



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Policy Development and Research



# **Strategies That Enhance Community Relations in the Tenant-Based Housing Choice Voucher Programs**

Final Report

March 30, 2001

Visit PD&R's Web Site

**[www.huduser.org](http://www.huduser.org)**

to find this report and other sponsored by

HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R).

Other services of HUD USER, PD&R's Research Information Service, include listservs; special interest, bimonthly publications (best practices, significant studies from other sources); access to public use databases; hotline 1-800-245-2691 for help accessing the information you need.

# **Strategies That Enhance Community Relations in Tenant-Based Housing Choice Voucher Programs**

## **Final Report**

March 30, 2001

*Prepared for*  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Policy Development and Research  
451 7<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W., Room 4122  
Washington, DC 20410

*Prepared by*  
Sarah Churchill  
Mary Joel Holin  
Jill Khadduri  
Jennifer Turnham

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors of this report—Sarah Churchill, Mary Joel Holin, Jill Khadduri, and Jennifer Turnham—acknowledge with thanks the assistance of others in completing this study. Judith D. Feins, Linda Pistilli, MaryAnn Russ, and Debra Torres of Abt Associates Inc. contributed to the primary research underlying the report, as did Amy Jones of Amy Jones and Associates Inc. and Eugene Rizor of Quadel Consulting Corporation. Michael Baker, Jenny Berrien, Carissa Climaco, Ty Hardaway, and Saty Patrabansh assisted with the secondary data collection and analysis. Jeff Smith and Monique Tucker provided production assistance.

This guidebook was prepared by Abt Associates Inc. under Contract C-OPC-18571, Task Order 4 for HUD’s Office of Policy Development and Research. The authors acknowledge the thoughtful guidance and support provided by Dr. Harold R. Holzman, the Government Technical Monitor. Robert Gray and Les Rubin also made helpful contributions to the research.

Finally, the authors would like to thank the HCVP administrators, community groups, elected officials, and nonprofit organizations at the eight study sites who so generously shared information and ideas with us.

The contents of this report are the views of the contractor, and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or the U.S. Government.

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background for the Study .....	1
1.2 Methodology .....	3
1.3 Contents of the Report .....	5
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Summary Profiles of the Study Sites</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 Fairfax County, Virginia .....	7
2.2 Montgomery County, Pennsylvania .....	9
2.3 Lynn, Massachusetts .....	11
2.4 Baltimore, Maryland .....	13
2.5 Cook County, Illinois .....	15
2.6 Camden County, New Jersey .....	18
2.7 San Antonio, Texas .....	19
2.8 Syracuse, New York .....	22
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>The Role of Neighborhood or Community in HCVP Conflicts</b> .....	<b>26</b>
3.1. Geography of the Conflict .....	26
3.2 HCVP Administrative Geography .....	27
3.3 Neighborhood Factors that Contribute to HCVP Community Conflict.....	28
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Housing Authority Practices that Contribute to HCVP Community Conflict</b> .....	<b>41</b>
4.1 Failure to Monitor Housing Market Change and Locations of HCVP Housing .....	41
4.2 Insufficient Attention to Assisting Families to Move to a Broad Range of Neighborhoods .....	43
4.3 Inadequate Attention to Rent Reasonableness and Housing Quality Standards.....	45
4.4 Insufficient Attention to Household Behavior.....	48
4.5 Unresponsiveness to Complaints and Controversy.....	50
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Underlying Issues and Outside Influences in HCVP Community Conflict</b> .....	<b>53</b>
5.1 Underlying Issues in HCVP Community Conflict.....	53
5.2 The Role of Outside Influences in HCVP Conflict .....	61

**Chapter 6**

**PHA Strategies and their Effectiveness..... 67**

- 6.1 Conducting Community Outreach ..... 67
- 6.2 Creating Interagency Partnerships ..... 72
- 6.3 Understanding Housing Market Dynamics/HCVP Locations ..... 73
- 6.4 Improving Compliance and Monitoring Efforts ..... 74
- 6.5 Revising Administrative Practices ..... 77
- 6.6 Conclusions..... 81

**Appendix A: Study Methodology ..... 82**

**Appendix B: Maps of the Study Sites ..... 99**

## Executive Summary

In 1999, Abt Associates Inc. initiated a HUD-sponsored study of *Strategies that Enhance Community Relations in Tenant-Based HCVP Programs*. The goal of the study was to provide HUD with a thorough understanding of the conditions that precipitate local opposition to the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP—in this publication, the term “HCVP” is used to describe the concept historically described as “Section 8”) and the strategies that are effective in mitigating potential or real conflicts. A team of senior housing professionals with extensive HCVP experience was assembled to research eight situations around the country where communities have faced local opposition to tenant-based HCVPs. This report presents the findings of the study.

The rapid growth of the HCVP in recent years has provided an important opportunity for many low-income families to find affordable housing in previously inaccessible neighborhoods. However, as the experience of the eight study sites suggests, this opportunity also presents its challenges as the program becomes more visible and the potential for controversy about the growing presence of HCVP families in certain neighborhoods increases. In many cases, HCVP becomes a scapegoat for larger problems or changes in the community over which the housing authority has little apparent control. It appears that the best course of action for housing authorities in such situations is to take ownership of the problem, whether or not they have the resources at hand to resolve the controversy.

This research offers some valuable lessons regarding the conditions that precipitate HCVP conflicts and the strategies that are effective in mitigating them. Although the number of study sites was limited, the data collected provide a good illustration of the kinds of neighborhoods that may be vulnerable to HCVP controversy; the kinds of issues over which controversy can arise; common housing authority reactions to community opposition; and effective approaches to improving community relations over the long-term. The principal lessons learned in each of these areas are summarized below:

- *Neighborhoods that are experiencing economic decline, or are perceived to be “not what they used to be,” are vulnerable to HCVP conflict.* Anxieties about neighborhood decline were often fueled by trends that are visible at a local level, such as a drop in property values or decrease in homeownership rates, changes in the racial makeup in the community, or a downward trend in public school test scores.
- *The areas with the highest concentration of poverty and/or the highest concentration of HCVP recipients may not be those that experience conflict.* Among the study sites where HCVP conflict emerged, poverty rates ranged from 6 percent to 41 percent, with

half of the sites at or below 10 percent. The fraction of the population made up by HCVP households ranged from 2 to 14 percent, with most sites falling into the 3 to 6 percent range. Thus, it appears that what makes a community vulnerable to conflict surrounding the HCVP is not a specific degree of poverty or concentration of HCVP households; rather, it is the perception that the community is changing or that families moving in are visibly different from existing residents in race or class.

- ***The presence of an active neighborhood group concerned about change can play a crucial role in galvanizing and organizing opposition to the HCVP.*** It is possible, however, for HCVP conflict to arise in the absence of a strong neighborhood group, particularly if it is perceived as part of a broader political struggle.
- ***HCVP conflict is almost always fueled by concerns that the program is being poorly administered.*** Whether these concerns are based on misinformation or not, housing authorities should be particularly careful to pay attention to the following administrative problems, many of which contributed to the conflict at one or more study sites: 1) failure to monitor housing market change and locations of HCVP housing; 2) insufficient attention to assisting families to move to a broad range of neighborhoods; 3) inadequate attention to rent reasonableness and housing quality standards; 4) insufficient attention to HCVP household behavior; and 5) unresponsiveness to community complaints.
- ***Before the HCVP controversy began, the HCVP administrators in most of the sites studied did not have a firm grasp of the number and locations of HCVP recipients across their jurisdictions.*** Information about the locational patterns of the program and how they had changed over time might have alerted housing authorities to problems in the way they were administering the program. At the very least, this knowledge could have enabled program administrators to be more proactive in their dealings with neighborhood organizations.
- ***Most of the housing authorities studied did not take the initial community complaints about the HCVP seriously.*** In addition, many reacted in a defensive way, providing information about the program and its participants that may have been factually accurate but that did nothing to engage those on the other side of the controversy in useful dialogue. In the cases where the housing authority did not take the initial complaints seriously, they did not go away. Rather, the failure to act promptly and directly to address community concerns universally resulted in the escalation of the conflict.
- ***Understanding and resolving HCVP conflict requires probing the issues of conflict underlying the surface complaints.*** HCVP controversies often initially appear to be about relatively minor, “nuisance” issues—rental units that are not up to neighborhood standards, tenant behavior that disturbs the neighbors, etc. These kinds of complaints, however, are often symptomatic of deeper concerns about control over local resources, or



philosophical differences between the community and housing authority. Both parties need to be aware of the underlying issues at stake in order to begin to resolve the conflict.

- ***Resolving community conflict over the HCVP requires that the housing authority “take ownership” of the problem, regardless of who is at fault.*** Taking ownership of the problem generally means making both practical changes—such as conducting owner outreach, improving compliance efforts, and improving administrative practices—and cultural changes, such as partnering with other agencies (particularly the police department) and viewing whole neighborhoods, and not just assisted families, as customers.
- ***In many instances, the housing authority is not in a position to solve the underlying problem—such as the economic decline or political weakness of a particular community—but a prompt and collaborative response can go a long way toward calming community fears and addressing those issues that focused opposition on the HCVP.*** In most cases, the housing authority will not be able to single-handedly turn the neighborhood around, but it can take steps to ensure that HCVP is perceived as part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- ***In some cases, effective HCVP administration alone may not be adequate to prevent HCVP conflict.*** Housing authorities need also to understand the economic, social, and housing market dynamics of the neighborhoods in their jurisdictions. This includes being aware of the other housing authorities administering tenant-based assistance in the region.
- ***Greater public education about the goals and regulations of the HCVP is necessary,*** particularly as the program enters a new era of greater visibility and is present in an increasingly wide range of neighborhoods.
- ***Finally, if housing authorities want to improve the image and acceptance of the HCVP over the long-term, they should reconsider their role with respect to the larger community.*** As HCVP becomes a visible presence in a growing number of neighborhoods, housing authorities must begin to take on broader, non-traditional roles. This includes getting involved in neighborhood revitalization activities and taking leadership positions in community-building initiatives.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In 1999, Abt Associates Inc. initiated a HUD-sponsored study of strategies that enhance community relations in tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher Programs (HCVPs). A team of senior housing professionals with extensive HCVP experience was assembled to study eight situations around the country where communities have faced local opposition to tenant-based HCVPs.

This document presents the final report on the findings of the study. It begins with short summaries of the HCVP conflicts studied, followed by a cross-site analysis of the various conditions that were found to precipitate opposition, the patterns of community conflict observed, and the effectiveness of strategies taken by local housing authorities to resolve potential or real conflicts. The report concludes with a section on lessons learned from the analysis of these eight study sites.

### 1.1 Background for the Study

The HCVP tenant-based program is intended to provide low-income families with the means to secure decent, affordable housing in a wide range of locations. However, some neighborhoods with a substantial inventory of decent rental units may be inaccessible for participant families due to high rental prices. In other communities, substantial numbers of HCVP participants have successfully leased housing, only to find that—because of lifestyle differences or differences in their race/ethnicity, income, and/or tenure (renter vs. homeowner)—they become a focal point for community concerns about neighborhood change. Finally, the very name “HCVP” has, in some areas, come to be associated with the presence of outsiders—families whose demographic characteristics differ from those of the majority of households—and people who engage in disruptive or criminal behavior. These households are often presumed by community residents to be recipients of HCVP assistance, whether they are or not.

Not surprisingly, public housing agencies (PHAs) are frequently at the center of these controversies. At times, the housing authority’s administration of the program is at issue. Many PHAs have been proactive in confronting community opposition to the HCVP. Some have worked to increase the amount and accuracy of information available to the public regarding the HCVP and its local administration. Others have looked to improve program performance to increase community acceptance of the program, to provide support services to participant families, or to establish cooperative working relationships with community

organizations. These agencies have generally been successful in diffusing opposition, but in some cases, underlying resistance has lingered. PHAs that do not take a proactive approach tend to face even greater challenges.

As the HCVP expands—and as new income targeting requirements for federally assisted housing are implemented—it is likely that community conflicts related to HCVP will continue to arise in cities around the country.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the nature of these problems, how they arise and how they are resolved, will inform HUD’s efforts to expand the housing choices of low-income families.

The goal of this study is to provide HUD with a thorough understanding of the conditions that precipitate HCVP opposition and the strategies that are effective in mitigating potential or real conflicts. The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of neighborhoods and cities where HCVP conflicts have arisen? What trends can be identified regarding: economic conditions; racial and ethnic composition; homeownership rates; quality of the rental housing stock; property values; crime; and change in neighborhood conditions over time?
- Are there distinctive HCVP administrative patterns that may be associated with the emergence of conflict situations? What are the practices of the housing authorities (PHAs) with regard to: admissions preferences; applicant screening and training; landlord outreach and training; rent reasonableness; Housing Quality Standards; tenant and landlord enforcement; and mobility counseling?
- What incident(s) or occurrence(s) in a community appear to precipitate a conflict? How are they viewed by the PHAs, program participants, community representatives, and others involved? What types of underlying issues or factors can fuel the conflict?
- How are the conflicts mitigated or resolved and who participates in the effort? What strategies do the local housing authority implement and how effective are they in conflict resolution?
- What are the “lessons learned” from these experiences, especially the strategies that prove most successful in resolving conflicts?

---

<sup>1</sup> The income targeting provision of the 1998 Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (QHWRA) requires that not less than 75 percent of new families admitted to the HCVP must have incomes at or below 30 percent of the area median income. This new targeting focuses on tenant-based HCVP to serve the lowest income families, while public housing becomes more mixed.

## **1.2 Methodology**

This section briefly describes our approach to collecting and analyzing the data needed to answer the research questions discussed above. First, we describe the process for selecting the eight study sites. We then present the qualitative and quantitative methods used to collect both primary and secondary data. Finally, we describe our methods for analyzing the conflict situation and outcomes. Appendix A provides a more thorough discussion of the methodology employed in this study.

### **1.2.1 Site Selection**

In identifying sites to include in the study, we began with a short set of selection criteria. In general, we wanted to include sites that offered variation in the types of HCVP conflicts that occurred, the size of the housing agencies involved, and the region of the country examined. The willingness of the PHA to participate in the study and the availability of secondary source material (news clippings, reports, etc.) about the conflict were also factors in selection.

A reconnaissance effort was then initiated to identify potential sites. This involved a variety of outreach activities, including:

- literature and media searches;
- discussions with HUD Headquarters and Field Office staff;
- discussions with staff from the assisted housing industry groups;
- a survey of current Council of Large Public Housing Agencies (CLPHA) members;
- solicitations from a posting on the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) website; and
- announcements and discussion at several industry group-sponsored meetings.

Based upon these efforts, leads were developed on more than 40 potential sites. Senior staff reviewed and discussed the list, and follow-up telephone calls were made to obtain specific information about promising sites. The candidate list was narrowed to 27 sites and, upon further review, the following eight study sites were selected:

- Fairfax County, Virginia;
- Montgomery County, Pennsylvania;
- Lynn, Massachusetts;
- Baltimore, Maryland;
- Cook County, Illinois;
- Camden County, New Jersey;
- San Antonio, Texas; and
- Syracuse, New York.

## 1.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Our data collection and analysis relied on a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources and methods that were flexibly applied, based on the situation under scrutiny. The most significant source of qualitative data was *key informant interviews* collected in the course of visits to each site. Although the individuals interviewed differed from site to site depending on the nature of the conflict and the roles played, most on-site interviews were conducted with:

- PHA staff—both managerial and line staff;
- Local government officials;
- Political and community leaders of the affected neighborhoods;
- HCVP landlord representatives; and
- Representatives of fair housing or advocacy groups.

Key informant interviews were an important source of information for establishing both the community context within which the conflict situations occurred and for understanding the various perspectives regarding the conflict itself. Key informants were also a valuable source of information regarding PHA administrative practices and their effects.

Secondary source material was helpful in developing the conflict's profile in two distinct ways. First, the written materials enhanced our understanding of the timeline and progression of the conflict. Although the interviews with key informants proved to be the best source of qualitative data about the conflict, respondents had difficulty remembering the precise sequence and timing of certain events. Dated correspondence, internal reports and, where it existed, press coverage helped to clarify timing and related specific events to one another. The team assembled as much secondary data as possible prior to going on-site. This helped the site visitors to identify questions and key issues up-front and gave them a preliminary framework within which to interpret the key informant interviews.

The major sources of secondary data were:

- ***Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System Data (MTCS)***: for recipients of tenant-based HCVP assistance (as well as public housing residents), standardized information collected by local housing agencies on HUD Form 50058.

- ***HUD's A Picture of Subsidized Households:*** summary information on households receiving HUD assistance at the property, census tract, housing agency, state, and national levels. The data are also linked to 1990 Census data on poverty rates, homeownership rates, and concentration of minority households by census tract.
- ***Census Data:*** standardized information on household demographic and income characteristics aggregated to levels of geographic interest, and composite information on neighborhood poverty rates, homeownership and vacancy rates, and house value. While 1990 Census data are nearly ten years old, they are still the most comprehensive source of neighborhood-level data available. In some cases, we also used more recent population estimates produced by Claritas Inc. as a point of comparison to information received through the interviews.
- ***Local Planning Data:*** local Consolidated Plans and other planning documents providing information about market dynamics, changing neighborhood demographics, and population growth patterns.
- ***Crime Data:*** where available and relevant to the study site conflict, annual crime statistics at the neighborhood, city, or county level were obtained to identify crime patterns.

Using this rich variety of data sources, a summary report was developed for each of the study sites. Each report included a profile of the community or neighborhood in which the event occurred, a description of HCVP administrative practices at the time of the controversy, a thorough discussion of the conflict and response of the housing authority, and lessons learned from the case study. The site summary reports were written to a common outline, facilitating cross-site comparisons.

The site profiles were circulated to all the senior team members for review. Cross-site matrices of conflict characteristics, community context, and PHA practices were developed, so that combinations and patterns could be readily identified. From this review, we developed a list of lessons learned and successful strategies. However, since the conflicts depended so clearly on local context and practices, we were careful to maintain the link between each lesson and strategy and the specific contextual factors limiting or shaping it. The site profiles, cross-site matrices, and strategy summaries became the building blocks for this final report of the project, as well as for a guidebook that will serve as a resource for PHAs, community residents, and local officials who are interested in building good relations between HCVPs and the wider community.

### **1.3 Contents of the Report**

The remainder of this report details the findings of the study. Chapter 2 presents summary profiles on the eight in-depth case studies, including: the community context, the

development of HCVP controversy, the housing authority's response, and the final outcome. In Chapter 3, we provide a cross-site analysis of the role that neighborhood and community characteristics play in HCVP conflicts. This chapter looks at the geographic scope of the various conflicts and factors that appear to contribute to or precipitate conflict.

At virtually every study site, one aspect of the community's concern was a perception that some element of the HCVP was being poorly administered. In some instances, these concerns were based on misinformation. In other cases, the PHA was forced to take a hard look at its practices. Chapter 4 discusses the housing authority practices that were found to contribute to the conflict.

Chapter 5 focuses directly on the nature and course of the conflict: the underlying issues that caused conflict, events that triggered a controversy, and outside influences (other than the PHAs response) that affected the course of the conflict. In looking across the eight study sites, a number of interesting patterns emerge that can be used to provide general guidance to housing authorities who may be confronting community resistance to HCVP.

Chapter 6 offers lessons with regard to specific strategies that housing authorities at the study sites used to try to resolve the conflict. These strategies fall into five categories: community outreach, interagency partnerships, compliance efforts, new administrative practices, and efforts to monitor local housing markets and locations of HCVP residents.

Finally, there are two appendices. Appendix A discusses the study's data collection methodology and highlights the most valuable sources and methods used in the study. Appendix B contains maps of each of the study sites.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Summary Profiles of the Study Sites**

Before searching for common themes among the HCVP controversies, it is important to understand the unique features of each study site and to appreciate that the community conflicts took place in different contexts. The remaining chapters of this report, dedicated to the cross-site analysis, use this information to draw comparisons and contrasts among the study sites and reap lessons from the various strategies employed to enhance community relations in HCVPs.

Each of the following site profiles follow a similar outline. The first section sets the social and economic context of the community in which the conflict arose, the second section reviews the community's concerns and actions taken during the controversy, and the final section outlines the response by HCVP administrators.

### **2.1 Fairfax County, Virginia**

#### **2.1.1 Community Context**

Fairfax County, strategically located to the immediate south and east of Washington, DC, is Virginia's largest, most populous, and wealthiest county. Its 1999 median income of \$87,569 was the highest in the nation and its 1.4 percent unemployment rate was among the lowest. Despite its proximity to the nation's capital, the county remained predominately rural until World War II, when the growth of the federal government and the influx of light industry turned the area into a busy suburb. The county's population doubled from 450,000 in 1970 to approximately 900,000 in 1999. After a heady period of growth during the 1980s, the county's economy slowed in the first half of the 1990s. An area in the southeast section of the county, known as the Route 1 corridor, was particularly hard hit. It was during this period that concerns about the HCVP first surfaced.

Along with population growth in the 1980s came increasing diversity, especially in the Route 1 corridor. Minorities represented four percent of the county and Route 1 population in 1970. Currently, minorities represent 22 percent of the county's population and 35 percent of the Route 1 population. In addition, the rate of poverty in Route 1 in 1990 was 6 percent, compared to 4 percent in the county as a whole. And while jobs are located throughout the county, much of the affordable housing is in the Route 1 corridor.



The HCVP in Fairfax County is administered by the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA), which is staffed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Although HCVP subsidies (a total of 2,500) are used throughout the county, three areas have significantly higher concentrations than the rest of the county—the Reston/Herndon area, the Bailey’s Crossroads area, and the Route 1 corridor. Differences between the characteristics of HCVP households and the overall population include racial composition (72 percent of HCVP households are headed by minorities versus 35 percent of the overall population), the percentage of households headed by an elderly person, and the percentage of households with income from wages.

### **2.1.2 The HCVP Controversy**

The general economic downturn of the early 1990s hit the Route 1 real estate market hard. Many families who wanted to move during this time could not sell their homes for acceptable prices and became reluctant landlords. Vacancies and lower rents in the Route 1 corridor attracted low-income families to the area. The perception that fueled the HCVP controversy in Fairfax was that the influx of new immigrants to the United States and other low-income minorities was affecting the schools negatively. Many felt that this new population, presumed to be living in Fairfax County because of HCVP assistance, was causing the local school system to deal with a greater number of children with special needs.

In addition, residents of the densely populated multifamily rental and condominium housing developments along Route 1 began to report behavioral problems, especially related to children and teenagers. The levels of concern about crime increased, as did complaints about noise, rudeness, and non-compliance with basic rules of the development. The HCVP (and the concentration of HCVP in the Route 1 corridor) became the focus of the community’s concern and the perceived reason for a downturn in the quality of life.

When residents brought their complaints about the HCVP to the FCRHA, they felt that agency staff was unresponsive. Staff took the position that tenants and landlords should take prime responsibility for problem solving. But since landlords were often inexperienced and absentee, this stance did little to respond to resident concerns. Community residents who were frustrated by the lack of action from the FCRHA sought the support of elected representatives of the Route 1 corridor. At the height of the controversy (June 1997), as a means of forcing the county to deal more meaningfully with the concerns from Route 1 residents, the Board of Supervisors rejected the FCRHA’s request to apply for 50 additional units of HCVP assistance.

### **2.1.3 The Response and Outcomes**

Following the Board of Supervisors' action, the FCRHA developed a HCVP Housing Program Action Plan intended to address community concerns. As part of this plan, an aggressive program enforcement initiative began that involved appointment of inspection staff dedicated to resolving community complaints, installation of a citizen complaint telephone hotline, implementation of a process for cross-referencing HCVP addresses with police department records, and adoption of new Housing Quality Standards (HQS) enforcement procedures. In addition, the FCRHA improved participant briefings and program materials to address tenant behavior. Written materials for landlords and property owners were also improved, and a landlord training program was developed. Lastly, the FCRHA commissioned a market study that resulted in a modified rent reasonableness procedure. Two additional interventions, not directly related to the HCVP, also helped ameliorate community concerns. The designation of the Route 1 corridor as a redevelopment area enabled HCD to demonstrate that it was concerned not only with affordable housing and low-income residents, but committed to overall revitalization of Route 1. While not initiated by the housing authority, the county's successful conversion to community policing has also played a part in resolving tensions in the community.

