Chapter 5: Park Hill, Denver

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Greater Park Hill is a uniquely integrated neighborhood in Denver, Colorado. Although the proportion of White residents in the city declined from 66.7 percent to 61.4 percent between 1980 and 1990, Park Hill's White population remained stable at about 36 percent. By 1980, under the assumption that Park Hill had already passed a racial tipping point, many urban researchers predicted imminent resegregation. This has not occurred. In fact, one developing trend finds more White Anglos and White Hispanics moving into predominantly African-American neighborhoods.

Park Hill remains largely a residential neighborhood of single-family houses. Its rate of 72 percent owner-occupied housing units is significantly higher than the citywide average of 51 percent. However, parts of the community are experiencing greater poverty, while other areas are home to a wealthier population than in the past. Neighborhood leaders continue to address the many difficulties of successful integration, but in recent years economic disparity and class differences, as well as increasing housing costs, have compounded the challenge.

Park Hill's popularity as a residential neighborhood is, in part, derived from its convenient location in the metropolitan area. It sits 3 miles from Denver's central business district (a 10- to 15-minute drive) and it is served by several bus routes. It also sits just south of the Interstate 70 industrial corridor, which links downtown to the new airport and points east. Until the spring of 1995, when the new Denver International Airport opened, Stapleton International Airport, immediately adjacent to the eastern part of Park Hill, was Denver's main airport. The closure of Stapleton has considerably reduced noise pollution in the neighborhood.

There are several small commercial clusters in Park Hill. These typically include neighborhood grocery stores, liquor stores, bakeries, and barbershops. There are several major cultural and recreational amenities on the western border of Park Hill, including City Park, City Park Golf Course, the Denver Museum of Natural History, and the Denver Zoo. Another golf course is immediately north of Park Hill. The University of Denver's School of Law is also located in East Park Hill. In the northern part of Park Hill, two major city recreation centers with parks and indoor pools provide programs for adults and youth.

Recent community investments by the city include a totally rebuilt and enlarged neighborhood health center, a new neighborhood library in the northern part of Park Hill, and the remodeling of the old library in South Park Hill. These improvements were the results of neighborhood lobbying.

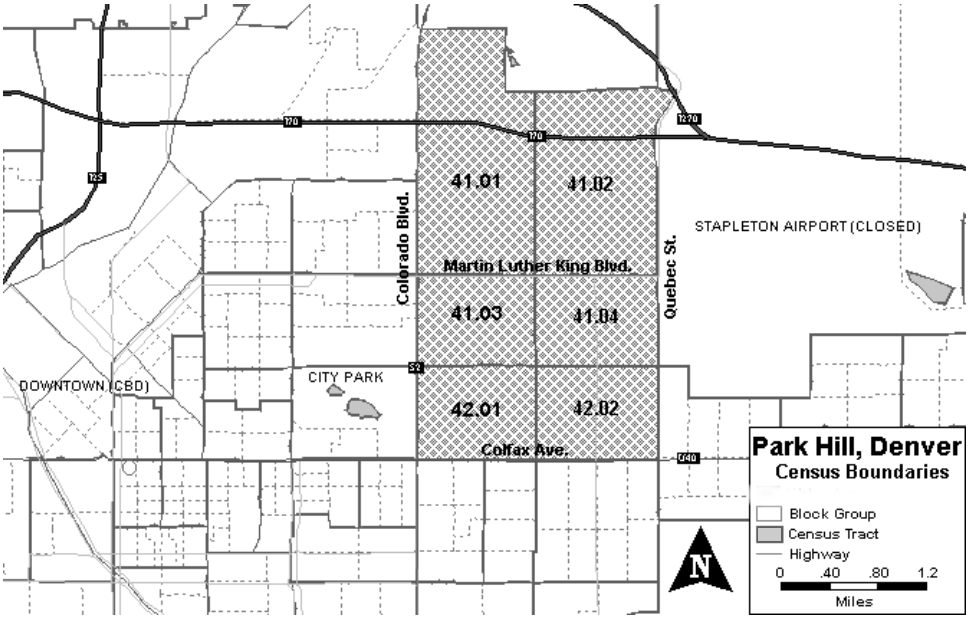
However, not all segments of Park Hill have benefited equally from its location. Recent demographic trends show several disparities. When compared with the city of Denver as a whole, Greater Park Hill appears a successful, stable, integrated community. Although this study fundamentally affirms that judgment, it also examines several of the problems facing the community today.

