
Privately-Funded Public Housing Redevelopment: A Study of the Transformation of Columbia Point (Boston, MA)



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Acknowledgements

This case study, which chronicles the transformation of Columbia Point, draws upon newspaper and magazine articles, academic articles and books, and interviews with local residents, government officials, architects, and developers, including Miles Byrne of Corcoran Jennison (formerly Corcoran, Mullins, Jennison, Inc.), Orlando Perilla, the Executive Director of the Harbor Point Community Task Force, and Etta Johnson and Ms. Chatman, residents and activists at Harbor Point. Members of the Institute for International Urban Development have been following and lecturing on the Columbia Point redevelopment for the last 20 years. Frank Vigier, Mona Serageldin and John Driscoll were instrumental in the direction and content of this case study.

D) Introduction

Constructed under the auspices of the state of Massachusetts's Veterans' Housing Program in 1954, the 1504-unit Columbia Point public housing complex, located on the Boston waterfront (fig. 1), was originally designed as a temporary dwelling for returning World War II veterans and their families. Less than twenty years later, the project, as well as the hopes that officials at the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) and the Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had once invested in it, were in a state of decay. The development became largely uninhabitable due to crime, a high number of dilapidated and closed units, a concentration of at-risk tenants, and a lack of basic amenities, the result of an inadequate operations and maintenance budget. By the 1980s, Boston police officers, municipal agents, and residents alike regarded Columbia Point as one of the most precarious and unsanitary public housing projects in the city. At the time of its redevelopment, only 350 units were legally occupied.

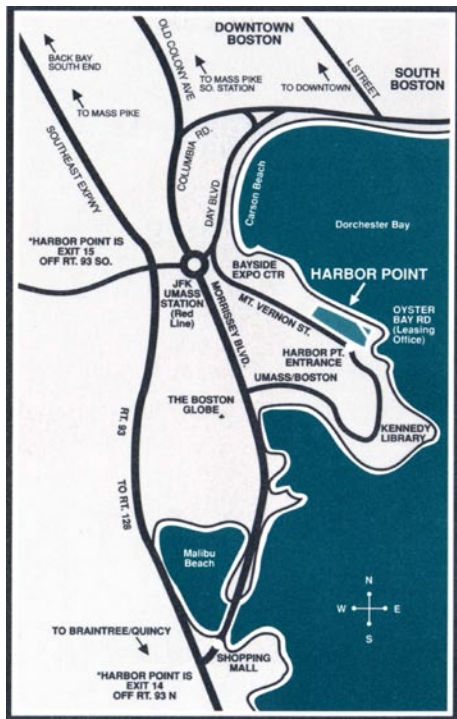


Fig. 1: Map of the Site Harbor Point Apartments,

Source:

<http://www.bostonapartments.com/harbor.htm>

Between 1986 and 1991, Columbia Point underwent a landmark transformation. It became Harbor Point, a 1273-unit complex that differs greatly from its predecessor in terms of management, architectural design, and the socio-economic level of its inhabitants. Columbia Point was reconstructed with the aid of a coalition between government agencies and private developers, specifically Peninsula Partners, a joint venture between Corcoran, Mullins, Jennison, Inc. (CMJ), other developers, and the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. As a result, in the 1990s it became a compass for housing officials seeking an alternative to public housing approaches that relied exclusively on government financing. CMJ developers and the architectural firm they worked with, Goody, Clancy & Associates, redesigned both the

buildings and the surrounding site as part of a strategy to encourage social interaction and to counteract the stigma of public housing.¹ For instance, they replaced several of the original apartments (fig. 2) with two- and three-story grey and light blue-colored townhouses (fig. 3) and designed an orthogonal street pattern with a 45 degree angle to the water's edge to provide views of the harbor.² They also added residential amenities such as swimming pools, tennis courts, a bike path, a basketball court, and a waterfront park, as well as a number of social services.

Most importantly, one of the defining features of the new development is its strong property management and effective policing. Whereas residents of Columbia Point watched their surroundings deteriorate with little response from the BHA, those at Harbor Point have had a very different experience. CMJ responds to residents' concerns in a timely manner, and maintains a solid operating budget for the upkeep of landscaping, shared spaces, buildings and units. Increased surveillance, an on-site security force and a zero tolerance policy toward violence have transformed an environment previously characterized by criminality and fear. The neighborhood is a truly different place to live.

Yet the transformation of the project was not carried out by developers, managers and architects alone. Beginning in the early 1960s, local residents of Columbia Point, mostly low-income African American women, actively participated in the transformation of their own surroundings. Residents have also been actively involved in the management and enforcement of rules at Harbor Point. While Harbor Point has won numerous awards and praise from numerous quarters, perhaps the greatest sign of success is that approximately 285 of the 350 low-income families (81.4 percent) that inhabited the complex when renovation began still reside in the new development.³ Given that fewer

¹ For more on the stigma of public housing and its late development in the twentieth-century U.S., see Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Vale explains that this was also a key strategy employed in the HOPE VI program, initiated by HUD in 1993.

² Joan E. Goody, "From Project to Community: The Redesign of Columbia Point," *Places* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 20-34, 25-26.

³ Paul C. Brophy and Rhonda N. Smith, "Mixed-Income Housing: Factors for Success," *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 3, no. 2 (1997): 3-31, 8.

than 20 percent of Boston residents lived in the same household in 1989 as in 2006 (American Community Survey, 2006), these families have had a remarkably low turnover rate. Nevertheless, Harbor Point is largely inhabited by residents whose income levels and ethnic backgrounds are poles apart from those who had spearheaded its transfiguration in the first place.