Today, conditions along the Route 1 corridor are calmer. An improved economy may be one reason for the healthier climate, but the improvements made to the administration of the HCVP are considered pivotal. Many suggest that the political process worked, and that out of the controversy has come a better understanding of the issues by all parties. However, concerns about a shortage of affordable housing in the county still remain. Today's housing market differs greatly from the soft market that existed in the mid-1990s and the mismatch between the locations of affordable housing and jobs has yet to be fully addressed.

## **2.2 Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**

### **2.2.1 Community Context**

Montgomery County is a large and prosperous county located about 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia. The case study focuses on the borough of Norristown, which is the county seat, and home to most of the county's social service agencies. Norristown's approximately 31,000 residents are significantly more diverse than the rest of the county, with minorities representing 29 percent of the population in 1990. They are also poorer. In 1990, the median household income in Norristown was about two thirds of what it was elsewhere in the county. Close to 10 percent of borough residents lived below the poverty line, compared with four percent in the county as a whole. The current demographics represent a significant shift from years past when Norristown, once a prosperous transportation crossroads, was primarily a

small middle-class city. Since the 1960s, Norristown has suffered population loss, disinvestment, and housing conversion and abandonment.

### **2.2.2 The HCVP Controversy**

The Montgomery County Housing Authority (MCHA) administers 1,728 HCVP certificates and vouchers throughout the county, 803 of which are currently leased up in Norristown. Even though the city has just under five percent of the county's population, it has 46 percent of the HCVP vouchers. Residents and local officials believe that the housing authority, perceived as indifferent to the concentration of the HCVP in Norristown, has been unresponsive to articulated community concerns. The MCHA argues that the affordable housing and convenient public transportation offered by Norristown naturally attracts HCVP voucher holders.

The current wave of conflict over the HCVP began in early 1998 when the superintendent of schools attributed the district's high special education costs to the HCVP. Following this report and the press coverage that it received, the Norristown homeowners' association and landlords' association, as well as some borough officials, began to voice their concerns about the program (and especially the concentration of voucher-holders) more strongly. The primary concerns that they attributed to the program included falling property prices, a proliferation of rental properties, and a decline in "overall quality of life" caused by disruptive tenant behavior.

One of the homeowners' association's most persistent criticisms about the administration of the HCVP was that the Fair Market Rents, which are based on regional average rents, were far above market rates in Norristown. Association members argued that the availability of higher rents through the HCVP caused increases in rents for both assisted and unassisted units in Norristown and gave landlords no incentive to improve poor quality units. In addition, both homeowners and representatives from Norristown's landlords' association raised concerns about the MCHA's enforcement of Housing Quality Standards (HQS) and tenant and landlord termination policies.

### **2.2.3 The Response and Outcomes**

The MCHA has taken a deliberately conservative approach to the conflict in Norristown. Although the general stance of the housing authority has been to keep its distance from the HCVP controversy, it has taken several measures to help deflect community opposition away from the administration of the program. In 1996, the MCHA hired a compliance officer and instituted a hotline for complaints. These steps have had positive results for MCHA staff, who contend that they are now coordinated more effectively with the police department and have hard data to counter longstanding misperceptions about crime and the HCVP. In

addition, the MCHA hires qualified contractors to determine the reasonableness of requested rents in Norristown and elsewhere in the county. Lastly, the MCHA disseminates information about the HCVP when necessary to dispel false allegations.

Today, the controversy surrounding the HCVP may be less heated than it was in 1998, but interviews indicate that the issues are far from resolved, and may even intensify with the Census 2000 results. Recent communication between the MCHA, borough officials, and community groups does not appear to have been very effective. Community groups distrust the MCHA and are pressing for restricting the HCVP in Norristown. The MCHA has responded by reaffirming the agency's commitment to providing affordable housing as long as there is a need and to implementing the program according to HUD regulations. The agency continues to work to encourage participant mobility, but also maintains that low-income families are naturally attracted to Norristown's affordable housing options.

## **2.3 Lynn, Massachusetts**

### **2.3.1 Community Context**

A small New England city located 15 miles north of Boston, Lynn was once a thriving center for shoe manufacturing and a popular landing ground for waves of immigrants seeking affordable housing. Between 1970 and 1980, while the population declined by 13 percent, the percentage of persons living below the poverty line increased from 11 percent to 17 percent. Today, more than half of Lynn's households is eligible for assisted housing.

The last three decades have also seen a change in the racial composition of the city's population. The white population dropped from nearly 97 percent in 1970 to 83 percent in 1990. Between 1990 and 1998, the total minority population increased by approximately 37 percent. Public school enrollment increased by 25 percent and the percentage of minority students increased from 37 percent to 55 percent of total enrollment.

Lynn's housing stock is divided roughly in thirds among single-family homes, 2-4 unit properties, and multifamily housing in structures of 5 units or more. Approximately 58 percent of Lynn's housing was built before 1940 and 75 percent before 1960. Of the housing that is renter-occupied (about half), more than 35 percent is subsidized through a variety of federal and state programs. These units tend to be concentrated in the urban core. The Lynn Housing Authority (LHA) administers 3,900 units of assisted housing, including about 2,000 HCVP vouchers and certificates.

### **2.3.2 The HCVP Controversy**

In the mid 1980s, the LHA—and the HCVP in particular—became the focus of the community's frustrations and anxieties about the economy, the housing market, and

demographic transitions. Resident complaints focused on LHA's administration of the program and community perceptions about the negative impact of the HCVP on the housing market and the negative behaviors of HCVP recipients. In particular, rents paid to HCVP landlords for poor quality units were seen as higher than actual market value. In addition, Lynn residents were concerned that the concentration of subsidized units made the city vulnerable to a downward spiral in which more and more low-income families would be attracted there. During the same period that increased numbers of "outsiders" sought out the city's affordable housing, Lynn experienced increases in crime, drug trafficking, and general neighborhood nuisances. Many assumed that HCVP families were responsible for these problems.

When it was discovered that many of the families and units that were the subject of community complaints were assisted, but through state not LHA programs, city officials argued for control of all housing subsidies within their borders. A controversy ensued between the City of Lynn and a state agency that administers HCVP and reached a peak in 1990. The state legislature became involved, and political negotiations led to the ultimate transfer of control of all housing subsidies to the LHA.

### **2.3.3 The Response and Outcomes**

Since 1990, several other steps have contributed to Lynn's success in improving the administration of housing programs and in regaining community confidence. First, the newly appointed Executive Director of the LHA engaged in proactive community education efforts and implemented several housing program reforms. In 1992, the Housing Integrity Program (HIP) was established as a separate unit to investigate complaints and prevent fraud. With upgraded administrative procedures, improved training for both residents and landlords, and enhanced service provision for residents, there is now general agreement that the HCVP is well run.

Secondly, the LHA has played a pivotal role in the creation of public-private partnerships that have contributed to community acceptance of the HCVP as well as to the city's revitalization efforts. A highly successful community policing program has had the effect of encouraging and reinforcing additional community collaborations. A \$2.5 million Reclaim Our City (ROC) grant stimulated community involvement and collaborative problem-solving.

The community still is sometimes divided over priorities, continues to face challenges of racial tension in schools and neighborhoods, and remains concerned about the large amount of assisted housing within its borders. But, on the whole, Lynn has managed to sustain real changes in program management as well as community acceptance of the HCVP.

## **2.4 Baltimore, Maryland**

### **2.4.1 Community Context**

Patterson Park is an historic neighborhood in southeast Baltimore that covers a one-square-mile area and has a population of just over 25,000. Once a thriving working-class immigrant community, today much of the neighborhood is moderate to low income, with pockets of gentrification along the major thoroughfares and adjacent to the park that gives the neighborhood its name. Over the past thirty years, the profile of Patterson Park residents has exhibited dramatic shifts in race, age, income, and homeownership. Patterson Park steadily lost population through the 1970s and 1980s, as elderly residents moved or died and the younger generation opted to leave the neighborhood. As the housing stock deteriorated or fell vacant, lower income families moved in as renters. Over the years, the neighborhood has experienced racial change. In 1960, the neighborhood as a whole was almost exclusively white, with a small African-American population living in Patterson Place, to the northwest of the park. African-American families moved south and east in the decades to follow, and by 1990 Patterson Place was 77 percent African-American, Baltimore-Linwood (northeast of the park) was 35 percent African-American, while the Butchers Hill and Highlandtown areas to the south remained 95 percent white.

These racial divisions are also apparent in other demographic characteristics. In 1990, African-American residents of the neighborhood were more than twice as likely as their white counterparts to be living below the poverty line. Households headed by African-Americans were also much more likely to be renters than homeowners. Between 1970 and 1990, Patterson Park saw a gradual increase in the percentage of rental units and in the housing vacancy rates. This rate of change varied by neighborhood area, with Patterson Place having the lowest homeownership and highest vacancy rates, and the Butchers Hill and Highlandtown areas remaining relatively stable. The late 1980s saw an aggressive intervention into the Patterson Park neighborhood by absentee landlords and investment companies, who saw an opportunity in the aging home-owning population and deteriorating housing stock to provide cheap rentals to a new generation of low-income residents.

Neighborhood vacancy rates, drug trafficking and crime, and exploitative real estate practices known as “flipping” (in which houses are bought and immediately sold at inflated prices) have increased in the past decade, and the City has been ill-equipped to manage these problems. Some community leaders believe today that Patterson Park is at the “tipping point” and would require massive investment to overcome the problems associated with the incremental changes in race, income, tenure, and age.

## **2.4.2 The HCVP Controversy**

The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) has funding for 11,500 HCVP certificates and vouchers. There are some 21,000 families on the waiting list, and selection is based on date and time of application. In spite of HABC's four mobility and training programs for HCVP participants, Patterson Park homeowners and community leaders maintain that the HABC has done little to encourage HCVP families to move to less impacted neighborhoods. Patterson Park does have a high concentration of HCVP families relative to many parts of the city, although it is not the only area of concentration. Moreover, the HCVP participants in Patterson Park tend to live in the parts of the neighborhood with the highest concentrations of poverty and the lowest homeownership rates.

In the early 1990s, when Patterson Park's neighborhood associations first raised complaints about negative tenant behavior, unresponsive landlords, and poor HCVP administration, the HABC implied that the complaints stemmed from racism and fears about the changing demographics of the neighborhood. In 1994, the Director of the Patterson Park Community Development Corporation (PPCDC) requested a formal meeting with HABC HCVP staff to discuss the community's concerns. The HABC, still on the defensive, claimed that the program was properly administered and that the majority of complaints probably did not involve HCVP families. This prompted the PPCDC to collect more information from the community and to take their concerns to other levels. By 1995, at the height of the controversy, the Director of the PPCDC had engaged a citywide effort to try to address problems related to HCVP. HUD was alerted to the situation and ultimately conducted a review of the HABC's administration of the HCVP.

## **2.4.3 The Response and Outcomes**

After HUD's intervention, the HABC implemented a number of administrative reforms to the HCVP between 1996 and 1999. HQS enforcement and rent reasonableness procedures were improved and a mandatory tenant training program was established. The HABC also became more effective in keeping bad landlords off the HCVP by maintaining stricter standards for landlords that violate HUD's HQS. In addition, a two-person community liaison staff was hired to field complaints about the HCVP citywide. While the community liaison for east Baltimore is well received by Patterson Park's neighborhood associations, members are frustrated that he can take little action to solve the most common complaints about HCVP tenants and landlords related to nuisance behaviors and curb appeal.

During the period of these reforms, the controversy died down somewhat. Over the past year, however, complaints about drug activity, disruptive behavior, and unsupervised children have resurfaced and the neighborhood associations have redoubled their efforts to effect change in the administration of the HCVP. Apart from the HABC's actions, nonprofit organizations

and community groups have tried to revitalize the neighborhood and mitigate some of the problems associated with the HCVP.

## **2.5 Cook County, Illinois**

### **2.5.1 Community Context**

With a population of 5.2 million in 1999, Cook County is a large, urbanized county that includes the city of Chicago. The southern suburbs of Cook County are the focus of the HCVP controversy and consist of about 40 municipalities, varying greatly in size and population. Differences in median family income, poverty rates, educational attainment, and homeownership are apparent throughout south suburban Cook County. Perhaps most striking are the differences in racial composition among the towns, with some virtually all white and some as high as 81 percent African-American. Racial transformations evident in many localities between 1970 and 1990 reflect the ongoing movement of white middle-class families out of the “first-ring” suburbs and some “second-ring” localities. During this same period, the proportion of residents receiving public assistance income grew substantially. South suburban Cook County is becoming part of the nationwide pattern of increased diversity and expanding poverty in suburban areas.

Housing indicators show that south suburban Cook contains about a quarter of the rental units in the suburban county and about a third of the subsidized rental units (excluding public housing). The area’s vacancy rate is higher than in other parts of the county, and average rents are substantially lower than in the northern part of the county.

Despite these differences, the south suburban localities are united by several concerns, including the HCVP. Although they speak with a single voice on a number of regional issues, the south suburban localities seem to lack clout within the larger county political structure.

### **2.5.2 The HCVP Controversy**

Issues about the HCVP were initially raised in the south suburban Cook County area in the late 1970s, when the tenant-based subsidy program was quite new. At that time, the controversy focused on the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), the agency designated by HUD to administer HCVP in the parts of the county outside the City of Chicago. A large agency with a staff of 170, HACC operates a variety of housing programs in the region and currently administers a total of 10,000 HCVP certificates and vouchers.

HACC is considered by HUD a high-performing agency. However, some critics have charged that over the years HACC has not taken adequate action against bad tenants and bad



landlords. Maintenance of HCVP properties has long been a concern in the south suburbs as well. Over a period of more than 20 years, the conflict over the HCVP has gone through three distinct rounds, but the dominant theme throughout the controversy has been the concentration of HCVP families in south suburban Cook County.

Starting in the late 1970s, questions were raised about the proportion of HACC's HCVP recipients who were living in the south suburban area. Between 1979 and 1983, the share of active contracts located in the area increased from a third of the program to about 45 percent. It was alleged that the concentration of HCVP families not only brought with it increasing needs and demands for public services, but would contribute to accelerated racial change and resegregation of the area. The core agenda of the organizations raising these issues was to prevent the area from becoming impoverished and resegregated. There had already been substantial loss of the economic base, and many feared that middle-class and working-class white families would continue to leave the area, with most new demand for housing from African-American families with lesser means. Written correspondence from mid-1986 voiced concern that particular neighborhoods were showing signs of distress, including declining property values, increases in renter occupancy, growth in FHA and VA rather than conventional mortgage financing, and higher rates of foreclosures followed by long-term vacant properties. Some municipalities took defensive steps against the influx of subsidized renters and created their own housing authorities to try to exert more control over HCVP administration and/or to block HACC from placing HCVP recipients there.

During the second round of the controversy (1990-95)—and with the advent of portability as a feature of tenant-based assistance—the conflict took on new dimensions. The south suburban localities threatened litigation against HUD and HACC for alleged discriminatory barriers to HCVP in the remainder of Cook County. They commissioned a study that furthered their cause by confirming a pattern of high concentration (68 percent of HACC's HCVP participants in 1992) living in the south suburbs, where just 22 percent of the county's below-FMR two-bedroom rental units were located. The study argued that HACC did not motivate clients to consider areas of Cook County with good employment opportunities and low minority populations, nor did it enable clients to search in those areas. Chief among the study's recommended changes to the program's administration was the creation of an affirmative counseling initiative designed to provide motivational HCVP briefings and one-on-one sessions with an experienced counselor to improve access to areas without existing HCVP concentrations.

In the late 1990s, south suburban officials reportedly felt as though some progress had been made on improving the HCVP. In addition, a mobility program implemented by HACC had already showed some success in reducing the concentration of HCVP families. But this optimism was counterbalanced by concerns triggered by the relocation plan launched by the

Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) in 1995, which had the potential to reinforce and increase HCVP concentrations in south suburban localities. As a result, CHA, the City of Chicago, and the private organization CHAC (the Chicago Housing Assistance Corporation, which runs the Chicago HCVP) became involved as well. The south suburban communities strengthened their lobbying efforts and are seeking a HUD moratorium on HCVP lease-ups in south suburban Cook County.

### **2.5.3 The Response and Outcomes**

Just as the long history of controversy falls into three distinct periods, HACC's response to the issues raised by the south suburban communities has gone through different phases. In response to early requests from the communities for changes in the administration of the HCVP, HACC was unwilling to take steps, beyond some improvements to briefing materials, to address the concentration question. The agency took the position that it could not guide the locational choices of HCVP assisted families. HACC officials saw housing conditions as local code enforcement problems and geographical concentrations as the combined result of landlord bias and participant preference. In 1987, however, HACC set up a voluntary counseling program to encourage HCVP families to make affirmative moves to other parts of Cook County, but this did not have much impact. By 1989, the share of HACC's HCVP contracts in the South suburbs had reportedly increased to 67 percent (compared to 45 percent in 1983).

Following the 1993 study on the locational patterns of HACC's HCVP families and under threat of litigation, HACC contracted with a new organization, Housing Choice Partners (HCP), to provide applicant briefings, workshops, and individual counseling designed to expand housing choice and encourage moves outside "traditional" areas. Traditional areas were defined as census tracts with more than 10 percent of persons in poverty or a population more than 10 percent minority.

The latest phase in the HCVP controversy and recent developments at HACC revolve around the reduction in financial support for the HCP mobility initiative, substantial growth in HACC's pool of HCVP vouchers (at least 700 added units in 2000, in part because of vouchers used as replacement subsidies when owners "opted out" of project-based HCVP contracts), and an increase in the rate of program intake. With reduced funding, HCP will not be able to serve higher numbers of applicants.

## **2.6 Camden County, New Jersey**

### **2.6.1 Community Context**

Camden County is a largely urban county in southern New Jersey, located at the midpoint of the New York City/Washington, DC corridor. The case study focuses on a suburban community, Avandale, that is made up primarily of housing developments built in the 1970s as a result of the Atlantic City gambling boom. Avandale is similar to the rest of the suburban county in terms of wealth and income growth, but is racially more diverse. In particular, the African-American population has grown over the past three decades while the white population has decreased. In 1990, 35 percent of Avandale residents were African-American, compared to 11 percent for the entire suburban county (excluding Camden City). Since 1990, the African-American population in Avandale is estimated to have grown by some 25 percent, while the white population is estimated to have decreased by 12 percent.

The HCVP controversy arose in Avandale East, one of Avandale's older developments made up of a mix of owner-occupied single-family homes and renter-occupied duplexes. Many of the duplexes are owned by absentee landlords and are in worse physical shape than the single-family homes. At the time of the conflict in February 1999, 17 families living in the Avandale East development were receiving HCVP assistance. According to HUD MTCS data, the HCVP households living in Avandale differ from the overall population in income and employment, as well as race. It is likely that economic differences in particular contributed to the Avandale Residents' Association's sense that the HCVP families were different from the rest of the neighborhood.

### **2.6.2 The HCVP Controversy**

The Division of Housing and Community Resources of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) administers the HCVP tenant-based program throughout New Jersey. The DCA runs its HCVP through five regional offices, each staffed with a regional manager for HCVP. In February 1999, the Avandale Residents' Association submitted complaints about HCVP landlords and tenants in the Avandale East development. Complaints were in written or e-mail form and were sent not just to the DCA, but also to HUD's New Jersey office, local and state elected officials, and to Avandale property owners.

The complaints ranged from general concerns about the state of the rental properties to more specific issues related to landlords and tenants participating in the HCVP. The Association argued that over the past two years they had noticed a "substantial decline" in the appearance of certain parts of the development, specifically the duplexes along Hopewell Lane, which forms the main entrance to the development and was known as an area for drug trafficking. Almost all the properties were rentals and the Association believed that a large share of the

tenants was receiving HCVP assistance. While their primary concern was the physical state of the rental properties, the Association also accused tenants of loitering and illegal drug activity. The Residents' Association did not request any immediate action on part of the DCA, but rather wanted suggestions on how to proceed.

### **2.6.3 The Response and Outcomes**

Once the Assistant Director of the DCA solicited further information about the nature of the complaints and charted the location of HCVP-assisted families, he asked the regional supervisor from the Camden office to conduct external and internal inspections of each of the units. The inspections revealed issues of disrepair that were, for the most part, minor. In fact, when compared to adjacent properties, the units in the HCVP were found to be among the best on the block. When the landlords were asked to make the necessary repairs, none of them complained and the work was done quickly. In addition to ordering the inspections, the DCA also provided the Residents' Association with a list of the landlords and the properties participating in the HCVP in Avandale East. The Assistant Director believes that giving out the addresses and landlord contact information, and in so doing showing that the main offending units were not those in the HCVP, went a long way toward defusing a potentially volatile situation. A year after the initial complaint, the Avandale Residents' Association again wrote to the DCA requesting an updated list of HCVP properties and landlords in the development. The list was provided, and no further complaints or issues have been voiced.

## **2.7 San Antonio, Texas**

### **2.7.1 Community Context**

Home to about 1.3 million residents, San Antonio is Texas's second largest city and the eighth largest city in the United States. The city's population has grown rapidly in recent years—13 percent between 1980 and 1990 and another 16 percent since 1990. Located in the south central region of the state, San Antonio has the second highest poverty rate (23 percent) in the country and double the nationwide rate at which poor households live in physically deficient housing (39 percent). According to the City's most recent Consolidated Plan, 44 percent of all households had incomes below 80 percent of median in 1990. HCVP controversies erupted in two San Antonio neighborhoods. The first, a neighborhood to the southwest of downtown San Antonio, is known locally as "Southwest" or "The Creek." The second is the Montgomery neighborhood, also called "The Glen," located northwest of the city center and just outside the city limits in Bexar County.

The Creek is a roughly four square mile area that includes three subdivisions developed during the 1970s and 1980s. The small single-family homes were built in large part to provide affordable housing to military families of modest means, particularly enlisted Air

Force personnel from nearby Air Force bases. An economic boom in San Antonio during the 1970s triggered additional housing development. But when mortgage interest rates increased, buyers were squeezed out of the market. The local developer who had financed this expansion eventually sold a number of new units to an out-of-state corporation. By the mid 1980s, however, the housing market had gone flat and more vacant homes were purchased by investors. HCVP certificate and voucher holders flocked to these new landlords.

During the period between 1980 and 1990, the Creek's population more than doubled, the racial composition shifted, and the area grew poorer. The Hispanic population grew from 53 to 76 percent and the percentage of households below the poverty line increased from 32 to 42 percent. The vacancy rate grew to 21 percent by 1990. The large number of vacant units, combined with the neighborhood's proximity to Interstate Highways 35 and 410, resulted in significant drug and gang problems. Despite a number of police interventions in the 1990s and the efforts of local community groups, the Creek today is considered one of the more dangerous neighborhoods in San Antonio.

Located in an unincorporated area (1.5 square miles) of Bexar County, just east of the city border, the Montgomery community was a middle-income neighborhood of moderately-priced single-family homes in the 1970s. With a declining economy precipitating significant change in the 1980s, numerous property foreclosures in the area enabled absentee landlords to purchase a large number of these properties. During the period 1980 to 1999, the area's population doubled in size and became increasingly diverse. In 1980, 90 percent of the residents were white; today, that figure is 45 percent, with the balance of residents predominantly Hispanic (32 percent) or African-American (19 percent). The number of owner-occupied units declined sharply, dropping from a high of 84 percent in 1980 to 61 percent in 1990. Despite the changes that have occurred in the Montgomery neighborhood, it is today a more stable and middle-class community than the Creek.

