense of insecurity…” (2002: 1). Don Mount Court’s interior courtyards were viewed as “indefensible,” and according to planners: “the concept of ‘opening up’ the development and therefore putting more ‘eyes on the street’ was exceptional, desirable, and worthy from a

---

20 Remarkably, one Hamilton resident believed that tenants should not be in the alley without a “legitimate excuse.” He argued: “[a garden] will allow people who are in the parking lot to say they are on their way to or from the community garden. In other words, it will provide an excuse and legitimize hanging out in the alley.”

21 While non-tenants were clearly bothered by outdoor socializing, they also critiqued the design specifically for making it difficult to figure out who “belonged” in the community. One homeowner explained: “people used to have backyards, so you knew for sure that if people were there, that was their yard. Now it’s ambiguous.”

22 Elsewhere, I have argued that the design wisdom of Jane Jacobs (1961) and Oscar Newman (1978) are part of a “new” conventional planning wisdom, that has replaced 1960s post-war modernism and influenced the socially-mixed approach to public housing redevelopment in Western developed nations over the past two decades (see August 2008).
crime prevention point of view,” permitting “better supervision of the neighbourhood” (OMB 2005: 4). Rather than enhancing safety, however, more (tenant) people on the street has been perceived as threatening by non-tenants, and more (non-tenant) “eyes on the street” has led to criminalization and targeting of tenants (particularly racialized youth) for police harassment.

Conclusions: The need for dedicated community development efforts

In Don Mount Court/Rivertowne, mixed-income interaction has not led to the outcomes promised by the promoters of socially-mixed public housing redevelopment. Rather than passing on social capital and lobbying for community improvements for all, higher-income residents in condos and the surrounding gentrifying community used their power and influence in ways that created a hostile environment for tenants and antagonistic community relations. Rather than pin hopes for improving conditions in poor communities on the supposed benefits of mixed-income interaction, I argue that funds would be better spent directly on programs and supports for low-income residents themselves. Indeed, in Rivertowne, the positive impacts of the community building process emerged from the efforts of the hired community development worker. Throughout the two years of her appointment, she listened to residents and helped them address the real problems they identified. While many participants in meetings offered ideas (Teach tenants skills! Create programs for youth! Teach kids their rights!), it was only the initiatives pursued by the worker that materialized. She applied for (and received) many grants, and put in motion programs that actually helped tenants in the community. In addition, she organized events that were non-acrimonious points of interaction. Without a dedicated (paid) individual, it is clear that the administrative efforts and leg-work behind these initiatives simply would not happen. Tenants emphasized the need for continued community development work, telling the worker: “[TCHC] is not involved in this community, they don’t care. It could fall down. Having someone like you around: we need it.” Another tenant agreed: “I hope they keep you, I don’t know what we’d do without you.” Community development efforts must also recognize the power dynamics that emerge in mixed-income environments. Community workers must not be constrained by an expectation that they will act as neutral facilitators bringing together equal parties, but be empowered to advocate for tenant interests in the face of powerful opposition.
Bibliography


Harvey, D. (1993). From space to place and back again: Reflections on the condition of