Community Demographics

City demographers pair Park Hill's six main census tracts into three tiers of two, from north to south (see exhibit 1). (An additional partial census tract in the southeast corner of Park Hill was not included in this study.) As with the city as a whole, the overall population of Park Hill has declined. As shown in exhibit 2, both non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic African-American populations declined from 1980 to 1990 (12.7 percent and 18.1 percent, respectively), while there was a slight increase (1.7 percent) among Park Hill's small Hispanic population. Overall, the community's racial and ethnic mixture has remained steady.

Exhibit 1

Map of Park Hill, Denver



The northernmost tier (census tracts 41.01 and 41.02, north of Martin Luther King Boulevard) reflects the highest concentration of African-Americans (91 percent), the lowest income levels (1989 median household incomes of $15,492 and $23,683), the highest concentration of renters, and one of the highest concentrations of publicly assisted housing units in Denver "with an overall poverty rate of 26.6%, and a child poverty rate of 41.6%." (Piton Foundation, 1994). In contrast, the median incomes of Park Hill's other census tracts (41.03, 41.04, 42.01, and 42.02) were $27,113, $36,169, $42,266, and $43,866, respectively. The middle pair of census tracts (south of Martin Luther King

Exhibit 2

Population of Park Hill and Denver, 1980 and 1990

		City of Denver		Greater Hill Park (total 6 census tracts)	
		Population	Percentage of Total	Population	Percentage of Total
Blacks	1980	58,183	11.8	17,234	58.7
(non-Hispanic)	1990	57,793	12.4	14,111	56.8
	Change	*(390)*	*-0.7*	*(3,123)*	*-18.1*
Hispanics	1980	92,257	18.7	1,242	4.2
	1990	107,382	23.0	1,263	5.1
	Change	*15,125*	*+16.4*	*21*	*+1.7*
Whites	1980	328,440	66.7	10,287	35.0
(non-Hispanic)	1990	287,162	61.4	8,984	36.2
	Change	*(41,278)*	*-12.6*	*(1,303)*	*-12.7*
Total	1980	492,365		29,357	
	1990	467,610		24,822	
	Change	*(24,755)*	*-5.0*	*(4,535)*	*-15.4*

Source: 1980 and 1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census (census tracts 41.01, 41.02, 41.03, 41.04, 42.01, and 42.02)

Boulevard to 23rd Avenue) is the most integrated, with 22.4 percent White, 71.8 percent non-Hispanic Black, and 4.3 percent Hispanic (Piton Foundation, 1994). The rates of homeownership are 86 percent and 77 percent in these two census tracts (41.03 and 41.04). The poverty rate in the middle census tracts is 13.6 percent (1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census). The final pair of census tracts (south of 23rd Avenue and north of Colfax Avenue) is 75.3 percent White, 16.9 percent Black, and 4.7 percent Hispanic. The average rate of homeownership is 75.2 percent. The income levels are highest in this area of Park Hill: The incomes in 42.8 percent of these households are double Denver's median household income (Denver's median household income in 1989 was $25,106; Piton Foundation, 1994). The 1989 poverty rate in the two southernmost census tracts was 5.4 percent.