### **2.7.2 The HCVP Controversy**

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) is the largest housing authority in Texas. It manages roughly 5,600 public housing units for families and seniors and administers about 12,000 HCVP certificates and vouchers located throughout the city and Bexar County. Waiting lists for subsidized housing are lengthy. The HCVP waiting list, which now includes more than 18,600 households, is presently closed.

SAHA started its HCVP early and it grew steadily throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, with most HCVP residents at that time locating in historic, inner city neighborhoods undergoing revitalization. The earliest complaints about the program came from the developers and homeowners who believed HCVP was deterring the neighborhood revitalization effort. But with a slowdown in San Antonio's economy and related softening

of the housing market, affordable, single-family homes became available in neighborhoods beyond downtown and attracted low-income families to move out to the suburbs.

The history of community concerns in the Creek neighborhood and the actions of both community leaders and the housing authority are well documented in local newspapers, which followed the story closely over a number of years. The articles written prior to 1996 paint the picture of a community of residents fearful of increased crime and frustrated by the lack of response of local agencies, including the housing authority, the courts, and the police. The news accounts suggest that the underlying cause of the criminal activity is families who receive HCVP assistance. Concerned residents formed a neighborhood association in 1995 and sought the attention of SAHA, the media, the police, city officials, and HUD. They also went door to door to recruit homeowners to assist in addressing the crime problem.

In the Montgomery neighborhood, HCVP residents first moved to the area in the 1980s and were initially welcomed by the neighborhood. But in time complaints about property conditions and crime led the Montgomery Neighborhood Association to contact the housing authority, the police, and their local government representatives. While the association expected SAHA to monitor the activities of HCVP residents and to ensure that landlords were adequately maintaining rental properties, they felt their concerns were not addressed. After a high-profile police intervention in 1993, followed by a large-scale community policing effort, residents saw improvements, but still felt that SAHA was not doing its job.

### **2.7.3 The Response and Outcomes**

In the early 1990s, SAHA and the city government took a defensive stance and made only modest efforts to acknowledge the community concerns about the HCVP. In 1994, SAHA sent a letter to all HCVP landlords that informed them of the complaints and advised them to enforce assuring compliance and lease terms as well as to inspect properties periodically. Landlords forwarded the letter to a journalist who reported on the landlords' viewpoint. More than one landlord expressed concern for his personal safety and noted that the housing authority needed to develop better screening procedures as well as procedures for investigating complaints. Overall, the authority's reputation suffered as neighborhoods across the city increasingly viewed SAHA as unresponsive, with a tendency to put the blame on the landlord.

In addition to problems with the HCVP, in early 1997 SAHA became the target of investigative newspaper reports detailing sexual harassment allegations against the Executive Director and alleged mismanagement of funds. Following an internal investigation, the Board of Commissioners asked the 18-year agency director to resign. A new acting director took aggressive action in face of this loss of public confidence and drafted a three-year plan

to reinvent the agency that included a substantial staffing overhaul and revamping SAHA's approach to the HCVP and its interaction with the community.

A four-tiered approach to the administration of the HCVP has since been adopted by SAHA and includes efforts to improve overall administration, to take a proactive approach to community complaints, to work to reduce problems with criminal activity, and to re-focus staff efforts on customer service. As a result, SAHA has implemented many reforms that have significantly improved the management of the HCVP.

With streamlined property inspection procedures and a larger team of 22 inspectors, SAHA can now follow through on complaints regarding the condition of an assisted unit. A new 24-hour telephone hotline allows the community to make complaints that can be responded to systematically. In addition, SAHA staff attends neighborhood association meetings on a regular basis, not simply to respond to problems, but also to educate members about the HCVP. They also maintain a cooperative relationship with the media that has resulted in far fewer negative stories than in past years. In 1999, SAHA began actively screening applicants for criminal activity, and now SAHA is better prepared than before to take enforcement action against current HCVP participants who are uncooperative or negligent. Lastly, SAHA has worked to provide improved customer services to HCVP clients by providing participant briefings with specific and helpful information designed to help families fit into their new neighborhoods and be successful in the program.

While these operational changes are acknowledged positively by many, there are still concerns—especially in the Montgomery neighborhood—that more work remains to be done. Neighborhood association representatives from Montgomery continue to claim that their community is negatively affected by an over-concentration of HCVP families, some of whom are not equipped to maintain their homes to community standards or whose behavior is at times in conflict with that of the neighbors. The neighborhood, while happy with the steps taken to improve the program in recent years, would like to see SAHA do more, especially in the areas of enforcement of landlord responsibilities, tenant education, resources for children, and communication with local police.

## **2.8 Syracuse, New York**

### **2.8.1 Community Context**

Syracuse, New York, is an older northeastern city of about 150,000 residents, located very close to the geographic center of the state. Syracuse was once a major manufacturing center, but with the loss of its two major employers—General Electric and Carrier—fell on hard times in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Today, Syracuse University is the largest employer in the area. Syracuse's population fell by 17 percent between 1970 and 1990, and by an

estimated 9 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1999, the population was estimated to be about 68 percent white, 23 percent African-American, 4 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian.

The University/Westcott area, where the HCVP controversy took place, is an area of primarily residential neighborhoods north and east of Syracuse University's main campus. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, investors began to buy large, older single-family and duplex units in this area as rental properties for the student market. In the early 1980s, enrollment at Syracuse University remained strong and encouraged the continued conversion of homes to rental units. A decade later, Syracuse's enrollment numbers dropped, the University required freshman and sophomores to live on campus, and the student demand for private rental units in the neighborhoods around campus declined drastically. In response, some owners walked away from their units while others attempted to maintain their former income stream by renting through the HCVP. The landlord at the center of the HCVP controversy, who had built up an inventory of student rental housing in University/Westcott and surrounding neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s, was one of the owners who turned to HCVP when the market softened.

Between 1985 and 1998, there was considerable growth in the number of HCVP families moving into the University/Westcott area as well as a lot of turnover. The transition away from the student rental market and toward one that included more HCVP families affected the demographic makeup of the University/Westcott neighborhoods. The percentage of the population made up of racial or ethnic minorities grew by 16 percent between 1980 and 1990, and by 24 percent between 1990 and 1999, driven by growth in the Asian, Hispanic, and African-American populations. In addition, property values continued to decline, and many owners believe the current market value to be less than what they paid for their homes.

## **2.8.2 The HCVP Controversy**

The Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) operates a number of housing assistance programs within the City of Syracuse. The HCVP is funded for 2,970 units and includes special programs for family unification and mainstream housing for persons with disabilities. SHA maintains an open HCVP waiting list and gives preference to persons who are in school or a job training program and to families with children with elevated blood lead levels (EBL).

The HCVP controversy officially began in the summer of 1996 and continued for a three-year period. The crux of the problem was neighborhood complaints about the behavior of HCVP tenants in three units on a single street, all owned by a single landlord, and the failure of that landlord to take action to evict the tenants or improve their behavior. Having complained years earlier when his units were rented to students, the homeowners had a long history of problems with this particular landlord and felt that the landlord maintained his properties at a



minimal level. Now the complaints focused on his HCVP properties, and in particular a large duplex and a single-family home on Greenwood Place (in University/Westcott), which soon became the exclusive focus of the HCVP controversy.

The neighborhood association first wrote a letter to Senator Alphonse D'Amato complaining of the changes that had occurred in the neighborhood and requesting information on HCVP regulations. After receiving a copy of the letter from HUD, SHA responded by informing landlords of their responsibility to screen tenants and enforce appropriate standards of behavior. By the summer of 1997, community concerns grew to include issues of code enforcement, diminished quality of life in the area, resident safety, and the lowering of property values. The neighbors organized into a more localized neighborhood group (the Concerned Citizens of Greater Greenwood Place) and focused efforts on getting SHA and city code enforcement officials to take action against the landlord.

At a meeting with the landlord, neighborhood representatives, the Mayor, and several other city officials, the landlord claimed ignorance of the problems and suggested that the basis of the complaint was related to race. When SHA suspended the landlord from any new HCVP contracts (on the basis of his failure to screen tenants), he appealed to HUD and then filed a housing discrimination complaint. SHA reinstated the landlord, but continued to investigate his management practices. During this same period, the Concerned Citizens emphasized their commitment to neighborhood diversity, rejected the insinuation of racist motivations, and initiated efforts to reach out to HCVP tenants through invitations to their meetings and attempts at mediation.

Following its investigation, in February 1998, SHA once again suspended the landlord from future HCVP contracts. This time the HUD Field Office backed the decision. The landlord responded by first filing a suit in the State Supreme Court and later a \$10 million damage suit. By March 1998, several of the landlord's Greenwood Place tenants filed individual housing discrimination suits. Many neighbors felt that the tenants' behavior worsened after they became convinced the suit could result in a large settlement or award. By this stage in the conflict, the volume and scale of incidents at the Greenwood properties increased and police calls were regular. Media coverage also reached its peak and the Concerned Citizens became upset with what they thought was sensationalist and one-sided reporting on the basis of the landlord's statements.

### **2.8.3 The Response and Outcomes**

It took over a year from the filing of the housing discrimination complaints for HUD to issue its opinion that there had been no civil rights violations by SHA or the City. When the ruling came in February 1999, SHA finally felt it could take action to terminate the participation of the tenants, but did not act right away. Instead, the City and Police Department, having

decided to work with SHA to resolve the Greenwood Place controversy, began to prepare a drug case against one of the tenants. The landlord finally evicted the tenants of the duplex after the police department declared it a nuisance property.

Today, the HCVP controversy has died down considerably. The State Supreme Court dismissed the landlord's damage claim suit, but has twice upheld on appeal the ruling that SHA did not act properly in suspending the owner. The case remains on appeal, but the landlord has been reinstated into the HCVP. The duplex is currently rented to graduate students and the neighbors claim that the situation has greatly improved.

As a result of the controversy, SHA now screens HCVP tenants for drugs and violent criminal behavior and is considering doing additional screening. SHA staff indicate that they are quicker to take action when there are complaints about tenants or landlords in the program. SHA has also been aggressive in implementing homeownership opportunities for HCVP families and is asking HUD for more authority under the HCVP regulations to deal with non-performing landlords. The city's experience with the HCVP controversy has made the executive director reluctant to apply for additional HCVP funding, despite the city's clear need for further assistance.

## Chapter 3

# The Role of Neighborhood or Community in HCVP Conflicts

This chapter draws on the case studies and research to explore the types of communities that are vulnerable to HCVP controversy. It looks first at the varying sizes of the geographic area in which a conflict can arise and at the ways in which the pattern of jurisdictional responsibilities for the HCVP can influence or exacerbate a conflict. The discussion then turns to the neighborhood factors that may create a climate for controversy. These factors include: economic decline; racial transition; concentration of HCVP households; an active neighborhood organization; and the perceived vulnerability of an area with respect to the surrounding or adjacent community. Appendix B contains maps of each of the study sites, highlighting the location of the conflict area within the broader jurisdiction.

### 3.3 Geography of the Conflict

While controversies surrounding the HCVP tend to become generalized to the nature and functioning of the program as a whole, the geographical scope of the area that gives rise to the conflict can vary dramatically. Sometimes the community in which the conflict is located is a *single city block* or a small portion of a housing subdivision. A typical scenario is the following: first, the behavior of some of the residents is perceived as causing problems; next, neighbors conclude that the problem families are subsidized by HCVP; and finally, the conflict takes off. This was the case in the Avandale East subdivision in Camden County, where from start to finish the controversy was focused on the HCVP units on a particular street. In the University/Westcott neighborhood in Syracuse, the conflict centered on a large duplex and a single-family house on the same street and owned by a single landlord.

At other times, the controversy starts with a homeowners' or other neighborhood association that makes concerns about HCVP part of an agenda for stabilizing or preserving the economic and social character of the *neighborhood as a whole*. In the Patterson Park neighborhood in Baltimore, a coalition of neighborhood associations spearheaded an effort to make changes in the way the housing authority administered the HCVP. Similarly, a homeowners' association in the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax County raised concerns about the relationship between HCVP and property values in that section of the county. Although the controversy came to involve the political leadership of the county as a whole, the focal point remained the particular neighborhood. Finally, in San Antonio, the controversy involved two large single-family subdivisions, not HCVP throughout the city. Again, homeowners' associations representing these two neighborhoods played a pivotal role in the conflict.

Finally, some HCVP controversies are not focused at all on a neighborhood or block, but instead take the form of debates about the role of HCVP in *an entire political jurisdiction* or other large geographic area. South suburban Cook County is the most extreme example. From the very beginning of the HCVP in the 1970s, local political leaders raised concerns that widespread use of HCVP subsidies would reinforce patterns of racial transition that could lead to the resegregation of communities in south suburban Cook County as entirely African-American. The Cook County controversy, now in its third decade, is in some sense a philosophical debate over whether HCVP should function as a proactive tool for achieving diversity or only as a social support in which families make individual choices.

Similarly, in Norristown (Montgomery County) and in Lynn, the HCVP controversy centered on the relationship between the HCVP and the problems and needs of an entire city. In both cases, local political leaders were concerned that a large number of subsidized households within a moderate-income city would place burdens on local resources for education and social programs.

### **3.2 HCVP Administrative Geography**

The geographical scope of the entity administering the HCVP also varied among the study sites and was a factor in the controversy in several cases. In Fairfax County and Montgomery County, the housing authority has countywide jurisdiction in a large suburban area. In both cases, the controversy was fueled by the perception of those representing a sub-area of the county that the housing authority was not sensitive to more localized problems or even was deliberately “dumping” disadvantaged households in the Route 1 corridor or in the city of Norristown.

Cook County also has a countywide housing authority, which covers an even larger jurisdiction. The population of suburban Cook was 2.4 million in 1999, and the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) administers 10,000 units of tenant-based HCVP.<sup>2</sup> In a theme also heard in Fairfax and Montgomery counties, political leaders in southern Cook County have argued that HACC has not done enough to encourage subsidized households to find housing in other parts of the county. Small independent municipalities have attempted to administer separate allocations of HCVP in Cook County but have been discouraged from doing so by HUD. In addition, the Chicago Housing Assistance Corporation (CHAC), the private entity that administers the HCVP in the city of Chicago, increasingly administers HCVP subsidies that families from Chicago have elected to use in Cook County. This has raised additional concerns among southern Cook County political leaders and fair housing

---

<sup>2</sup> HACC does not have jurisdiction in the city of Chicago, although Chicago is also part of Cook County.

advocates about their inability to monitor and influence the use of HCVP in the southern area of the county.

In Lynn, the overlapping administration of HCVP between the local housing authority and the state agency that also administers tenant-based HCVP subsidies within the city limits was an important part of the conflict. The city political leadership, along with many other local PHAs in Massachusetts, objected to the state agency administering the HCVP in the jurisdiction, primarily because the state was lax in the administration of rent reasonableness procedures and housing quality standards enforcement.

In Camden County, overlapping program administration has not been a major issue thus far, but that could change. In this case, it is the statewide agency that administers the bulk of HCVP subsidies and took responsibility for resolving the conflict that occurred in the Avandale neighborhood. But some HCVP subsidies are administered by small, local housing authorities in Camden County, and the neighborhood group representing Avandale East is concerned about access to information and problem solving across multiple agencies.

The three remaining study sites—Syracuse, Baltimore, and San Antonio—all have city housing authorities. Issues of administrative geography did not play a significant role at these study sites.

### **3.3 Neighborhood Factors that Contribute to HCVP Community Conflict**

Some types of communities and some types of neighborhoods may be especially vulnerable to HCVP conflict. The following sections explore these issues, looking for patterns that may help PHAs administering the program be aware of warning signs and focus their attention on preventing controversies in vulnerable places. Awareness of these patterns might also help HUD focus technical assistance on particular types of PHAs and geographic areas.

#### **3.3.1 Economic Decline**

HCVP conflict appears to be a regional phenomenon. In the course of identifying potential sites for this study, the Abt Associates team found that repeated instances of HCVP community conflict were abundant in the Northeast, less frequent in the Midwest, and quite rare in the South and West. The neighborhoods and communities that were identified as having experienced conflict often had one thing in common: they are all places that “aren’t what they used to be.” They have experienced not just economic distress (there are plenty of poor communities in the South and West), but economic decline.

However, while economic decline is prevalent in these communities, these are by no means the poorest sections of metropolitan areas. In fact, the poverty rate for a number of the study sites was below 10 percent, low enough that most voucher mobility programs would consider them places to which families should be *encouraged* to move. Exhibit 3-1 shows poverty rates in 1990 for the eight study sites, highlighting the conflict neighborhoods. Among the eight study sites, the lowest poverty rates were in Camden County's Avandale community (with an 8 percent poverty rate in 1990), and the Route 1 corridor of Fairfax County (with a 6 percent poverty rate in 1990). In addition, the Montgomery neighborhood in San Antonio was only 9 percent poor in 1990 in a city with an overall poverty rate of 23 percent. In Cook County, where the area of concern is the entire south suburban portion of the county, the poverty rate was only 8 percent overall but 26 percent in the poorest individual jurisdiction. The city of Chicago has large areas with much higher poverty than any part of southern Cook County.

Several sites had poverty rates of 10 percent or above, although there was variation in different sections of these communities. Patterson Park in Baltimore is a mixed income neighborhood, with the poverty rates of the census tracts making up the neighborhood ranging from 11 percent (just above the national average) to extremely high poverty (41 percent). But Baltimore also has far poorer neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> The overall poverty rates for the cities of Lynn and Norristown (Montgomery County) were 16 and 10 percent, respectively, in 1990. In the case of Norristown, this represented a decline from 12 percent in 1980.

Finally, for the census tracts that comprise the University/Westcott neighborhood in Syracuse, the 1990 poverty rate was 36 percent. However, this includes a large student population that still lived in the neighborhood at that time.

Median family income is another indication that these are not the most vulnerable communities in metropolitan America. In several of our study sites, median family income, adjusted for inflation, grew slightly during the 1980s rather than declining. In addition, as shown in Exhibit 3-2, median family income was not always lower in the conflict neighborhood than in the broader jurisdiction.

---

<sup>3</sup> The 2000 Census may show that additional Patterson Park census tracts now have extremely high poverty.

---

**Exhibit 3-1****1990 Poverty Rates of the Case Study Sites, Highlighting the Neighborhood of Conflict**

---

	Percent of Population below the Poverty Line
<b>Fairfax County, Virginia</b>	
Fairfax County	4%
Route 1 Corridor	6%
<b>Montgomery County, Pennsylvania</b>	
Montgomery County	4%
Norristown Borough	10%
<b>Lynn, Massachusetts</b>	
Essex County	9%
Lynn City	16%
<b>Baltimore, Maryland</b>	
Baltimore City	22%
Patterson Park Neighborhood	23%
<b>Cook County, Illinois</b>	
Cook County (includes Chicago City)	14%
South Suburban Cook County	8%
<b>Camden County, New Jersey</b>	
Camden County (includes Camden City)	11%
Avandale Neighborhood	8%
<b>San Antonio, Texas</b>	
San Antonio City	23%
Montgomery Neighborhood	9%
The Creek Neighborhood	42%
<b>Syracuse, New York</b>	
Syracuse City	21%
University/Westcott Neighborhood	36%

Sources: 1990 Decennial Census, US Census Bureau (1990 Census Lookup Server, [www.homer.ssd.census.gov/cdrom/lookup](http://www.homer.ssd.census.gov/cdrom/lookup))

---

---

**Exhibit 3-2****Median Family Income, 1969-1989 (in 1989 dollars)<sup>a</sup>**

	1969	1979	1989
<b>Fairfax County, VA</b>			
Fairfax County	\$53,070	\$56,659	\$65,201
Route 1 Corridor	\$45,154	\$44,242	\$52,490
<b>Montgomery County, PA</b>			
Montgomery County	\$43,069	\$44,071	\$51,353
Norristown Borough	\$32,943	\$30,715	\$35,056
<b>Lynn, MA</b>			
Essex County	\$36,960	\$36,995	\$45,794
Lynn City	\$43,062	\$31,486	\$35,830
<b>Baltimore, MD</b>			
Baltimore City	\$29,784	\$36,037	\$28,217
Patterson Park	\$27,824	\$25,844	\$25,126
<b>Cook County, IL</b>			
Cook County (includes Chicago)	\$39,335	\$39,415	\$39,296
South Suburban Cook County	\$41,335 <sup>b</sup>	\$44,826 <sup>b</sup>	\$43,773
<b>Camden County, NJ</b>			
Camden County (includes Camden City)	\$37,031	\$35,864	\$41,961
Avandale Neighborhood	\$31,916	\$36,747	\$41,748
<b>San Antonio, TX</b>			
San Antonio City	\$26,131	\$27,087	\$26,885
Montgomery Neighborhood	\$37,680	\$39,680	\$37,100
The Creek Neighborhood	\$24,033	\$23,937	\$17,596
<b>Syracuse, NY</b>			
Syracuse City	\$31,240	\$28,337	\$28,012
University/Westcott Neighborhood	n/a	\$32,728	\$31,764

<sup>a</sup> Adjusted income figures were calculated by inflating 1969 and 1979 raw data to 1989 dollars using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.stats.bls.gov/cpihome.htm](http://www.stats.bls.gov/cpihome.htm)).

<sup>b</sup> Income figures for 1969 and 1979 represent only those cities in south suburban Cook County that were incorporated at the time of the 1970 and 1980 censuses. They should be read as approximations only. The 1989 figure represents the complete set of census tracts in the south suburban area.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Decennial Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, 1970 Census of Population and Housing; Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.stats.bls.gov/blshome.htm](http://www.stats.bls.gov/blshome.htm)).

---



Overall, it appears that what makes a community vulnerable to HCVP conflict is not a high degree of poverty or income levels within some specific range. Rather, it is economic distress compared with expectations, expectations often formed by the community's past when times were better. The clearest case for economic decline among the study sites is Baltimore's Patterson Park, which has changed over time from a solid working class neighborhood to one with declining income and homeownership rates, growing poverty, and loss of housing units.

The stories in Norristown (Montgomery County), Lynn, south suburban Cook, and Syracuse are similar. Norristown is an older urban center that has experienced decline since the 1950s, including a drop in population. Lynn is a blue-collar city with a declining or just barely stabilized population. South suburban Cook County began to lose jobs and tax base with the closure of several major employers in the mid to late 1970s. While the area as a whole retains a strong middle class character, poverty rates increased dramatically in some Cook County towns between 1970 and 1990. Finally, Syracuse as a whole has experienced a declining employment base and substantial loss of population. The University/Westcott neighborhood, already vulnerable, was weakened (at least in some ways) by the loss of its off-campus student population during the 1990s.

The remaining three sites all have slightly different stories, although in each case one can identify neighbors' concerns about economic transition in the community. The Avandale area is comparable to Camden County as a whole in terms of wealth and income growth. However, the locus of the HCVP conflict, the Avandale East subdivision, has experienced some transition from owner occupancy to rental and, as one of the older subdivisions, may be less attractive than newer portions of a rapidly growing area.

The only site in the South or West, San Antonio is a special case in other ways as well. The entire city has a very high poverty rate by national standards, and this reflects a continued influx of new immigrants rather than economic decline for the city. The population of San Antonio as a whole and of the study neighborhoods—the Creek and Montgomery—has continued to grow. The Creek, in particular, is unusual among the study neighborhoods because it has an extremely high poverty rate (42 percent in 1990), a substantial amount of vacant housing (21 percent in 1990), and a severe problem with gang-related crime. What this neighborhood may have in common with other study neighborhoods is that expectations for the neighborhood based on what it once was have been frustrated. Built in the 1970s, it was made vulnerable in the 1980s by staffing reductions at the local Air Force bases that previously had supplied the neighborhood with moderate-income homebuyers.

