



# FROM THE GROUND UP:

Housing as a Catalyst for Community-Driven Redevelopment  
of Chicago's Majority-Black Woodlawn Neighborhood

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Majority-Black, low- and moderate-income neighborhoods typically do not experience investment or positive changes in the physical and social environment on the scale of what happened in Woodlawn, making this community-driven effort to change the neighborhood's trajectory an important case for national attention.

The lessons and recommendations offered by Woodlawn's experience are relevant for many neighborhoods across the United States where movements to achieve economic, housing, and social justice seek to rectify the hardships caused by institutional racism, disinvestment, and exclusion of communities of color by government and private entities.



# FROM THE GROUND UP:

## Housing as a Catalyst for Community-Driven Redevelopment of Chicago's Majority-Black Woodlawn Neighborhood

### Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood, like many urban settings, has had plenty of ups and downs.

Woodlawn has long possessed many ingredients for a thriving urban neighborhood. It has a rich, resilient, and deep-rooted culture that residents value and sustain. It has a history of organizing community-led responses to neighborhood concerns. And it has parks, lakefront property, architecturally attractive historic structures, and easy access to downtown Chicago, the suburbs, and beyond via two train lines, an expressway, major bus routes, and Jean Baptiste Point DuSable Lake Shore Drive.

Woodlawn has also faced challenges, however, of the type experienced by many long-disinvested majority-Black neighborhoods. Redlining during the first half of the 1900s, followed by White flight during the second half—plus a widespread decline in population and an economic downturn—caused housing stock to deteriorate and tensions to escalate among wealthier and poorer residents. By 2010, Woodlawn had fewer homeowners and more renters, many of whom lived in run-down subsidized housing. The area had hundreds of foreclosed houses, gang violence, and chronic crime (although the perception of crime probably was worse than the reality). As a local stakeholder recalled, "I think there was a sense of the neighborhood sort of being on the edge and going in the wrong direction." Residents wanted change but lacked the resources to tackle large-scale community redevelopment and attract new investment.

### Today, after a decade of cross-sector collaboration, Woodlawn is on an upswing.

Formerly vacant parcels now contain hundreds of high-quality, mixed-income rental units and new and renovated single-family homes. A safer transit hub connects residents to the rest of Chicago and brings visitors into the neighborhood. Retail businesses, many owned by Black entrepreneurs, provide services that residents want. At a new community center, neighbors of all ages and income levels gather to learn, play, plan, and access support. Residents have co-created an upbeat community

where people of all backgrounds share a renewed sense of hope and pride. Although Woodlawn has continued to struggle with some issues, such as an uptick in crime during the Covid-19

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*Thanks to tremendous foresight and advocacy from Grove Parc residents and Woodlawn community members, expertise from the national housing developer POAH, and significant federal resources, the revitalization of 63rd and Cottage Grove is an important demonstration of how the development of quality affordable housing can serve as a spark for positive community revitalization.”*

**JOANNA E.V. TROTTER**

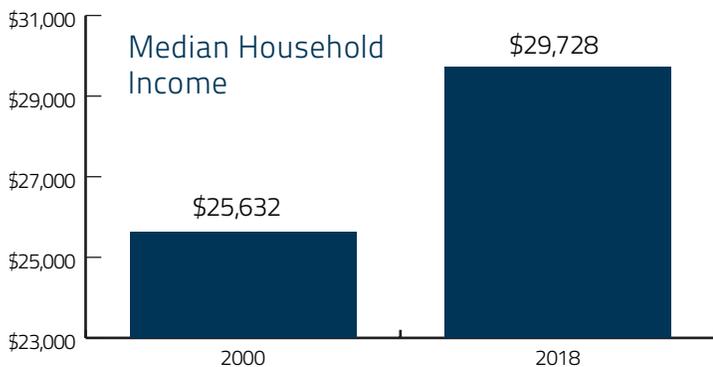
Former Senior Director of Community Impact,  
The Chicago Community Trust

pandemic, the successes achieved thus far have left residents confident that things will continue to improve.

Just as importantly, median household incomes have increased, and neighborhood crime rates have decreased. Woodlawn also experienced changes in housing tenure, as the mix of renters and homeowners became more balanced. Instead of being forced out by a rising housing market, many of Woodlawn's economically vulnerable residents remained and benefited from the improvements. Power holders outside of Woodlawn have come to appreciate the community's worth and made significant, ongoing investments in the area, including the Obama Presidential Center, Friend Health headquarters, and a building boom by the University of Chicago that includes new dormitories, a conference center, graduate school buildings, and a hotel. Today, more undergraduates live in Woodlawn than in Hyde



## CHANGE IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

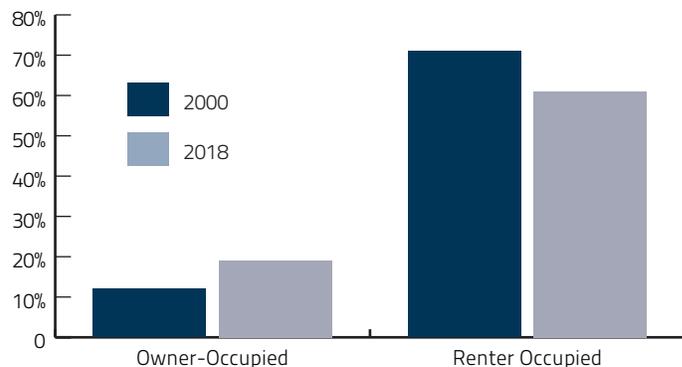


Park, the school's historic base. The university also has prioritized employer-assisted benefits for employees who purchase homes in Woodlawn and has become more deliberate about engaging with resident leaders in meaningful ways.

