Celebrating the achievements of our Puget Sound HOPE VI communities

This issue of My View is a history and a celebration of the six HOPE VI redevelopments in the Puget Sound region. To date, just one project, Seattle Housing Authority’s (SHA) Westwood Heights, has completed construction. But all six redevelopments are in the process of building thriving communities and positively transforming their surrounding neighborhoods.

We’ll take an in-depth look at the groundbreaking history of SHA’s NewHolly. That story will be told from the perspective of several leaders, including Doris Koo, Doris Morgan, former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, and current SHA Executive Director Tom Tierney. Next, we’ll take a close look at Tacoma Housing Authority’s (THA) Salishan development and King County Housing Authority’s (KCHA) Greenbridge community. Finally, we’ll survey the remaining current projects and briefly look ahead to proposed new developments that are taking shape today.

Community pride in Tacoma Housing Authority’s Salishan
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HOPE VI’s ambitions

Our Puget Sound HOPE VI communities are among the most successful in the country. They frequently get national attention as examples of how to “get it right.” This is urban renewal on a massive scale, the creation of planned communities that can accommodate and knit together a host of cultural, ethnic, and economic differences, along with a multiplicity of languages. But, as successful as they are, these redevelopment efforts faced major challenges and significant questions when the first of them was proposed in the Puget Sound region. A quick history of the HOPE VI program will set the stage.

HOPE stands for Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere, and VI means that Congress got it right on the sixth try. The HOPE VI program was developed by the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (NCSDPH), established by Congress in 1989. After extended review, the NCSDPH estimated that about 6% of our U.S. public housing stock was severely distressed, and recommended a 10-year effort to comprehensively create solutions. NCSDPH recommended an allocation of $750 million over 10 years: $7.5 billion in 1992 dollars.

This funding was earmarked for capital costs to reconstruct replacement units, Section 8 vouchers for displaced tenants, and improving and streamlining Housing Authorities’ (HAs’) management practices. In line with HOPE VI’s mandate to address the social and economic ills of public housing communities, 20% of the initial appropriation was set aside for community and supportive services, including literacy and job training, day care, and youth activities.

Since the first funding grants approved in 1992, HOPE VI has spurred the creation of many of the most ambitious, beautiful, and inspiring housing developments to be found anywhere in the U.S. HOPE VI has played a critical role in the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) efforts to transform public housing. It has represented a bold social and economic experiment, and a huge relocation—both temporary and permanent—of public housing residents. At its best, HOPE VI has succeeded in:

• Providing a desperately needed infusion of federal dollars to demolish, rebuild, and transform severely distressed public housing.
• Spurring communities to think about what will make them successful – and to reconfigure themselves accordingly.
• Providing a catalyst for new financing partnerships, including private financing, and the creation of healthy, thriving neighborhoods.
• Reducing concentrations of poverty.
• Establishing an environment that fosters self-sufficiency and empowerment for its residents.

The national picture

Since 1992, there have been some 240 HOPE VI revitalization grants made to more than 125 HAs in 34 states, along with Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. The total dollars awarded thus far? About $6 billion. Many, if not most, redevelopment efforts are still in the process of completion.

Unfortunately, not every HOPE VI redevelopment has lived up to its dream. Many of the most severely distressed housing developments, like the infamous Chicago high-rises Robert Taylor and Cabrini-Green, lacked the land needed to reduce density while still housing the same number of residents. This has been a major source of controversy nationwide: many redevelopments have necessarily resulted in massive displacements of tenants—and fewer replacement units that could ultimately become permanently available to households at the very low end of the income spectrum.

In Washington State, our HOPE VI neighborhoods were not as “vertically challenged” as their counterparts in Chicago and many other eastern cities.

Abolishing islands of poverty

Of our Puget Sound HOPE VI communities, just one, Westwood Heights, didn’t begin life as WW II defense worker housing—but hastily constructed barracks-style homes that were never meant to last. In an effort to mimic the then “modern” suburbs of the 1940s, these homes were typically built on streets that had little connection with their surrounding neighborhoods. Over time, the homes deteriorated, along with the quality of life available to residents. Although each differed in its degree of safety and integrity, these developments were islands of poverty isolated from their larger neighborhoods.

When we think back to the most distressed U.S. public housing developments that existed in the last decades of the last century, those in the Puget Sound region don’t jump to the top of the list. Yet the challenges many of our public housing residents
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My View
FROM KIM HERMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JUNE 2008

SHA’s “other” HOPE VI redevelopments: Westwood Heights, Rainier Vista, and High Point

All told, the Seattle Housing Authority has secured $135 million in HOPE VI monies for four redevelopment projects. These communities, as have all of the HOPE VIIs in our region, offer former residents the “right of return”—the option to move back to the place they previously called home. Here’s a brief overview of SHA’s three HOPE VIIs that have come after NewHolly:

**Westwood Heights** is a senior preference community located in West Seattle. This community offers a range of services for the elderly. It is the smallest HOPE VI redevelopment in our region, and was the first to be completed. Built on the four-acre site of the former Roxbury House and Village, Westwood Heights encompasses a high-rise of 130 units that houses primarily seniors, along with Westwood Court and Longfellow Court, which comprise 45 cooperative rental townhomes developed in partnership with the Lutheran Alliance to Create Housing. The entire complex was completed in 2001.

**Rainier Vista** is located in Southeast Seattle in the heart of the culturally diverse community of Rainier Valley. Like NewHolly, it will include a station for Seattle’s soon-to-be completed Sound Transit light rail. The barracks-style homes of the former Rainier Vista housed about 481 families before demolition for the new community began in 2002. When completed, it will offer some 1000 units of housing. More than 500 of these will be reserved as rentals for low-income households, and 250 to 350 market-rate homes and condos will be built and sold to help Rainier Vista achieve a balance of incomes in the community.