Expectations can relate to a neighborhood or community's past character. They also can be formed by the growing affluence of a neighboring or surrounding area. If we were to describe the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax County without naming it and without reference to

Fairfax County as a whole, the corridor might be seen as a gateway community for urban minorities and foreign-born residents on their way up. But its location in the middle of one of the wealthiest counties in the nation fueled the resentment of homeowners in the immediate vicinity who saw their property values stagnate or decline.

Economic decline may not only fuel negative community perceptions about HCVP. It can also lead to administrative problems with the program. In a neighborhood with a declining or stagnant housing market, owners of rental housing are increasingly willing to participate in the HCVP because there is not as much demand from unsubsidized households. This creates opportunities for the program and for the low-income families it serves, but it also creates dangers.

A declining or lagging rental market increases the likelihood that the HCVP administrator will agree to above-market rents, because a rent requested by the owner may be above market and still below the program's FMR or payment standard. Furthermore, it can be especially difficult to determine a comparable market rent when a sudden drop in demand occurs because of a particular event, such as a plant closing or a requirement that students live on campus. In this case, a history of neighborhood rentals at a level that reflects the new market reality does not exist.

Above-market program rents may cause owners to *prefer* HCVP tenants to other tenants to the extent that they fail to enforce lease provisions about property upkeep and neighborly behavior. In at least one of the study neighborhoods, Baltimore's Patterson Park, investors were buying houses at depressed sales prices and converting them to rental properties, in part to take advantage of the above-market rents paid by the housing authority.

Economic decline depresses house prices as well as rents. This can affect the way neighbors react to the presence of HCVP families. In the three study sites where controversy was focused at the neighborhood level, a perception of declining or lagging house prices either started the conflict or fueled it. Patterson Park (Baltimore), the Route 1 corridor (Fairfax County), and the two neighborhoods in San Antonio experienced real declines in house prices at about the time the HCVP controversy began. Increasing use of HCVP in a neighborhood may be a result of declining real estate values rather than a cause. That does not make the controversy over HCVP any less real.

### **3.3.2 Racial Transition and Class Differences**

Many of the communities under study were undergoing racial as well as economic transition. In Lynn, for example, key census indicators associated with income—the poverty rate, the percentage of households with public assistance income, and the percentage of families with

children and a female head of household—all improved between 1980 and 1990. At the same time, Lynn had rapidly growing African-American and Hispanic populations.

In the Route 1 corridor of Fairfax County, the picture is similar: stable incomes but racial and ethnic change. The census tracts making up the area of conflict were 8 percent African-American in 1980 and 21 percent in 1990. In Norristown (Montgomery County), indicators associated with income are stable, but the African-American population is projected to increase from 26 to 33 percent between 1990 and 1999.

South Suburban Cook County and, to a lesser extent, the Avandale community in Camden County reflect the growing suburbanization of the African-American population. While south suburban Cook County was once almost entirely white, some communities, especially those closest to Chicago, now have African-American majorities. According to local informants, all of the in-movement is of African-Americans. Similarly, Avandale is growing more rapidly than other parts of Camden County and has an increasing percentage of African-Americans (projected to increase from 27 percent in 1990 to 34 percent in 1999).

Patterson Park in Baltimore is continuing the pattern of rapid racial transition characteristic of many older Northeastern urban neighborhoods in the 1960s and 1970s, in that what was once a white, ethnic neighborhood has become increasingly African-American over time. In this case, racial transition *is* accompanied by income decline and the HCVP controversy has been led by neighborhood groups concerned that the current mixed-income, mixed-race neighborhood may in time become a high poverty urban ghetto.

Finally, transition in the racial (and in this case also ethnic) character of the San Antonio study neighborhoods occurred as well. The Montgomery subdivision in San Antonio was 90 percent white, non-Hispanic at the beginning of the 1980s. By 1990 that figure had dropped to 58 percent and by 1999, 45 percent. Minorities in Montgomery in 1999 are split among African-Americans (19 percent), those of Hispanic origin (32 percent), and others (4 percent). The Creek neighborhood in San Antonio was a mixed Hispanic (53 percent) and white, non-Hispanic (36 percent) neighborhood in 1980. In 1990, it was 90 percent Hispanic. The poverty rate of the Creek already at 32 percent in 1980, increased to 42 percent by 1990.

Fears and prejudices associated with racial transition clearly play some role in the emergence of conflict around the HCVP. But it is too easy to dismiss HCVP conflict as racially motivated and to fail to ask whether the administration of the HCVP feeds fears and prejudices or can help to dissolve them. It is also noteworthy that in communities undergoing racial transition, many of the concerns about HCVP have been raised by African-American political figures or leaders of neighborhood groups.

It is also too easy and too dangerous for PHAs to ignore changing demographics in their community as “not their business.” Awareness that areas undergoing racial transition may be volatile and careful program administration in those areas may be keys to avoiding conflicts that focus on the HCVP as symbol or scapegoat. Specifically, PHAs should take care that they are not unwittingly steering families to these neighborhoods through the information they give out at briefings and that the established rent levels are reasonable. Particular attention should also be given to assuring clear and effective communication with residents.

Beyond race, conflicts over HCVP often reflect differences in social class or culture, with tensions arising around the behavior of neighborhood “newcomers”—for example, leaving trash in front of houses, playing loud music, or spending more time “hanging out” on the street. Whether or not the new residents are assisted by HCVP, the program becomes associated with these behavior differences. And this is almost inevitable, because at its very heart, the HCVP is an income-mixing program. HCVP makes it possible for families with low incomes to rent housing in neighborhoods that otherwise would be inaccessible to them. That is what it is supposed to do.

Sometimes it is very clear that social class (rather than race) is at the root of the conflict, for example, when the community from which objections to the HCVP arise is a middle or moderate income African-American community. The racial barriers that persist in the society as a whole play a role here, because it is the lower barriers to in-migration by poor African-American families that make working or middle class African-American communities feel vulnerable. Southern Cook County is an excellent example. On a smaller scale, so is Avondale East (Camden County), where the president of the homeowners association that made the complaints about HCVP families is African-American.

Finally, at a number of sites, the use of HCVP to accommodate households moving out of public housing or homeless shelters has heightened concerns related to race, social class, and the real or perceived problems faced by these families. The demolition and redevelopment of public housing high rises in Baltimore resulted in some former residents of one project moving to Patterson Park—and probably a community perception that an even larger number did so than was actually the case.

Similar perceptions existed at two other sites. Earlier redevelopment of public housing in neighboring Alexandria was believed by residents of the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax County to explain some of the in-migration of African-American families. And, in San Antonio, representatives of the Bexar County sheriff’s office asserted that many newcomers to the Creek have moved there from public housing.

At three study sites—Cook County, Avandale (Camden County), and Norristown (Montgomery County)—local informants expressed concern about the potential for further influx of HCVP families due to upcoming relocation activity. Elected officials in southern Cook County were vocal in their fears about the implications for their communities resulting from the massive transformation of Chicago public housing that will continue over the next ten years. Public housing residents, especially those living in physically unattractive, high crime developments such as those in Baltimore and Chicago, are believed to be unprepared to meet the expectations of good neighborly behavior in moderate- to middle-income neighborhoods.

In Lynn, it was not the demolition of public housing, but the use of tenant-based assistance to provide housing for the homeless through a special state program that fueled the HCVP conflict. From the point of view of a homeless family, relocation from a shelter to a modest, or even a high poverty, neighborhood in Lynn is an important step forward. But it fed anxieties in Lynn that went beyond racial and class differences. A key concern in Lynn was that these homeless families were moving without adequate support and services.

The use of tenant-based assistance for public housing relocation or for the homeless is often essential. The experience at these sites suggests that when this choice is made—by HUD, by local policy makers, or by the affected families—the administration of the HCVP in the “receiving” communities must be self-conscious and careful.

### **3.3.3 The Concentration of HCVP Households**

Those raising concerns about the HCVP often talk about “concentrations.” This can mean different things depending on whether the HCVP conflict is focused on a block, a neighborhood, or a city. In the Avandale East (Camden County) and University/Westcott (Syracuse) neighborhoods, it meant the highly visible presence of a few disruptive families on a single block. Not all of the families turned out to be HCVP recipients, but some were.

Where the focus is an entire neighborhood, concentration implies a high percentage of subsidized units compared with the entire housing stock of the neighborhood or the larger political jurisdiction. An examination of HUD program data shows that Patterson Park, the Route 1 corridor, and the Creek and Montgomery neighborhoods do indeed have a higher proportion of HCVP tenants than Baltimore, Fairfax County, or San Antonio as a whole. In both Patterson Park and the Route 1 corridor, individual census tracts have a much higher proportion of subsidized units than does the entire neighborhood. Patterson Park has a heavy concentration of tenant-based assistance on some blocks. Parts of the Route 1 corridor have substantial amounts of project-based assisted housing. However, the Creek is the only entire neighborhood in which subsidized households exceed 10 percent of all households. In this case, they all have tenant-based subsidies. (See Exhibit 3-3.)

---

**Exhibit 3-3****Concentrations of Subsidized and Tenant-Based Households at the Study Sites, from HUD's A Picture of Subsidized Households, 1998**

	<b>Total Subsidized Households</b>	<b>Total Tenant-Based Households</b>	<b>Federally Subsidized Households/ Total Households<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Tenant-Based Households/ Total Households<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Fairfax County, VA</b>				
Fairfax County	8,226	2,302	3%	1%
Route 1 Corridor	1,961	738	7%	3%
<b>Montgomery County, PA</b>				
Montgomery County	3,885	1,618	2%	1%
Norristown Borough	978	759	8%	6%
<b>Lynn, MA</b>				
Essex County	13,893	4,601	6%	2%
Lynn City	3,955	1,382	13%	4%
<b>Baltimore, MD</b>				
Baltimore City	32,649	2,558 <sup>b</sup>	12%	1%
Patterson Park	384	318 <sup>b</sup>	3%	3%
<b>Cook County, IL</b>				
Cook County	112,221	7,849	6%	1%
South Suburban Cook County	24,342	4,879	4%	2%
<b>Camden County, NJ</b>				
Camden County	5,929	778	3%	0%
Avandale	23	22	0%	0%
<b>San Antonio, TX</b>				
San Antonio City	23,284	9,303	6%	2%
Montgomery	350	350	6%	6%
The Creek	394	394	14%	14%
<b>Syracuse, NY</b>				
Syracuse City	7,155	2,654	11%	4%
University/Westcott	123	123	3%	3%

<sup>a</sup> Data on total households are from the 1990 Decennial Census.

<sup>b</sup> Tenant-based data appear to be under-reported for Baltimore City and Patterson Park. Housing authority sources suggest that there were closer to 700 HCVP-assisted households living in Patterson Park in 1995.

Sources: HUD's A Picture of Subsidized Households in 1998; US Census Bureau, 1990 Decennial Census.

Turning to the study sites where the HCVP controversy was city- or county-wide, HUD data show that 13 percent of Lynn’s households are subsidized by tenant-based HCVP, public housing, or project-based HUD rental assistance. According to local data, however, more than 35 percent of Lynn’s housing stock is subsidized through a variety of federal and state programs.<sup>4</sup> South suburban Cook County is difficult to report on since it includes such a large number of communities. While HUD data show that 4 percent of households are subsidized, it is likely that some of the poorer communities have a high percentage of assisted housing. Eight percent of Norristown (Montgomery County) households receive federal housing subsidies.

At every site where HCVP conflict emerged, there was a higher rate of HCVP (or HCVP plus other types of assisted housing) than in nearby or surrounding areas. But there does not appear to be a trigger point. In fact, the concentration of HCVP in the Route 1 corridor is not the highest in Fairfax County, and several of the study areas have “concentrations” of tenant-based HCVP, or of assisted housing, that would not be considered high by national standards. The Creek neighborhood of San Antonio is an exception. It is the only really high poverty neighborhood in the study and has the highest concentration of federally subsidized households.

Ultimately, the rate of change may be a more important factor in HCVP controversy than absolute level. A rapid increase in the number of HCVP families, especially if they have moved into the neighborhood and are visibly different from other neighborhood residents by race or class, may trigger a conflict. This may have happened in Baltimore’s Patterson Park. It certainly happened in the San Antonio neighborhoods.

### **3.3.4 Presence of an Active Neighborhood Group**

The presence of an active neighborhood group in a community undergoing some combination of economic decline and racial transition may make it more likely that HCVP conflict will erupt. Most often, these groups are led by homeowners rather than renters. In Patterson Park, a network of neighborhood groups determined to arrest and reverse the decline of the neighborhood has been at the center of the controversy over HCVP. In Fairfax County, Avandale (Camden County), Syracuse, and Norristown (Montgomery County), neighborhood groups played a major role in defining the issues and bringing them to the attention of elected officials and the press, as well as to the HCVP administrator.

---

<sup>4</sup> HUD data do not include units subsidized by HUD block grant programs, Community Development Block Grants and HOME. Nor do they include Low Income Housing Tax Credit units or units subsidized only by state programs.

In San Antonio, neighborhood groups emerged soon after the Creek and Montgomery began to decline and played an important role in pressing for administrative reforms in the HCVP. However, conditions in the Creek are said to have deteriorated to the point at which neighborhood activism is met with intimidation and is no longer possible.

An active neighborhood group is not always a necessary ingredient for HCVP conflict. In Cook County, elected political leaders of communities in the southern part of the county have been much more at the center of the conflict than any particular neighborhood or community group.

### **3.3.5 Vulnerability Within a Larger Community**

At several study sites, opposition to HCVP became the rallying point for broader conflict between the local jurisdiction and another level of government. In communities that felt economically vulnerable and unable to change what was happening within their borders, the HCVP became a symbol of their vulnerability and lack of political power. Specifically, residents and community leaders saw the concentration of HCVP families in their neighborhoods as part of a deliberate policy by the larger jurisdiction of “dumping” the problems associated with poverty and economic distress on smaller communities, without giving them additional resources to handle the problems. For example, Lynn residents became convinced that the state agency administering the voucher program was deliberately sending families to Lynn. Many Norristown officials believe that the Montgomery County Housing Authority encourages concentration of HCVP in that city.

The southern part of Cook County and the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax are different from Lynn and Norristown in that they are not separate political entities, but instead vulnerable portions of larger and wealthier jurisdictions. In Fairfax County, this was ultimately an advantage, because political representation of Route 1 within the county was a key to changing the way in which the program is administered and getting commitments of more resources for the Route 1 corridor. The same thing has not happened in Cook County.

Avondale and Patterson Park do not follow quite the same pattern. However, the residents of all these communities are likely aware that they live not far from some of the poorest, most racially and economically isolated neighborhoods in the country. Patterson Park is immediately adjacent to such neighborhoods in Baltimore. The city of Camden, 20 miles from Avondale, is one of the most distressed political jurisdictions in America. South suburban Cook County looks a few miles north to a vast expanse of high poverty and physical insecurity in South Chicago. Norristown is in an affluent suburban county, but here again distressed neighborhoods, in this case in Philadelphia, are a looming presence.



This may also help to explain the regional pattern noted earlier, in which HCVP conflict appears more likely to erupt in older metropolitan areas of the Northeast and Midwest than in the South or West. The phenomenon of “hyper-segregation” that most often exists in the Northeast and Midwest creates an especially perverse dynamic for the interaction of housing markets, neighborhoods, and race.<sup>5</sup> In addition, northeastern and Midwestern metropolitan areas are far more likely than metropolitan areas in the South and West to have a central city that cannot expand its borders and suburbs characterized by extreme jurisdictional fragmentation.<sup>6</sup> This creates hard edges around a Lynn, a Norristown, or a town in south suburban Cook County and makes them economically and politically vulnerable with respect to the larger area of which they are a part.

However, San Antonio is a useful contrast, reminding us that HCVP conflict *can* occur in other parts of the country and that no program administrator should believe him or herself to be immune from it. The next chapter draws on the case studies to examine administrative practices that tend to increase the likelihood of HCVP conflict, regardless of the type of community.

---

<sup>5</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> David Rusk, *Cities without Suburbs* (Washington DC, 1993).

## **Chapter 4**

# **Housing Authority Practices that Contribute to HCVP Community Conflict**

At virtually every study site, one aspect of the community's concern was a perception that the HCVP was poorly run—that inappropriate rents were paid, that housing quality was poor, and that there were few, if any, consequences for inappropriate behavior by tenants or landlords. In some instances, these concerns were based on misinformation about the housing authority's policies and procedures or misconceptions about the extent of the PHA's authority under program regulations. In other instances, however, the PHAs were forced to take a hard look at their own practices and to identify shortcomings in the administration of the program that were causing or contributing to problems in the community.

This chapter focuses on the mistakes that HCVP administrators can make that increase the likelihood that the program will become controversial or that conflict, once begun, will escalate. The chapter is divided into five sections according to the key administrative failures that contributed to community tensions at the eight study sites:

- Failure to monitor housing market change and locations of HCVP housing;
- Insufficient attention to assisting families to move to a broad range of neighborhoods;
- Inadequate attention to rent reasonableness and housing quality standards;
- Insufficient attention to household behavior; and
- Unresponsiveness to complaints and controversy.

The efforts that housing authorities made, in the midst of controversy, to resolve these issues are discussed in Chapter 6.

### **4.1 Failure to Monitor Housing Market Change and Locations of HCVP Housing**

Many of the housing agencies that found themselves embroiled in controversy over the HCVP understood the program in a particular way. They believed that households make their own choices about where to live, and that those decisions are not the program administrator's concern. They did not make an effort to understand what was going on in the local housing market, which neighborhoods were becoming more accessible to the program, and what that might mean for changing patterns of where HCVP certificates or vouchers were

used. The result was that the controversy came as a surprise, and there was no way for the housing authority to anticipate it, attempt to head it off, or plan for an appropriate response.

HCVP tenant-based assistance often is administered by institutions that do not participate in broader community efforts to assess housing needs and implement neighborhood revitalization programs. Thus, it is not surprising that thinking about the HCVP in the context of neighborhood change is not automatic and that information on changing housing and demographic trends would not be available to, and reviewed by, HCVP administrators on a routine basis. What is surprising is that many administrators did not pay attention to the locations of the units in their own programs.

#### **4.1.1 Tracking Locations of HCVP Households**

At least until the controversy began, the HCVP administrators at most study sites did not use their program information to map the locations of assisted households. Well into the controversy there, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City was unable to provide information on the numbers and locations of households using HCVP subsidies in Patterson Park. Some of the housing authorities in other study sites developed information about concentrations of HCVP families in the conflict area and in the broader jurisdiction, but only in response to a conflict already under way. This was the case in Fairfax County, where the housing authority developed data on the location of assisted households only after tensions in the Route 1 corridor had been brewing for some time.

Information about the locational patterns of HCVP households and how they might be changing might have alerted PHAs to problems in the way they were administering the program. At the very least, this knowledge could have enabled program administrators to be more proactive in their dealings with neighborhood organizations.

#### **4.1.2 Gauging HCVP Concentration**

When HCVP administrators responded to controversy by looking at data on where households were located, they frequently concluded that the concentration was small and, therefore, there could not be a problem. For example, the San Antonio Housing Authority checked program data to determine how many HCVP households were in the Creek neighborhood in 1995 and discovered that HCVP households made up only 10 percent of all households. But the program director did not put this figure in the context of what else was happening in the Creek. In particular, the housing authority did not pay attention to a pattern of rapidly increasing use of HCVP in this community. Two years later, in 1997, MTCS data show that HCVP households represented 12 percent of all households in the neighborhood. By 1998, it was 14 percent.

In Fairfax County, a focal point of the controversy was several large condominium developments where former owner occupants were renting their units or selling them to investors for use as rental property. Again, it was found that the fraction of units in these developments rented under the HCVP was “only” 10 percent. But in a volatile situation, 10 percent can be significant, especially if it represents rapid change in the character of the community.

Throughout the long period of controversy in Cook County, the housing authority has attributed the relative concentration of HCVP families in south suburban Cook to housing market conditions and family choice. The housing authority was not concerned about the much more rapid growth of the program in south suburban Cook than in the county as a whole during the 1980s and 1990s or the particularly rapid growth in some towns. As the fraction of all Cook County HCVP units located in south suburban Cook increased from 34 to 56 percent, the housing authority kept emphasizing that most families already lived in the area before they became HCVP recipients. But in the minds of those pressing for different ways of administering the program, that was beside the point. In their view, the program could have reduced concentrations of needy families by encouraging mobility to other parts of the county. Moreover, the recent increased use of HCVP by Chicago families to move to south suburban Cook has created a new dynamic in the controversy in which not all of the program growth can be attributed to families who already lived there.

## **4.2 Insufficient Attention to Assisting Families to Move to a Broad Range of Neighborhoods**

Cook County is not the only place in which the housing authority was criticized for failing to help families gain access to a broad range of housing locations. This was the case in other study sites as well. Several housing authority practices can encourage HCVP families to concentrate in certain neighborhoods: failing to recruit owners of housing in a variety of locations to participate in the program; failing to advise families on a broad range of housing choices; and providing insufficient support to separate mobility programs when such programs are funded.

### **4.2.1 Lack of Landlord Outreach and Insensitivity to Landlord Expectations**

Research on HCVP during the 1980s revealed that, in many locations, a HCVP “sub-market” had developed. Typically in such cases, a limited group of landlords put their units on the lists that housing authorities provide to families during orientation sessions or otherwise advertised that they accepted HCVP. Not surprisingly, households tended to rent those

units.<sup>7</sup> Rates at which families succeeded in renting under the HCVP rose dramatically during the 1980s,<sup>8</sup> and for many housing authorities, everything seemed to be going well. But, in many localities, the program was not taking advantage of the full range of rental housing locations that potentially could be made available within the program's Fair Market Rents.

Most of the housing authorities in the study did not have active programs for recruiting additional owners of rental housing into the HCVP at the outset of a controversy. Perhaps as a result, several of these sites offer good examples of agencies that have not taken full advantage of the rental market in their communities. This is particularly the case in the two large suburban counties in the study, Cook and Fairfax. Both housing authorities were administering the HCVP "by the book," leaving it to the families themselves to recruit additional owners or not. Both housing authorities came under strong criticism for doing just that.

There are two sides to owner recruitment. One is proactive outreach to associations of owners and to management agents to explain the program, its potential advantages for owners, and the relative lack of bureaucratic hassle it takes to participate. The other is making sure that there really is a relative lack of bureaucratic hassle. In Baltimore, it was learned that the program administrators had gained a reputation for discouraging "good" landlords from participating by not returning phone calls and not sending checks on time. In Norristown (Montgomery County), the head of a landlords' association claimed that many of his members had given up renting under HCVP because the housing authority did not provide enough support for dealing with problem tenants.

#### **4.2.2 Lack of Search Assistance for Families**

Most housing authorities do not have explicit mobility programs where certain staff are dedicated to counseling families about housing locations and providing one-on-one assistance to help them through the process of finding a unit and persuading a landlord to rent to them. But short of such programs—which usually receive special funding—there is a great deal the housing authority can do, or not do. In briefing sessions for new voucher holders, the housing authority can be more or less explicit about the full range of housing available under the program. At the extreme, a briefing might leave families with the mistaken impression that they can only rent units that are on the housing authority's list. During the search

---

<sup>7</sup> Meryl Finkel and Stephen D. Kennedy, "Racial/Ethnic differences in Utilization of HCVP Existing Rental Vouchers and Certificates," *Housing Policy Debate* 3, no. 2 (1992): 463-508.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HCVP Rental Voucher and Rental Certificate Utilization Study, Final Report*, October 1994.

process, housing authority staff can be available to provide advice and suggest additional locations, or not.

In the areas of HCVP conflict we studied, most of the housing authorities reported that their regular program administration was *not* focused on encouraging voucher enrollees to locate in areas other than where HCVP recipients already reside. In addition, in large programs (and the programs in this study were all large), processing efficiency may take priority over establishing individual relationships between a voucher holder and an individual staff member. In Cook County, for example, intake and eligibility determinations are conducted entirely by mail. After a group briefing, enrollees leave to begin the search process without one-on-one contact with a particular staff member. This makes it difficult to make advice on searching for housing part of the regular administration of the program.