### Those outcomes didn't happen by accident, and they didn't come easily or quickly.

Woodlawn is changing because Grove Parc residents, led by the Grove Parc Tenants Association, used their voice and power to initiate revitalization and to ensure the existing residents would be able to remain in the neighborhood. Other resident and community leaders, neighborhood-based organizations, and affordable housing advocates also organized against displacement and played a significant role in shaping the direction of neighborhood redevelopment. They were part of a coalition that also involved the nonprofit Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), Network of Woodlawn, the City of Chicago, the University of Chicago, and other public and private partners and funders. The coalition worked hard to overcome deep-seated doubts, opposition, and fluctuations in some partners' commitment. The changes also were the result of an intentional and adaptive strategy that put residents' interests first, built on existing neighborhood-improvement efforts by community organizations, and prioritized partnerships. The strategy coordinated leadership, preserved and built new affordable housing, redeveloped the neighborhood, and leveraged hundreds of millions of dollars in public and private investments.

## CHANGE IN HOUSING TENURE



The strategy used in Woodlawn illustrates how the redevelopment of affordable housing and related amenities can be a catalyst for broader, more equitable neighborhood development—if change-makers have a shared vision, an executable plan, and the right partners at the table.

The lessons and recommendations offered by Woodlawn's experience are relevant for many neighborhoods across the United States where movements to achieve economic, housing, and social justice seek to rectify the hardships caused by institutional racism, disinvestment, and exclusion of communities of color by government and private entities.

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*With POAH we have an opportunity to halt the displacement of low-income renters...Our goal is to ensure that they can stay, age in place, and ultimately transfer wealth to the next generation. We believe that these new ideas and bold experimentation are critical enablers of social change.”*

**THURMAN “TONY” SMITH**

Senior Vice President,  
Community Development Banking, PNC Bank

# BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOODLAWN NEIGHBORHOOD

Woodlawn occupies two square miles on Chicago's lake-front, just south of Hyde Park and adjacent to the University of Chicago campus. Cottage Grove Avenue runs north-south through the neighborhood, and 63rd Street runs east-west; a stop on the city's Green Line marks where the two thoroughfares meet. Woodlawn's population was almost entirely White until the late 1950s, when redlining, blockbusting, and steering in the broader real estate market led to turnover and the demographics began shifting to mostly Black residents. Landlords divided up apartments to house more people, and over time the housing stock deteriorated.

In the 1960s, the university sought to expand into the neighborhood, using federal funding for urban renewal. Concerned that low-income residents would be displaced, organizer Saul Alinsky unified two groups of Woodlawn activists to fight the plan and also to protest the low quality of schools serving Black children and the racist practices of local landlords. This alliance, later named The Woodlawn Organization (TWO), reached a deal with the university in which the school could expand but would have to help secure federal dollars for replacement housing. In the 1960s, the city demolished three blocks of commercial buildings along Cottage Grove to make room for a new development called Woodlawn Gardens. TWO owned and operated the property until 1986, but the buildings were plagued by structural flaws and financial problems. After the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) foreclosed on it, the Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corporation (WPIC) purchased the property for redevelopment. The former Woodlawn Gardens reopened in 1990 as Grove Parc Plaza Apartments, a Section 8 housing development with retail components.

In the 1970s, Woodlawn Community Development Corporation (WCDC, TWO's real estate and management arm) helped to construct and rehabilitate rental units in Woodlawn and across Chicago. Through its efforts and those of the Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors Association (WECAN) and others, during the 1990s the area saw growth in housing and a new YMCA, a library, and a commercial strip along 63rd Street. Nonetheless, Woodlawn's population continued to shrink, and unemployment grew between 2000 and 2010.

Much of the early planning to address neighborhood decline in Woodlawn occurred under the leadership of the Network of Woodlawn (NOW) and through the New Communities Program (NCP), a comprehensive community initiative

funded by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). NOW and NCP started planning for comprehensive community development in 2003. Their plan, "Rebuilding the Village Quality of Life"—part of a series of neighborhood plans LISC funded around the city—has informed community development efforts in the neighborhood since 2005.



In 2004, the university decided to expand further along the southern border of 60th and 61st streets with student dormitories, an arts center, theological seminary, and mixed-use buildings. At the time, Chicago had a housing revival spurred by the easy availability of mortgage credit. Developers built and renovated condos and apartments across the community, including south of 63rd Street and west of Cottage Grove. However, the owners of Grove Parc had defaulted on the mortgage. Community activists known as Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP) mobilized to call attention to the needs of Grove Parc's residents. In 2008, HUD facilitated the transfer of the property, which housed 834 residents in 325 households, from WPIC to the city, which immediately transferred it to the Boston-based organization Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH). The buildings were in such poor shape that they could not be preserved and required demolition.

The global financial crisis that hit in 2008 temporarily slowed Woodlawn's revitalization process. Property values fell, and foreclosures and vacancies grew. The tide began to turn, however, in 2011 when POAH and the City of Chicago received a \$30.5 million Choice Neighborhoods Initiative grant from HUD.

# UNDERLYING VALUES

Woodlawn's revitalization story is also the story of POAH's innovative approach to housing development—not as a dominant outsider but as part of the engine for co-creation and partnership with existing residents.

In 2011, POAH and the City of Chicago received one of the first Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (Choice) grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The \$30.5 million grant was to implement a community change initiative, including efforts to support positive outcomes for households living in Grove Parc, reduce concentrated poverty, and attract additional investment throughout the neighborhood. Explicit commitments included providing opportunities for existing households intended to increase wages over time, improve access to high-quality schools and early learning programs, and improve physical and mental health.