There is economic diversity in the Greater Park Hill neighborhood as a whole when compared with the rest of the city, but within the neighborhood, there are three tiers of economic stratification, closely following the lines of racial diversity (see exhibits 3, 4, and 5). In 1980 Greater Park Hill was composed of 22 percent lower income households, 62 percent middle-income households, and 17 percent upper income households. By 1990 the composition of Greater Park Hill had shifted to 25 percent lower income households, 48 percent middle-income households, and 28 percent upper income households. Essentially, the neighborhood's lower and upper income groups increased at the expense of the middle-income group, with the upper income group increasing at a greater rate than the lower income group.[1]

Exhibit 3

Economic Stratification in Park Hill, 1980 to 1990*

		Northeast Park Hill		North Park Hill		South Park Hill	
Population		**Population**	**Percentage of Total**	**Population**	**Percentage of Total**	**Population**	**Percentage of Total**
Black	1980	7,525	91.8	8,477	71.0	1,262	13.6
(non-Hispanic)	1990	5,673	91.7	6,988	70.3	1,450	16.7
	Change	*(1,852)*	*-24.6*	*(1,459)*	*-17.3*	*188*	*+14.9*
Hispanics	1980	251	3.1	575	4.8	416	4.5
	1990	235	3.8	540	5.4	488	5.6
	Change	*(16)*	*-6.4*	*(35)*	*-6.1*	*72*	*+17.3*
Whites	1980	296	3.6	2,650	22.3	7,341	79.3
(non-Hispanic)	1990	207	3.3	2,237	22.5	6,540	75.3
	Change	*(89)*	*-30.1*	*(413)*	*-15.6*	*(801)*	*-10.9*
Total	1980	8,198		11,899		9,260	
	1990	6,185		9,947		8,690	
	Change	*(2,013)*	*-24.6*	*(1,952)*	*-16.4*	*(570)*	*-6.2*

* Census tracts included are: Northeast Park Hill, 41.01 and 41.02; North Park Hill, 41.03 and 41.04; and South Park Hill, 42.01 and 42.02.

Source: 1980 and 1990 U.S. Bureau of the Census

In the past, this economic diversity (of lesser extremes) has been considered by many residents to be a positive feature of the community. The largest community organization, Greater Park Hill Community (GPHC), Inc., has drawn on the resources of more affluent families to meet the needs of lower income residents through an emergency food shelf, summer youth programs, and so forth. However, the growth of economic disparity is particularly problematic in this community because it compounds the difficulty of maintaining racial integration.

Racial, Ethnic, and Class Relations

Understanding Park Hill today requires some knowledge of its past. Throughout the early 1950s, Denver's African-American community was centered in the Five Points Community, 2.5 miles west of Park Hill. This neighborhood, just north of the central business district and adjacent to several railroad yards and facilities, was home to many middle-class Blacks, including railroad porters and doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. However, as in many other northern and western cities, there was a large in-migration of Blacks from the South following World War II.

Exhibit 4

Poverty Indicators in Greater Park Hill

Indicator	Northeast Park Hill	North Park Hill	South Park Hill
Percentage child poverty	41.6	22.9	5.0
Percentage change in rate, 1979–89	+13.6	+4.9	-1.1
Percentage single-parent families	63.5	40.2	21.6
Percentage unwed births, 1991	69.6	58.4	20.1
Percentage change in AFDC* households, 1990–94	+67.8	+56.2	-19.0

*Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Source: Piton Foundation, 1994

Exhibit 5

Household Income in Greater Park Hill*

Income	Households With Incomes Less Than Half Median (Percent)	Percentage Change	Households With Incomes Greater Than Twice Median (Percent)	Percentage Change
	1989	1979–89	1989	1979–89
City of Denver	24.6	+1.1	18.9	+2.4
Northeast Park Hill	31.5	+3.9	8.8	-3.6
North Park Hill	20.4	+6.1	25.4	+5.8
South Park Hill	11.8	+1.3	42.8	+10.6

*Median household income in Denver in 1989 was $25,106. Households with less than one-half the median income ($12,553) are frequently considered poor. Households with twice the median income ($50,212) are often considered upper income.