#### **4.2.3 Inadequate Support for Existing Mobility Programs**

It is noteworthy that at two sites—Baltimore and Cook County—special mobility programs were created in response to the HCVP controversy, although they were never integrated into the ongoing administration of the program. Baltimore currently has four mobility programs underway, including a HUD-funded Regional Opportunity Counseling program operated by a nonprofit agency and an in-house mobility program run by housing agency staff. But, even the mobility program that is operated by the housing authority is organizationally separate from regular HCVP functions, so that the benefits of mobility counseling do not reach all clients. Furthermore, it is claimed that the separate, HUD-funded Regional Opportunity Counseling program in Baltimore is underutilized because of a lack of referrals from the housing authority. In the case of Cook County, a mobility program operated by the nonprofit, Housing Choice Partners, has served only a modest number of HCVP participants over the year, and its budget was recently cut by the housing agency.

### **4.3 Inadequate Attention to Rent Reasonableness and Housing Quality Standards**

A pervasive theme in places that experience HCVP conflict is that the program encourages irresponsible behavior by landlords by paying much more than they would receive for the same housing unit outside the program, given the housing unit's location and its condition. Irresponsible landlord behavior includes unwillingness to enforce the lease for subsidized families because their presence as renters represents a windfall. This was a major complaint—and probably has been a reality—in seven of the eight sites we studied.

### **4.3.1 Inadequate Rent Reasonableness Determinations**

The HCVP requires the administrator to perform a “rent reasonableness” determination, comparing the rent requested by the owner to the rents of comparable, unassisted housing units in the same or similar locations. This is a particularly difficult part of administering the program, requiring the periodic collection of data on a large number of housing units and the examination of that data to find the rents of comparable units and to make appropriate adjustments when precisely comparable units do not exist. There also is a natural tension between recruiting landlords into the program by agreeing to attractive rents and avoiding the problems (quite aside from inflating program costs) that can result from overpayment.

The study sites demonstrate what those problems can be. In Syracuse, the owner of the housing unit at the center of the controversy (and of other units in the neighborhood) was able to charge the same rent for a HCVP family that he had previously been charging a group of Syracuse University students. But a requirement that students live on campus had all but eliminated the student market. The owner found HCVP rents so attractive—compared with the alternative of renting outside the program—that he was willing to engage in a legal battle with the housing authority to avoid evicting problem tenants.

In the longstanding controversy over HCVP in Cook County, the south suburban municipalities claim that the housing authority is too willing to approve rents that approach or equal the metropolitan-wide FMR. The rental market is softer in south suburban Cook than in other parts of the county and units are available at lower cost. The effect of this is to pay landlords a premium for accepting HCVP tenants.

The Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) operates a manual system for determining rent reasonableness, with data books maintained for five different market zones. HACC’s HCVP administrative plan says that a staff member determining rent for a unit coming into the program must see a copy of a lease for a comparable unassisted unit in the same building or complex, as well as three listings from the book for that zone. But direct comparables from the same building often do not exist and the data books are not kept up to date. Most importantly, five market zones almost certainly are insufficient to capture market differences within an area (all of suburban Cook County) that has 240,000 rental housing units.

In Lynn, the rent reasonableness problem was that the nonprofit organization operating the state agency’s allocation of HCVP units in that part of metropolitan Boston was unfamiliar with rent levels specific to Lynn. Rents that were \$80 to \$100 higher than the actual market value reportedly were paid. A property owner interviewed for this study confirmed this, and state agency officials acknowledged in the media that some rent determinations in Lynn probably were excessive.

Rent reasonableness was also a problem in Fairfax County and in Baltimore, where units were switching from homeownership to rental. In Fairfax, for example, it was alleged that rents for the units in the large condominium complexes that were converting from homeownership to rental were way out of line with contemporary sales prices for the same units. The Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority, in response to the HCVP controversy, subsequently modified rent reasonableness procedures.

In Baltimore, the neighborhood association leading the campaign for HCVP reform claimed that investors were buying houses expressly to rent them at the above-market rents permitted by the HCVP and that this was contributing to the transformation of Patterson Park from owner occupancy to rental. A HUD central office review of Baltimore's HCVP confirmed that rents as much as \$200 above market had been agreed to in Patterson Park. This happened largely because the geographic area on which comparable rents were based for Patterson Park rent reasonableness determinations was much too large and included some of the highest rent neighborhoods in the city. Housing authority staff remarked during that program review that they were trying to encourage owners of rental housing to participate in the program.

Finally, in Norristown (Montgomery County), the homeowners' association charged that the rent levels in the HCVP were excessively high relative to the quality of the units leased. They claimed that the housing authority did not follow a procedure for rent reasonableness determinations, but rather agreed to rents that fell within the countywide Fair Market Rents.

#### **4.3.2 Poor Quality of Program Housing**

Complaints about housing quality are sometimes related to setting and enforcing Housing Quality Standards. But more often at the study sites, housing quality became a concern in connection with the rents paid for particular units. In Baltimore's Patterson Park, for example, community groups argued that because the housing authority did not do a good job of adjusting rent levels to the quality of the units, landlords had little incentive to maintain their properties, other than to meet HQS requirements. In 1995, one of the major points of complaint was that landlords could get the same rent for a house with painted over wallpaper, dropped ceilings, and a 50-year-old furnace as they could for one with new drywall and insulation and central air conditioning. While rent reasonableness procedures were changed after the 1996 HUD program review to be more geographically precise, the neighborhood groups continue to argue that HCVP rents in Patterson Park remain too high relative to the quality of the housing units.

In Norristown, the HCVP was criticized for failing to improve the dilapidated condition of much of the city's rental housing stock. There is no evidence that the Montgomery County Housing Authority has failed to enforce the program's Housing Quality Standards. However,



the homeowners' association involved in the HCVP controversy believes that a program that offers such "generous rents" should insist on housing units in visibly better shape than others in the same neighborhood.

In San Antonio's Montgomery neighborhood, the homeowners' association took a somewhat different stance. When the homeowners complained about the exterior condition of some units, the housing authority responded that they could only ensure that the units met the HQS standards and could not require landlords to make repairs that went beyond those standards. The neighborhood association has taken the position that given what landlords are paid for these units, they should be expected to maintain them to "acceptable community standards."

#### **4.4 Insufficient Attention to Household Behavior**

Problem behavior by particular families, *and the housing authority's failure to take responsibility for this issue*, has also been at the center of HCVP conflicts at virtually every site. The presence of HCVP participants who allegedly engage in criminal activity (especially drug related criminal activity) is one of the major causes of complaints about the program.

##### **4.4.1 Lack of Screening**

Traditionally, many PHAs have taken the position that their responsibility is to determine applicant families' *eligibility* for participation in the HCVP, and that it is the landlord's responsibility to screen the families for *suitability* as tenants. Indeed, during the period when most of these controversies originated, HUD rules allowed the PHAs minimal discretion in excluding undesirable families from receiving assistance. PHA authority and responsibility for screening otherwise eligible applicants for prior criminal activity began only in the late 1990s. However, the history of the HCVP controversies at the sites visited shows that PHAs have always been held responsible by neighbors, community groups, and ultimately elected officials for negative behavior of HCVP families. Critics have brushed aside housing agency claims that it is solely the landlord's responsibility to screen families.

##### **4.4.2 Inadequate Tenant Training or Counseling**

It also appears that the program administrators at many of the sites we studied did not take the opportunity provided by an orientation session to provide some training on how to be a good renter and neighbor. This may be particularly important when new areas are becoming affordable for families using HCVP because of housing market change. For example, in San Antonio the president of the Montgomery community association, the more affluent of the two neighborhoods studied, believed that families were moving to the neighborhood without

a basic understanding of how to maintain a single-family home and yard. She wanted to work with the housing authority in developing a training program to address these issues.

#### **4.4.3 No Direct Knowledge of Families and Their Issues**

When problems with particular families were brought to the attention of housing authority staff, few appeared to have ongoing personal contact with families receiving HCVP assistance. As noted earlier, all of the programs studied were relatively large, too large for even informal “case management” to be applied. Recertification of household income and reinspection of the housing unit for a particular family was assigned to whomever was available, and this was often not the same staff that performed the function for the family at intake.

Cook County is an extreme case. Income recertification takes place entirely by mail. This may or may not be efficient.<sup>9</sup> It certainly means that there is no one with personal knowledge of the family and their possible problems to assess a complaint from a neighbor and determine how to proceed. If the PHA is too large for an informal mechanism to exist, the PHA needs to create more formal mechanisms, such as a tenant integrity program (discussed further in Chapter 6).

#### **4.4.4 Failing to Enforce Termination Policies or to Resolve Tenant Problems**

A common complaint about the HCVP was that housing authorities took no action against families whose behavior clearly violated program rules. From the housing authorities’ perspective, tenant damage to a housing unit was an issue between the tenant and the landlord, rather than an issue that could potentially require termination of HCVP assistance because of a violation of Housing Quality Standards. Along the same lines, criminal behavior had to result in an actual conviction before the housing authority would take action, and unauthorized persons could continue to live in the housing unit despite neighbor complaints.

Since enforcing the lease is primarily the responsibility of the owner of the housing unit, dealing with problem tenants must involve communication between housing authorities and landlords so that the latter understand their rights and responsibilities. Landlords need to know that, for example, that when they act appropriately, the housing authority will back them up. This often did not happen at the study sites and was an ongoing source of conflict.

---

<sup>9</sup> Some people believe that reporting of income is more accurate when there is a face to face interview in which PHA staff can detect inconsistencies and probe for additional information.

In several situations, including Fairfax County, San Antonio and Lynn, community groups asserted that landlords were inexperienced owners of one or two units and often did not live in the area. They believed that it was the housing authority's responsibility to prod the landlord into appropriate action and that this was not happening. At one point, the San Antonio Housing Authority sent a letter to its landlords noting that there had been increasing complaints about HCVP properties and reminding them that they were responsible for enforcing the terms of the lease. The response of several landlords was to express concern for their own safety and suggest that the housing authority needed to develop screening procedures to "weed out the bad apples."

It should be noted that at all three of these study sites, major revisions to the ways in which the housing authority deals with problem tenants and their landlords have been part of the response to the HCVP controversy.

#### **4.4.5 Lack of Coordination with Police**

At the time the HCVP conflict began, the housing authorities at the study sites had no systems in place for exchanging information with the police about alleged criminal behavior involving occupants of program units. Moreover, many of the sites did not see any need for or value in enhancing coordination between the PHA and the police departments. As discussed in Chapter 6, several agencies corrected this oversight in response to ongoing complaints about criminal activity among HCVP families.

### **4.5 Unresponsiveness to Complaints and Controversy**

In six of the eight HCVP controversies studied, the housing authorities did not take the earliest complaints about the program seriously. Avandale in Camden County is a contrary example, in which an immediate and appropriate response by the housing authority, the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, appears to have brought the problem under control. In addition, in Syracuse, the housing authority acted immediately, and ultimately this should be to the benefit of the program. However, the Syracuse experience provides some lessons about the procedures housing authorities should follow in order to be sure of HUD support and to avoid protracted legal battles.

Perhaps even more damaging to community relations, many of the housing authorities took a defensive posture at the first signs of trouble. They hid behind program regulations. They provided information about the program and its participants that may have been factually accurate, but did nothing to engage those on the other side of the controversy in useful dialogue. This only encouraged critics to become more vocal, garner more local support, and turn to the media to express complaints more openly.

#### **4.5.1 No Systematic Approach to Addressing Complaints**

A major factor contributing to HCVP conflict in case after case was that the housing authority had no system in place for dealing with complaints about individual households and housing units. Telephone calls or letters fell into a black hole. At the time the controversy started, few of the housing authorities had ombudsmen or community relations staff. They appeared not even to have had protocols for responding to individual complaints. If a caller succeeded in talking to a staff person, the typical answer would be “I can’t tell you if that family is on HCVP because it would be a violation of their privacy.” There were no promises that the complaint would be investigated or that staff would follow up to let the caller know the complaint had been addressed.

An indication of the pent up demand for a system of handling complaints comes from Lynn. This agency has logged over 3,000 complaints since 1992, when the housing authority established a Housing Integrity Program and first began to monitor citizen complaints.

#### **4.5.2 Housing Authority Responses that are Factual but Ineffective**

When the controversy reached the level of press attention, the reaction of many housing authorities was professional, factual, but nonetheless unresponsive. For example, in both Fairfax County and Lynn, the housing authorities assembled program information to demonstrate that most of the families about whom complaints were received were not recipients of HCVP assistance. The reaction of a resident of the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax was: “They don’t understand that statistics don’t mean anything if the crack house is next door to you!”

The response of some housing authority representatives was to dismiss complaints about concentrations of HCVP households as motivated by racism. This, too, is factually correct in some cases. Racial fears, along with lore about the relationship between racial transition and property values, undoubtedly plays a role in starting and sustaining HCVP controversies. But refusing to consider any other issues as real is a recipe for escalating conflict and even for perpetuating stereotypes about race.

#### **4.5.3 Hiding Behind HUD and the HCVP Regulations**

It was not unusual for housing authorities to hide behind HCVP regulations when confronting complaints about the program. Here are some typical scenarios:

- A general complaint about HCVP causes the PHA to cite the program regulations to the effect that tenant selection and lease enforcement are the landlord’s responsibility.

- If the complaint is about the quality of the housing unit, the response is to point out that the Housing Quality Standards do not demand improvements that may be in keeping with neighborhood norms, but are not related to health and safety.
- If the complaint is about concentrations of HCVP families, the response is that “HUD policy” insists that the family make the decision on where to live.

Several housing authorities were proud of the fact that they administer the HCVP “by the book” and that HUD considers them to be a well managed agency. But a program that operates strictly in compliance with HUD requirements may nonetheless have problems in the community. Good program administration may build or restore confidence in a program, but it may be necessary to address concerns not contained in the regulations in order to avoid or contain HCVP conflict.

The case study in Syracuse illustrates, however, that a housing authority needs to be on a firm legal and regulatory basis for the way in which it responds to community complaints. The Syracuse Housing Authority suspended an owner from leasing additional units under the program without first alerting the HUD field office and without examining the regulations to make sure that it was using the right grounds for suspension. The result was that, in the first round of the controversy, HUD refused to support the housing authority’s action. The legal battle following the owner’s complaint that his suspension was motivated by the race of the HCVP families occupying his units has been protracted, because the grounds used for suspension (landlord failure to screen) were held by a court to be insufficient.

In Chapter 6, we discuss tools and strategies that housing authorities have found effective in addressing HCVP controversy and reducing the likelihood of future opposition. Before turning to the resolution of conflict, however, Chapter 5 considers two further aspects of HCVP conflict—the issues underlying the conflict and the role that outside partners can play in intensifying or mitigating conflict.

## Chapter 5

# Underlying Issues and Outside Influences in HCVP Community Conflict

This chapter uses the case studies to explore the ways in which HCVP conflicts originate, develop, and either fade away or are resolved. The chapter begins with a discussion of the kinds of issues underlying the community conflicts at the eight study sites. Understanding the basic issues at stake and their emotional intensity is a first step toward understanding how and why community complaints can develop into conflict situations. The chapter then considers the role of outside influences—factors other than the underlying conflicts and the response of the housing authority—in the emergence and development of HCVP conflict. In particular, at many of the sites, third parties—such as elected officials, the police department, and HUD staff—played an important role in either the escalation or the resolution of the conflict. The involvement of the media was also a common force shaping the direction of HCVP conflict. The chapter concludes by considering other kinds of factors—the overall economic climate, the stamina of the various parties, and the emergence of other priorities—that can contribute to the suspension, if not resolution, of HCVP conflict.

### 5.1 Underlying Issues in HCVP Community Conflict

Recognizing the underlying issues in a conflict—what is at stake for each party—is fundamental to analyzing its development and resolution. A useful starting point for understanding the kinds of conflict that can develop around the HCVP is to set out a framework for the basic issues that underlie most conflict situations and place the HCVP controversies within that framework. Morton Deutsch, a scholar of conflict resolution, suggests that most conflict situations come about because of disagreement over one or more of the following basic types of issues:<sup>10</sup>

- Control of resources;
- Values;
- Preferences and nuisances;
- Facts and beliefs; and
- The nature of the relationship between the parties.

---

<sup>10</sup> Deutsch, Morton, *The Resolution of Conflict, Constructive and Destructive Processes*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1973.

Conflicts involving the first two kinds of issues tend to be the most difficult to resolve, especially if the resources are viewed as finite or non-sharable and the values are considered fundamental. Conflicts over nuisances and preferences can usually be addressed through enforcement of rules and negotiation of reasonable community norms, but often mask deeper conflicts around values. Likewise, conflicts generated by contested beliefs can often be resolved by producing accurate information, but without adequate communication, the effort can degenerate into “dueling statistics” or unceasing requests for additional information. Conflict over the nature of the relationship between two parties often stems from disagreements over respective roles and responsibilities. These kinds of disagreements are not usually the only factor behind the conflict, but they can seriously hamper efforts at cooperation and resolution.

Exhibit 5-1 illustrates how the eight HCVP conflicts studied fit into Deutsch’s framework. The goal of the table is not to classify the HCVP conflicts as one type or the other, but to highlight common themes in the conflicts and suggest why some conflicts were more intense and protracted than others.

---

**Exhibit 5-1**

**Comparison of Basic Issues Underlying the HCVP Conflicts at Eight Study Sites**

	Control over Resources	Values	Preferences and Nuisances	Facts and Beliefs	Relationship bet/n Parties	Approx. Length of Conflict
Fairfax County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 years
Montgomery County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 years
Lynn City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 years
Baltimore City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 years
Cook County	✓	✓		✓		20 years
Camden County	✓		✓	✓		6 months
San Antonio City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 years
Syracuse City	✓		✓	✓	✓	3 years
✓ Primary issue at stake in the conflict ✓ Secondary issue at stake in the conflict						

### 5.1.1 Control Over Resources

As described in Deutsch's model, conflicts over the control of resources may be as small as the division of a piece of candy and as large as nations contending over water rights. In the housing context, such conflicts might be about the fairness of a housing authority's methodology for awarding valuable HCVP assistance or, more subtly, whether the housing authority's administration of the program appears to be diminishing the value of a community's prized resource—its housing.

Control over resources played a central role in the HCVP conflicts at all of the study sites. As discussed in Chapter 3, all of the neighborhoods in which HCVP conflict occurred were places perceived by local residents to be in decline, or “not what they once were.” At all of the sites, residents characterized this decline as a loss of personal resources—reduced house values, change in the quality of their lives. At many of the sites, key community resources, such as public schools and public safety, were also believed to be at stake. In addition, where the conflict came to involve elected officials as much as private citizens, issues of the overall allocation of resources—on a citywide or countywide basis—became very important. Examples include Cook County and Fairfax County, where residents felt that the needs of the children of HCVP recipients were placing a significant burden on the school systems.

Deutsch argues that conflicts over the control of resources are especially difficult to resolve if the resources are viewed as finite and non-sharable, or as a need as opposed to a desire. For example, one might more easily defer to another party over a convenient parking place than over one's place in line on the HCVP waiting list. The overall context of economic decline at most of the sites contributed to the perception that resources were limited. Even in Fairfax County, which is a prosperous area by most standards, the perception that a relative decline in school test scores in certain districts could hurt property values made it seem to those districts that they could not afford to provide further housing assistance to additional low-income families.

From the point of view of the housing authorities involved, the issue of resources also loomed large, because “losing the battle” might mean having to limit the amount of HCVP assistance in areas where there continued to be a clear need for affordable housing. In Fairfax County, for example, the conflict reached a head when the Board of Supervisors rejected the housing authority's request to apply for 50 additional family HCVP units. The Lynn Housing Authority found it necessary to suspend their application for additional HCVP allocations while they “put their house in order” and regained the community's trust. In places such as Montgomery County, where many of the communities outside the area of HCVP conflict are not affordable to low-income families, housing authorities run the risk of not being able to use the resources that are already available. In the words of a nonprofit housing provider in



Montgomery County, “Looking at it from the outside I could see how people would think that people are being sent to Norristown [the site of HCVP conflict], but that’s not fair. Where else would people go?”

In the HCVP conflict in Syracuse, the struggle for control over resources was played out slightly differently. At this site, the conflict was primarily between the community residents and a particular HCVP landlord, with the housing authority supporting the community. Like the other sites, the residents in Syracuse were concerned about the effect of HCVP properties on personal and community resources, but it was the landlord, not the housing authority, that feared losing income from his HCVP tenants.

### **5.1.2 Values**

Another finding of this study that is captured by Exhibit 5-1 is that almost all the HCVP conflicts were conflicts over values, in addition to resources. According to Deutsch’s definition, values conflicts relate to matters of fairness and equity—what “should” be. Differing values need not always result in conflict. When a “live and let live” approach is possible, people or institutions with differing values can co-exist without conflict. However, if the value-holders or circumstances operate to force one set of views or values on others who do not hold them, conflict is the result. Sometimes an abstract value seemingly held by an individual or community (such as fair housing opportunities for all) is challenged in the face of a specific situation (a homeless shelter around the corner). Conflicts that involve values may be particularly intractable, because they appear to threaten the parties’ very concept of reality.

In Fairfax County, Montgomery County, Cook County, Lynn, Baltimore, and, to a lesser extent, San Antonio, the community residents opposed to the HCVP articulated a clear value related to the number of HCVP households in their neighborhoods. While there was some variation among the sites, the overall message was that they supported the goals of the HCVP, but believed that there ought to be limits on the number of HCVP households in any one area within the jurisdiction of the housing authority. None of the communities were able to define what constituted an “over-concentration” of HCVP households, but they all firmly believed that there was a ratio between the number of assisted families and the overall population that ought not to be exceeded. In Fairfax County, Cook County, and Montgomery County, there was also a notion that HCVP households should be distributed equitably across the housing authority’s jurisdiction, with each part of the jurisdiction housing their “fair share.” In Lynn, this issue was cast more broadly as residents argued for an equitable regional, and even statewide, distribution of lower-income families.

In most cases, the community’s vision of regulating the geographic distribution of HCVP households flew directly in the face of one of the housing authority’s (and HCVP’s) most

strongly-held values—that HCVP participants should be free to look for housing wherever they choose. This philosophical conflict made the HCVP controversy at some sites especially difficult to resolve, particularly where the housing authority had a difficult time encouraging tenant mobility (e.g., Montgomery County), or where the housing authority’s view of “over-concentration” differed from that of the community (e.g., Baltimore and Fairfax County). Another way in which value conflicts underlay the HCVP controversies was that communities and housing authorities typically held different views about who the housing authority’s customer should be. In San Antonio, Montgomery County, Lynn, and Baltimore, for example, neighborhood residents felt that the housing authority was only interested in helping its clients, and did not care about protecting vulnerable communities. The homeowners’ groups believed that they should be considered customers as well, and that the housing authority should take their concerns seriously. Although they did not totally disregard the need to be responsive to the broader community, the housing authorities generally felt that they were first and foremost advocates for the low-income families they were trying to assist. Some housing authorities, such as Lynn and San Antonio, tried to resolve this aspect of the conflict by embracing the community as a legitimate customer and reorienting their staff toward customer service. Others were not prepared to make this organizational change.

In two of the study sites—Camden County and Syracuse—values were not a significant element of the HCVP conflict. The issue of HCVP concentration did not emerge as a strong theme at either site, and the question of customer service was not raised, largely because in both cases, the housing authority was perceived as being responsive to community concerns.

### **5.1.3 Preferences and Nuisances**

Deutsch describes this issue as “when one person’s or group’s activities disturb another’s preferences, sensitivities, or sensibilities.” In theory, resolution of conflicts over preferences and nuisances can be done through enforcement of rules and negotiation of reasonable community norms, and should not present major challenges. However, Deutsch cautions that what appears to be a preference or nuisance conflict on the surface actually may be a deeper conflict around values. Conflicts related to preferences and nuisances often start small but, if not addressed quickly, have the potential to escalate.