POAH based its plans for implementing the grant on these values:

- 1. Put neighborhood residents' interests first.** The rationale for all work in the neighborhood stemmed from a commitment to creating high-quality resources that residents want, need, and value. For instance, it was the desire among homeowners and others who lived near Grove Parc to increase homeownership and decrease rentals that led POAH and its partners to develop a program, Renew Woodlawn, creating affordable pathways to homeownership. It was residents' concerns about local sources of food and employment that led POAH to recruit a grocery store, Jewel-Osco, and ensure a focus on hiring and training neighborhood residents to work there. And it was residents' articulation of their needs that led partners to ensure that the "new" Woodlawn offered space and services for child care and early education, academic support, afterschool enrichment and recreation, GED classes, job training and placement, connections to health services, retail businesses, help with buying a home, and more.
- 2. Prioritize partnerships with neighborhood residents, organizations, and businesses.** These partnerships—with individual community leaders as well as the Network of Woodlawn, the local chamber of commerce, block clubs, churches, and others—were designed to lead activities that directly reached residents, including resource fairs, community gardens, and targeted programming.
- 3. Preserve affordable housing.** All 28 Grove Parc buildings had to be demolished, which ordinarily would have displaced more than 350 households. However, POAH committed to keeping all 504 subsidized apartments available through a mixture of new construction and the revitalization of existing buildings.
- 4. Attempt to expand affordable housing options for low-income households.** While not every Grove Parc apartment could be rebuilt in the same place, POAH committed to expanding affordable and subsidized housing options. POAH committed to replacing at least 378 of the subsidized Grove Parc apartments (75%) within Woodlawn proper; the balance could be placed in nearby neighborhoods, subject to the approval of the Grove Parc Tenants Association and HUD. Ultimately, 414 Grove Parc subsidized units will be in Woodlawn, with 90 located elsewhere. Furthermore, every Grove Parc resident who wanted to remain in Woodlawn was guaranteed a new home, either in a new building or a newly rehabbed one.
- 5. Use intentional design to improve residents' interactions with the physical environment.** New construction along Cottage Grove was designed to make the street more walkable, maximize health and safety by including landscaping and open-air spaces, and set entrances back from the sidewalk. POAH also created outdoor spaces behind the buildings so children could play safely away from traffic.
- 6. Coordinate leadership of other neighborhood improvement efforts.** The Woodlawn neighborhood underwent several different development studies and plans over time, but implementation of the plans proceeded in fits and starts. POAH sought to partner and coordinate with neighborhood groups so their prior work could inform the Choice Neighborhoods plan, with hopes that the leaders of those efforts would commit to improve housing, education, social and economic outcomes for residents, and the new development. Thus, for example, POAH focused on housing and economic development while the Network of Woodlawn doubled down on its efforts to improve education by organizing cohorts of school principals, teachers, and parent advisory councils to examine school safety and develop better curricula.



## POAH'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: Transparency, Inclusivity, and Consistency

As anti-POAH signs went up in the neighborhood around Grove Parc, and homeowners held large public meetings to vent their anger, newly hired POAH staff member Felicia Dawson saw that the volatile situation was “about to explode.” Although she was brought on primarily to work with gang leaders on safety issues, Dawson immediately expanded her focus to engaging with a wide set of community members—including long-time Black community leaders who had been mentored by famed organizer Saul Alinsky in the 1960s and had strong organizing skills. Dawson had attended high school in Woodlawn, and her local relationships and knowledge enabled POAH to navigate the tangle of local stakeholders and their competing agendas.

POAH didn't have a lot of experience with community engagement at the scale required by Woodlawn's transformation, although Dawson had a community organizing and project management background. In response to the persistence of the Grove Parc Tenants Association and the surrounding neighbors, Dawson organized an internal team to forge relationships in the community, connect the redevelopment dots, and establish responsiveness as one of POAH's key approaches to engagement. The team included the manager of the overall project, whose job included responding to what happened in the community; the property manager; and members of the property management team who worked with residents on issues involving the property and its relationships to the community. It was through this process that POAH learned the importance of valuing a community's own vision for itself.

The community engagement team's initial strategy was to build consensus by being relentlessly transparent. Team members talked with everyone who had a bone to pick and attended every possible block meeting. They organized community sessions where residents could hear directly from HUD staff and attorneys about the scattered-site approach to subsidized housing. Staff from POAH shared details of the Choice grant budget, explained how the properties would be managed, and described the roles each entity would play. Resident leaders and activists sat with representatives from the police department, three major developers working in the city, and HUD's regional office to hash out what could and couldn't be done. Even Shawn Donovan, then the U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, came to Chicago to meet with Woodlawn's resident leaders and respond to their concerns.

POAH staff realized the underlying tensions were rooted in clashes over race and economic class. While still working to build consensus, POAH doubled down on insisting that everyone who lived in Grove Parc had a right to remain and that the neighborhood's growth required a balance of various types of housing and retail. POAH's unflinching commitment to that principle, along with its consistent and transparent interactions with community members, established POAH's role as a trusted co-creator and co-owner, along with neighborhood stakeholders, of Woodlawn's success. These relationships will be vital as POAH and the community emerge from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the neighborhood and seek to move forward together, including in the planning for the Obama Presidential Center.