Fig. 2: Columbia Point before its redevelopment⁴ **Fig. 3: Light-colored townhouses at Harbor Point**

II) Public Housing on a Peninsula

The Columbia Point public housing project was built on an oceanfront peninsula just outside of Dorchester, in South Boston, in the early 1950s. The area, then known as the “Calf Pasture,” was an expanse of mud flats that extended into Dorchester Bay (fig. 4). Beginning in the mid-1800s, the flats served Boston as a garbage dump, and by 1950s, decades of dumping had created an artificial infill that significantly expanded the land mass. This polluted site created the foundation on which the Columbia Point residential complex was ultimately built. In an interview conducted in 2004, the architect I.M. Pei reflected upon the shocking state of Columbia Point in the 1960s. He recalled that when they excavated in the site in preparation for the construction of the JFK Library,

⁴ Roessner, Jane. *A Decent Place to Live: From Columbia Point to Harbor Point. A Community History.* Boston, MA: Northeastern University, 2000.

methane gas came out of the soil. “You [could] light a match on it and then it’d burn,” he exclaimed.⁵

By 1975, Columbia Point was the largest of the BHA’s fifty-seven housing projects. It consisted of thirty high-rise and mid-rise buildings that were uniformly flattop and a muted yellow brick. Numerous families shared a common entrance to their buildings as well as elevators. Residents complained of feelings of isolation. Located at the edge of Dorchester Bay, the peninsula was surrounded by water on three sides and a highway on the fourth. The Columbia Point subway stop, which was built in the late 1920s,⁶ was located a half a mile away from the site through open fields with no lighting. Residents remarked that they were fearful of walking to and from the station, especially at night.



Fig. 4: Aerial view of the Columbia Point Peninsula, 1932
Photo courtesy of the Boston Public Library Print Department

Moreover, although Columbia Point was built to house over 6,000 individuals, it was designed as a housing project, not a community. Basic institutional necessities, such as schools, stores, and recreational facilities were noticeably absent. The lack of easy transportation to surrounding neighborhoods and commercial areas only amplified this problem. But the isolation of Columbia Point had a surprising effect: Early accounts of life at Columbia Point indicate that, despite the inherent shortcomings with which they were faced, residents rallied to create a strong sense of community. Many tenants have since attributed such feelings of unity to the neighborhood’s seclusion from the rest of

⁵ Robert Campbell, moderator, “A Conversation with I.M. Pei,” John F. Kennedy Library & Foundation, September 26, 2004. www.jfklibrary.org/NR/rdonlyres/.

⁶ The Columbia Point subway stop on the MBTA’s Red Line was redeveloped in the 1980s and became the JFK/UMASS station.

the city.⁷ Tenants worked together to clean, maintain, and decorate the interiors of their buildings, to look after one another's children, and to report concerns to the management for immediate attention.

By the late 1960s, conditions at the development had begun to deteriorate. Buildings fell into disrepair yet drew little management response from the BHA. Criminal activity increased as offenders went unpunished. An exodus of working-class families who could afford living arrangements in other parts of the city ensued as more "problem" tenants moved in. Hundreds of units became vacant and were prime spots for illegal pursuits. By the mid-1970's, news stories about Columbia Point almost exclusively dealt with crime and gang-violence.

Yet the deterioration of Columbia Point in the 1960s and 1970s must also be understood within the context of public housing policy on the federal level. The Public Works Administration initially created public housing during the Great Depression of the 1930s to provide temporary accommodation for working class families as they gained socio-economic footing and also to create jobs. As these families moved on in the 1950s, they were replaced by needier and more troubled families, many of whom were on welfare. Public housing grew to be "housing of last resort for the hard-core poor."⁸ In the 1960s, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the racial composition of Columbia Point, as in many other public housing developments in cities across the U.S. at that time, underwent a radical shift. In 1954, Columbia Point residents were more than 90 percent white; by 1970, the complex was over 60 percent African American. This pattern, echoed in public housing projects throughout the northern United States, was due in part to in-migration of black families from the South. At the federal level, public housing suffered a loss of revenue as the result of the Brooke Amendment of 1969, which limited public housing rents to 25 percent of the tenant's household income. While intended to alleviate the burden of housing costs on low-income individuals and families who resided in public housing project, the loss of revenue that ensued from the

⁷ Jane Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live: From Columbia Point to Harbor Point. A Community History* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University, 2000), 93.

⁸ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 83.

new restrictions resulted in a shortage of funds for maintenance. As a result, many public housing projects across the United States fell into disrepair.

Residents themselves point to three primary factors that brought about the decline of Columbia Point. The first was a lenient approach to the process of screening potential tenants. The BHA responded to growing numbers of urban poor by sending them off to public housing projects as a means of containing the problem. With the ratification of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the earlier practice of screening tenants for their ability to pay the rent, to ensure that they did not have criminal pasts, and that they did not suffer from anti-social problems such as alcoholism, drug use, or domestic violence, was now prohibited. Subsequently, Columbia Point became a nexus of poor and troubled families.

The second factor came in the form of the Tenants' Rights Movement. In the mid-1960s, activists argued that subjecting tenants to routine apartment checks and requiring that they participate in building maintenance violated their civil liberties. Tenancy should not be subject to housekeeping rules, activists asserted. Validating this position stripped managers of the authority to enforce basic maintenance standards. With the threat of penalties such as fines and even eviction eliminated, tenants began to reject the shared responsibility that had sustained Columbia Point, and conditions rapidly worsened.