At face value, almost all of the conflicts studied fall into this category. With the exception of Cook County, where the controversy involved public officials more than ordinary citizens, community members reported problems with HCVP landlords and/or tenants in their neighborhoods that created disturbances or otherwise violated their “peaceful enjoyment of the premises.” These issues seem to have been particularly important at the start of the conflict, galvanizing neighborhoods against HCVP. In some places, however, once the conflict escalated to involve a larger set of parties or lasted over several years, preference and

nuisance issues tended to be overshadowed by or to give way to more fundamental conflicts over values and resources. This appears to have been the case in Fairfax County, Montgomery County, and Lynn, although the nuisance issues certainly did not disappear over the conflict period. At other sites, for example Baltimore and San Antonio, nuisance and preference issues continued to play a major role, even after conflicts over resources and values were articulated.

At two of the study sites—Camden County and Syracuse—nuisance and preference issues were central to the HCVP conflict. In Camden County, although concerns about declining property values played some role, community opposition to the HCVP focused on reduced curb-appeal at a handful of rental properties. The housing authority was able to address these concerns by asking the landlords in question to make minor repairs and improvements, and because the conflict did not have deeper roots, it was quickly resolved. In Syracuse, nuisance and preferences were also at the forefront of the conflict, which centered on a HCVP landlord’s unwillingness to sanction tenant behavior that violated community norms and was in some cases illegal. The housing authority’s decision to support the community favored a quick resolution to the conflict; however, the landlord’s decision to dig in his heels on the issue revealed that it was not a matter of preferences for him, but rather one of resources (and perhaps values).

#### **5.1.4 Facts and Beliefs**

Many conflicts are about “reality”—the facts of the case. At each of the study sites, claims such as “HCVP is responsible for the increase in crime” and “the influx of HCVP tenants is ruining our neighborhoods” were made on the basis of strongly-held beliefs but limited hard data. It might be expected that conflicts related to lack of information or misinformation would be among the easiest to resolve, and sometimes this is true. Communicating accurate information can be one of the keys to effective conflict resolution. However, despite the old saying “seeing is believing,” research demonstrates that parties often “see what they believe” in spite of the facts presented, to avoid having fundamental values challenged or to protect self-esteem.

Conflicting beliefs and facts played a role in all of the HCVP controversies studied. In some cases, contentious beliefs and assertions went unchallenged because of a lack of accurate information. For example, the homeowners’ association in Avandale East (Camden County) began their complaints on the assumption that a “large proportion” of the problem properties in the neighborhood were participating in the HCVP. Once the housing authority provided the true figures—that HCVP units made up only a small proportion of the rental properties in the neighborhood and by and large were not the worst offenders—the association was willing to concede that their initial views were without merit. Another example is Norristown (Montgomery County), where at the start of the HCVP conflict the perceived wisdom among

police officers was that 50 to 60 percent of all police calls were generated by HCVP households. It was not until the housing authority and police department collaborated to match police records to HCVP addresses that they found that the true figure was in fact somewhere between 9 and 14 percent, roughly in line with the proportion of the population receiving HCVP assistance. These new facts shifted the emphasis of the debate away from crime, although some community members held on to their beliefs about HCVP households and crime.

In Baltimore, part of the controversy has centered on the belief of the Patterson Park neighborhood groups that the demolition of the city's older public housing developments has led to a steady influx of HCVP households into the neighborhood. Because the housing authority has been unwilling or unable to provide accurate statistics about the growth of the HCVP in the neighborhood over time and its relationship to public housing relocation efforts, these beliefs continue unabated, and community anxiety grows with each new public housing redevelopment initiative. Similar kinds of fears underlay the HCVP conflict in Lynn, but the housing authority was able to produce the information necessary to address their validity.

At other study sites, it was not so much a question of information being absent as it was of information being interpreted differently by the parties to the conflict. In Cook County, for example, the housing authority was very forthcoming about the growth of the HCVP in the south suburban localities, but emphasized that most families already lived in the area before becoming HCVP recipients. The opponents of HCVP, however, were concerned with curtailing what they perceived as a growing concentration of HCVP households in their communities, and did not find the housing authority's explanation compelling. A similar phenomenon occurred in Montgomery County with respect to a perceived influx of low-income families from Philadelphia seeking HCVP vouchers in Norristown. The housing authority has a local residency preference for admission to the program and can attest that very few HCVP recipients have come from Philadelphia, but the community is not receptive to this kind of argument because it has developed a strong perception of HCVP households as "outsiders." As discussed in Chapter 4, in other cases the available statistics simply were not meaningful to the community, because community members were thinking on an individual or highly localized level while the housing authority was looking at their jurisdiction as a whole. An example of this is the Fairfax resident who claimed that overall program statistics meant nothing to him while he was living next door to a crack house.

That some of the HCVP conflicts studied degenerated into a contest of "dueling statistics" and endless demands for information rather than a thoughtful engagement with the available information seems to be related to both the depth of the underlying issues—what is at stake—and the willingness and ability of the parties to communicate effectively. In many of the study sites, resolving the conflict over facts and beliefs was the first step toward resolving the

conflict as a whole. In other sites, where the communication has not been as effective, conflicting beliefs and untested allegations continue to fuel the controversy.

### **5.1.5 The Nature of the Relationship Between the Parties**

Conflicts over the nature of the relationship between the parties typically result from lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities. In the HCVP, conflicts often arise over whose responsibility it is to solve a particular problem. Differences in the perceived or desired relationship among the parties may also be a source of conflict. If one scenario is “no one is in charge,” the opposite—the desire on the part of each party to make the final decision or have a final veto—can also create conflict.

The nature of the relationship between the parties generally did not play as important a role in the HCVP controversies as the other issues discussed, and was never the sole source of the conflict. However, at certain sites it appears to have hampered attempts at resolution. In Syracuse, for example, disagreement over the relative responsibility of the landlord and the housing authority to screen HCVP participants, and over the housing authority’s ability to suspend the landlord without HUD’s approval, became major factors in the legal battle that turned what might have been a relatively simple conflict into a lengthy and costly one. In Lynn, a longstanding disagreement between local housing authorities and the State about the appropriateness of state subcontractors administering HCVP within their jurisdictions came to a head as community dissatisfaction with the program increased.

At other sites—for example Fairfax County, Montgomery County, San Antonio, and Baltimore—the community could not accept the distinction made by the housing authority between its role as administrator of federal policy and HUD’s role as creator of that policy. Instead, community members wanted the housing authority to address what the housing authority felt were problems with the HCVP itself. Many housing authorities took the position that they were simply marching to HUD’s orders and could do nothing to change the way the program was set up. On a similar note, members of the Montgomery neighborhood in San Antonio have called for the housing authority to redefine its role in the community. Although they are satisfied with most aspects of the housing authority’s program administration, they believe that the agency should be playing a more active part in community revitalization efforts, for example by funding new recreational resources and organizing after-school activities for local at-risk children.

### **5.1.6 Underlying Issues and the Intensity/Length of HCVP Conflict**

The preceding discussion drew upon the literature of conflict to suggest ways in which the HCVP conflicts, however different in detail, exhibit a number of similarities in terms of the underlying issues at stake. In general, it appears that the conflicts in which issues of control

over resources or differences in the values held by the parties were dominant, were those that proved to be the most intense and difficult to resolve. This was the case at most of the sites, but Camden County provides an example of how conflict can be resolved more easily if it is primarily a question of nuisances and preferences or a lack of accurate information. That the conflict in Syracuse, which bears some similarities to that in Camden, lasted for three years was largely due to the tenacity of the particular landlord involved and the fact that the conflict was fought out in the legal arena. The Syracuse case highlights the role that events within the conflict itself—in addition to its underlying causes—can have on determining its course and resolution. The following section examines some of these factors more closely.

## **5.2 The Role of Outside Influences in the Emergence and Development of HCVP Conflict**

At most of the study sites, it was not possible to identify a particular event that triggered the HCVP conflict. In most cases, community concerns had been longstanding and were galvanized into active conflict either by the formation of an active neighborhood group or by visible changes in the community—such as an increase in crime in Lynn and San Antonio—that focused attention on problems in the neighborhood. In none of the cases did any specific actions on the part of the housing authority initiate the conflict. Therefore, while it is possible to identify some of the underlying factors that make HCVP conflict likely—a perception of relative economic decline, a softening of the housing market, racial transition—it is less easy to predict how and when a particular conflict will surface. It does appear, however, that any event that captures the frustrations and anxieties of the community—such as an announcement about lower school scores or a decline in homeownership—in addition to changes directly related to subsidized housing (such as public housing demolition) can serve to focus attention on HCVP. As the program grows and spreads into more communities, housing authorities need to anticipate that seemingly unrelated problems in the neighborhoods within their jurisdictions can become their problems as well.

Once the first shot in a HCVP controversy has been fired—usually in the form of a letter from a community group to the housing authority or elected official, or a particularly contentious public meeting—the single most important factor in determining whether the controversy becomes a full-blown conflict is the response of the housing authority. Chapter 4 discusses the many ways in which an ineffective response on the part of the housing authority in the early stages can lead to the escalation of HCVP conflict, and Chapter 6 will consider housing authority strategies that have been successful in mitigating community concerns. In addition to the potency of the underlying issues and the behavior of the housing authority, however, the case studies reveal that third parties and other outside influences can also play a vital role in shaping the course of HCVP conflict.

### **5.2.1 The Role of Third Parties in Escalating and Resolving HCVP Conflict**

The major third parties that played a role in our sample of HCVP conflicts were elected officials, the police, and, to a lesser extent, HUD Field Office and Headquarters staff.

#### ***Elected Officials***

Looking across all of the sites, it is clear that once community complaints about the HCVP came to be seen as part of a local political agenda, the controversy tended to escalate and become much more difficult for the housing authority to resolve on its own. Elected officials—ranging in rank from members of the school board, to members of state legislative delegations, to U.S. Senators—participated in several of the most intense and protracted conflicts, including Fairfax County, Montgomery County, Cook County, Syracuse, Baltimore, and Lynn.

In Fairfax County, for example, community residents who were frustrated by the lack of action from the housing authority sought the support of elected representatives of the Route 1 corridor. This considerably raised the stakes in the conflict, which reached a peak when the Board of Supervisors rejected the housing authority’s request to apply for additional HCVP units. The political challenge ended up being the critical turning point in the HCVP conflict, because it forced the housing authority to develop an action plan intended to address community concerns.

In Lynn, elected officials were key to the controversy in three distinct ways. First, the dispute between the city of Lynn and the State concerning jurisdiction over HCVP units ultimately involved elected officials from many jurisdictions, the state legislature, and the governor. The decision to give administrative jurisdiction over the state’s HCVP units only to the City of Lynn was the result of strong existing political relationships between political leaders in Lynn and at the State level. Second, because Lynn is a relatively small city, citizens have reasonably direct access to city council representatives. They were able to make their concerns known specifically and personally. This direct feedback quickly caused the city council to place pressure on the Lynn Housing Authority to solve the problems. Once LHA exhibited the ability to be a responsive, problem-solving organization, the council demonstrated its trust in the organization by transferring housing programs formerly administered by the community and economic development agency to LHA.

Finally, with respect to the element of the controversy that still remains unresolved—a fair share distribution of low-income households throughout the region—both local elected officials and the State legislature have played a role. The State enacted legislation that set a goal that at least 10 percent of the housing stock of each community be “affordable housing.” Most communities surrounding Lynn have lagged far behind this goal. Some community

members as well as some LHA staff suggested that the strategy of the political leadership in more prosperous, surrounding jurisdictions is to obtain funding in the form of vouchers. Because little affordable housing exists within those jurisdictions, this has the effect of causing families who receive vouchers to move out of the jurisdiction.

In Norristown (Montgomery County), the involvement of local officials—this time the School Board—gave new life to a simmering debate over the HCVP. The report presented by the School District superintendent and Board president, claiming that HCVP families were responsible for an increase in special education costs and subsequent budget shortfall, received a great deal of press coverage and fostered a sense of shared interests among the opponents of HCVP.

At those sites where, either through ignorance or a perception of housing authority unresponsiveness, community members turned first to elected officials for help, the stakes were immediately higher for the housing authority and a response tended to come more quickly. This was the case in Camden County, where the state agency administering HCVP was upset that the Avandale residents had made their complaints first to HUD headquarters, and also in Syracuse, where the community's letter to Senator D'Amato got the attention of the housing authority and HUD Field Office alike.

### ***Police Departments***

The involvement of the local police department played a significant role in the course of the controversy in several communities. At the start of the controversies in Lynn and Montgomery County, for example, attributions about HCVP households and crime fed existing community anxieties and lent weight to local stereotypes. In Lynn, police officials confirmed that at the start of the HCVP controversy, many officers (like community residents in general) tended to assume that “those HCVP people” were the ones causing the problems. But the housing authority in Lynn, as in Montgomery County, was able to collaborate with the police department to change these negative perceptions. After it decided to take ownership of the problem, the housing authority worked with the police to establish the City's first walking patrols in public housing. This early effort was a model for what shortly became a citywide community policing program, which has been highly successful and has had the effect of encouraging and reinforcing additional community collaborations.

In Fairfax County, the county's conversion to community policing has also played a key role in helping to resolve tensions in the community. Although this was an independent intervention that was not initiated by the housing authority, the timing and the resulting successful cooperation among agencies contributed to the resolution of many community concerns.



In San Antonio, the police have been an important actor throughout the controversy. In the Creek neighborhood, one of the first steps that residents took to combat the growing crime problem—which they attributed to an influx of HCVP families—was to team with the police department’s Citizen Police Academy and the Family Assistance Crisis Training program to train and mobilize a roving telephone patrol and neighborhood response team. That neighborhood residents turned first to the police rather than the housing authority was in part because of the particular focus of neighborhood concerns—escalating crime—and in part because of the unresponsiveness of the housing authority at this stage. Until the housing authority decided to take the concerns seriously and address problems in its program administration, the success of the police initiatives was limited. However, the early partnership served to strengthen neighborhood organization.

The police played a similar organizing role in the conflict in Baltimore. Just at the time that complaints about the HCVP in Patterson Park had begun to take off, the police department initiated a forum for discussion and exchange between the neighborhood’s twelve associations and representatives of the different branches of City government, including the housing authority. In addition to opening new lines of communication between the City, housing authority, and community, the Patterson Park Outreach Committee served to strengthen coordination among the individual neighborhood associations, many of which were experiencing turnover as once-committed homeowners opted to leave the neighborhood.

### ***HUD Headquarters and Field Offices***

In two of the study sites, Syracuse and Baltimore, the involvement of HUD Field and Headquarters staff played a role in the course of the controversy. In Baltimore, HUD’s intervention in the conflict and review of housing authority procedures appears to have been the most important factor in prompting the housing authority to take community concerns seriously and to take initial steps to improve program administration (although the impact of these changes was ultimately limited). In Syracuse, inadequate communication between the housing authority and the HUD Field Office in the early stages of the conflict played a role in its escalation. In particular, the landlord interpreted the Field Office’s initial dismissal of the housing authority’s decision to suspend him to mean that he could not be sanctioned without HUD’s approval. Once the housing authority gained the Field Office’s support, however, HUD’s defense of the housing authority’s actions contributed to the resolution of the conflict. Community members and the housing authority in Syracuse were also frustrated at how long it took HUD headquarters to rule on the Housing Discrimination complaints filed by the landlord and several of his tenants. It took over a year for HUD to render its verdict that the charges were without merit, during which time many believed the behavior of the tenants worsened and the landlord became more obdurate.

## 5.2.2 The Role of the Media

The HCVP conflicts received some form of media coverage at all of the sites except Camden County. In most cases, the involvement of the media served to escalate tensions among the parties and increase the number of participants. At some sites, it was a first step toward focusing the housing authority's attention on the problem. This appears to have been the case in San Antonio and especially in Baltimore, where neighborhood leaders worked with the press to bring the issue citywide attention, after which other articles were written about other neighborhoods undergoing similar problems.

At other sites, press coverage has played more of a provocative role. In Montgomery County, for example, the local newspaper has very actively pursued the HCVP conflict, which has remained a live issue in the community. The conservative approach of the housing authority has meant that many of the articles focus on the points of view of the opponents to HCVP—the School District and Homeowners' Association—while only offering the minimum (HCVP philosophy and regulations) to elucidate the housing authority's position.

In Syracuse, the media served to escalate the conflict by seizing upon the race issue. The neighbors thought that the coverage on the radio and television was balanced and generally accurate, but were quite upset with what they thought were sensationalist headlines and reporting in the local newspapers. Inflammatory comments about the landlord in internal housing authority correspondence made it into the papers. The newspaper also appeared to accept the accuracy of the landlord's charges of discrimination on the basis of race without interviewing local neighbors, some of whom were African American. The neighbors met with the editor of the local newspaper to protest reporting solely on the basis of the landlord's statements. After the meeting, the neighbors thought the reporting became more balanced, and the newspaper published an extensive article by one of the neighbors arguing that the controversy was not about race. Toward the end of the conflict, however, the media again picked up on the race issue when the neighbors staged a protest at the landlord's offices. The local television coverage focused on the fact that most of the neighbors were white and the tenants black, and aired a comment by the landlord's attorney implying a racist motive for the protest.

Such incidents suggest that housing authorities and communities need to work closely with the press to ensure fair coverage of HCVP-related issues. In all situations, extensive press coverage adds fuel to the fire, but in some cases, poor reporting can sour the relationship between the parties and make efforts at resolution that much more difficult.

### **5.2.3 Other Factors that Can Affect the Course of Conflict**

In addition to the involvement of third parties and the press, other kinds of outside forces can indirectly change the course or tenor of a conflict. In the same way that a downturn in the economy, or the relative decline of one community versus another, can serve to heighten community concerns about the HCVP, so too can an economic boom or sense of relative prosperity make those concerns seem less pressing. For example, respondents in Fairfax County agreed that the actions taken by the housing authority notwithstanding, a stronger economy has improved community relations around the HCVP greatly.

In other cases, especially where the conflict is protracted or particularly bitter, it is possible for the leadership of one of the two sides to burn out and withdraw. This started to happen in Syracuse as a result of delays in the legal process. The neighbors began to despair that they would never be able to do anything about the landlord or his tenants, and some moved out of the area. Fortunately, in that situation, the housing authority had taken ownership of the problem and was determined to see it resolved. In San Antonio's Creek neighborhood, major damage had already been done to the neighborhood before the housing authority began to take steps to remedy the situation, and some residents felt that it was too late. That the conflict in the Creek is no longer active is not an indication that community concerns have been resolved. Instead, it appears that the community groups that had once been willing to fight for the neighborhood are no longer active, presumably because many of the key players moved away.

In Baltimore, community opposition to the HCVP conflict has tended to ebb and flow as other important community issues have commanded residents' attention. For example, some of Patterson Park's key community leaders have recently become involved in a large-scale investigation into the predatory lending practices and "flipping schemes" that have plagued this neighborhood. Others have turned their attention to other aspects of community revitalization, having all but given up on the housing authority's capacity to effect real change in the HCVP. These kinds of things can take the HCVP off a community's radar screen, but they should not be construed as providing any lasting resolution to the conflict. Chapter 6 offers lessons on the kinds of long-term strategies that housing authorities need to pursue in order to resolve HCVP conflict effectively.

## Chapter 6

# PHA Strategies and their Effectiveness

PHAs at the eight study sites used a variety of strategies to address community opposition to their HCVPs. In some instances these strategies were short-term solutions developed quickly to diffuse a tense neighborhood situation. In other instances they were implemented after careful planning and as part of a larger scheme to improve the program and its image. The PHA efforts discussed here focus primarily on the longer term strategies that housing agencies used to resolve a particular HCVP conflict and to reduce the likelihood of further opposition. The strategies are grouped under the following categories:

- Conducting community outreach;
- Creating interagency partnerships;
- Understanding local housing market dynamics and HCVP locations;
- Improving compliance efforts; and
- Revising administrative practices.

Most housing agencies tried a combination of measures to address their HCVP community relations problem. The effectiveness of a particular strategy often varied depending on how and under what circumstances it was tried. Exhibit 6-1 identifies the key strategies tried by each of the study sites.

### 6.1 Conducting Community Outreach

At the outset of most of the HCVP controversies there was a perception by neighborhood groups that the local housing authority was unresponsive to community concerns. In some instances, housing authorities acknowledged that this was true. For example, at the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority, staff noted that they had “built a firewall” between the HCVP and the public and suggested that their practice of relying on the landlord or the police department to solve problems was often not responsive to the neighbors’ concerns. Other agencies responded to initial complaints by attempting to show that HCVP families were not at fault for a particular problem.

In the face of a prolonged dispute or vocal community opposition, all of the housing authorities were forced to take further action. Community outreach took a variety forms. The short-term response usually involved a community meeting or public briefing where the concerns of the citizens were aired and the housing authority had an opportunity to state its

position. Depending on the willingness of the participants to listen, to reach consensus, and to resolve the problem, these meetings were useful in identifying possible solutions.

**Exhibit 6.1  
PHA Strategies**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Baltimore</b>	<b>Camden</b>	<b>Cook</b>	<b>Fairfax</b>	<b>Lynn</b>	<b>Montgomery</b>	<b>San Antonio</b>	<b>Syracuse</b>
<b><i>Community Outreach</i></b>								
Community Liaison	U						U	
Public Education					U			
<b><i>Interagency Partnerships</i></b>								
Police	U			U	U	U	U	U
Local Govt./Elected Officials	U			U	U		U	U
<b><i>Compliance and Monitoring Efforts</i></b>								
Compliance Program				U	U	U	U	
Hotline		U		U	U	U	U	
Linked Police Record	U	U		U	U	U		
<b><i>New Administrative Practices</i></b>								
HQS	U			U	U			
Screening				U	U			
Tenant Training	U			U	U			
Landlord Training				U	U			
Rent Reasonableness	U			U		U	U	
Landlord Outreach				U				
Mobility	U		U					

U Strategy pursued aggressively; U Strategy pursued, but not as aggressively

However, where participant viewpoints diverged dramatically, community meetings had the potential to create expectations that could not be met. In these cases, the meeting itself could fuel opposition and harden the views of conflicting parties.

At most of the study sites, community meetings ultimately led to more positive outcomes and encouraged housing authority staff to think about long-term strategies for reaching out to the community and maintaining good relations. Two such strategies, each adopted by a handful of sites, are discussed here:

- Dedicating staff to act as official community liaisons; and
- Developing public education materials or a public awareness campaign.

### **6.3.1 Community Liaisons**

In the wake of vocal opposition to the HCVP, several housing authorities decided to dedicate staff to community outreach activities. For example, in Baltimore, the housing authority hired two community liaisons—each with responsibility for a different geographic area of the city—to resolve citizen complaints by working closely with HCVP staff, city housing officials, the police, and the sanitation department. The liaisons have access to police records, which enables them to determine if a particular tenant has been arrested for criminal activity.

The community liaison for east Baltimore attends the monthly meetings of the Patterson Park Outreach Committee, which was created in 1996 in order to provide residents with a forum to meet with city staff and have their concerns addressed. The meeting is also attended by representatives of the police, the city department that administers code enforcement, the sanitation department, and neighborhood groups. The role of the community liaison is to respond to community concerns related to HCVP landlords or tenants. While the community liaison is well received by the local residents, they are frustrated by the limitations under which this staff member must operate. In particular, he is unable to reveal whether a given address (identified as a problem by neighbors) is in the HCVP. Instead, he privately investigates all complaints and reports back in general terms whether action has been taken. In addition, this individual is responsible for managing all of the HCVP concerns in east Baltimore and is severely overburdened. For these reasons, he is seen as not as effective as he could be in addressing the concerns of Patterson Park residents.