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*As years have passed, I have seen major changes. We became one community together. The neighborhood became safer. I have seen the young people become more community-minded. They have begun to care about where they live, too. I'm watching the community become cleaner. I am watching landlords doing things differently now. I'm watching people take care of the neighborhood now. It has become the norm rather than the expectation.”*

**JEANNE CLARK**

Long-time community resident



## THE APPROACH

### 1. Establish legitimacy, trust, and shared aspirations by building authentic, collaborative relationships with a diverse coalition of neighborhood, city, and local and national organizations.

During 2009-2010, POAH worked to build consensus around the redevelopment plan through meetings with resident leaders, city officials, University of Chicago leaders, and neighborhood stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, the plan called for demolishing and rebuilding Grove Parc as a new mixed-income community called Woodlawn Park. A memorandum of agreement between the tenants' association and POAH created protocols for a relocation process that aimed to minimize displacement of the 350-plus households still living in Grove Parc. The agreement ensured resident engagement in development decisions, including input into the specific housing subsidy mix and designs for a redeveloped mixed-income community.

POAH had expected the plan to be embraced by community members with open arms. Certainly, many Grove Parc residents liked it because the existing property was in terrible condition, but other Woodlawn residents pushed back. The Grove Parc Tenants Association opposed any plan that might push residents out of the neighborhood. Nearby homeowners were upset to learn that POAH was going to purchase and rehab several other buildings near Grove Parc, after having been told initially that POAH would not buy them. Homeowners and several local community groups also didn't like the idea of having some Section 8 housing moved out of the Grove Parc footprint and into the broader community—part of the Choice initiative's plan to deconcentrate poverty and address segregation by scattering subsidized housing throughout neighborhoods. Already flanked by Section 8 housing on several sides, homeowners felt outnumbered and requested a moratorium on subsidized housing.

1. At the neighborhood level, POAH has worked with WECAN (Woodlawn East Community and Neighbors), One Woodlawn, Network of Woodlawn, Apostolic Church of God, Sunshine Gospel Ministries, the Woodlawn Children's Promise Community, and STOP (Southside Together Organizing for Power). Within the city, POAH has worked most closely with the University of Chicago, Neighborhood Housing Services, South East Chicago Commission, Community Investment Corporation (CIC), Preservation Compact, Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), Emerald South, and DL3. At the national level, POAH has engaged with the National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities, Federal Home Loan Bank, and Enterprise Community Partners.

The process of turning community opposition into support played out over two and a half years (see box on page 7). During that time, POAH emphasized the importance of reaching a balance of owned homes, rental properties, subsidized units, and commercial spaces in the neighborhood. POAH also found ways to engage all of the stakeholders in activities that touched on common interests:

- POAH worked with neighborhood leaders in the Network of Woodlawn to improve public safety by funding and assisting the Woodlawn Public Safety Alliance, which contributed to a drop in shootings and murders. POAH staff eventually joined the Network's board of directors.
- POAH hired a community impact coordinator to serve as a liaison between property management and residents. It also established a program that supported some renters in becoming homeowners, which increased the neighborhood's stability.
- A mini block grant program brought homeowners and subsidized residents together to organize and implement projects of their own design, such as community gardens and block club events.
- POAH staff joined block clubs and attended other affinity groups' meetings, such as those held by small contractors. In the "organic conversations" that ensued, people shared stories about Woodlawn's past and realized they had experiences in common.
- Community members gradually came together to make shared decisions about how to create opportunities for young people to engage in positive activities, how to make the area more walkable, what kinds of retail and commercial options to attract, and other concerns. POAH held off on bringing in specific businesses until they were sure the goods and services met the community's interests, and they prioritized finding Black business owners from the neighborhood.

Through these efforts, diverse members of the Woodlawn neighborhood came to support the revitalization of their shared community. Equally important to POAH's growing acceptance was the performance of its property management team. By effectively managing the buildings, especially those located off the footprint of the subsidized housing project on Cottage Grove, the team allayed fears that those properties would negatively impact surrounding blocks.

## **2. Adapt plans as needed in response to contextual and market factors.**

The initial plan for Woodlawn's revitalization called for developing a substantial amount of market-rate housing early on. But the economy was still recovering from the global economic recession of 2008-2010, and POAH leaders concluded that

focusing first on subsidized and affordable housing would stabilize the market and help clear the way for more market-rate development in later years. Although the demolition of old buildings was originally designed to proceed in concert with new construction, POAH accelerated the final and largest phase in order to better market the 3.7-acre retail site at 61st and Cottage Grove. Accelerating this phase created space for residents and other community members to reimagine what this area could be like, which fostered a sense of hope as well as urgency.

The redevelopment now encompasses six new apartment buildings containing 244 units (as of 2021) on the old Grove Parc footprint, along with parking, laundry facilities, and community rooms; Woodlawn Resource Center, an 8,000 square foot facility that provides employment and financial supports for Woodlawn residents, community gathering space for events and meetings, and space for recreation and enrichment; a Jewel-Osco grocery store; and outdoor amenities for senior citizens. As the market improved, POAH also built Trianon Lofts at Woodlawn Park, a mixed-income building with 24 two-bedroom, two-bath units, half of which were unrestricted market-rate units.

## **3. Establish small wins to serve as proof points, attract support, and build momentum.**

Despite concerns about the neighborhood's marketability to investors, POAH decided to move ahead with demolishing the Grove Parc subsidized housing project, renovating buildings around the community, and rehousing former Grove Parc residents. In doing so, POAH hoped to create momentum that would make it easier for people to see the potential of the redeveloping site. Indeed, investment picked up when the changes became tangible. Outsiders and residents alike saw new homes and buildings that looked inviting and aligned with the neighborhood's historical architecture.

