

Small Group Discussion—Creighton Court Redevelopment



The City of Richmond contains several neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty, creating pockets of distress that lead to rippling negative effects on health, quality of life, and life expectancy. Conditions in current public housing developments exemplify the negative effects of poverty on quality of life, with high rates of chronic unemployment, crime, and little upward social mobility. Residents who live in the Richmond's public housing units are some of the city's poorest with an average household income of less than \$9,400 annually.

Part of the Mayor's community wealth building initiative calls for a transformation of the public housing model in Richmond starting with Creighton Court in the East End. The Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) and the Boston-based nonprofit developer, The Community Builders, are leading the planned Creighton Court redevelopment. Phase one of plan, which was approved by the Planning Commission this year, will build a mixed-income community in the vacant Old Armstrong High School site in North Church Hill as the start of a process to gradually replace the current public housing at Creighton Court. This is important because mixed-income neighborhoods have been shown to be more likely to have better schools, more resources, attract retail/jobs, have higher safety standards, better transportation, and more parks/sidewalks. The vision is to create mixed-income housing while also strengthening amenities and services available to residents and connecting residents to economic opportunities.

Creighton Court currently houses 1,300 residents within its 504 public housing units. The current Creighton Court residents will move into communities with a balanced mix of housing types available for renters, home owners, and (government subsidized) RRHA tenants. The Armstrong site will include 256 new units, at least half of which will be set aside for Armstrong residents; 36 units will be homeownership, 90 units will be senior apartments, and the balance apartments for families. Creighton Court residents who will need to relocate will be provided

with intensive transition coaching up to a year in advance of the move and their moving expenses will be covered by RRHA.

Future plans call for a mix of multi-family and single-family homes spread across more than 50 acres, including both the Armstrong site and the current Creighton Court footprint as well as scattered sites in the City and region. This larger project would increase the number of housing units to between 1,300 and 1,500 market-rate homes and units, approximately one-third of which will be public housing equivalent. The City and RRHA have committed to a “build-first” policy in which new units must be constructed before existing units are destroyed, as well as to one-for-one replacement of all units. The City and RRHA also are committed to providing comprehensive support services to residents throughout the process as required by the federal Choice Neighborhoods program. A comprehensive transition plan is currently being prepared with input from residents, multiple City agencies, and nonprofit organizations in the community. The entire project will cost upwards of \$100 million to complete, and is expected to take around 8 to 10 years.

A Health Equity Impact Review Tool will be provided to help the attendees work through the scenario. Some of the questions listed below will be raised as part of that tool, but if not, these may be helpful in guiding group discussion.

- *Which populations will bear a higher health or economic burden from the dismantling of Creighton Court and shift to mixed-income housing?*
- *What if the second phase of the project takes years to complete – how will this affect the lives of current residents?*
- *What if property values in the area go up as a result of this project – will one population be disproportionately affected (think about current home-owners and renters in the area)?*
- *What is the impact on resident’s social networks and social interaction - will the relocation sever strong social networks that currently exist among Creighton Court residents? (Prior similar redevelopment efforts have shown low levels of interactions between mixed-income neighbors)*
- *Are there measures in places to appropriately address the stress of relocation?*
- *What strategies could be used to ameliorate the potential negative impacts and enhance the positive impacts of relocation?*
- *What steps can be taken through this process to reduce the level of violence in the community and build a culture based on constructive, peaceful resident engagement?*
- *What social determinants of health are being addressed through this project? What elements need to be included in the project? (Think about, for instance, safe and affordable housing, safety from violence and crime, opportunities for physical activity, residential segregation, economic and job opportunity, transportation to well-paying jobs, access to healthy foods, education, safe routes to school for children)*
- *Which sectors will need to coordinate their work to address these issues?*
- *What additional measures should be incorporated to assess the impact on health, equity, Quality of Life, and poverty reduction?*