**High Point** is Seattle’s newest HOPE VI community. Located on 120 acres in the center of West Seattle, it will eventually house 1600 families. Its park-like setting is being preserved with over 20 acres dedicated to parks, open spaces, and playgrounds. High Point has demonstrated a model for creating a healthy environment in its redevelopment, by integrating a natural drainage system, preserving mature trees, and protecting air quality.

One unique feature of High Point has been the construction of 60 “breathe-easy” homes, developed as part of a study by King County Public Health and the University of Washington. The objective has been to determine whether building homes to the highest standards in terms of circulating air and water quality would help decrease the risk factors that cause asthma in low-income children. Early results have shown about a 75% reduction in ER visits—along with a corresponding reduction in missed days from school for kids and work for parents. High Point was awarded its $35 million redevelopment grant from HUD in 2000, and broke ground in 2003.
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My View
From Kim Herman, Executive Director
June 2008

Holly Park was not connected with respect to opportunities. Where do you hear about a job? From your friends and neighbors. And if you’re not connected to that larger community, you have a much lower chance of gaining employment.

Tom Tierney  Executive Director of Seattle Housing Authority

faced—though not as dramatic as truly squalid conditions and soaring crime rates—were still pernicious. Housing that exclusively throws profoundly poor, nonworking people together contributes to the kinds of social problems that have historically plagued so many of these distressed developments.

A central tenet of HOPE VI is that deconcentrating poverty will help reduce it. Doris Koo puts it eloquently: “Housing the poor is but one step. It must be paired with circumstances and an environment that gives them, and their children, nutrients—to get economic opportunities.”

Here’s one sterling statistic, from Tom Tierney. In the former Holly Park, 80% of the residents did not work. In NewHolly, of those residents who qualify as extremely low income—80% of them now do work. Tom sees this as a complete change in residents’ work exposure: “You had these isolated, segregated pockets of extremely low-income people. The rest of the community was not connected well with Holly Park in as simple a way as the street grid. But even more, it was not connected with respect to opportunities. Where do you hear about a job? From your friends and neighbors. And if you’re not connected to that larger community, you have a much lower chance of gaining employment.”

Through HOPE VI, this deconcentration of poverty has been achieved in a number of ways. To begin with, people of all income levels are invited to make their home in these redevelopments through the provision of different types of housing, all attractive and of high quality—subsidized rental, market-rate rental, and homeownership. Additionally, those who move out when the redevelopment takes place are aided in relocating to more economically diverse neighborhoods with the help of Section 8 vouchers.

Encouraging homeownership
Another important aspect of many HOPE VI developments has been to encourage homeownership for low-income residents. This was true at Salishan, which is located on a large tract of land in East Tacoma. Says THA Executive Director Michael Mirra, “We did that in a number of ways that began before we tore anything down. We sought out families living in Salishan or participating in other THA housing programs who were interested in buying and could be made ready to buy responsibly.”

These families went through a homebuying and homeowner training process and worked to clean up their credit. THA also created individual development accounts that matched residents’ dollars with its dollars. The City of Tacoma has a great downpayment assistance program for first-time homebuyers. And THA turned its Section 8 voucher program into one that could pay the mortgage as well as the rent.

This is what I’d call a resounding success: By the time THA moved out about 800 families to begin redeveloping Salishan, nearly 100 of them moved directly into a home they had purchased. About 20 of these families have since moved back to Salishan—where they’d lived as renters—as homeowners.
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NewHolly: The right dream to have

NewHolly, in south Seattle, was the first public housing project in the Puget Sound region to receive HOPE VI funding. NewHolly is being built in three phases; the first ground-breaking took place in 1997. At the time of relocation, 832 families were living in Holly Park. The first residents were able to return in 1998 and the first home was sold in 1999. It encompasses 118 acres, and currently provides homes for more than 950 families. When it’s finally completed, it will house about 1,390 households.

There are vast open spaces that include parks, playgrounds, and community gardens. The NewHolly community includes the 318-unit Elder Village, which was developed in partnership with Providence Health Systems and the Retirement Housing Foundation, and provides a spectrum of housing services for the elderly. NewHolly is also home to a community center, a branch of the Seattle Public Library, and classrooms for South Seattle Community College and Head Start.

The “price tag” for NewHolly residents ranges from SHA's minimum of $50/month for its lowest-income renters—which includes both rent and utilities—to market-rate homes that have sold on the market for as high as $500,000. When complete, 38% of the units will house people of very low income, 21% will house residents of moderate-but-below-median income, and 34% will be market-rate rentals and for-sale homes. All of the housing is of such consistent quality that it’s impossible to tell who lives where.

NewHolly, as with all HOPE VI redevelopment projects, has required enormous vision, planning, patience, stamina—and sources of funding. The HOPE VI grants can be viewed as a powerful catalyst for creating healthy, innovative, diverse communities. But they represent a relatively small portion of the total cost of these projects, and both planning and funding efforts have necessarily been creative and diligent.

Tom Tierney has directed SHA since March 2005, but before that, he was director of the City of Seattle’s Office of Management and Planning, which was responsible for the City’s urban planning—and he was the city’s lead on NewHolly during Mayor Norm Rice’s administration.

“We were there at the very beginning with SHA to address the community’s questions,” Tom recalls. “There weren’t any mixed-income communities to look at back then—at least regionally. The City Council had to do some zone changes, and they were also being asked to fund some of the project’s infrastructure. They also had numerous questions, including, Can this really work? Norm’s administration really got together with SHA to say yes: This is the right way to do it and the right dream to have.”