Ultimately, POAH partnered with a commercial developer to bring the first new full-service grocery store in decades to Woodlawn, Jewel-Osco, locating it on a former Grove Parc parcel. POAH then worked with the grocer to maximize job opportunities for local residents, and by the time the store opened, 376 Woodlawn residents had been hired. POAH continues to work with store management to support retention and maintain a steady flow of Woodlawn residents in the hiring process.

Getting Jewel-Osco into the neighborhood boosted the redevelopment's visibility and helped other potential business owners see more clearly how Woodlawn connects to Hyde Park and surrounding neighborhoods. POAH sought to attract and retain businesses that Woodlawn residents wanted, especially small businesses; to purchase and relocate businesses that many residents opposed, such as a check cashing store and a liquor store; and to create and expand businesses that residents valued, such as Daley's Restaurant, a neighborhood landmark and

Chicago's oldest operating restaurant. POAH particularly worked to attract businesses owned and operated by Black entrepreneurs, such as a UPS franchise, a preschool/day care center that serves almost 100 families, and an African-diaspora-themed dance company. These efforts filled 90,000 square feet of new commercial and community spaces in Woodlawn.

#### **4. Advance affordable homeownership and rental housing while stabilizing neglected homes and blocks throughout the neighborhood.**

This tactic was intended to reduce the concentration of project-based Section 8 units and to spread opportunity across the community. Over the course of 13 years, POAH has built, acquired and/or renovated more than 1,000 housing units in Woodlawn, including a variety of assisted, workforce, and market-rate rental units. Of these, 337 were "replacement units" for Grove Parc residents, with another 41 replacement units identified for renovation. In addition to the Grove Parc property, POAH purchased and renovated 25 other Woodlawn apartment

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*The Department of Housing works to reverse decades of disinvestment in Black and Brown communities through equitable development that revitalizes neighborhoods while minimizing displacement. In my experience, the success of that work hinges on our ability to build trust with residents and co-develop plans that include the diverse voices and needs of each community.*

*This deeper understanding of the unique needs of each neighborhood can only be realized by listening to those who know them best, so that we can achieve our goal of helping every Chicagoan choose and remain in quality housing that is affordable, safe, and healthy.”*

**MARISA NOVARA**

Commissioner, Chicago Department of Housing

buildings. POAH continues to own and operate these properties, which include a mix of Section 8 replacement housing and apartments at other income levels. In 2021, POAH purchased a 240-unit property called Island Terrace, near the site of the Obama Presidential Center, which will be renovated and maintained as an affordable housing development.

POAH also funded Renew Woodlawn, an initiative inspired by West Woodlawn Coalition and other local community organizations to acquire, finance, renovate, and sell for homeownership vacant homes on blocks that needed housing stability. POAH allocated \$3.2 million of its Choice grant to create the fund and partnered with Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, Community Investment Corporation, and the Chicago Department of Housing to ensure that low- and moderate-income households could purchase and maintain homes. Renew Woodlawn helped to advance an affordable homeownership strategy while also preventing the tear-down of single-family homes and dual-unit properties. This strategy was part of POAH's commitment—reinforced through resident planning activities—to ensure a balance of housing options in the neighborhood. The program resulted in 44 home sales—a total of 69 units, because many included two apartments per building. A second phase is planned for 2022. Renew Woodlawn intentionally focused on acquiring vacant, foreclosed, and at-risk properties that could be restored for resale but also to stabilize key blocks in West Woodlawn.

#### **5. Preserve subsidized housing so low-income residents have options to stay.**

All original Grove Parc households had the option of moving into either a new apartment within the newly constructed buildings along Cottage Grove Avenue or a renovated building in the broader community, or taking a Housing Choice Voucher and moving elsewhere. This was part of a strategy to ensure that redevelopment did not lead to displacement, and it was essential for gaining the trust of existing community members and groups. The Grove Parc Tenants Association helped POAH design the process for temporarily relocating and then returning residents after rebuilding was completed. New apartments were offered through a resident lottery conducted before the revitalization work began. Each household had up to three housing choices so they could select the one that best met their needs. In the end, 25% of the original households remained housed within a POAH-owned unit, while 75% moved out. POAH staff supported and stayed in touch with residents during the transition.

#### **6. Augment housing and commercial redevelopment with private-sector amenities, nonprofit services, and equitable transit development and improvement.**

POAH staff, leaders at the University of Chicago, and other community stakeholders developed a new master plan for the critical intersection of 63rd & Cottage Grove Avenue, including a more pedestrian-friendly corridor that better connects residents and visitors to the Green Line transit station. POAH also worked with the Chicago Transit Authority to improve the Green Line station, using money from the Choice grant on signage,



lighting, and safety cameras. With the Obama Presidential Center slated to be built in nearby Jackson Park, the transit authority and city have secured \$60 million in state funding to develop a new, modern station that is currently in design. POAH's ongoing role will be to ensure that the development process is inclusive and equitable for low- and moderate-income residents. In fact, the transit authority plans to include its new station customer service center and train access point in a commercial building that POAH expects to develop beginning in late 2022 or early 2023.

Numerous other enhancements give Woodlawn residents more access to opportunities and supports than they had before the redevelopment. For example, Choice grant funds enabled the Woodlawn Children's Promise Community to provide after-school programming and instructional assistance in two elementary schools attended by approximately 60% of youth who relocated from Grove Parc. POAH leased the first floor of Trianon Lofts to a preschool that provides child care and early education to children aged 2 to 5, which met an important need for local working parents. And MetroSquash, a nonprofit organization that provides academic support, competitive squash, and enrichment opportunities for young people, developed and operates a 21,000 square foot youth recreation and education center on former Grove Parc land donated by POAH.