Finally, Columbia Point suffered from a growing neglect on the part of its landlord, the BHA. As funds decreased and bureaucracy expanded, services to the project were gradually eliminated. Basic repairs to apartment units went unattended to for months, and finally, not at all. Building upkeep deteriorated to the point that central heating often did not even function during the winter. Elevators stopped operating, forcing families to climb through stairwells that had become havens for criminals. Infrastructural services such as garbage collection and street cleaning occurred more and more sporadically. After a series of violent crimes committed in the area in the 1970s, the BHA finally placed a halt on all new transfers into Columbia Point. Despite a

long waiting list for publicly-subsidized housing units, the BHA allowed vacated apartments to remain empty. These spaces were quickly occupied by squatters, drug-dealers, and bandits, and were frequent targets for vandalism and arson. By the late 1970s, even fire trucks and ambulances would not enter the complex without a police escort.

III) Redeveloping Columbia Point

Plans for the project's redevelopment commenced in the mid-1970s and accompanied public housing reform at the municipal level. In 1975, following a class-action law suit filed by a group of public housing tenants throughout Boston, the Boston Housing Court ruled that conditions at the BHA's housing projects across the city were "not decent, nor are they safe, nor are they in compliance with the provisions of the state sanitary code."⁹ In 1979, after four years of failed efforts by the BHA to bring its operations in line with its legal responsibilities, the court intervened again and placed the BHA in receivership. Lewis Harwood (Harry) Spence – a charismatic Harvard Law School graduate with a renowned social conscience¹⁰ -- was appointed as receiver. With new leadership, and a renewed dedication on the part of its landlord, Columbia Point was given a framework within which to initiate its metamorphosis.

Yet the transformation of Columbia Point was spearheaded not by city officials alone but in conjunction with local residents. The primary actor in the redevelopment of the complex was the Columbia Point Community Task Force (CPCTF), a seven-member volunteer group that was comprised primarily of African-American women. The task force was initiated in 1978 in response to a loan of \$10 million made by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through its Urban Initiatives Program. The funding was a response to the increasing national attention that Columbia Point was attracting as a symbol of the failure of public housing in America. The Urban Initiatives Program stipulated that a resident-elected body of tenants work

⁹ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 178.

¹⁰ Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 346.

with the BHA and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) to ensure the optimum use of funds. The stated primary goal of the task force was “[to improve] the overall living conditions for all residents of Columbia Point.”¹¹

In the fall of 1978, the task force met with the real estate development firm of Corcoran, Mullins, Jennison (CMJ) and invited them to take on the project. CMJ's interest in this venture stemmed both from its previous experience in transforming blighted communities and the recognition that Columbia Point was a scar across some of Boston's most valued real-estate: an ocean-side peninsula with a dramatic panoramic view of downtown. CMJ's vision was to transform Columbia Point into a privately-owned mixed-income community, like King's Lynne, a CMJ development in Lynn, MA. This former public housing project had been transformed by CMJ in partnership with its residents.

First contact between CMJ and CPCTF was made in 1978. By this time, Columbia Point had been the subject of analysis for numerous private design firms and public consultants for over a decade, and the Columbia Point peninsula had become the target of new development. In 1974 and 1979 respectively, the University of Massachusetts' Boston campus and the JFK Library were constructed, even as conditions at Columbia Point were degenerating. These new projects, as well as the renovation of the Columbia Point subway station in the early 1980s, greatly impacted plans for the redesign of the project. For instance, CMJ used the new university campus as an entryway that would attract higher-income tenants, bypassing the previous entry through Mount Auburn Street.¹²

In February of 1979, the BHA, BRA, and CPCTF drafted a Columbia Point Peninsula Redevelopment Agreement to address tenants' rights and public and private responsibility in the redevelopment process. A “Memorandum of Understanding,”

¹¹ Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, 1993 Winners and Finalists, *Harbor Point Boston, Massachusetts Apartment Community: Mixed Income Rental Community*, Harbor Point Community Representative Perspective #1, Etta Johnson
http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/bruner/1993/harbor_point/mainindex.html

¹² Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 247.

clearly informed by conversations between the task force and CMJ, established the redevelopment's objectives and conditions as well as specific guarantees for the current residents of Columbia Point. Key points included:

- All existing Columbia Point residents were to be guaranteed housing on the peninsula at a cost not to exceed 25 percent of their incomes;
- The development that would replace Columbia Point was to accommodate individuals and families with multiple income levels;
- The CPCTF would participate jointly with the BRA and the BHA in the redevelopment, construction, and management of all new and rehabilitated housing on the peninsula, including the developer selection process;
- Columbia Point residents would be eligible for job training and job opportunities associated with the redevelopment project.¹³

Initially, the BHA, under Spence's leadership, rejected CMJ's proposal to transform Columbia Point into a mixed-income privately managed community. It required instead that the company submit a proposal for the modernization of the development while keeping the housing public. This would prevent the city from losing over 1100 subsidized units at a time when the demand for them was high. Miles Byrne, a current spokesperson for CMJ, offers a different perspective: "The process of taking that huge number of public housing units off the market was very political, and the BHA had a number of reasons to oppose it. At the time, there were only 353 active units and over 1100 units inactive. Despite this, the BHA didn't want to lose the administrative revenue associated with those units. Furthermore, to lose units implied that the BHA couldn't handle managing their own housing, which would reflect very poorly on the agency."