New urbanism and healthful housing

“What we’ve learned through NewHolly and our other redevelopments is that we know we can build much more healthful housing for low-income residents than what they had,” Tom says.

As I mentioned previously, in many U.S. cities, a significant criticism leveled at HOPE VI projects is that many have resulted in fewer permanent units for very-low-income households. This has not been the case with NewHolly and every other HOPE VI redevelopment in our region. The New Urbanism that has
From Holly Park to NewHolly: Doris Morgan remembers

Doris Morgan lived in what she affectionately calls “Holly” for some 25 years. She was president of Holly Park’s Residents’ Council at the time it received its initial HOPE VI planning grant. Doris’ commitment in leading the residents in giving voice to what they wanted for their new community was critical in making it what it is today. Says former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice: “Doris Morgan stepped up and provided leadership for NewHolly in a way that was really wonderful.”

Doris Morgan: Holly Park was sort of nice when I moved in there. We didn’t have the shooting, the drugs—this evolved in the years I lived there into that mess. Finally a young man was killed. He was 11 years old. They used a revolver: they were playing Russian roulette. The police knew who did it. And so we lost two people, that young man and the 14-year-old who went to the pen. This made us decide that we really had to do something drastic to get this stopped.

Near the end, I had taken some groceries to one of my shut-in residents, and fell through the front porch steps. I still carry scars on my legs from that. Three or four of us fell through parts of our houses. They were built during wartime, and most of them were not built to last.

SHA told us that they were going to bring a national developer in. And after that the project would belong to them. SHA would own the land, but not the housing. We didn’t like that. I was president of the Residents’ Council at that time, and I talked to the different leaders, because we spoke so many different languages. They talked to the residents, and they all said: ‘No, we don’t want that.’ We said no. At that time, we had the authority to say no—the government gave us the authority through HOPE VI.

It was the residents’ choice: We wanted to get rid of the drugs. Our kids didn’t even go out to play. There was such a mess in Holly.

We said SHA should do it themselves. Then there was a big study—you know Seattle, we study everything. They studied it and said yes, that was the way to go. We, the residents, became equal consultants with SHA. That was important. We had a lot to say about how it would be done.

We wanted other types of housing—to sell some, rent some to working people. And then we would build places for seniors. And there would be some for us.

The Council got a 501(c) 3; I was the director. The SHA gave us a contract for relocation. We hired expertise to do the relocation part. We hired interpreters, and met with residents, who made their choices. The people who wanted to come back had the opportunity to come back. We had a certain amount of Section 8 vouchers that were allotted, too.

I was on so many committees I was never home. We were doing the first part of Sound Transit at that time. All of these things had to come together to make Holly work. Sometimes people tell me I was the voice for Holly, but it took all of us—the residents, the housing authority, the developers, and the city.

Now I’m living not far away in the Brighton. I had moved out, then I lived in the first phase of NewHolly, then they moved me down to the third phase, and we had to move while they built that. They called me and said ‘Doris, your place is ready,’ and I said, ‘No, I can’t move again.’ I’m 76 years old now. They said ‘We’ll come and move you,’ and I said, ‘No, I’m settled—we’ll leave me here.’

NewHolly is beautiful. The Brighton is not far away, and on good days, when I’m feeling good, I get in my wheelchair and go up the hill and see Holly. I’m very thankful we did something about it. It was a beautiful experience.
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DORIS MORGAN
Former President of Holly Park’s Residents’ Council

Pictured below and at right are homes in the NewHolly community.

NewHolly is beautiful.... I’m very thankful we did something about it. It was a beautiful experience.
served as the philosophical and design thrust of HOPE VI communities recognized the shortfalls of dense, multi-storied housing, where residents had to rely on common entrances and hallways, and had little or no control over the entrances and exits to their homes. HOPE VI redevelopments adhere to the concept of “defensible space,” in which communities provide residents with less density, and more security and control and ownership.

Achieving lower density is a problem that our Puget Sound region HAs haven’t had to contend with. The hastily created barracks-style developments that characterized Holly Park, Rainier Vista, High Point, Park Lake Homes (the precursor to KCHA’s Greenbridge), and Salishan were built when developable land was cheap and plentiful. “We’ve actually doubled the density at NewHolly,” Tom says. “Therefore we got to use some of the value of the land, and we’ve made them—we think—better neighborhoods with greater density.”

Being able to make use of this relatively plentiful land as a financial strategy has been key for all our Puget Sound Hope VIs. The ability to include market-rate homes and rentals and, in some cases, retail businesses, adds much-needed revenues to the development effort. For the HAs, it has been a win-win: it helps to create a stronger balance sheet, while also following the principles of New Urbanism, which brings neighbors relatively close together in housing clusters that face the streets and promote interaction.

“We’re seeing this not just across Hope VIs, but in almost any planned community that is being built in the U.S.,” says Tom. “Instead of loading the front of the house with garage doors, it’s trying to get the community interacting off front porches. There’s more security in that kind of neighborhood, but more importantly, a stronger sense of community.”

Having voted again and again for affordable housing levies, Seattle was not about to give up on its low-income residents or lose subsidized units.

DORIS KOO

Homes in the NewHolly community.
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The “glue” that made NewHolly go: The tenacity of Doris Koo

Doris Koo was director of development of SHA for seven years before she joined Enterprise Community Partners. Doris was hired by SHA in 1994 as part of the effort to put in a formal application, after the 1993 planning grant, to apply for $50 million to redevelop NewHolly. At the time, her role was to help SHA build replacement housing: HUD was still requiring one-for-one replacement of every unit demolished for HOPE VI.

But in January 1995, Congress voted to repeal the one-for-one replacement requirement. SHA found itself in a situation where the Seattle Displacement Coalition was organizing against the demolition for Phase I of NewHolly. Their argument: ‘If you can’t replace, then you can’t demolish.’