### **7. Invest in improving the individual and collective capacities of community members as essential components of a sustainable mixed-income neighborhood.**

POAH's approach to direct services began as a tool to reach residents and provide traditional case management for needed supports, but it grew into a way to deliver the resources residents needed and wanted to become financially stable and

upwardly mobile. The Woodlawn Resource Center has become a LISC-supported financial opportunity center—a place where all Woodlawn residents can go for employment assistance and placement, GED classes, job-specific training, connections to health services, and help with buying a home. By mid-2021, more than 1,200 Woodlawn residents had found work or increased their hours of employment by working with resource center staff, and some had made the transition from subsidized housing to homeownership.

### **8. Assist broader comprehensive planning**

In 2020 and 2021, the City of Chicago undertook a comprehensive effort to review all of Woodlawn's redevelopment plans and, in collaboration with neighborhood stakeholders and POAH, develop one central plan intended to inform community development efforts within the neighborhood. The city's efforts were driven partly by new opportunities presented by the planned Obama Presidential Center, as well as concerns about gentrification and potential displacement.

POAH participated in and hosted community meetings related to the Obama Presidential Center and its potential impact on the community. Initially, much of this work focused on attracting the center to Woodlawn; later, it focused on how to shape and manage development in a way that minimizes displacement without stifling creativity.

POAH also contributed to the final deliberations of a Woodlawn Housing Preservation ordinance led by the Department of Housing, which the City Council adopted in September 2020. This legislation assists with the rehabilitation of existing affordable housing, promotes equitable and inclusive income diversity, and attempts to protect existing residents from displacement.

# KEY OUTCOMES

Majority-Black, low- and moderate-income neighborhoods typically do not experience investment or positive changes in the physical and social environment on the scale of what happened in Woodlawn, making this community-driven effort to change the neighborhood's trajectory an important case for national attention. As the following data show, key outcomes occurred in public and private investment, resident wealth building and economic mobility, homeownership rates and housing values, neighborhood amenities, and public safety.

## Woodlawn attracted a broad array of public and private investment.

- POAH and its partners leveraged HUD's Choice grant multiple times, ultimately bringing more than \$400 million to Woodlawn's redevelopment, including \$170,712,533 for housing from 16 public and private sources. Significant public funding came from multiple City agencies, HUD, and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA), as well as the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program administered by IHDA and the city.

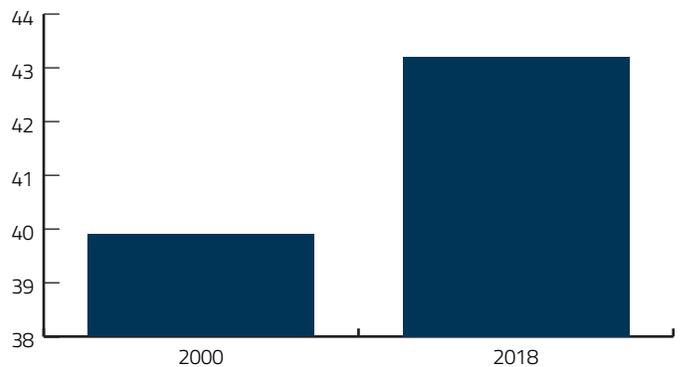
## Woodlawn households' economic stability improved.

- The median household income in Woodlawn increased between 2000-2018, from \$25,632 to \$29,728.
- Income diversity increased, with a growth in households with higher incomes and a decline in the number of households with lower incomes.
  - A group of more affluent residents emerged for the first time, earning more than \$75,000 (7% of residents), \$100,000 (7%), and \$150,000 per year (4%).
  - The proportion of households earning less than \$25,000 per year dropped to less than half (from 65% to 48%).
- Households with children benefited from the income growth. Two-adult households with children began with the lowest average earned income (\$2,340 in 2009) but had the greatest earned income growth (76%).
- The employment rate of Woodlawn residents increased between 2000 and 2018, from 39.9% to 43.1%. This represents an 8% increase in the employment rate.

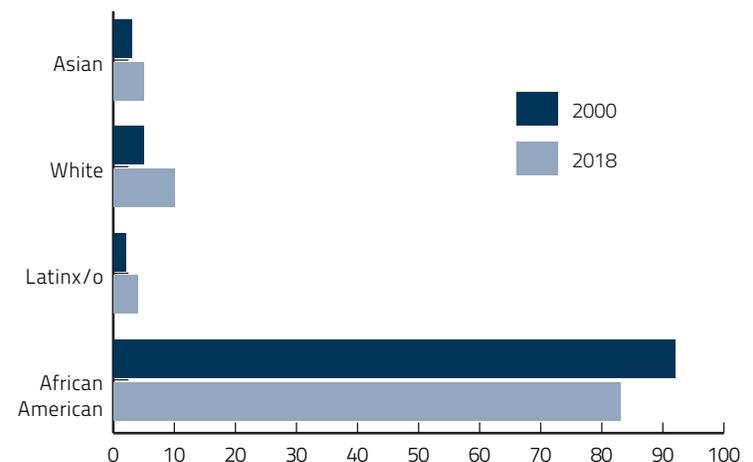
## Original households that remained in a POAH-owned property gained income.

- Average incomes increased for the original Grove Parc households that remained living in Woodlawn, from \$6,849 in 2009 to \$16,316 in 2019. Despite significant efforts by

## CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT RATE



## CHANGE IN RACIAL DIVERSITY



POAH to ensure the housing stability of original Grove Parc residents, the return rate of 25% was lower than what most staff expected.