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) did not create new staff positions, but charged HCVP staff with taking a more active community outreach role. The HCVP manager attends neighborhood association meetings on a regular basis. In addition, the HQS inspectors are assigned to specific geographic areas within the city. Because they visit their assigned

neighborhoods frequently, they become known to residents and can follow up on complaints quickly. In the Montgomery neighborhood of San Antonio, residents spoke positively about the willingness of HCVP staff to meet with them regularly, even though they believe their concerns about HCVP concentration have yet to be fully addressed.

In addition to becoming increasingly responsive to community complaints, SAHA staff reported that they are now proactive in reaching out to local political leaders and to the media. The Executive Director and Deputy Director meet routinely with political and community leaders to identify potential problems and intervene before they boil over. SAHA's HCVP division works to maintain a cooperative relationship with local news media and is often offered the opportunity to comment on HCVP stories prior to publication. This has resulted in fewer negative stories than in past years.

Looking across the study sites, the use of community liaisons has met with mixed results. In Baltimore, the hiring of community liaison staff was clearly a step forward and appreciated by Patterson Park neighbors. But a neighborhood representative noted that more than two staff persons are needed to address the HCVP problems in the city and that the individuals assigned to these positions do not have the seniority to recommend policy changes within the housing authority.

San Antonio seems to have been more successful, perhaps because more total staff time has been devoted to community outreach. Outreach occurred at a variety of different levels within the agency—from housing inspectors to senior HCVP staff to the Executive Director—suggesting the level of commitment throughout the organization to this effort. This is similar to what has taken place in Fairfax County, where staff dedicated to program compliance and monitoring (see Section 6.4) also play significant outreach roles.

### **6.3.2 Public Education Materials/Public Awareness Campaigns**

Several housing authorities developed written materials to explain the program and its operations to neighborhood groups and interested citizens. The Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA) has found it productive to work with homeowners' associations. In townhouse developments it is often the neighbors, rather than the absentee landlord, who are first affected by a problem tenant. The FCRHA created a brochure for homeowners' associations that explains the HCVP, including the responsibilities of the landlord, the tenant, and the agency; the process for making a complaint; and the circumstances in which the FCRHA may be able to intervene.

The Lynn Housing Authority (LHA) offers an example of how this can be taken further to create a multi-faceted public awareness campaign to improve the image of the agency and the



HCVP. The campaign began when LHA’s new Executive Director invited city council representatives to take an evening tour and to point out the ten most troublesome addresses in the city. As it turned out, none of the properties identified were HCVP units. Although this was a moment of education for the city council and relief for the housing authority, it was not the end of the discussion. The housing authority recognized that proving the HCVP’s “innocence” in these particular situations did nothing to resolve the council’s concerns about problem properties or problem residents.

In response, the LHA initiated a three-part strategy:

- to enhance confidence in the HCVP by improving program administration;
- to educate city officials and the public about the subsidized housing programs; and,
- to engage with the community in problem solving—*whether or not* the problem sites were under the jurisdiction of the LHA. In essence, the LHA committed to becoming an active citizen of the community.

The first challenge for the LHA was to change community perceptions about the HCVP. As discussed later, a Housing Integrity Program (HIP) was implemented to address concerns about specific families or properties and to develop confidence in the integrity program administration. However, it was also necessary for LHA to address the more general issue of the role of subsidized housing in the community. LHA officials met with citizens who felt that Lynn had far too much subsidized housing and others who felt that even more assisted housing was needed. They heard from parents who felt that subsidized housing was ruining the schools and elderly individuals who no longer felt safe in their neighborhoods. It appears that LHA staff managed to maintain a balance in these discussions. They acknowledged the concerns of citizens without pandering to their fears and, at the same time, advocated for carefully conceived and competently administered housing assistance programs. Most importantly, the LHA took a leadership role in trying to solve the larger problems of the Lynn community. They took ownership of these problems even though they did not have all of the tools at hand to resolve them.

## **6.2 Creating Interagency Partnerships**

Housing authorities sometimes have a reputation for being insular and not working in consultation with local governments or elected leaders. At a few sites, key informants noted that a positive outcome of the HCVP conflict was the increased collaboration between the housing agency and other local government institutions.

At five study sites, a perception that there was a link between neighborhood crime and HCVP residents prompted housing agencies to look to local police departments for data and an increased level of coordination. Fairfax County appears to have been especially successful in

developing a relationship with the local police. As a first step, the FCRHA implemented a process for cross-referencing HCVP addresses with police department records to identify instances of criminal behavior or unauthorized occupants. This sometimes has led to terminations of assistance. In other cases, it has led to a warning.

In addition, during the course of the controversy, the Fairfax County police department converted to a community policing model which was viewed by many as helping to relieve tensions. Community policing brought bicycle patrols to the Route 1 corridor and a designated police contact for each of the homeowners' associations. Complaints about crime and HCVP tenant behaviors diminished considerably. Although the move to community policing was an independent intervention not initiated by the housing agency, the timing and the resulting successful cooperation contributed to the resolution of many community concerns. This collaboration also changed the perceptions of the police department about the HCVP. The Fairfax County experience suggests that PHAs could benefit from encouraging and participating in community policing initiatives.

Several other sites might have benefited from earlier involvement with the police department. In the case of Syracuse, the HCVP conflict dragged on for several years as neighbors in the University/Westcott area tried unsuccessfully to have HCVP tenants evicted for disruptive, sometimes criminal behavior. Countless police incidents and several arrests over a three-year period ultimately led the police to declare one duplex a nuisance property and subject to confiscation by the City. This step effectively ended the controversy. Coordination between the housing authority and the police earlier in the process might have helped to solve this problem at an earlier point.

### **6.3 Understanding Housing Market Dynamics/HCVP Locations**

As noted in Chapter 4, at the start of the HCVP controversies few of the housing agencies at the study sites were knowledgeable about local housing market dynamics or mapped the locations of HCVP residents. Over the course of the conflicts, several agencies began to monitor where HCVP residents were living. The information gained from this exercise was useful in providing factual information to the community about the real concentration of HCVP in the area of controversy. While this information created greater understanding of the issues, factual information was generally not enough to address community concerns.

Not far into the controversy, the Fairfax County housing agency attempted to show that the proportion of HCVP recipients in the county was relatively small, even in the Route 1 corridor. But community residents were not appeased. To be effective, a PHA must help local citizens interpret the information it provides and educate the public about how assisted

housing programs interact with the market place—sometimes merely reflecting existing conditions and other times perhaps serving as a catalyst for neighborhood improvement.

In addition to understanding where HCVP residents are located, it is also important for housing authorities to know about the neighborhoods in their jurisdiction and how local housing markets operate. The Lynn Housing Authority took this step, in part to help inform the public debate about subsidized housing, and developed two communication and planning tools. A citywide housing market study was undertaken in 1998. A year later, the housing authority commissioned a comparability study of Lynn and ten other Massachusetts cities. Key among the issues raised by these studies was the need to find a balance between meeting the needs of Lynn's many low- and moderate-income residents and increasing the overall value of the city's housing and tax base. The comparability study also pointed to the need for Lynn to strengthen its commercial viability, increase homeownership rates, and focus on redevelopment activities that would improve housing quality and reduce housing density. Both of these reports have helped LHA staff to understand local housing market dynamics and have been used effectively by the LHA to engage the community in a discussion about the future of Lynn and the role of subsidized housing.

## **6.4 Improving Compliance and Monitoring Efforts**

Six of eight study sites responded to the HCVP conflict by increasing their program compliance or monitoring efforts. Three specific strategies were implemented:

- A separate housing compliance program with dedicated staff to investigate complaints and implement fraud prevention policies;
- A telephone hotline; and
- Linkages to police records.

### **6.4.1 Compliance Programs**

A few agencies—including Lynn, Fairfax County, and Montgomery County—developed aggressive compliance programs as a means of addressing community concerns. The Lynn Housing Authority established the Housing Integrity Program (HIP) to receive and investigate complaints from the community about HCVP units and participants, as well as to implement the authority's in-house fraud prevention and detection activities. Under HIP, complaints can be received by mail, telephone, or in person and may be made anonymously. Staff reported that most complaints about tenants relate to unauthorized household members, unreported income, housing quality, or nuisance behavior. There are also occasional complaints about landlords who are suspected of requiring additional illegal payments from tenants.

Regardless of the source of information, both tenants and landlords may be asked to appear for informal meetings to discuss allegations or information that has been received. At the informal meeting, the parties are given an opportunity to respond to the complaint. LHA also uses this opportunity to remind the parties of program rules and requirements. If an allegation cannot be substantiated, the participant receives information about the applicable rules and no further action is taken. If deliberate program abuse has occurred, steps are taken to terminate participation. When the authority determines that there was no intent to commit fraud, the situation may be corrected (for example, by putting an unauthorized tenant on the lease or by having the family enter into a repayment agreement) without terminating the family.

LHA staff emphasized that solving problems and assuring the program's integrity are the goals of HIP, not terminating tenants. The low rate of terminations, about 10 percent of the more than 3,000 complaints received since the program began, substantiates this claim. LHA staff also noted that the meetings often present an opportunity to provide additional assistance to participants. When it appears that the tenant needs supportive services, appropriate referrals are made. Finally, staff also suggested that investigations under HIP have helped the authority to refine its procedures and have taught staff how to ask better questions of tenants during the certification and recertification processes.

The Montgomery County housing agency has also made efforts to improve enforcement, by hiring a compliance officer to investigate allegations of HCVP fraud. Housing authority staff reported that this step (in addition to a hotline) has helped to reduce fraud and improve overall program operations. It has provided the MCHA with hard data to counter longstanding misperceptions about crime and the HCVP. The compliance officer position has also encouraged greater coordination between the Norristown Police Department and the MCHA, improving the agency's ability to screen applicants and terminate tenants for criminal or drug related activity.

#### **6.4.2 Telephone Hotlines**

Housing authorities at four study sites established telephone hotlines to accept and act on complaints about the program or particular participants or landlords. As an example, the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) put in place a 24-hour telephone hotline that allows the community to make complaints, either anonymously or by name. Non-anonymous callers are typically called back within one working day. Where a complaint indicates a lease violation, an investigation by HCVP staff is undertaken. In cases of possible fraud, the call is routed to SAHA's Inspector General. Even when a complaint does not appear to be a lease or program violation, SAHA staff are careful to sympathize with the complainant while explaining that

they cannot control every aspect of participant behavior. SAHA staff are instructed not to put off the caller by simply indicating that it is not a housing authority problem.

Montgomery County has a telephone hotline that functions similarly to the San Antonio hotline. Staff noted that efforts are made to publicize the hotline by placing posters on bulletin boards at rental properties and through newspaper advertisements.

### **6.4.3 Linkages to Police Records**

In order to respond to allegations about criminal behavior of HCVP residents, several housing authorities have made arrangements under which law enforcement agencies identify HCVP units where criminal activity has been reported. The Fairfax County initiative to cross-reference HCVP addresses with police department records was described earlier as part of the County's effort to improve interagency partnerships. Similar arrangements have been made in Montgomery County, where the MCHA compliance officer receives monthly police reports that identify police calls to buildings where there are HCVP households. If a particular address is generating a number of calls, he will follow up with the participants, issue a warning and, in some cases, initiate proceedings for terminating the household from the HCVP. In Baltimore, the community liaison officer is able to search police records for information on HCVP tenants although there is no systematic exchange of information on a regular basis.

### **6.4.4 Success of Compliance and Monitoring Efforts**

Effective program compliance and monitoring are important elements of good HCVP administration. Three housing authorities—Fairfax County, Lynn, and Montgomery County—used all of the mechanisms described here in their effort to address community concerns and improve program performance. Of these three sites, Fairfax and Lynn appear to have been the most successful in using these strategies to solve community relations problems, perhaps because they were engaged in solving the problem on a number of fronts. That is, in addition to working to improve program compliance and weed out bad tenants, they were creating interagency partnerships and taking other measures to improve their image in the community. Montgomery County, on the other hand, relied more heavily on compliance and monitoring measures as a means of solving the problem. The MCHA had a difficult relationship with the local neighborhood organization as well as with government entities in the county, and compliance improvements alone were not enough to reverse negative perceptions about the HCVP.

## **6.5 Revising Administrative Practices**

In the course of most HCVP community conflicts, questions arise about the manner in which the local housing authority is administering its program. As discussed in Chapter 4, some of the most common complaints at the study sites concerned basic administrative practices such as determining rent levels and housing quality for HCVP units, screening tenants, and providing tenant and landlord training.

A number of agencies at the study sites took these complaints seriously and began a process of reviewing and revising their administrative practices. In this section, we present several specific examples of administrative changes that were tried and discuss whether these changes contributed to conflict resolution.

### **6.5.1 Changes in Rent Reasonableness and HQS in Baltimore**

Following initial complaints by Patterson Park neighbors and a HUD intervention in 1996, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) took several steps to improve its administration of the HCVP. At the direction of HUD staff, the HABC improved its procedures for conducting rent reasonableness. A better basis for defining relevant geographical areas was established, and an effort was made to draw distinctions among housing units that passed HQS based on the quality and amenities of the unit. For several years after these reforms were initiated, HCVP staff consulted with the local community development corporation about rent levels when a new landlord joined the HCVP. According to the CDC director, despite these changes there are still fundamental improvements that need to be made in terms of adjusting rent levels to reflect unit condition, providing incentives for landlords to make improvements, and using higher rents to encourage landlord participation in less-impacted areas. This opinion is consistent with a recent report commissioned by the Mayor, which found that “although HABC has made some efforts to improve its process for setting program rents, it still appears that excessively high rents are being paid for marginal units in concentrated areas... The result is increasing concentrations of HCVP families in impacted neighborhoods.”<sup>11</sup>

The story for the enforcement of HQS is similar. Following HUD’s review, the HABC made several changes to its inspection and termination procedures. The agency adopted stricter guidelines for terminating tenants who created HQS violations by damaging units, and the inspections department streamlined procedures for logging in complaints and initiating sanctions, i.e., abating rents for non-compliant units. The department also improved the

---

<sup>11</sup> “Managing for Success, A Report to the Mayor by the Greater Baltimore Committee and the Residents’ Roundtable,” July 2000, Section 10-F.

percentage of inspections that take place as scheduled by sending out letters of notification in advance of the inspection. From the point of view of Patterson Park homeowners, however, these initiatives have been only moderately successful. The report to the Mayor also found much room for improvement in the area of HQS, citing quality control reviews conducted by the HABC as part of the SEMAP certification process that showed error rates in excess of 90 percent in the HQS inspections process.<sup>12</sup> The comments of the HCVP Director indicate a lack of confidence in the current system: “I think that we need to make sure that we are enforcing HQS. We probably need to raise HQS standards or provide neighborhoods with the opportunity to enforce their own standards. But if we do this we stand the chance that no landlords will participate in the program.”

In short, efforts made by the housing authority to improve administrative performance have not fully resolved the HCVP controversy in Patterson Park or resulted in a major overhaul of the HCVP. The fact that the administrative changes were initiated by HUD and not internally may explain why they do not appear to have been fully implemented or sustained.

### **6.5.2 Fairfax’s HCVP Housing Program Action Plan**

Fairfax County took initiative on many fronts to resolve concerns about the HCVP. In addition to the community outreach, interagency partnership, and compliance efforts already discussed, the housing authority took stock of program administration and implemented a number of changes as part of a HCVP Housing Program Action Plan. These included:

- ***Improved Briefings on Housing Opportunities to Encourage Mobility.*** The FCRHA refocused participant briefings to emphasize that affordable housing opportunities exist throughout the county. A new briefing script, video presentation, and participant packet have been developed, as well as a new brochure “Finding Your New Home in Fairfax County” that highlights the employment opportunities, transportation services, housing, and community amenities that are available in five distinct areas of the county. These actions met with the approval of Route 1 residents and political leaders, but reportedly created considerable controversy among other members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors who felt that the FCRHA was now “steering” families to other parts of the county. Because of such sensitivities, FCRHA officials note that they rarely talk about “mobility” opportunities. Rather, they have established as a goal the administration of a quality program in all parts of the county.

0

---

<sup>12</sup> “Managing for Success,” Section 10-G. SEMAP is HUD’s new performance measurement system for the HCVP.

- ***Participant Responsibility Initiative.*** Tenant outreach and briefing materials were revised to stress the need for good tenant behavior and the penalties for bad behavior. The headline on the authority’s brochure announces: “HCVP: A Responsibility—Not a Right.” Families who move from other jurisdictions are required to participate in a FCRHA briefing even if they have been briefed by the sending housing authority to assure that they are aware of local expectations or, as stated by one staff member, to “scare them about compliance.”
- ***Landlord Initiative.*** Because a majority of HCVP landlords are amateur landlords and many of the problems that were identified stemmed from lack of appropriate action by landlords, the FCRHA improved its written materials for landlords and developed landlord training programs. FCRHA staff became active in a newly created Route One Corridor Council composed of the property managers in the Route 1 area.
- ***Improved Rent Determinations.*** The FCRHA commissioned a market study, as well as a study of how rent comparability is administered by other housing agencies. Following these studies, they modified rent reasonableness procedures.

### **6.5.3 Identification of HCVP Units in Baltimore and Avandale**

At several study sites, neighborhood groups asked the housing authority to provide information on whether specific problem units were occupied by HCVP families. While this seems a modest request, the housing authorities that received such requests were concerned about ensuring the privacy of HCVP families. Ultimately, this request was treated differently at the study sites with very different results. In Baltimore, HABC staff decided that they could not legally provide HCVP location information, although they readily identified problem units that were not HCVP and in so doing indirectly told neighbors part of what they wanted to know. Where HCVP units were involved, the community liaison officer investigated complaints privately and then informed the community in a general way as to the outcome. This approach proved frustrating to community residents who wanted concrete assurances that attention had been paid to the properties they had identified.

The New Jersey State Department of Community Affairs (DCA) took a very different approach in response to the requests of residents of the Avandale (Camden County) community. The DCA’s Assistant Director provided the association with a complete list of the landlords and properties participating in DCA’s HCVP in the Avandale East development. The list did not include the names of the families receiving HCVP assistance, but it did reveal their addresses. The Assistant Director recognized that he was making a controversial move and cleared it with the State Attorney General’s Office. DCA staff noted



that, in giving out this information, he demonstrated that the main offending units were not part of the HCVP and went a long way toward diffusing a potentially volatile situation.

DCA's Assistant Director believed that, in the case of Avandale, identifying the HCVP units was an important step in defusing the situation and in countering the residents' allegations about the HCVP. However, he recognized that he may have set a precedent for providing this information to the Association on an ongoing basis. (In fact, Association members were upset that the information was not being provided to them automatically in the months following the incident.) By simply checking the physical state of the properties from the sidewalk, this particular Association does not appear to be abusing the information that the DCA provided. In the wrong hands, however, the list of addresses could be used to stigmatize and harass families receiving HCVP assistance. PHAs will have to make the decision to provide this information based on their knowledge of and relationship with a community association.

#### **6.5.4 Cook County's Mobility Program**

Under threat of litigation, the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) issued a Request for Proposals in 1995 for an organization to operate a program that would assist certificate- and voucher-holders in finding housing outside "traditional" areas. Traditional areas were defined as census tracts with 10 percent (or more) poverty or 10 percent (or more) minority population, or both. A new organization was created to respond to the RFP, and Housing Choice Partners (HCP) began operations in October 1995.

HCP's clientele are applicants coming to the top of HACC's HCVP waiting list who live in traditional areas of Cook County or Chicago.<sup>13</sup> Such applicants must attend the HCP briefing, rather than the regular briefing at HACC, in order to receive their vouchers. The program is designed to open their eyes to a wider set of locations as they search for housing. They are given extra search time as well as information and the support of a counselor.

HCP staff brief about 100 HACC applicants per month and then add to their caseload those who decide—after the six-hour briefing—to work with a counselor on their search. About 70 percent of those briefed decide to try the program. Its primary services are landlord outreach, workshops and individual counseling on a range of topics (search techniques, repairing bad credit, budgeting, housing quality standards), leasing assistance, follow-up support after a non-traditional move, and linkage to other services directed at becoming economically self-sufficient.

---

<sup>13</sup> Applicants who work in Cook County but live in Chicago receive HACC's residency preference.

From HCP's start through February 2000, the program has briefed 2,400 applicants, of whom 76 percent were from south suburban Cook County. Some 1,700 of those briefed have worked with counselors. Of the families that have leased up, about 26 percent have made moves to non-traditional areas, while the rest of chosen traditional locations. External evaluations have indicated that HCP offers an important service in expanding housing choices for poor families in suburban Cook County.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, recent developments at HACC do not paint an encouraging picture of the agency's ongoing mobility efforts through HCP. In 1999, HCP requested \$200,000 per year for five years, but the HACC Board only provided a single year of funding at \$175,000. Even this was committed only after extensive lobbying by HCP's supporters and by south suburban officials. The prospects for funding in the year 2000 appear at least as bleak.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

The overall lesson from these eight HCVP community conflicts is that there is no "magic bullet" strategy that will quickly resolve citizen concerns. Housing authorities that want to improve the image and acceptance of the HCVP in their communities must be willing to embark on a long-term effort that includes many or all of the strategies discussed in this chapter: greater community outreach, partnerships with police and other government institutions, an improved understanding of local housing markets, and greater attention to administrative practices and compliance efforts.

Underlying these efforts, however, there must be a change in how the housing authority views itself with respect to the larger community. Increasingly, as HCVP becomes a presence in many more types of neighborhoods, housing authorities must be willing and able to take on broader, non-traditional roles. This includes getting involved in efforts to coordinate neighborhood revitalization activities and taking leadership positions in community building initiatives.

---

<sup>14</sup> "An Evaluation Update of the HCP/HACC Mobility Counseling Program," by Paul B. Fischer and Jason Holton, Unpublished paper, June 1999, p. 19.

# Appendix A

## Study Methodology

This Appendix presents the methodology employed for the study of *Strategies That Enhance Community Relations in Tenant-Based HCVP Programs*. To answer the research questions outlined in the introduction to this report, the Abt Associates team conducted in-depth studies of eight communities that have experienced local opposition to HCVP. Through the data collection effort, we developed for each study site a profile of the conflict situation, and an understanding of the community context and the operations of the local HCVP. We also learned about the strategies that housing authorities had employed to address HCVP resistance, and under what circumstances they were successful. Following the development of individual site profiles, a cross-site analysis was performed to identify commonalities in the conflicts and responses.

In the first section of this Appendix, we describe the process we followed to select the eight study sites. We then present the qualitative and quantitative methods used to collect both primary and secondary data. In the third section, we describe our methods for analyzing the conflict situation and outcomes. The final section critiques the methodological approach and offers recommendations for future work in this area.

### A.1 Site Selection

#### A.1.1 Factors Used in Evaluating Prospective Study Sites

Our first task was to identify factors to be used in evaluating prospective sites. At the outset, we determined that the selected sites should represent both the range of conflicts that have arisen and a variety of responses. Although it was viewed as unlikely that we could cover the continuum of experience for every single factor, our goal was to capture a range of local experiences through the selected sites. Two additional factors for consideration were a range in the size of the housing authorities (PHAs) involved and representation from different regions of the country. Finally, it was important that adequate information was available about the situation at the selected sites and that the PHAs were willing to cooperate with the study. Our site selection factors are shown in Exhibit A-1.



## **Exhibit A-1**

### **Site Selection Factors**

The study sites were selected to represent a range of experiences with HCVP community resistance. Specific factors considered included:

#### **The Type of Precipitating Event**

- Was the conflict triggered by an incident involving a single family, or was it a case of generalized criticism and resistance?

#### **The Key Issues**

- What were the underlying issues that caused the problem? Were they landlord issues, tenant behavior issues, questionable administrative practices by the PHA, or the perception that too many HCVP residents were moving to a particular neighborhood?

#### **The Scale of the Conflict**

- Was the conflict relatively localized (in a limited area or neighborhood), or was it more widespread?