Doris Koo: Though we did not have Robert Taylor Homes-like vertical ghettos, what we had were horizontal ghettos. That $.5 million grant was to plan how to knit a horizontal complex back into the community. These complexes were in three major pockets of the city—remnants of WW II housing that had been deeded to the City Council to house the poor. They had steadily become communities of last resort. After the war, everything around them got rebuilt, but these three communities remained bastions of invisible walls.

When the new legislation passed, we found ourselves having promised the City and its citizens a one-for-one replacement. And being caught in the political reality where, since it was no longer a requirement, HOPE VI was not funding it. That promise was the premise under which they’d blessed the whole exercise. Having voted again and again for affordable housing levies, Seattle was not about to give up on its low-income residents or lose subsidized units.

My job was to make it all work. Because my background was as a community organizer who had learned how to build affordable housing, my response was to take an organizing approach: The central core would be the residents, and their benefits would be what would center us.

A two-year dialogue

We started a two-year dialogue with the residents. I moved my office onsite to Holly Park. I parked myself in the management office. I saw the residents, the kids coming home. I saw the anxieties. They would tell me, ‘Lock your door, pull the drapes,’ or at night—‘Ms. Koo get out of here now.’ I understood why we had to do this.

The nonprofit community was angry with us because we had told the City Council that the Feds would not give us money to replace housing and we needed their help. Hitherto it had been a self-sufficient project: You get a HOPE VI grant, you get some tax credits, some traditional financing, some replacement money and bam! You’re home free. And now we started asking the City for participation. And suddenly people said the 900-pound gorilla is coming to feed at the trough. And saying that replacement...
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housing was not the city’s responsibility, it was federal. And the Displacement Coalition was protesting that the City should not give a permit for demolition until all this was accounted for.

Because I set the residents as the core, our negotiation was not with the Displacement Coalition, or the nonprofits, or the City Council—it was always with the residents first. We started a series of meetings with just the residents that at first were very hostile. I wanted to show them that it was okay for them to tell me their grievances. I listened and took notes and tried to bring back easy fixes for things that were totally unacceptable. We spent a lot of time, not talking about HOPE VI, but of the entire site development.

Along the way, I recommended to SHA and its Commissioners that we had made a promise about replacing housing and we needed to keep that promise. Making that commitment eased the residents’ concerns.

The fact that we decided to be our own developer was both a blessing and a curse. The curse was that we had to figure out how to do what we didn’t know how to do. But the blessing was that we stood to earn and pocket the entire development fee. We knew we would use part of that fee for daycare, a family center, and other key community assets. But the other part of the fee could become—in my mind—replacement housing.

As the developer, I could find the money we needed. Prior to that, I had done about 500 to 600 units of housing in New York. I remember kidding with [then-SHA Director] Harry Thomas: It’s just like adding a zero to the end, right?

SHA signed a legal contract with the residents. We established a Holly Park Board of Governors. Residents had three seats; SHA had three; the community at large, three. This became the new partnership.

SHA as developer: A blessing more than a curse
SHA issued an RFP for NewHolly, and the sole bid came in from a national developer. Along the way, the residents saw that as much as they hated the HA, they knew they could trust us more than an outside developer.

That meant a quick end to the idea of using an outside developer. We held a blue-ribbon panel, inviting local Seattle developers to help us figure out how to build such a huge number of units—how could we cut the development into segments so that local capacity could be cultivated. Suddenly I became head, not just of the replacement housing offsite, but of the entire site development.

Along the way, I recommended to SHA and its Commissioners that we had made a promise about replacing housing and we needed to keep that promise. Making that commitment eased the residents’ concerns.

We also promised that SHA would build all of this new housing with no 9% tax credits—that we would use bond financing with 4% credits. So that we wouldn’t ‘feed at the trough.’ With that commitment, brokered by a couple of City Council members, we developed a replacement housing plan.

With that, we entered into an MOU because the nonprofits told the Council they supported the plan, and the residents supported it, too. The City Council voted to give SHA $15 million from the City’s general fund for infrastructure. Tom Tierney scraped money from each department.

We began to line up resources. We said: If you were planning to replace some underground transformers at Holly Park, let’s yank that budget for funding new ones. If there’s a library bond to build new libraries, why not put the first new branch in NewHolly? Can we invite Seattle Community College to offer classes if we provide the space? We invited Sisters of Providence to build elder housing with the offer of free land. And offered lots to Habit for Humanity. There was a lot of asset and resource mapping. We won the route with Sound Transit because we could demonstrate the ridership when all these units were populated again.
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Senator Patty Murray continues to champion HOPE VI in Washington, D.C.

**Senator Murray:** Our local communities need the federal government to be a strong ally in economic and community development. We have great examples of what we can accomplish when government, the non-profit sector, private sector and committed citizens work together. You see – or will soon see – those results in Salishan, New Holly, Rainier Vista, Greenbridge, and High Point.

For the working people and young people we serve, these new neighborhoods mean healthier homes, safer streets, better connections to services, and greater opportunities to achieve independence and realize their dreams. Stable and affordable housing is so critical to resolving other challenges, from strengthening public health to improving education to helping businesses and workers alike by creating housing for all income groups close to job centers. HOPE VI has helped communities take a more comprehensive approach to local and regional issues.

**What are your aspirations for the HOPE VI program in the coming years?**

**Senator Murray:** For me, HOPE VI is not an abstract budget line item. When I was growing up, my family fell on hard times. Fortunately, we lived in a country and community that cared about our future. I was able to succeed because I had a country at my back; a country that believed in investing in people with job training and Pell grants. Supporting HOPE VI and other effective housing and community development programs is one way I can ensure that we are giving today’s families the same opportunities I had.

