

INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT: CASE 1

Public Housing Redevelopment: Race, Physical Design, and Expertise in Planning

Overview. Based on your knowledge of a variety of redevelopment cases, you have been appointed by Thomas Menino, the Mayor of Boston, to the Task Force on the Future of Public Housing. Given uncertainties about the future of funding for public housing redevelopment as well as ongoing misperceptions about the current state of public housing in the city, the mayor wants to know what housing authority planners should do next.

In particular, he wants to know what issues matter most when trying to assess “success” in public housing redevelopment. So you’ve worked with his Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Planning to identify the scope of an information memo you will write for the Mayor, to help him organize his thinking before giving the Task Force its full charge. Among the many contentious issues confronted during the first quarter-century of public housing redevelopment, **three issues** stand out as particularly complex: the role of race, the efficacy of design-centered planning solutions, and the struggle to integrate professional expertise with the “indigenous knowledge” held by public housing tenants.

The task. Please prepare an informational memo, of no more than 1,500 words, addressed to the Mayor, that discusses any two of these three ongoing concerns. You may choose to write a few sentences about the third issue, particularly if you feel it links to the other issues in crucial ways, but don’t try to address all three issues in such a compact document. The mayor has tapped other experts, and his Deputy Chief of Staff is confident that collectively, they will cover all three issues effectively. Do not concern yourself with the formal authority of the Mayor’s Task Force or other jurisdictional issues that were not in the case material provided. Focus on the questions that define each major issue (see next page).

Note: Although some of the guidance below, in the form of subquestions, includes “should” questions, the purpose of an informational memo is to illuminate choices and considerations, not to recommend specific actions as a decision or “action” memo would. In a sense, you’re recommending how a decision-maker should *think* about something, as a precursor to acting effectively.

Turn in your memo to no later than 10AM, Session 6.

Format. Be sure to double-space your memo, and use ample margins (at least an inch on all sides). No micro-print, please: Assume a busy reader whose eyes are strained already. Use your word processing software to count the number of words in your document, and place that number below the text, i.e. on the last page (e.g. "Word count = 1,486 words"). As with any professional memo, be concise and clear, and provide an effective summary up front. Don't formally cite sources unless you use a direct quote, in which case make it brief, and simply footnote the source.

Having discussed the issues at some length with both the Mayor and his staff, you've identified important **subquestions** that you should address under whichever two of the three issues you choose to write about:

1. The Role of Race in Redevelopment

Of the three Boston public housing redevelopment efforts discussed in class, the one with a racially and ethnically integrated community [Commonwealth] clearly fared best. Is this merely a coincidence or is racial diversity an important component of success? Why did the expensive redevelopment effort fail at Franklin Field (a community of color) while parallel efforts in white and mixed-race communities were substantially successful? In what ways did race affect the course of public housing development and redevelopment? Were planners race avoidant? Should achieving racial diversity be a chief goal of redevelopment?

2. Redevelopment: Physical Design vs. Social Policy

Each of the three redevelopment efforts discussed in class entailed spending tens of millions of dollars on efforts to redesign the physical environment. What aspects of this design intervention were most important? Were there important missed design opportunities? Should more of the money have been spent on some other non-design aspects of the redevelopment, such as social services? Are physical designs and social policies *alternative* ways to take action to improve public housing, or are they connected in some important ways? If you were in charge of developing a proposal for a public housing redevelopment now, what priorities would you set for allocating funds to these different forms of intervention?

3. Planning Knowledge: Trained vs. Indigenous Experts

Planners made a variety of efforts to organize tenants in order to get their input. What kind of involvement from tenants was most significant, and how might design and planning professionals best involve residents? Or, alternatively, how might residents, best involve design and planning professionals? Where do you see evidence of optimal partnering of expert and indigenous input, and where do you see conflicts? If you were a redevelopment planner, what would you have done to engage the tenants better?