In response, CMJ decided to circumvent the BHA and go directly to the federal level. They sent a proposal to HUD and were later invited, along with the CPCTF, to Washington D.C. to present their plan at HUD headquarters. HUD responded

¹³ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 192.

enthusiastically to a plan that would “demonstrate that private enterprise could provide housing for the poor while reducing federal expenditures and the government’s role.”¹⁴ After this landmark decision, HUD made clear to the BHA that it would not sponsor mere modernization of Columbia Point. HUD also exempted the project from having to maintain the existing number of public housing units in the new development, observing that the high densities and the concentration of poverty at Columbia Point had contributed to its deterioration.

On September 12, 1982, the BHA and BRA, in partnership with the CPCTF, issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to private developers. Its provisions echoed those of the “Memorandum of Understanding” of 1979:

- At least 400 units were to be permanently maintained as affordable housing for lower-income families. The units would be equivalent in design and level of amenities to other units, and mixed across the site with both moderate-income and market-rate units. They would be made available first to the Columbia Point residents;
- All households remaining in occupancy at Columbia Point would be guaranteed the right to live in newly-constructed or substantially rehabilitated units of a size appropriate to their family’s needs. Construction was scheduled with consideration to allow most residents to remain at the site and to be immediately relocated to new apartments;
- The Columbia Point Community Task Force, representing project residents, would have a genuine, strong, and active role in the redevelopment planning process and in decisions of the future ownership entity;
- Columbia Point residents would be afforded a fair share of the construction and permanent job opportunities created by the redevelopment process;
- A trust fund would be established to provide reasonable additional security for the lower-income component of the project.

¹⁴ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 192.

Other key points of particular importance to the CPCTF included:

- Increased recreational facilities and open, green play areas for children;
- Sufficient social services for all residents requiring assistance with relocation and other issues, including educational and employment opportunities;
- Increased, visible, 24-hour security, in addition to private entranceways for all family units, thus eliminating dark hallways;
- Accessible and hands-on management that would meet on a regular basis with the task force.¹⁵

By 1983, three development firms had submitted proposals for the redevelopment of Columbia Point, and two were under serious consideration: CMJ's design by the architectural firm Goody, Clancy & Associates, and a proposal by Columbia Associates, a large and politically-connected real-estate development partnership. In the following months, a standoff ensued in which the BHA refused to sponsor CMJ as the developer. However, CMJ's proposal, the only one to include tenant partnership as part of its program, had the full support of the CPCTF. The task force now had enough legitimacy to oppose the BHA with equal strength, and it lobbied HUD to ensure that its preference was given fair consideration. The mayor appointed Boston developer Arthur Winn as an arbitrator and in October a resolution was reached: the two development teams were merged to create a limited partnership with Corcoran Mullins Jennison as the lead developer. The team was called "Peninsula Partners," and was granted co-general partnership with the CPCTF, who would retain a 10 percent financial share in the project. The agreement dictated that CMJ's private management company would manage the new complex.

The cost of development was initially estimated at \$200 million but grew to over \$250 million. The Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) provided a first mortgage through a bond insured by HUD of \$121 million, and a second uninsured mortgage of \$30 million. The \$151 million total was tax-exempted and provided at 9.5 percent, a

¹⁵ Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, Community Representative Perspective #1, Etta Johnson.

rate consistent with mortgage rates at that time.¹⁶ \$12 million was obtained through the federal government's Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program and made available through the HUD and BRA. Combined with the \$9 million remaining from HUD's 1978 Urban Initiatives Grant, the federal contribution totaled \$21 million. An additional \$3 million was obtained through a Massachusetts Chapter 884 Grant. Private equity investment began at \$25 million and totaled \$75 million by 1990.¹⁷

DEVELOPMENT FINANCING (in millions of dollars)					
Federal		State		Private	
Source	Amount	Source	Amount	Source	Amount
UDAG	12	MHFA	151	Equity Investment	75
Urban Initiatives	9	Chapter 884	3		
Total: \$21 million		Total: \$154 million		Total: \$75 million	

The land was obtained through a long-term ground lease to Peninsula Partners from the BHA at a cost of \$1.00. The development secured subsidies for 350 units of the development through the federal government's Section 8 Program, a rent subsidy voucher. The remaining fifty units were subsidized through Chapter 707, a similar program offered through the State of Massachusetts for elderly residents. Later on, the development also qualified for SHARP, a state rental voucher program which made up to \$2.5 million per year available for up to 15 years.

OPERATING SUBSIDIES		
Entity	Contribution	Source
Section 8	350 units subsidized	Federal
Chapter 707	50 units subsidized	State
SHARP Program	Up to \$2.5 million/year	State

¹⁶ http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/H15/data/Annual/H15_MORTG_NA.txt. (accessed 07/02/2008).

¹⁷ See Appendix B for detailed information about these programs.