We all know the fiscal challenges facing the federal government. Like many domestic programs, initiatives focused on housing and community development are struggling. While HOPE VI will not reach the funding levels achieved during the 1990s, my goal is to retain it as a viable tool for our communities in Washington State.

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**Senator Patty Murray** has been a strong advocate of our HOPE VI redevelopment communities in the Puget Sound region since the beginning. I recently asked for her perspective on the benefits of the HOPE VI program for low- and moderate-income families in Washington State.
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We’re creating a community that cuts across all those boundaries. We’ve now got nine years under our belt for the first folks who moved into NewHolly, but it will be 15 to 20 years before we truly have a way to judge how well all of this has worked.

*How well* is the yardstick—because NewHolly is flourishing. Crime is down significantly, and the entire area of South Seattle surrounding NewHolly is undergoing a renaissance. New businesses and residential developments are cropping up along nearby Othello Street and Martin Luther King Way South. Property values are rising, although, as Tom points out, it’s difficult to distinguish how much of this is due to the new Sound Transit line that will open for service in the fall of next year. Of course NewHolly was a big part of the argument for siting the station at Othello Street in the first place.

Building any community is a process. It takes time for people to get to know one another. To deepen relationships. In these new developments, the goal is not some kind of utopian paradise. The goal is simply a normal neighborhood—one that we’d all like to live in.

All three HAs interviewed for this article are working earnestly to create environments that have the right ingredients for great communities. One of the barriers of course is the many languages spoken. In the case of SHA, one way in which this whole process of growth is encouraged is through a position called “community builder.”

Each SHA housing development has one, but Joy Bryngelson, NewHolly’s community builder, was the first. Joy puts it this way: “The role of community builder is to support the vision of the people who live here,” she says. In her years at NewHolly, she’s seen a range of successes, from small block gatherings and babysitting coops on the block level, to residents forming committees to take on issues they care about, to, in a larger sphere, residents going out into the larger community to represent NewHolly at city hearings. “We have leaders in NewHolly who connect with the region. And in turn, we in NewHolly are seen as an asset to the community at large.

“This is an amazing community. It’s wonderful to see the pride in people’s eyes,” Joy says simply.

“The true beauty of these communities is that people are coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, and learning to live together,” sums up Tom. “Residents at NewHolly and SHA housing in general are very largely proportionately foreign-born new immigrants, so the question of connecting people is all the more important. At NewHolly, 50% of the subsidized renters are low-income East African. That highlights the challenge. But it is also part of the wonder of the story, that people are choosing to buy homes to live in a community that is that richly diverse.”

Building community

As these extremely attractive redevelopmentst are getting built, people begin to move back in, many as “pioneer” first-timers. What has come next is a concerted effort to help build a community that is supportive of diversity while at the same time encouraging neighborliness, comfortable co-habitation, and community pride.

“I think it’s okay to call it a social experiment,” Tom says. “We’re cutting across racial and ethnic lines. Across income lines. Ages. What was the core—doing better for residents—ended up bringing benefits to many, many more. By partnering with others and by being stewards of the land, you can create wealth and extract it from the land in a thoughtful way. So that became the model.

By the time Doris was recruited by Enterprise’s former chairman and CEO Bart Harvey in 2001, Phase II of NewHolly had been completed. But just as importantly, she had spearheaded a model and an approach to transforming horizontal housing communities that other HAs in our region could draw from, including KCHA and THA, along with Housing Authority of Portland with its HOPE VI, New Columbia.
A willing partner in NewHolly: Former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice

“The story of NewHolly,” says Doris Koo, “started with the Mayor. There was a lot of opposition, and I think Norm truly set the tone for how he wanted this city to behave: It would be civil, with a fair process, and everyone’s opinion would count. At the end of the day, his vision of the City—as being for everyone—prevailed.”

Norm Rice served as Mayor of Seattle from 1989 to 1997. A committed public servant and affordable housing advocate, he is currently teaching at the University of Washington’s Evans School of Public Affairs. He is also Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Enterprise Community Partners.

Norm Rice: The three principles of my administration—social equity, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship—were the underpinning of our comprehensive plan in growth management and our strategies for the urban villages.

We knew that if we were going to enter into a process with Holly Park, we needed to have those principles in place. And we created a citizens’ committee to execute that, with that as the overarching effort. We got the residents involved and talking.

The glue that made it go was Doris Koo. Because you need someone who is determined to execute and get the plan done. Someone has to make sure that everything is done on time. And that’s what Doris did. Tom Tierney was the City’s liaison. He was making sure he was shepherding those principles, that they were inherent as we moved forward.

We had some ups and downs—the easiest thing is to get the money and build the project and ‘everybody be damned.’ But that’s not a public process.

The enduring aspects of what you create are about taking the time to listen. We listened to our residents. Many of them were suspicious, and were urged on to be negative. But by having those value propositions driving the process, some of the residents began to own those things. They began to make sure that they were keepers of those values.

It was an extraordinary effort. Yes, we had detractors. But this was the residents’ community. Not the City’s, not the HA’s. And that’s where you have the enduring legacy. It was exciting from that standpoint. I got to be a cheerleader—predominately. But a cheerleader as an executive.

We learned a lot. I always tell one story—we were building some of the units. And the residents said that the essence of their community was the kitchens—not the living room. So we changed the plans to make the living room smaller and kitchen bigger, because that’s where the family gathered. There was a wonderful aspect to sharing that, and making that happen.

This was my priority. We were going to move the resources that we needed. It was huge infrastructure investment. It was important to do. And when people saw you do that, when the next one came down the line, whether Rainier Vista or High Point, they knew they had a willing partner.