Source: Piton Foundation, 1994

The segregative real estate system in Denver was similar to that in other cities. In the 1950s Denver real estate agents were following the mandate of the National Association of REALTORS® and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which instructed agents to avoid introducing disruptive elements into a community. This “fill-in-the-block” approach rapidly increased segregated housing in the neighborhood immediately to the west of Park Hill. Available housing units west of Colorado Boulevard were filled (per FHA guidelines) by basically “one-race” (African-American). Demand for more housing brought the first African-American families across Colorado Boulevard and into Park Hill in 1956. On May 6, 1956, clergy from seven of Park Hill’s largest churches urged Park Hill residents to welcome people of all colors to the neighborhood and to the churches. However, a White panic—largely resulting from real estate-inspired, panic-peddling, and blockbusting techniques—began to spread.

In 1959 Park Hill residents were the primary initiators of the first Colorado State fair housing law, the first State law that covered private sales as well as public housing and commercial real estate transactions. When that law was emasculated in 1962 by the Colorado Supreme Court, groups including civil rights, neighborhood, and religious organizations[2] pushed hard for a tougher, stronger law, also written and cosponsored by a State representative from Park Hill. It passed in 1965 by one vote after some statewide lobbying by Park Hill residents. This 1965 law opened up other parts of the city and suburbs to people of color 3 years before HUD's Title VIII Fair Housing Act.

In addition to supporting legislative action, Park Hill residents pursued a more direct strategy. In 1960 laypeople from the seven churches met and agreed to work together to welcome African-Americans and to stop the panic among Whites. They also undertook to reassure White residents that their property values would not suffer through a careful local and community newspaper campaign. Their organization was named the Park Hill Action Committee (PHAC), which was one of the predecessors of GPHC. Thus Park Hill became an intentionally multiracial neighborhood. Building on the enactment of the fair housing laws and the supposed opening of the suburbs, an early strategy of Park Hill integrationists was to encourage the development of human relations councils in outlying suburban communities. Park Hill emissaries went to southeast and southwest Denver suburban churches to build support networks for families of color to move there. The complement to this effort was a campaign to continue to attract Whites to Park Hill. Activists made allies of resident real estate agents, many of whom were active members of Park Hill churches that supported peaceful integration. One effort was to work with resident advertising executives, who created cooperative real estate agent advertisements featuring Park Hill's attractions (such as schools, a nearby zoo, and parks) and the large number of resident professionals (lawyers, teachers, and doctors) living there. In 1970 the Park Hill Action Committee (predominantly Anglo) merged with the Northeast Park Hill Civic Association (predominantly African-American) and was incorporated and renamed the Greater Park Hill Community, Inc.

Greater Park Hill Community, Inc.

Today GPHC wields a reputation as the institutional heart of a politically well-connected Denver neighborhood. For more than 35 years, it has taken on major issues and brought them to successful resolution. It uses an extensive (more than 60 people, including religious congregation delegates) and purposely biracial board, which includes representation and support from 15 area religious organizations, a community newspaper, and many active volunteers and professionals willing to give back to their community. GPHC has maintained a multiracial cochair system, which guarantees diversity in its leadership.

In addition to fighting segregation of the neighborhood in the 1960s, GPHC has subsequently been given credit for supporting legal actions that resulted in 20 years of court-ordered desegregation of the public schools, forcing the city and county of Denver to build a safer airport farther away from neighborhoods, and bringing community policing into Park Hill. Along with other neighborhood organizations, it has forced the withdrawal of a permit to locate a hazardous waste transfer site just north of the Greater Park Hill neighborhood. Along with other Denver neighborhood groups, it has also been influential in passing a nuisance ordinance to fight crime and eliminate crack houses. GPHC has also been a community service organization. For the past 30 years, it has run an emergency food bank, providing food for more than 3,000 residents a year who are facing sudden emergencies. For the past 14 years, GPHC has also operated a summer internship and mentoring program for junior high school students who are too young to qualify for

regular jobs. For the past 3 years, GPHC members have spearheaded a summer scholars program (described below in the section on education).