The process of securing financing was complex and required much effort, ingenuity, and collaboration among the various groups involved. A representative for CMJ stated that “the exact financing cannot be replicated since much of the project was financed through federal and state programs which constantly change. But the conceptual framework can be. Tax-exempt bonds and the low-income housing tax credit are likely to continue and provide financial assistance to projects such as these.”¹⁸ The viability of the project was jeopardized in late 1983 when the federal government’s Section 8 funds had effectively run out. The project was saved by a plan devised by the BHA through its attorneys: the housing authority arranged a swap with Franklin Field, a development that had been granted subsidies for 350 of its units through Section 8. In exchange, Franklin Field could apply for “modernization funding” for which Columbia Point, as a private project, was no longer eligible. Redevelopment efforts were endangered yet again three years later, with the ratification of the 1986 tax bill, which eliminated incentives for private investment in real estate. Without exemption from this new law, Columbia Point would have lost almost \$50 million of its private funding, making redevelopment impossible. After much negotiation, Senator Ted Kennedy secured a one-time tax credit for private investors of the project, thus ensuring its continuation.¹⁹

The architectural redesign of the project also required much collaboration, ingenuity, and effort. The Peninsula Partnership included two architectural groups: Goody, Clancy and Associates (GC&A) and Mintz Associates, Architects. The tenant task force had its own reviewing architect, Antonio Di Mambro, whose job was to clearly communicate design ideas to the tenant group and to communicate tenants’ concerns to the designers. Finally, the office of architect Hugh Russell was in charge of construction administration. Tenant priorities fell into three categories: (1) equal treatment of subsidized and market-rate households; (2) functionally sensitive housing design; and (3) security. As a CMJ representative recalled, “The message from the tenants...was clear. They wanted to live in a ‘normal’ neighborhood, one that didn’t look or work like a project, one that felt safe for walking and letting their children out to play...they

¹⁸ Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, Abstract.

¹⁹ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 217-218.

wanted conveniently arranged, reasonably sized apartments...and nearby parking places...they knew that shared entries for families with children could never be made secure: kids forgot their keys; doors were kept ajar.”²⁰

Incorporating these concerns into the design took several months of meetings between the task force, Di Mambro, and GC&A. Ultimately, a plan materialized with key components including the even distribution of subsidized units throughout the development, uniform treatment of market-rate and subsidized units in terms of design, and the provision of a variety of housing types to accommodate the needs of households of varying sizes and types. GC&A designed the site plan and most of the new buildings for Harbor Point. The architects’ priorities included connected street patterns and protected view corridors. The new grid was situated at a 45 degree angle to the water’s edge, affording every street a view of either the ocean or the downtown Boston skyline. To create a sense of community, the design included individual front doors, porches and porticos, sidewalks and courtyards, and front-curb parking. The new building design entirely rejected the aesthetics of public housing, with its uniformity, colorlessness, and flat-topped roofs. Instead, the design team aimed to erase the stigma associated with public housing by making the buildings more in line with individual houses of a style one might find in a middle-class suburban neighborhood.

In total, the planning period took three years, from 1983 to 1986. During this time, the task force and CMJ solidified their partnership. Discussing this novel alliance, representatives of the task force described a progression from skepticism to trust to a shared vision and mutual respect. “[CMJ] sat back and listened to us. They told us up front that they were not there to tell us what to do and what not to do...the decisions we made were our decisions because we got information that we needed. Not one time in my involvement did they ever come and say, this is the way you should do it.”²¹ CMJ’s Miles Byrne notes that the task force consistently made requests that were reasonable and feasible. Their demands were never prohibitive. The task force, meanwhile, worked

²⁰ Goody, "From Project to Community," 23.

²¹ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 212.

to persuade the tenant community that plans for redevelopment were real. One such method was to keep task force meetings open to the public. Another was to construct a model unit and invite tenants to visualize what new living conditions would resemble. Still, early task force member Etta Johnson states, “It was only when they started tearing down buildings that people started believing that things were finally going to change.”

The period of construction occurred from 1986-1991. During the course of construction, twenty buildings were demolished. Ten were kept and radically rehabilitated. 198 two- and three-story townhouses, 258 garden apartments, and 827 five- to seven-story elevator buildings were introduced on the site.²² Each townhouse and ground-level apartment was provided with its own private rear-patio, and the remaining spaces on the block were made into green common areas. Parking for the townhouses and renovated three-story buildings was provided along the front curb. Parking for the taller buildings was provided in the rear space of the blocks on which they were situated.

The central feature of the complex is a scenic mall that leads from the entryway to the public waterfront, along which most community buildings are situated (fig. 5). The mall “is meant to function as a town green/main street/ common meeting ground for the residents, as well as the link between the public access street and the public water’s edge park, both of which connect Harbor Point to the large community and the city.”²³

The task force worked with the CMJ management team to transform the community. The first phase of this process was to



Fig. 5: Landscaped Mall

²² Goody, "From Project to Community," 33.

²³ Goody, "From Project to Community," 23.

recover the existing buildings that were to remain in the new complex.

This involved consolidating families into one area of the development, securing the remaining vacant units of the site, and cleaning out the buildings. The second phase was to restore social order, a dual process of enforcement and social rehabilitation. Most crucially, the drug and crime problem at Columbia Point required immediate attention. A year after CMJ's management team began managing the property, an armed and deputized security force was employed to enforce a new security policy. The police force cracked down on drug dealing and violent crime at the Point. The atmosphere for criminals went from one of complete permissiveness to one of uncompromising intolerance. Even with this new force, it took several years to completely eradicate the drug problem. Joe Corcoran has said, "If we had to do something differently, we would have established a security force immediately, rather than after we had been managing the property for one year."²⁴

A fundamental component to restoring social order was working closely with the residents. A key partner in this process was Housing Opportunities Unlimited (HOU). HOU is a private provider of resident services unaffiliated with CMJ – a point that the management company mentions as necessary to its success. HOU's efforts were centered on supporting families with social issues, ranging from drug addiction and domestic violence to unemployment and personal disputes. HOU guided families toward opportunities for psychological counseling, job-training, and employment. It counseled troubled families and mediated disputes between neighbors. It worked with the resident community at large to help them understand the new terms of tenancy and help the task force to enforce them on a more intimate basis. Recognizing that lasting change within a community necessitates the empowerment of its residents, HOU worked to identify community leaders and train the elected resident board.