This was the residents’ community. Not the City’s, not the Housing Authority’s. And that’s where you have the enduring legacy.

Norm Rice
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New Salishan: The Jewel of East Tacoma

Tacoma Housing Authority’s HOPE VI redevelopment, Salishan, broke ground in 2003. Salishan occupies a significant tract of land in East Tacoma—188 acres. Like NewHolly, Salishan got its start as military housing in the early 1940s. But Salishan has several key attributes that set it apart from other HOPE VI projects in the region.

First, there’s its size relative to Tacoma. In fact, until the mid-1960s, Salishan’s 850-plus homes represented the only housing units in THA’s portfolio. Currently, THA owns about 800 additional units, but even so, before the demolition began, Salishan made up more than half of THA-owned homes. “It was very important,” says THA Executive Director Michael Mirra, “that we anchor this redevelopment tightly to our local community. The project is immensely important to Salishan residents, the City of Tacoma, the Eastside, and our neighbors. A project of this scale and this type just could not happen without their full-throated support.”

Second is the fact that, although the housing itself qualified as severely distressed, Old Salishan, as Michael points out, “was a successful community. It was tightly knit, well organized, and occupied by people who were very fond of it.”

Accessible through THA’s website is a moving documentary that was made by fifth-grade students at Lister Elementary School in the Salishan community about five years ago—just before the redevelopment began. In the documentary, many of the residents are interviewed about their history at Salishan, their feelings about living there, their hopes for its future. What you take away is a deep affection for their community.

That sense of community and place has been hugely beneficial to the rebuilding effort. Over the years, many Tacomans have lived in Salishan, and are proud to acknowledge it. Salishan has a beautiful setting; the site is lush with mature trees. A wide swath of greenbelt—the T Street Gulch—ribbons through the middle. A 250-acre regional park adjoins it.

The need for new infrastructure

Another critical differentiator for Salishan, says Michael, has been its economic realities: “Salishan has this difference from the Seattle, King County, and Portland experiences. Tacoma is not as prosperous a community, so the city—as helpful and wonderful as it has been—has not been able to be as helpful as other cities have been able to be.... Also, all of these projects have been funded in part by their land sales. And although our market is fairly strong, it has not been nearly as strong by comparison.”

That said, he is quick to point to the significant support Salishan and THA have received from elected officials. Senator Patty Murray has been a big champion, as have Representative Norm Dicks, and Senator Debbie Regala from the state legislature.

“We have not had difficulty enlisting...
the support of important stakeholders in the community—locally, on the state level, and in our congressional delegation,” he says. “Early on, these leaders realized this project’s importance. And once the building started, its importance and appeal became even easier to see, in part because it looked so lovely. We face some particular challenges; chief among them is paying for infrastructure.”

The punch list includes a new sewer system, replacing the water and electrical distribution systems, new roads, new lights, and new curbs. “Salishan is one of those housing development projects that is a proxy for an urban infrastructure rebuild. In fact,” Michael jokes, “we’ve come to think of Salishan as an infrastructure project with this interesting housing element. But while it’s relatively easy to find a dollar to build a house, it’s much harder to find a dollar to build a sewer or an electrical distribution system.”

Costs—and benefits

Michael currently estimates the total cost of the Salishan rebuild at $225 million. Most of that will ultimately come through private sources. In terms of raising funds, THA is more than a third of the way there. A huge help has been set-asides for tax credits. “We could not have done this without those set-asides. A multi-year project like this is on a development conveyor belt. If we could not have presumed upon getting those tax credits the following year, we would not have been able to leverage our other funding.”

When completed, Salishan will provide about 920 rental units that will be affordable to a range of families’ income levels, and 300-350 homes purchased by residents. It will also encompass a new medical-dental clinic; an education, training, and retail center; 110 apartments reserved for seniors; 36 service-enriched units reserved for homeless families; new parks, community gardens, and playgrounds; outdoor art; and pedestrian bridges over T Street Gulch.

Most importantly, Salishan will continue to house a very diverse group of residents—by race, language, national origin, income, age, abilities and disabilities, and tenure, both homeowner and renter.

Old Salishan’s residents had included many first- and second-generation immigrants to the U.S., with countries-of-origin including about one-quarter Vietnamese, and one-quarter Cambodian—and also many immigrants from Eastern Europe, Russia, and Korea. This will continue. “We were intent,” says Michael, “that the homeownership population would show a comparable diversity.” In New Salishan, homeownership rates for racial and ethnic groups greatly exceed these groups’ representation in Tacoma and Pierce County generally. THA recently received a 2008 Housing Justice Award from the Fair Housing Center of Washington for their efforts and success in this regard.

Under Michael’s leadership as executive director, HOPE VI’s social justice objectives continue to anchor the Salishan redevelopment process. For example, they’ve far surpassed HUD’s guidelines for its mandate to “Spend a Dollar Twice”—by reinvesting in people and businesses in the local community, contracting with firms owned by minorities, and hiring minorities and people of low income.

Seed investments

Like NewHolly, Salishan is igniting the transformation of its local neighborhood. Land values are rapidly rising around it and new homes are being built. Lister Elementary School, which serves the Salishan community, was recently torn down and rebuilt: “We count New Lister Elementary School as a jewel in New Salishan.” And Mcllvaigh Middle School, a long-time neighborhood school, will be rebuilt next year. The funding for the schools is separate from THA but, as Michael points out, it’s an indication of how, when you make an investment like Salishan, it paves the way for a host of others.