## Woodlawn saw racial diversity increase, while remaining a majority-Black neighborhood.

- Woodlawn remained a majority-Black neighborhood despite a decrease in the African American population between 2000 and 2018 (from 92.7% to 82.8%, a 10.7% decline), which mirrors citywide changes reflected in the 2020 Census.
- The neighborhood population as a whole became more racially and ethnically diverse, with an increase in White (4.3% to 9.7%), Latinx (1.1% to 3.2%), and Asian (1.2% to 4.2%) residents.

## Homeownership rates and housing values increased, as did the median cost of renting, while the proportion of renters shrank.

- Renter-occupied units decreased (-14.7%), while owner-occupied units increased (23.1%) from 2000-2018.

## Woodlawn attracted and sustained important housing and neighborhood amenities.

- The redevelopment included more than 90,000 square feet of new commercial and community spaces, including:
  - The first new full-service grocery store in Woodlawn in decades
  - An 8,000 square foot Woodlawn Resource Center, which houses employment and financial supports for Woodlawn residents

- A 21,000 square foot youth recreation/education center, Metrosquash
- A new early childhood education center

## Public safety efforts led to stability and a sense of connection across the neighborhood.

- Public safety efforts, plus the new housing and commercial redevelopment, have reduced vacancy and blight, improved management and operations of housing developments, and created a more walkable neighborhood.
- Crime fell steadily year-over-year beginning in 2000, from 22.8 violent crimes per 1,000 residents in 2012—more than 200 percent higher than the citywide rate—to 18 crimes per 1,000 residents in 2019. The number of people gathering in parks, taking public transit, and exercising in public has grown visibly.

# LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

Despite Woodlawn's renaissance, the work of sustaining progress remains. The neighborhood is at a crossroads between new, market-rate housing opportunities and the threat of gentrification, which could exclude long-time, less-affluent residents. Plans for future investments, such as the Obama Presidential Center in Northeast Woodlawn, along with a recent jump in median home prices to \$287,500—the biggest percentage increase in all of Chicago in 2020<sup>2</sup>—bring new development opportunities and new potential for displacement.

Those pressures are specific to Woodlawn, but not unique. What can this neighborhood's redevelopment experience, results, and lessons tell residents and community leaders, policy makers, planners, elected officials, private partners, funders, and others about how to move forward?

POAH's experience in Woodlawn suggests the following lessons about how to advance inclusive, equitable mixed-income neighborhoods while prioritizing benefits for existing low-income residents.

### 1. Cultivate authentic, meaningful community engagement by being transparent, inclusive, and consistent.

Earn the community's trust before expecting acceptance and cooperation. Start by acknowledging and respecting the community's history with development and neighborhood change. Recognize that residents have likely been promised many changes that never came through. Allow space for community members to discuss their hopes, dreams, disappointments, and resentments. Respect their feelings and ensure that their

current needs are understood by other partners. Recognize that it is unreasonable to expect that there will not be at least some opposition to outsiders' plans for redevelopment, coming from community members who have been ignored, exploited, and deceived for decades and from neighborhood groups such as tenant associations. Next, continue working with community members in an authentic way to achieve the community-building goals of neighborhood revitalization. It takes time, money, and human resources to work this way, but the value added is far greater than the cost.

The following tactics proved especially useful for POAH's engagement with Woodlawn communities:

- **Work closely with the people most affected.** Use community organizing techniques to help them advocate effectively for what they want. Involve community members in making decisions such as what locations to acquire, what materials to use for the buildings, and where people should be temporarily housed during redevelopment.
- **Work with all types of stakeholders, including small, indigenous neighborhood groups** that outsiders often ignore. Connect them with each other to increase their collective power and capacities.
- **Put your own skin in the game.** Commit publicly to what you will do, what it will cost, and what resources you will bring to bear. Besides demonstrating your accountability to the neighborhood, this has the advantage of positioning developers as a resource funnel rather than an endless money source.

- **Communicate openly with all partners, including resident leaders, block clubs, and tenant/resident associations.** This is the only way to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of what is happening and have adequate opportunities to contribute their ideas and expertise. In particular, be clear about what is possible and what is not, and for what reasons.
- **Establish a neighborhood presence by having a full-time community liaison on staff.** This should be someone who represents the neighborhood's social and racial demographic majority, as well as someone with the ability to go wherever people gather. Hold informal and formal conversations, listen carefully, identify flash points and trouble spots, create relationships with all sorts of community members—such as people who are homeless and people in contact with the criminal justice system—and figure out how to resolve problems. Bring this community liaison on as a staff member at the beginning of the initiative, to alleviate community mistrust and avoid entrenched resistance.
- **Bring the property management function in-house to ensure it's done in a community-responsive way.** Working closely with the community liaison, POAH's property manager attended neighborhood meetings, served as a second "face" of the organization in the community, and responded promptly to community members' questions and concerns.

## 2. Reach out to neighborhood institutions—early in the development process—to gain their support, build bridges among them, and connect them with outside partners.

Entities like Network of Woodlawn and neighborhood block groups are important to have as allies and partners. Connecting with institutions that are based in the neighborhood helps to establish a positive working relationship, clarify each party's role, and create a bridge between institutions (in and out of the neighborhood) that either do not have strong relationships with each other or are not familiar with each other. A developer that has relationships with neighborhood institutions also may be more attractive to outside institutions that lack those connections, and the developer can encourage outside partners to become more transparent to community stakeholders about their plans.