During this period of transition and in its aftermath, 17 percent of the remaining tenants at Columbia Point were evicted. The only allowable cause for eviction was proven

²⁴ Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, Developer Perspective, Joseph E Corcoran.

involvement with drugs or violence. The task force was extremely active in the process of identifying which families would not be able to make the transition to the new private development. Eviction trials necessitated the approval of the task force, which brought an element of personal insight to the proceedings. In numerous cases, the tenant board would agree that a family in question had in fact become a problem, but would blame the management or the city for having missed opportunities to salvage them in the past. If permitted to remain, these families would be referred to HOU for counseling and other forms of support.

Regular inspections of the inhabited units at the development were conducted by the management team and task force to ensure compliance with the guidelines. The presence of both parties was necessary to understanding the real needs of the community. The management team was on hand to document structural damages and observance of cleanliness standards. The task force representative could go further in addressing the personal needs of the tenants. Whereas three broken doors in a unit would indicate to the management a need for repair, to a tenant peer it could potentially signal a domestic violence problem.

Task force members anticipated that convincing residents to partake in their shared upkeep of their buildings and the individual upkeep of their units would be a challenge. Additionally, under BHA proprietorship, rent collection was neglected for years. The new management team ensured that illegal tenants were either officially placed on the lease and paid their rents or left the development. Contrary to what had been feared, the general population of residents was extremely responsive to change. Once they realized they were dealing with a management entity that put tangible investment into the community and that assumed real accountability, residents began to respond.

IV) Harbor Point: An Experiment in Mixed-Income Housing

From its completion in the early 1990s, housing officials, architects, urban planners, and journalists alike have extolled Harbor Point as a phenomenal success. It won major

awards, including the Urban Land Institute's Award for Excellence (1992), the Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment (1993), and the International Real Estate Federation Award for International Excellence (1996).²⁵ What has made it such a success in the eyes of these and other observers is (1) its ability to attract market-rate renters through architectural design, geographical location, dependable management and policing, and amenities; (2) the extent of cooperation between CMJ and local residents, and the high retention rate for the original tenants; and (3) the even distribution and identical design of subsidized and market-rate units throughout the complex.

Harbor Point contains 400 low-income units and 873 market-rate units. Currently, the development is home to 1210 households, 394 of which are subsidized. Of the 2671 individuals that presently reside at Harbor Point, nearly 25 percent are students of area universities, the most common of which being the neighboring U-Mass Boston. 453 youths (17 percent of the population) live at Harbor Point, 80 percent of them in subsidized households. Only 5 percent of the residents are elderly, and 75 percent of them are subsidized residents. The elderly are the only group given their own building at Harbor Point, with amenities that address their specific needs. As of 2007, the unemployment rate at Harbor Point stands at 6 percent, while the unemployment average for the city as a whole is 4.4 percent. The absolute number of unemployed tenants is almost evenly divided between median-income and low-income residents. However, the proportion of unemployed subsidized tenants is marginally higher than that of unemployed market-rate tenants. The remaining 48 percent of tenants are adults that are either working class or employed in professional fields.

Harbor Point is dependent on federal Section 8 subsidies. In recent years, similar mixed-income projects around Boston have suffered from a reduced availability of Section 8 financing. However, thus far, Harbor Point has reportedly not had the same difficulty in receiving their necessary allotment of project-based Section 8 funds, even with regular rent increases over time. The management attributes this to the fact that

²⁵ Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live*, 290.

Harbor Point provides a desirable product using a constructive model, and thus the federal agency is eager to support it. Harbor Point recently underwent a massive refinancing to get out from underneath MHFA's umbrella. This has been both economically and politically advantageous. Having reached the expiration date on its tax-credit obligations, the development team was able to secure private financing with lower interest rates. Furthermore, the HPAC has more operative autonomy. A recurring tension with the MHFA had been in the selection of tenants. Pressure from the public agency to rapidly fill vacant subsidized units would allow for the admission of families that would otherwise not have passed initial screening. The result was often a time-consuming and costly eviction proceeding.

The success of the development is dependent upon its ability to attract market-rate renters. In the earliest days of its transition, the media expressed much doubt as to whether the complex would undergo significant change in terms of crime and safety. The process of changing the public's perception of this area was slow. One of Harbor Point's first strategic acts was to change the complex's name to Harbor Point, thereby eradicating the negative associations of crime, bad management, and ugliness that had infused the phrase "Columbia Point." Harbor Point's marketing group also succeeded in attracting market-rate tenants to this mixed-income community by emphasizing its waterfront location, dependable management and policing, and its quality architectural design.²⁶ With its view corridors and diversity of housing types, Harbor Point was competitive with other market-rate developments in the city.

The design of the site linked the development to its New England context in physical terms. The aesthetics of Harbor Point borrowed from architecture customary to traditional New England housing, such as red-brick, sloped roofs, and townhouses. The landscaping connected the Harbor Point complex to its immediate surroundings. The mall running through the center of the development extends into a park and beach operated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. In addition, the new

²⁶ Schwartz, Alex and Kian Tajbakhsh, "Mixed-Income Housing: Unanswered Questions," *Cityscape* 3, no. 2 (1997): 71-92.

compound offers a variety of amenities, such as a shuttle bus to and from the red line station, two swimming pools, a club house, tennis courts, a beach, a health center, a day care center, and numerous social services. Harbor Point also provides a small onsite commercial center, located along the main mall at the entrance of the complex, with a convenience store and pizza restaurant.