In fact, there’s barely a shadow to the Salishan story, except in the minds of some of its gardeners. Because Salishan, like other regional HOPE VIs, is moving towards higher density, its huge backyards will be missed by these residents. “Old Salishan was actually a poor use of urban land,” Michael says. “It was not dense enough. With proper design increased density should not be a detraction from the neighborhood. Yet it has meant a loss of personal open space that some people miss. Salishan has very accomplished gardeners, both flower and vegetable, who were very fond of their large private gardens that they had at Salishan. We have heard from them that their smaller gardening space is not quite the same thing.”

In response, Michael adds, the first of Salishan’s community gardens is going in right now.
Greenbridge: A great place to live—and work

Greenbridge is the newest of our region’s HOPE VIs; construction began in 2005. It is emerging like a brightly colored butterfly from the site that was originally named Park Lake Homes. Park Lake, like Holly Park and Salishan, had been a neighborhood of run-down barracks homes that exclusively housed the very poor—566 units on 92 acres.

“Because of its age,” says KCHA Deputy Director Dan Watson, “Park Lake was highly stigmatized as a very large public housing project, even though it provided some decent housing for people who needed it. It did have a tremendous impact on residents there, as well as on the surrounding community, just because of the scale of having that many poor people all in one place.” Like Holly Park, it had been a maze of serpentine streets that were disconnected from the larger neighborhood.

Greenbridge is located in White Center, which is the lowest-income community in all of King County. White Center is squeezed in between the cities of Seattle to the north and Burien to the south in unincorporated King County, which, historically, has suffered from a lack of investment; the County’s financial challenges in providing services in unincorporated areas like White Center are well documented.

The “Bridge” in Greenbridge pays homage to the many ways in which this redevelopment will span its residents’ history, cultures, and generations. But you could also make a case for how it has been designed to help residents connect with economic opportunities. This is one of Greenbridge’s great innovations.

8th Avenue: Creating economic opportunities

8th Avenue Southwest has become Greenbridge’s Main Street. It intersects Greenbridge about midway, and the entire development has been remapped to connect it with the larger community—and to welcome that community in. White Center’s main business district is located about four blocks from Greenbridge, and KCHA has improved both pedestrian and vehicle access into that downtown.

On 8th Avenue is the Jim Wiley Community Center, the YWCA and Public Library complex, the site of a soon-to-completed Head Start school, and many storefronts for different businesses, including both live/work units and retail spaces. Currently, the live/work units house a range of micro-businesses, including two gift retailers, a hair salon, and an artist’s studio.

The community organizations housed on 8th Avenue are “oriented towards creating economic and employment opportunities for adults,” says Dan. “They have a whole set of programs that are employment- and opportunity-driven for low-income residents—not only those who live in Greenbridge, but the entire White Center community.” Adult education courses are offered at Jim Wiley. Highline Community College offers ESL classes. The YWCA is building a learning center.

KCHA has given Greenbridge the blueprint for an economically healthy community, one that has some retail businesses mixed in with all these community and service agencies. All told, 8th Avenue will include about 15,000 square feet of leasable retail space that will become available over the next two years, beginning this November. KCHA is seeking out businesses like coffee shops, restaurants, convenience stores, and other neighborhood-oriented storefronts.

Defining ‘severely distressed’

Dan, who has worked for KCHA for almost 30 years, is involved primarily in the development and financing of new housing projects. Greenbridge, he says, has been “a true team
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Rental homes at Greenbridge today

Greenbridge’s Jim Wiley Community Center
effort by many people. Our executive director, Steven Norman, saw the opportunity and pushed hard to get everyone behind it. It took a huge effort to get that initial $35 million grant from HUD to get started.”

When HOPE VI was first launched, KCHA didn’t immediately think of Park Lake as a candidate. There was less crime in Park Lake than in the surrounding neighborhoods, for example. “The definition of ‘severely distressed’ left room for interpretation,” Dan says. “Certainly Holly Park was a far more challenged place than Park Lake Homes.”

But when SHA got HOPE VI awards for Roxbury Court (1998) and Rainier Vista (1999), it became clear that it was probably not as difficult as KCHA had thought to make a case for the Greenbridge project. “Park Lake was not dissimilar from Rainier Vista. After managing and maintaining this housing for many years, we had come to believe that it was fairly decent housing for people. But when we looked out over 10 to 15 years from a long-term maintenance perspective, these homes were not sustainable.”

The grant submission process took about six months, and was the highest-rated HOPE VI application in the nation in 2001.

Greenbridge is being built in multiple phases, including five phases of rentals. The third of these will be completed this fall. It involves a whole new system of streets, utilities, parks, and community facilities. One important element of this new incarnation is a brand-new elementary school on the site, White Center Heights Elementary, which opened in 2004. “This school was a very big piece of this plan. The old school there had been closed down,” says Dan. “It was very important to us to get that school rebuilt—to have a neighborhood school.”

$16,227—for, on average, a family of three. KCHA is honoring former residents’ wish to return; of the current 187 completed rentals at Greenbridge, 182 are occupied by former residents of Park Lake Homes. Of these current residents, 153 households represent first-generation immigrant families.

The “green” in Greenbridge
One of the most compelling aspects of the site is part of the inspiration for the “Green” in Greenbridge. The entire community is a demonstration project under the County’s low-impact development ordinance, and it has won numerous state and national awards. All homes are built green-designated and embrace green features and building standards that reduce energy and maintenance costs and provide healthy living environments.

Dan and KCHA are already seeing many positive impacts of Greenbridge on the larger White Center community. “We’re seeing more public and private investment in White Center, a lot of renovation of homes around the site, as well as new houses being built in neighborhoods that were always considered a little shaky before Greenbridge went up. We’re seeing more investment in the schools and the streets. Greenbridge has been a catalyst for community development in White Center—and it’s just going to be a great place to live.”