#### **Parties to the Conflict**

- Who was involved? Community groups, landlord groups, elected officials, and the press can each affect the way the conflict unfolds and is resolved. We wanted to examine situations where “outside forces” played a role as well as situations where the controversy was resolved by the principal parties to the conflict (usually the PHA and a homeowners’ group).

#### **Responses to the Conflict**

- How did the PHA and other involved parties respond? Was the PHA proactive in its response, taking ownership of the problem and initiating corrective actions, or did the PHA take a lower profile, leaving this to the fair housing groups, local politicians, or HUD? We selected sites that represented a range of interventions, including: third party mediation; involvement of HUD; community outreach; and use of the legal system.

#### **Demographic Characteristics of the Communities**

- How do the communities experiencing HCVP conflict differ along such dimensions as income, homeownership, and race? How are they similar? As far as possible, we selected sites that represented a variety of demographic profiles and patterns of change over time.

#### **Nature and Condition of Local Housing Markets**

- Is the local housing market strong or weak? How do local housing market conditions factor into these situations? We included sites where market conditions and pressures varied and played different roles.

#### **Practical Considerations**

- When did the event occur? If it was some time ago, are key informants still available and will they be able to report events accurately? If the event was of recent origin, could our site visit reawaken the conflict? Are good data available and is the PHA willing to participate?

### **A.1.2 Reconnaissance and Final Site Selection**

The second task was a reconnaissance effort to identify the final eight study sites. Senior project staff undertook a number of different steps to identify potential sites, including:

- Literature and media searches;
- Discussions with HUD Headquarters and Field Office staff;
- Discussions with staff from the assisted housing industry groups: National Leased Housing Association, Council of Large Public Housing Agencies (CLPHA), and National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO);
- A survey (conducted by fax) of current CLPHA members;
- Solicitations for suggested sites from a posting on the NAHRO website; and
- Announcements and discussion at several industry group-sponsored meetings, including NAHRO's National Conference and NAHRO's West Coast Conferences (Pacific Southwest Regional Conference and Nevada, Oregon, and Washington State meetings).

Through these initial efforts, we developed leads on more than 40 potential sites. Senior staff reviewed and discussed this list and made follow-up telephone calls to obtain specific information about promising sites. Staff targeted these calls to individuals who were thought to be knowledgeable about the incident or situation in question. Based on the information obtained, we narrowed the list of candidate sites to 27. Upon further review of these potential sites, we recommended the final eight study sites. The selected sites represented a broad range of agencies that have experienced community resistance to the HCVP in recent years.

## **A.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection**

Our study approach used a variety of *qualitative* and *quantitative* data collection methods to address the three key components of the study:

- The conflict situation and its outcomes;
- The community and its characteristics; and,
- The PHA's HCVP administrative practices and response to the conflict.

In order to determine the range of data collection methods to be employed at the study sites, staff conducted a preparatory phase of data collection that involved the assembly of as much secondary data as possible, including press reports and other documents that informed our understanding of the actual event/conflict and the context in which it occurred. At the same time, we collected and analyzed HUD, Census, and other community characteristics data in order to build a profile of the community and the local HCVP. Finally, we spoke with local

housing authority staff by telephone to verify our findings and collect any reports or other documentation related to the conflict situation.

Team members then evaluated which data collection methods should be applied during the second phase of data collection—site visits that lasted up to five days at each site. The on-site data collection plan was designed to allow senior site visitors to be flexible in their data collection methods, depending on the nature of the conflict situation.

### **A.2.1 Preparatory Data Collection and Analysis**

The major sources of data collected during the preparatory phase of data collection included:

- Secondary information sources such as local planning reports, newspaper articles, and crime reports;
- Current and historical population and housing data from the U.S. Census Bureau;
- Current and historical data on HCVP participants from HUD’s *Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System* and *A Picture of Subsidized Households* database; and
- HCVP policy and procedure documents and planning reports from the PHA.

These materials contributed to the development of the conflict profile in three key ways. First, the written materials enhanced an understanding of the timeline and progression of the conflict. Although the interviews with key informants conducted on site proved to be the best sources of qualitative data about the conflict, respondents had difficulty remembering the precise sequence and timing of certain events. Dated correspondence, internal reports and, where it existed, press coverage helped to clarify timing and related specific events to one another. Second, quantifiable data from the census, from HUD, and from local police departments formed the backbone of the community profile. Similarly, the administrative and planning materials gathered from the PHA enabled us to develop a PHA profile. Third, the quantitative data and secondary documents collected in the preparatory phase provided a key set of “facts” with which to contextualize and evaluate the information gathered through the on-site interview process.

**Local Planning Reports.** Reports produced by local planning departments or community development agencies are typically a good starting point for identifying neighborhood conditions and recent demographic trends. Some form of local planning report is available for most communities, although level of detail contained in the reports varies greatly. Also, most reports are based primarily on 1990 Census data. Some of our study sites were able to provide locally commissioned studies of housing market dynamics, changing neighborhood demographics, or population growth patterns. These studies generally provided more in-depth and up-to-date material.

**Newspaper Articles.** During the site selection phase and again prior to the site visits, we conducted extensive newspaper searches for each of the study sites to obtain articles related to the HCVP controversy. These articles typically provided an initial sense of the course of the conflict (when it began, when it reached a peak, when and how it was resolved), the issues at stake (at least on the surface), and the parties involved. Once the site visits and main data collection activities were complete, the site visitors revisited the newspaper articles to analyze the coverage of the conflict and the role that media attention played in shaping the course of the conflict.

**Crime Reports.** At some of the study sites, a perception of increased crime in certain neighborhoods caused by HCVP households contributed to local opposition to the program. It was thus important to examine whether actual crime patterns in those neighborhoods that matched local respondents' perceptions. We pursued several avenues for obtaining crime reports and data. First, we contacted the local police department to request annual reports on crime statistics for the specific neighborhoods in which the HCVP conflicts took place. Because these statistics were broken down differently from city to city and in some places were simply not available, we could not always obtain relevant neighborhood-level data for the communities under study.

For sites where crime was of particular concern, we also looked at the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, which provide citywide data on crime. Where possible, we compared citywide data to the neighborhood-level data to see if the level of crime in the neighborhood was increasing or decreasing compared to the city as a whole. If a deeper understanding of crime patterns was important, we conducted interviews with local police officers regarding crime patterns in the neighborhood.

**Census Data.** The 1990 Census data are now ten years old, but they are still the most comprehensive source of neighborhood-level data available. For all of the study sites, we collected comprehensive a set of demographic, economic, and housing market data from the 1990 Census. We then used these data to generate comparative tables and to map key variables such as the percent of population below the poverty line, the percent of the population that is a racial or ethnic minority, and, in some cases, the percent of housing units that are owner- versus renter-occupied. For those sites where it was important to take an historical perspective, we gathered similar data from the 1980 and 1970 Censuses.



For all study sites, we also collected 1999 and 2000 updates to the 1990 Census produced commercially by Claritas Inc. Although Claritas uses a range of data sources to create these updates, they are estimates only and not a substitute for actual, collected data. We therefore did not rely too heavily on the updated data, but rather used it to test and probe information on recent trends gathered during the on-site interviews.

***A note on neighborhood boundaries:*** Census (and Claritas) data are available at the national, state, MSA, county, place, census tract, and block level. For sites where the area of conflict was a neighborhood rather than a place, city, or county, we used the local definition of the neighborhood (usually defined by combinations of streets) to determine which combination of census tracts most accurately captured the area.<sup>15</sup> If the neighborhood was smaller than a single census tract, we used the same process to determine which block group within the census tract was most appropriate. Using this system, we were able to collect census data on the area that best approximated the conflict neighborhood. It was rare, however, that the neighborhood boundaries matched exactly the census divisions.

**Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System (MTCS) Data.** Since the mid-1980s, local housing agencies have been required to collect and submit to HUD standardized information on the households they serve. For recipients of tenant-based HCVP assistance (as well as public housing residents), the information is collected on HUD Form 50058. The form includes information such as household composition, age of household members, race and ethnicity, income sources and amounts, and household contribution to rent. It also records information on the HCVP unit, such as the address, the number of bedrooms, the owner's name and address, the contract rent, and the subsidy paid by the housing agency. The information is collected for all households at initial program entry and annually at re-certification and is entered into HUD's Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System (MTCS). Housing authorities are required to submit updated data to the MTCS monthly, although there is still some incidence of non-reporting.

MTCS data were used to produce detailed maps of the location of tenant-based households at each of the study sites. By linking the location information to Census data on poverty rates and income levels, we were able to observe whether there appeared to be patterns in geographic concentration in neighborhoods with particular demographic characteristics. MTCS data also permitted some limited analysis of the characteristics of HCVP households at each of the study sites and how these characteristics had changed over time.

---

<sup>15</sup> In order to match street names to census boundaries, we imported data on census tract and block group boundaries (from the CD-Rom *Census CD Blocks*) into the software *MapInfo*, which provides street names and other local landmarks. We were then able to use *MapInfo* to generate street maps overlaid with census boundaries.

**HUD’s “A Picture of Subsidized Households” Database.** HUD’s website offers a useful tool for collecting information on the presence of subsidized households in particular geographic areas. The Picture of Subsidized Households database provides summary information on households receiving HUD assistance at the property, census tract, housing agency, state, and national levels. It was possible to select and aggregate data for HCVP certificate- and voucher-holders, as well as for public housing or HUD-assisted multifamily developments. The data could be linked to 1990 Census to determine concentrations of assisted households at the neighborhood level (i.e. the percent of total households in the neighborhood receiving housing assistance). The “Picture” data could also be mapped and compared to the maps on poverty rates, concentration of minority households, homeownership rates, and the distribution of HCVP households created using Census and MTCS data. As with MTCS, the Picture of Subsidized Households database also has some problems with missing data.

**HCVP Policy and Procedure Documents/Agency Reports.** Prior to conducting the site visit, we contacted the HCVP director to request the PHA’s written policies and procedures to determine how the authority handles routine program functions. If these policies or procedures had changed since the conflict situation began, we asked to examine both current documents and those in effect at the earlier time. Documents reviewed included:

- The PHA’s HCVP Administrative Plan;
- Written procedures describing selection preferences, applicant screening, voucher holder briefings, rent reasonableness determinations, HQS enforcement, and owner outreach/owner briefings;
- HUD and agency data concerning targeted HCVP allocations, including public housing relocation;
- Organizational charts showing staffing arrangements and lines of responsibility;
- Materials distributed to voucher holders at tenant briefings;
- PHA outreach and owner information materials; and
- Community relations materials.

In addition to policy and procedures documents, at some sites we were also able to review internal and external reports about the HCVP. These reports provided us with information on the nature and level of activities and overall program performance. Examples of pertinent reports included:

- Maps and/or reports on the location of HCVP participants;
- Demographic information on the characteristics of HCVP applicants and participants;
- Information on the size and composition of the HCVP waiting list;
- Internal management reports; and

- Monthly board reports.

A review of these documents prior to the site work allowed us to gain a basic understanding of HCVP operations prior to going on site. It was also used to tailor the key informant topic guides to the unique circumstances of each site and to include questions that would elicit information about deviations from formal policies and changes in policies over time.

During and following the site visits, we conducted a second review of PHA materials in order to assess how closely the PHA's written policies and procedures were followed in practice. To complete this task, we reviewed a limited number of applicant and participant files at sites where this information was necessary to understand the actual implementation of PHA practices and policies.

### **A.2.2 On-Site Data Collection and Analysis**

The second phase of data collection was conducted through site visits lasting up to five days at each of the study sites. Prior to going on site, the team received training in the dynamics of conflict resolution as well as data collection techniques designed to maximize the investigators' understanding of the local situation and the motivations, values, and perspectives of key actors. The principal sources of on-site data were:

- Key informant interviews; and,
- Focus groups.

**Key Informant Interviews.** This was the most important source of qualitative data collected during the site visit. Prior to the site visit, staff canvassed a variety of local telephone contacts to develop an initial list of individuals to be interviewed. Although the individuals interviewed differed from site to site depending on the nature of the conflict and the roles played, most on-site interviews were conducted with:

- PHA staff—both managerial and line staff;
- Local government officials;
- Political and community leaders of the affected neighborhoods;
- HCVP landlord representatives; and
- Representatives of fair housing or advocacy groups with knowledge of the situation.

Individual key informant interviews were an important source of information for establishing both the community context within which the conflict situations occurred and for understanding the various perspectives regarding the conflict itself. In addition to describing the events and issues involved in the conflict situation, key informants provided qualitative

information on the characteristics of the community and a local perspective on changes that may have occurred before, during, and after the precipitating events.

Key informants were also a valuable source of information regarding PHA administrative practices and their effects. Much of the information needed to understand the actual operations of the HCVP came from open-ended interviews with key informants who were knowledgeable about the conflict situation and the PHA's response. During the interviews, we tried to determine what, if any, operational changes had been made since the HCVP conflict began; how the staff functions were organized; what departments interfaced with the HCVP department, and who the key players in these departments were; what reports regarding HCVP activities were produced; and where pertinent records were kept.

In order to assist the site visitors in conducting the key informant interviews, informal topic guides were created for discussion of the conflict situation, community characteristics, and PHA practices. These guides are presented in Exhibits A-2 through A-4 at the conclusion of this Appendix.

**Focus Groups.** The study team had planned to use focus groups to elicit in-depth data from groups of respondents in selected sites. Potential respondents were to include HCVP participant landlords, non-participant landlords, HCVP tenants, applicants and searchers, and/or residents of the community or neighborhood in question. An experienced Abt Associates focus group leader was to conduct the sessions, working with the senior staff member responsible for each site to tailor the focus group questions to the needs of that site. All focus group discussions were to be audio taped and written summaries prepared.

As discussed in the final section of the Appendix, after conducting the site visits, the site visitors at each of the study sites independently determined that formal focus groups either were not feasible or were not necessary for the analysis of the conflict situation. However, at many of the sites the site visitors held informal focus groups with key parties to the conflict, such as neighborhood associations, landlords' associations, and local nonprofit agencies.

### **A.3 Analysis of the Conflict Situation and Outcomes**

Following the data collection phase, for each of the eight study sites we developed a summary report that detailed the conflict situation and its resolution. These reports combined descriptive materials with analysis, based on the viewpoints of those interviewed for the study, written commentaries or analyses, and the understanding developed by the site visitors during the data collection effort. These reports were then subjected to a cross-site analysis that formed the basis for the final report.

### A.3.1 Site Summary Reports

The site summary reports were written to a common outline, facilitating cross-site comparisons. This outline included:

- An analysis of the *community context*, including such salient factors as demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, housing characteristics, crime and public safety, and the political context;
- A description of *PHA practices and local administration of the HCVP*, including the distribution of HCVP households in the community;
- A description of the *conflict situation*, including the community perceptions with regard to the PHA;
- An description and analysis *PHA's response* to the conflict; and
- *Lessons learned* from the analysis for PHAs and HCVP administrators.

There were several challenges to creating an accurate and comprehensive community profile. First, the study “communities” ranged in geographic scope from very localized points (a small section of a neighborhood) to much more dispersed areas (such as a region of several suburban communities.) For each study report, we defined “community” in close consultation with key local respondents to make sure our selection of secondary data reflected local definitions of the neighborhood or area as closely as possible.

Limited existing secondary data at some sites also proved challenging. Our site selection approach favored communities where problems occurred in recent years over those where the conflict situations arose longer ago. Unfortunately, the most comprehensive source of demographic data on the study communities is the increasingly dated 1990 Census. In addition, some features of local communities were difficult to document because current data were unavailable, inconsistent across sites, or difficult to interpret.

To address these challenges, our data collection approach maximized the use of standardized secondary data while also drawing on key informant interviews to add texture and local perspective to the secondary data. The community profile used Census data to characterize community residents’ demographic traits such as race, income, household size, and tenure type (e.g., homeowner or renter). Information on crime incidence and trends were obtained from local sources and compared to the perceptions of crime levels described by key informants. HUD administrative data permitted us to look at the characteristics of HCVP-assisted households compared to non-assisted community residents, as well as to assess the concentration or dispersion of HCVP households in the community. Further, by obtaining administrative data for each housing agency’s overall HCVP, we observed how the characteristics of assisted families in neighborhoods with problems compare to households

served in the balance of the agency's HCVP. To the extent possible, we documented changes and trends in the characteristics of the neighborhood and of HCVP recipient households *within* each community during the time frame under study. Overall, our approach of combining findings from several data sources helped to overcome the weaknesses of any single strategy.

### **A.3.2 Cross-Site Analysis and Final Report**

The site profiles were circulated to senior team members for review and cross-site matrices of conflict characteristics, community context, and PHA practices were developed. We then convened a meeting of the site investigators to discuss the cross-site differences and commonalities among the conflict situations. From this discussion, we developed a list of lessons learned and successful strategies. However, because the conflicts depended so clearly on local context and practices, we were careful to maintain the link between each lesson and strategy and the specific contextual factors limiting or shaping it.

## **A.4 Methodological Limitations**

Through the course of the study, we identified two key methodological limitations. The first limitation concerned our evaluation of PHA administrative practices and the second concerned capturing the perspective of HCVP tenants.

### **A.4.1 Evaluation of PHA Practices**

One of our basic site selection criteria was the willingness of the PHA to participate in the study. Although we interviewed a wide range of participants to the conflict and gathered secondary data independently, we relied on the PHA to provide the bulk of the initial information about the course of the conflict, the issues and principal parties involved, and the local administration of the HCVP. In securing the PHA's cooperation, we emphasized the study's focus on the nature and course of HCVP conflict and on strategies that have been successful in resolving or mitigating conflict.

At some of the study sites, however, we found that the conflicts had not been effectively resolved and that inadequate program administration was partly to blame. In many cases, sources outside the PHA made strong claims about PHA practices with little hard evidence to back them up. In order to assess the validity of the claims, the site visitors examined PHA reports and plans and conducted limited file reviews. They did not, however, feel that it was within the scope of the study to undertake a thorough evaluation of the HCVP at sites where the quality of program administration was at issue. In some cases, the site visitors were able to draw upon existing evaluations and external reports. In other cases, however, particularly where there was a major discrepancy, between the PHA's view of their practices and the view

of those opposed to the HCVP, the site visitors were limited to presenting the views of both sides as fairly and accurately as possible.

When available, external evaluations of PHA program administration can help to overcome this limitation. In general, however, we believe that it would have been difficult to secure the kind of cooperation and exchange of information necessary for this kind of study if it was perceived to be part of a program assessment.

#### **A.4.2 Capturing HCVP Tenant Perspectives**

At the onset of the study, we believed that it would be possible to solicit viewpoints from all parties to the conflict through either key informant interviews or focus groups. Focus groups in particular were expected to be an effective way to capture the perspectives of HCVP tenants. However, at sites where the main HCVP conflict took place some time ago, the site visitors found that tenants who might have been involved in or affected by the conflict could not easily be tracked down, if indeed they were ever individually identified. Furthermore, in cases where the controversy was very recent or ongoing, some PHAs were reluctant to have tenants interviewed for fear of stirring up further conflict. Site visitors generally concurred with this assessment and felt that focus groups might play an incendiary role. In some cases, site visitors compensated by holding informal focus groups with some of the parties to the conflict, such as homeowners' groups and community associations. Had we been able to convene similar groups of HCVP tenants, their perspectives would have enriched the study.

**Exhibit A-2**  
**Key Informant Interview Topic Guide**  
**Profile of the Conflict Situation**

**Informant Background**

- Affiliation with the HCVP
- Informant's role in the conflict (e.g., participant, interested observer, third party facilitator)
- Previous interactions and relationship with the key actors

**The Initial Complaint/Conflict**

- Description of the complaint or conflict (precipitating event or events, key issues involved, parties involved in the conflict)
- Key issue involved in the initial concern
- Who initiated the complaint and how?
- Why did the issue come to the surface at that time?
- Length of time it took for the concern to surface
- Intensity of the conflict at the onset
- Description of any underlying issues that fueled the complaint

**Local Perceptions of the PHA and the HCVP Program**

- Opinion regarding the competence of the PHA
- The status of HCVP community relations prior to the incident or concern being raised

**Progression of the Conflict**

- Description of the initial response of the HA and HUD
- Factors that worked to inform, fuel, and mitigate the conflict
- Opinions about successful and unsuccessful strategies. Reasons that some were successful and other were not? (Ask about each of the examples below)
  - fact finding
  - public information
  - task forces
  - others (describe)
- Additional issues (if any) raised as the response to the conflict unfolded
- Did the conflict escalate over time? If yes, how and why?



### **Perceptions of the Key Players**

- Description of the major interests, motivations, and competence of key players (e.g., HA managers and staff, representatives from community organizations, elected officials, etc.)
- Response of these key players as the conflict progressed
- How and why did additional players become involved? Describe the additional players and their involvement.
- Opinions about the roles played and relative impact of key players

### **Factors in Resolution**

- Factors that facilitated resolution
- Were mediators used? If yes, were they helpful to the process? If no, why was this method not used?
- Which strategies were believed to be most effective in resolving the conflict? Why?

### **Outcomes**

- Types of agreements and/or understandings reached? (e.g., revised policies, procedures, practices, accommodations) Please describe each one in detail.
- Assessment of the quality of the resolution. Were needs met? If not, please describe. Were improvements made? Why or why not?
- Likelihood that the original conflict might resurface
- Assessments of other parties to the conflict (community members, local officials, neighborhood groups/residents, HCVP tenants, landlords, etc.) regarding the outcome?
- Costs associated with resolving the conflict (e.g., diverting staff time/resources from other issues, costs associated with adopting new policies, time involved in responding to conflict, others) Which group or groups bore the costs?
- Benefits involved in resolving the conflict. (Strengthening relationships, building new relationships, opening lines of communication, informing the public about the HCVP, others). Which group or groups benefited most?

**Exhibit A-3**  
**Key Informant Interview Topic Guide**  
**Profile of the Community**

**Demographic Patterns in the Community**

- Description of the neighborhood in [reference date] compared to now in terms of:
  - population
  - physical conditions
  - homeownership rates
  - trends in property sales
  - new construction or rehabilitation
- Race and ethnicity of the community's residents in [reference date].
- How did this compare with the city's (or region's) racial and ethnic make-up?
- Changes in the racial and ethnic characteristics of the neighborhood. Incidence of citywide changes.
- Economic status of the community in [reference date].
- Changes since [reference date]?
- Factors contributing to these changes, both positive and negative.

**Housing Market**

- Characteristics of the housing market in this community in terms of: home purchase prices; rents; vacancy rates; housing quality
- Has the rate of homeownership increased, decreased, or stayed about the same since [reference date]? What factors have contributed to any changes?
- Has the rate of investor ownership increased, decreased, or stayed about the same since [reference date]? What factors have contributed to any changes in investor ownership?
- Changes in the number of HCVP recipients since [reference date]
- Changes in lease-up success rates since [reference date]
- Changes in property owner attitudes toward HCVP holders since [reference date].
- Changes in property owner attitudes toward the housing agency since [reference date]

**Crime**

- Incidence of crime in this area now
- Types of crime that are a problem in the community
- Changes in the level of crime since [reference date]
- Changes in the types of crime since [reference date]
- Comparisons of crime in this community to the rest of the city (region)
- Changes in the incidence of crime at the city (or regional) level?

**Exhibit A-4**  
**Key Informant Interview Topic Guide**  
**Profile of PHA Practices and Their Effects**

**HCVP Operations**

- Staffing functions and organization
- Changes to staffing arrangements and responsibilities since [reference date]

**HCVP Policies and Procedures and Relationship to the Conflict Situation and Its Resolution**

- Admissions preferences
- Applicant screening
- Owner outreach practices
- Participant briefing
- Rent reasonableness
- Enforcement of participant obligations

**Relocation of Public Housing Residents**

- Role of relocation of public housing residents in the conflict and its resolution

**Local Perceptions of the HA and the HCVP Program**

- Opinions about the competence of the local HCVP operations
- Changes in perception over time

# **Appendix B**

## **Maps of the Study Sites**