Most importantly, the management of Harbor Point is dependable and police keep the area under surveillance. The program for the social restoration of the compound, as applied by the development and task force partnership, was double-sided. The process required enforcement of regulations as well as social rehabilitation. The Harbor Point police and management were successful in curbing crime and maintaining the physical aspects of the complex. However, they would have been entirely ineffectual at staging the kinds of social interventions that the population at Harbor Point so desperately needed on their own. Restoring the social fabric of Harbor Point demanded the participation of multiple departments, each with their own respective strengths.

In order to make the concept of living in a mixed-income community more marketable, CMJ has written a number of measures into the operational framework of Harbor Point. These measures include:

- The even distribution of subsidized units throughout the development makes the division between tenant groups less visible. The alternative model, namely isolating subsidized households in one sector of the complex, serves to accentuate the lines that divide tenant groups rather than to erase them.
- A management team that is exceptionally responsive to tenant concerns, complaints and suggestions.
- Strict rule enforcement and immediate reaction to prohibited activity.

In their assessment of Harbor Point, the Rudy Bruner Award committee stressed the extent of cooperation between CMJ and local residents. This collaboration, they argued, was key to facilitating the redevelopment process and assuring its eventual success. The

development remains desirable for low income families: the waiting list is long. However, subsidized tenants, particularly in the early days of Harbor Point, have their own set of concerns about living with wealthier neighbors. The primary fear is unequal treatment under the new system. In recent years, this has materialized as suspicions of unfair treatment dealt to minority children by the security force. Allegations of this kind are treated seriously by the management. Responses to valid claims of this kind range from programs for re-education to dismissal.

Another advantage of the privately-owned and managed Columbia Point complex is that it now produces revenue for the city through property taxes, whereas before it was a major destination for tax dollars. The former Columbia Point had been entirely the responsibility of the city. Maintenance, structural and infrastructural improvements, public safety, and public health had been managed at a huge municipal expense. Furthermore, Columbia Point produced a large number of citizens that ended up in the penal system, a further expense to tax payers. By contrast, the present population of Harbor Point is largely law-abiding, and the median income of the subsidized population has risen four-fold in 20 years.

The innovative approach employed to redevelop Columbia Point, while successful, does not offer a definitive solution to the ongoing problem of public housing in America. Privately operated mixed-income housing developments have their benefits, but may not provide adequate numbers of social housing units at an affordable cost. A major critique of many public housing redevelopments in the United States is that they have failed to replace all subsidized units. The worst public housing projects may have densely concentrated derelict housing of last resort. But unless new housing options are provided, mixed-income redevelopments will tend to help a geographic location but at the expense of exacerbating an overall shortage of affordable housing. In the case of Columbia Point, subsidized units were replaced on a one-to-one basis, but this was possible only because at the time of the 1989 redevelopment less than one quarter of the original 1,504 units remained open. Furthermore, all of these units continue to receive annual government subsidies. To expand the Harbor Point model to other failing public

housing projects, it is essential to provide adequate total units of affordable housing and to reduce the amount of annual government subsidy.

Appendix A: Harbor Point Associations

The Harbor Point Apartments Company (HPAC) owns and manages the housing estate. The city of Boston and the BHA own the land, but it is leased to the private development team. The HPAC partnership consists of two general partners, the Harbor Point Task Force and Peninsula Partners.

The HPAC governing board is the principal executive body of Harbor Point. The board is comprised of two representatives from the developers and two representatives from the local task force. The governing board makes all major policy decisions concerning Harbor Point. It also oversees the management team, the Harbor Point Police, and Housing Opportunities Unlimited (HOU). Among the board's most important roles is judging eviction cases for "problem" tenants. In these cases, the management presents a case for tenant eviction, and the tenant may plead his or her case with the assistance of legal counsel. The board decides whether or not the management may proceed with its case to housing court.

At present, evictions among subsidized tenants are relatively low. The most common cause for eviction is non-payment of rent, which is far more prevalent among market-rate renters. However, evictions for violations of project rules, while rare, are more common among subsidized tenants. In 1995 there were fifty evictions, forty for non-payment, and ten for violation of project rules.²⁷ A consensus must be reached on all items brought before the board; however, meetings are reportedly rarely contentious. Legal arrangements provide for the use of an outside arbiter in the occurrence of an impasse. In twenty years of operation the governing board has not had to resort to outside arbitration.

The Harbor Point Task Force is an eleven-member body representing the development's tenants. The role of the task force is to oversee the everyday management of the site and to ensure that the property runs properly. The task force

²⁷ Brophy and Smith, "Mixed Income Housing: Factors for Success," 8.

reviews contracts and policies, and facilitates communication between the various departments that operate Harbor Point. In order to keep tabs on the community's physical needs, the force appoints building captains to communicate the needs of individual buildings. The task force meets three times a month to discuss management, business plans, and ongoing issues. Annual elections are held for task force positions.²⁸

Housing Opportunities Unlimited (HOU), the resident services provider, is contracted by the HPAC governing board and caters directly to the social needs of the tenants. HOU is comprised of professional service workers and community outreach personnel. It is given a set of specific deliverables by the task force, including:

- Working with young adults between the ages of eighteen through twenty-five. The primary goal is to bring employment opportunities to young adults living in Harbor Point;
- Keeping regular contact with and watching over Harbor Point's senior citizen population;
- Looking after the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) and Department of Mental Health (DMH) residents that live at Harbor Point. The development is required to have twelve residents from the DMH and DMR combined. At present there are eighteen;
- Guiding and assisting all families at Harbor Point facing any type of social issue, including substance abuse, domestic violence and unemployment.