A tough market for home sales
As with all HOPE VIs, KCHA is providing housing opportunities for people of all income levels. Like NewHolly, the density will be approximately doubled. When completed, it will offer 448 rental units, and from 400 to 500 homes for purchase.

Right now, the housing market in White Center is not faring as well as Seattle’s. “The home sale market is in the worst condition around here that we’ve seen in about 20 years,” says Dan. “This is not a good time for homebuilders to be building new product, and we have built a couple of years’ lag time into our projections. We’re reasonably optimistic that we’ll be one of the first out of the chute once the market recovers—because we’re so close in to downtown Seattle, and because the pricing is on the more affordable end. The land, streets, and utilities are ready to go.”

Homeownership, says Dan, has simply not been a financial option for most of the former Park Lake’s residents. For example, the median income of families living in Greenbridge, as of last December, was...
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The future of HOPE VI—and beyond

In recent years, Congress has continued to authorize funding for HOPE VI, albeit at lower levels than in its first decade. Grants that used to be in the $35 million range are now made for closer to $15 and $20 million—and there are fewer of them. But the HOPE VI dream is still breathing. Senator Patty Murray, on the Senate Appropriations Committee, continues to fight for allocations.

Last year, one of the original creators of the legislation in 1992, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), introduced the HOPE VI Reauthorization and Improvement Act (S. 829) and continues, along with many others, to advocate for its passage. The updates and improvements to HOPE VI that this bill offers include placing a strong emphasis on improving the local schools that serve these new communities and ensuring that residential construction adheres to a Green Communities or equivalent standard. A third modification is one that Doris Koo says Seattle “absolutely ought to be proud of and famous for”: The requirement of no net loss of affordable housing. Doris, who with Enterprise Community helped advise on the new bill, calls it “Hope VI 2.0. It has learned from all of our experiences.”

SHA and KCHA are still submitting—or weighing submissions—for the current downsized HOPE VI project funding. Still pending is a grant SHA submitted last year for HOPE VI funding in the $10-12 million range, for a smaller complex in the Lake City area in north Seattle. “It’s nothing like the scale of NewHolly,” Tom Tierney says.

And when I last spoke with Dan Watson, KCHA had not yet decided whether to submit a NOFA by the end of this month for the redevelopment of a project built in the mid-1960s called Park Lake Site II. It’s about 10 blocks from Greenbridge. “Site II has some very serious problems that we can’t seem to find solutions to,” Dan says.

Major efforts are continuing without HOPE VI’s help

Two very interesting, very sizeable public housing redevelopment projects in our region are going ahead without that initial funding boost of a HOPE VI grant. Bremerton Housing Authority’s (BHA’s) 82-acre Westpark has the same lineage as NewHolly, Salishan, and Greenbridge: WW II defense worker housing. Because the housing has been well maintained, it didn’t qualify under HOPE VI.

The projected mix of incomes and New Urbanism approach in the finished Westpark development will follow lines similar to its HOPE VI predecessors in the region. But a big difference will be Westpark’s retail component. Along with approximately 800 housing units, BHA’s plans call for about 250,000 square feet of retail space that will help finance the entire effort and provide job opportunities for residents.

SHA’s Yesler Terrace, located right on the southeastern edge of Seattle’s downtown, is another major redevelopment in the works. Built on 30 acres in 1939, it was the very first racially integrated public housing project in the U.S. Yesler’s housing is in bad shape, but its location, as well-placed real estate, represents a significant resource. Says Tom, “at Yesler, we have very low density housing. Land at Yesler is hugely more valuable than the land at NewHolly, High Point, or Rainier Vista. We believe that if we can strategically use the value of that land for some purposes in addition to housing, we’ll get enough value so that we can not only replace its low-income housing—but actually also be able to create additionally many hundreds of units of workforce housing.”

Following Doris Koo’s lead, you might call the plans for Yesler Terrace, SHA’s 2.0 version of how to create a great process for bringing the entire community into the redevelopment dialogue. Last year, SHA sponsored a year-long series of hearings chaired by Norm Rice. “It was the hardest process that I’ve had to manage in a long time,” Norm says. “In some ways it was made more difficult because of the language barriers.” In the end, about 10 interpreters were hired and about 30 hearings and meetings of the Citizen Review Committee were held. Even opponents of the redevelopment acknowledged that they respected the process.
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My View from Kim Herman, Executive Director

June 2008

The result was a document called the Guiding Principles for Yesler Terrace’s redevelopment. SHA’s board has adopted these and will integrate them into its policy directions for the new Yesler Terrace community.

“You can do some wonderful things with Yesler Terrace,” says Norm. “Some people would argue that all you have to do is sell it. But you can’t sell public property for a higher use—it’s bad public policy. At the same time if we expand the footprint of Yesler Terrace, we could probably build more replacement housing, and more affordable housing, if it’s designed and done right. But the way to do that is to get the community into the conversation.”

Encomiums

All of the redevelopments I’ve discussed have thoughtfully utilized significant public resources, and created communities that are infinitely better than they were before.

Each of our six HOPE VI’s has a unique character that is the sum of its history, its residents and surrounding neighborhoods, and the vision brought to life by those who have participated in its remaking. These include of course the people who live and work there; those engaged in leveraging public, private, and philanthropic dollars; the housing authorities and governments that are charged with their security, safety, and well-being; and of course the community leaders and elected representatives who dreamed big.

If you haven’t visited any of these redevelopments, I would urge you to do so. You might want to choose a day when you’re looking to restore your faith in how great things can be achieved if only we reach for them. All of these communities are that phenomenal and beautiful. The accompanying photos in this issue do justice to the high quality and appeal of the homes and public spaces—if not the vast scale of the dream that continues to be realized.