

GROUP ASSIGNMENT: Case 1

How do Design, Planning, and Policy Matter in Public Housing Redevelopment?

Be sure to read the entire assignment document, regardless of your group number.

Groups 1, 2, and 3

Your groups have been appointed by Thomas Menino, the Mayor of Boston, to staff the Task Force on the Future of Public Housing. Each group includes staff members from the Boston Housing Authority, the planning division of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and the Department of Neighborhood Development, as well as social service staff from other agencies. But the Mayor has stressed that the group's work should reflect the best-available evidence, and your candid analysis, not agency viewpoints. So don't feel the need to defend any particular agency or interest group in your work or to research the agencies themselves.

Given uncertainties about the future of funding for public housing redevelopment as well as ongoing misperceptions about the current state of public housing in the city, the Mayor wants to know what housing authority planners should do next. In particular, he wants to know what issues matter most when trying to assess "success" in public housing redevelopment and therefore has requested analysis of several past efforts.

The Mayor has asked each group to prepare a 20-minute briefing that analyzes the lessons of a single redevelopment case (see below) for (a) the role of physical design in redevelopment success; and (b) the optimal role for planners in public housing redevelopment. What is the best mix of physical and non-physical planning interventions to ensure effective redevelopment? What kinds of planning policies can best promote this mix? **In addition, you should prepare a briefing summary**—a report in miniature—of no more than 500 words, to summarize your analysis and recommendations. Think of it as the executive summary to a report you don't have to write out in detail. Use the concise, clear writing style of an action memo. Double space it, and leave ample margins. You may include a cover sheet with all group members' names and a project title. Bring a dozen copies of this document to the briefing to use as handouts for Task Force members and other guests.

To help organize your briefing, it may also help to review the questions posed to those who are writing individual assignments, since these raise

particular issues about the role of race, physical design, and professional vs. indigenous knowledge in planning. Do not concern yourself with the formal authority of the Mayor's Task Force or other jurisdictional issues that were not in the case material provided.

Your primary **audience** will be the Task Force members themselves—a relatively diverse group that includes two local philanthropists, a former editor of *The Boston Globe* newspaper, two respected real estate developers, a university professor who works on housing and urban policy issues, the retired head of a local civil rights organization that has long represented African-Americans in the city, and the heads of three nonprofit community-based development organizations active in Boston neighborhoods. In addition, the head of the Boston Housing Authority and the Mayor himself might also attend, as well as other public officials and civic activists. While not officially a public meeting, the Mayor feels that a transparent process is important for the Task Force's work, so even this early working meeting of the Task Force will not turn away interested others who may wish to hear what you have to say. While it's often hard to predict how interactive the audience will be, expect at least a few Task Force members to interrupt, ask for specifics, or challenge you on your claims. They might also argue (a bit) with each other. Good luck!

Group 1: West Broadway Case

For additional background detail on this case, please refer to *Reclaiming Public Housing*, chapter 2.

Group 2: Franklin Field Case

For additional background detail on this case, please refer to *Reclaiming Public Housing*, chapter 3.

Group 3: Commonwealth Case

For additional background detail on this case, please refer to *Reclaiming Public Housing*, chapter 4.

Groups 4 and 5: Cross-Site Analysis of Public Housing Redevelopment Policy

Your groups have been invited by Thomas Menino, the Mayor of Boston, to add national perspectives on redevelopment issues and choices. Your groups each consist of two former affordable housing developers (now working as planning consultants), the former public housing redevelopment director for a housing authority, a former tenant of public housing in Chicago (now consulting on redevelopment issues around the country), and a senior

researcher with a Washington, DC-based think tank that has studied redevelopment projects.

You will be briefing the Task Force (see above), and the context outlined above applies: Given uncertainties about the future of funding for public housing redevelopment as well as ongoing misperceptions about the current state of public housing in the city, the Mayor wants to know what housing authority planners should do next. In particular, he wants to know what issues matter most when trying to assess “success” in public housing redevelopment.

The Mayor understands that the redevelopment efforts at West Broadway, Franklin Field, and Commonwealth represent the ‘state of the art thinking’ of the 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, however, there has been something of a backlash against efforts to re-invest heavily in low-income public housing communities. Instead, under the federal HOPE VI program established in 1993, more than \$5.5 billion has been allocated to what has slowly evolved into a new paradigm. Boston has completed two of these HOPE VI projects (at Mission Main and Orchard Gardens), is partway through a third one (Maverick Gardens), and is applying for a fourth grant.

Compared to many cities where local officials have used HOPE VI to markedly reduce the numbers of extremely-low-income households served by public housing, Boston planners have endeavored to resist much of the impulse to gentrify neighborhoods. Nationwide, however, HOPE VI policy now generally entails wholesale demolition of housing developments, and their replacement by mixed-income communities in which public housing residents are the minority. On average, one study found, only 11 percent of those public housing residents who were displaced by plans to construct a HOPE VI development have received (or are scheduled to receive) an apartment in the new development. The Mayor wants to know whether public housing should continue to primarily serve extremely-low-income households, or whether this “concentration of poverty” is the primary cause of public housing’s failure and something to be avoided in the future.

The Mayor has asked each group to prepare a 20-minute briefing that addresses the following questions, based (at least in part) on the experience of Boston: Should planners advocate that public housing developments be returned to their origins as communities composed primarily of upwardly-mobile working-class families instead of dominated by extremely-low-income households with high unemployment? Should public housing remain a resource for those with the fewest housing options? Conversely, how should decisionmakers address the needs of those public housing residents who are forced out of their homes by HOPE VI policies that seek to impose “mixed-income” communities? In general, which people should the city choose to serve through ambitious, complex, and often conflict-ridden redevelopment efforts?

In addition, you should prepare a briefing summary—a report in miniature—of no more than 500 words, to summarize your analysis and recommendations. Think of it as the executive summary to a report you don't have to write out in detail. Use the concise, clear writing style of an action memo. Double space it, and leave ample margins. You may include a cover sheet with all group members' names and a project title. Bring a dozen copies of this document to the briefing to use as handouts for Task Force members and other guests.

For additional background on HOPE VI, see two contrasting assessments:

- *A Decade of HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges*
<http://www.urban.org/template.cfm?Template=/TaggedContent/ViewPublication.cfm&PublicationID=8864&NavMenuID=95>
- *False HOPE: A Critical Assessment of the HOPE VI Public Housing Redevelopment Program*: www.nhlp.org/html/pubhsg/FalseHOPE.pdf