## 3. Encourage local government to play a "more-than-money" role.

All types of public funding (city, state, and HUD) are necessary for redeveloping long-neglected neighborhoods, but the city and state's role goes beyond providing money. The city housing agency often owns or manages the properties in need of redevelopment, so its involvement and commitment is essential to make rebuilding, renovation, and new construction possible. Designating a senior person who is committed to the project, able to coordinate existing programs, and has decision-making authority is especially important.

City leaders' support as champions of the redevelopment plan can be a key to securing HUD grants and tax credits, attracting state funds, winning approval from the public at large, coordinating with necessary local agencies (e.g., transportation, schools, parks and recreation), gaining support from private stakeholders and anchor institutions, and building momentum for change. The significance of this role means that redevelopers should expect to put effort into cultivating the commitment of city government (and other public funders) and sustaining it beyond the release of grant funds, especially if city leadership changes.

## 4. Seek private dollars for community building.

Neighborhood revitalization is about *community* building as well as housing construction and real estate development, and private funders play a key role in supporting this dimension. Community building reaches far beyond the physical structures of a neighborhood. It seeks to: organize and empower residents to advocate for themselves and their community; improve social, economic, and racial equity; build social cohesion; bring in the amenities, opportunities, and services that residents want and need; and influence policies and practices that affect health, education, employment, the environment, and other determinants of residents' quality of life. These are essential dimensions of neighborhood revitalization, but they require time and dedicated personnel, which makes them costly. Furthermore, community building is needed not only at the beginning of an initiative, to build trusting relationships and attract other resources, but as the initiative unfolds, to ensure that the neighborhood changes reflect and respond to what residents want.

Often, private sources are better positioned than public funding streams to invest in community building; it is also appropriate for them to do so because many (especially banks and commercial interests) contributed to the need for community building by ignoring low-income communities in the past. To attract private funding for this purpose, redevelopers have to "sell" the vision for what they are trying to accomplish and put it in context. The message should be that this is not just another affordable housing deal, it is part of a broader plan to strengthen and transform a neighborhood *with* community residents.

## 5. Reach general agreement on plans and then begin to create proof points of change, rather than waiting to move forward until total consensus exists.

The quest for 100 percent buy-in by every stakeholder can be intimidating. By starting work on some projects after reaching general agreement (while continuing discussions with stakeholders and funders), POAH accomplished two things: it developed momentum for change, and it created tangible examples of progress. Both outcomes made it easier for people to envision something different happening in Woodlawn.

# WHAT'S NEXT? ACTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

## Implications for Residents and Community Leaders

- **Recognize your inherent capacities and power and assert them to participate fully in planning and redevelopment activities.** Your vision for change, your voice, and your ability to galvanize action bring as much value as anyone else's to the neighborhood change process. Develop your vision, so that you can drive how growth happens in your community.
- **Develop your technical skills.** Identify people in the community who already have these skills and bring them on board to help. Ask questions so others can learn about how the housing and neighborhood redevelopment process works.
- **Be willing to trust.** Once you discern whom you can trust, have confidence that together you can achieve your shared vision.
- **Be insistent and persistent.** Don't let up on trying to bring your vision to reality.

## Implications for Policymakers

- **Use federal dollars to leverage private investment.** Federal funds often are the key to unlocking state and local funds, and it can be difficult to attract other investors without them—especially for stigmatized efforts such as making housing available for low-income residents.
- **Use state and local funds to attract additional developer investment in affordable housing projects.** To preserve and maintain existing affordable housing, use tax credit incentives to stimulate developer involvement.
- **Allocate public funds to support homeowners' efforts to maintain and renovate affordable housing in neighborhoods.** Helping long-term and lower-income owners improve and preserve their homes will help them remain in place.
- **Help owners of smaller rental properties with lower rents to finance repairs and upgrades in return for maintaining affordability** and keeping so-called "naturally occurring" affordable housing (NOAH) from converting to higher-end market housing.
- **Recognize that affordable housing, if done effectively, can be a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization** and does not hinder growth.

## Implications for Planners, Developers, Funders, and Practitioners

- **Make room at the table for community members and seek to sit at tables where they are already planning community initiatives.** Invite resident and community leaders to have a meaningful role in planning, considering key questions, making choices, and resolving challenges as the work unfolds. Be aware of your own racial, economic, and other biases that impact how you build relationships with community members.
- **Prioritize anti-displacement policies and practices.** These policies not only help protect low-income residents from displacement, they also send a signal that redevelopment efforts will be targeted to include current community members.
- **Maximize benefits for the original community members, including people of color.** For example, focus on fostering small businesses already in the neighborhood and on attracting and supporting new entrepreneurs from within the area. Concentrate investment in geographic areas where the funding will make the most impact, such as hubs that can impact surrounding areas. Assume that original community members will not experience benefits unless intentional efforts are made to share power with them in the process of neighborhood change.
- **Cultivate authentic, trusting, accountable partnerships.** Strive to establish an honest and open relationship in which partners hold each other accountable for their practices and for what they are or are not doing for the community. In relationships with community members, start by listening and seeking to understand residents' concerns. Then, work with them to identify how the reinvestment efforts can help to address historical and contemporary subordination.
- **Invest with intentionality.** Identify what each group involved in an initiative needs and figure out how they can meet those needs through their involvement in making the initiative a success.
- **Seek partners' input, and help them see where they fit in.** For instance, elected officials often must focus on immediate results and short-term initiatives, so it is important to help them understand what changes they can make within their risk tolerance. Similarly, invite community members to be a part of the process instead of assuming you have all the answers. Provide them with resources to participate and invite them to engage on key questions and challenges.



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