The resident services approach is very intensive. Its "efforts focus on interventions to individuals and families."²⁹ HOU identifies "problem" families in the community or those that are undergoing difficulty and works directly with them. They provide counseling, advocacy and negotiation, and referral to other social service providers

²⁸Voter turnout for task force elections has a yearly average of 10 percent. While seemingly low, this is relatively normal for community boards of all kinds. This percentage generally rises when the community is galvanized by a particular crisis.

²⁹April M.W. Young, "Bodies in jeopardy: Discourse and experience among Black women in a Boston community," (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1996).

when needed. HOU has taken over the social role of the original Columbia Point Community Task Force, particularly in terms of forging intimate relationships with individual tenants. HOU now assists with the inspection of the four hundred subsidized units conducted by the management, rather than the task force. Currently only one member of the HOU staff is a resident of Harbor Point.

The Harbor Point Police Force is licensed and deputized through the Boston Police Department, and given the right to carry arms and to make arrests. The security presence consists of two officers, one guard at the front entrance, and one dispatch officer. The primary responsibilities of the force are to police illegal activity and to enforce Harbor Point regulations. In the twenty-year history of Harbor Point, there has been no weapon discharged by the police force, or shooting deaths at the development. The distinction is made between a “lock-down” model and “courtesy patrol” model, with Harbor Point being the latter.

CMJ Management, a subsidiary of Corcoran Jennison (formerly Corcoran Mullins Jennison), provides all management services to Harbor Point. The management office oversees the maintenance and structural needs of the complex, as well as tenancy issues as pertain to compliance with the development’s rules and regulations. The management office receives daily reports from the Harbor Point police and thus is well informed as to tenants causing and experiencing problems.

Social Services: Harbor Point also provides a youth center and a health center. The youth center at Harbor Point is for children between toddler-age up to age seventeen, and provides after-school assistance and care. In addition, it provides jobs for youths during the summer. The Geiger-Gibson Community Health Center provides primary health care as well as behavioral health services to Harbor Point residents. In all communication between tenants and administrative offices, the lease agreement is used as the guiding principle. Regulations and guidelines are entirely outlined therein, and in essence it functions as the constitution of the Harbor Point development.

Ongoing Role of Public Institutions: The Boston Housing Authority still owns the land on which Harbor Point is situated. As such, Harbor Point is required to execute a land lease for ninety-nine years, with the property reverting to the Housing Authority at the end, and to provide four hundred low-income units for ninety-nine years. Other stipulations of the city include that Harbor Point operate a public Benefit Fund to assure the long-term affordability of the low-income units; that a waterfront park connect to a regional park along the waterfront; and that Harbor Point management maintain specified adjacent city-owned property for the term of the Partnership's land lease.

Appendix B: Public Financing Programs

FEDERAL

UDAG: The Urban Development Action Grant is a federal grant made through the U.S. Department for Housing and Urban Development. The grants are made to cities and urban counties which are experiencing severe economic distress to help stimulate economic development activity needed to aid in economic recovery. Eligible cities and urban counties are those which have demonstrated results in providing housing for low- and moderate-income persons, and in providing equal opportunity in housing and employment for low- and moderate-income persons and members of minority groups.

Urban Initiatives: The Public Housing Urban Initiatives Program was created by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. It provided funds for public housing authorities to address the physical needs of troubled public housing projects. Funds were also used to address crime and social problems and to provide technical assistance to improve the management of housing authorities. The funding was given on the condition that an elected group of tenants work with the housing authority to direct the application of the funds.

Section 8: The Housing Choice Voucher Program (commonly referred to as Section 8) is a federal assistance program provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development which sponsors subsidized housing for low-income individuals and families. Section 8 vouchers subsidize landlords by paying the difference between low-income and market rate units. Tenant-based vouchers are given to eligible families who are then able to lease a unit in the private sector and pay a share of the rent. Project-based vouchers are dispensed to landlords and are tied to particular units within a development.

STATE

Chapter 884: Chapter 884 of the Massachusetts State Acts of 1973 was created to provide a framework for replacing poor quality public housing with private, mixed income developments. Under the Chapter 884 program, state-owned housing property is handed over to a development corporation to redevelop the property into a private, mixed- income development. The legislation stipulates that the development corporation be comprised of a private developer and a tenant task force who share equal control. The state funds improvements to the physical infrastructure, as well as funding the task force for planning and social services.

Chapter 707: Chapter 707 is a form of rental assistance offered through Massachusetts' Department of Housing and Community Development. The program offers rental subsidies to eligible clients of the department of mental health.

SHARP: The State Housing Assistance for Rental Production program (SHARP) aims to support the inclusion of low-income housing within private developments. SHARP provides permanent financing and rental subsidies to private development corporations, with the condition that 25 percent of units within a complex are reserved for low-income families.

Appendix C: List of Acronyms

BHA	Boston Housing Authority
BRA	Boston Redevelopment Agency
CMJ	Corcoran, Mullins, Jennison, Inc.
CPCTF	Columbia Point Community Task Force
GC&A	Goody, Clancy & Associates
HPAC	Harbor Point Apartments Company
HOU	Housing Opportunities Unlimited
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
MHFA	Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency
SHARP	State Housing Assistance for Rental Production
RFP	Request for Proposals
UDAG	Urban Development Action Grant

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