GPHC publishes a free monthly 16-page community newspaper, the *Greater Park Hill News* (circulation: 17,500), which is distributed by volunteer block workers to 440 residential blocks of Park Hill. This well-respected paper helps keep Park Hill residents informed about neighborhood issues and events. It is nonprofit and funded by advertising. The *GPH News* is one of the strongest identifiers of the entire Greater Park Hill area as a single neighborhood.

GPHC's annual home tour (in its 18th year) brings thousands of people—at least one-third from outside Park Hill—to view some of the area's older renovated homes. The tour is accompanied by an arts and crafts fair, offering works by multiethnic local artists and artisans. This fair celebrates the cultural diversity of the community and is GPHC's largest fundraiser.

Other Community Organizations

The other main diversity-promoting group in Park Hill is the Denver Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP rents office space in the GPHC headquarters building, devotes most of its energy to fighting discrimination in employment and education, and provides strong support for housing and school desegregation.[3] In the recent past, outside organizations that have worked for diversity in Park Hill include Housing for All,[4] the Metro Denver Fair Housing Center, and the Denver Community Housing Resource Board (CHRB).[5] Churches and other religious organizations have also supported diversity in Park Hill.

Social service providers in the neighborhood include the Park Hill Health Station and the Northeast Women's Center. The Health Station provides medical services, payable on a sliding scale, for low- and moderate-income Park Hill residents. The Women's Center provides high school equivalency and vocational training to help mothers on welfare and other low-income women gain skills to succeed in the work force. The Park Hill Health and Human Services Coalition succeeded in getting social services intake personnel at the Health Center and is working with Planned Parenthood to reduce teen pregnancy.

In 1988 an organization was formed in Park Hill that some members of GPHC regard as a challenge to maintaining and promoting a racially integrated neighborhood. Park Hill for Safe Neighborhoods (PHSN) started out as a crime-prevention committee within GPHC, but became a separate organization registered with the city to foster more community spirit, encourage home and neighborhood improvements in northeast Park Hill, and work more directly with the police. PHSN members also encourage middle-income residents to purchase homes in their neighborhood. PHSN represents about one-third of the total area of Park Hill, with about one-fourth of the population.[6] Although leaders of PHSN have not directly attacked GPHC, they have appealed to northeast Park Hill residents on the basis of this area's geographic isolation and economic differences.

The implicit message of PHSN has been that other residents of Park Hill cannot adequately represent the interests of those in this racially segregated, lower income community. In fact, it was PHSN that took the lead to fight the proposed locating of a hazardous waste transfer station just north of the neighborhood. It successfully portrayed this proposal as an environmental justice issue. Proponents of environmental justice object to the disproportionate siting of projects with undesirable environmental impacts in low-income and minority neighborhoods. Several GPHC sector leaders, mostly from the

southern parts of Park Hill, supported PHSN with letter-writing campaigns, rallies, and gatherings of support from throughout Greater Park Hill. Although the decision was successfully reversed in a zoning board appeal, the case illustrates both the possibilities and the tensions of working across a racial and widening economic chasm. At the same time, the tension between the different interests emphasizes the importance of working together to address issues that can affect the entire Park Hill community.

This issue of maintaining racial diversity under conditions of economic divergence is also seen in other aspects of community life. The following sections address three of these: housing, safety, and education. Together, these seem to form the crux of issues that Greater Park Hill will face during the next several years.

Housing

Park Hill's housing stock is probably even more diverse than its population. It ranges from $700,000 mansions to 1,000-square-foot, 1950s ranch-style homes with market values under $80,000. The distinctive characteristics of the housing stock are distributed in tiers, south to north. South Park Hill has the oldest housing, with most of it having been developed between the 1890s and 1920s as a streetcar suburb. The styles of these houses are eclectic and vary considerably in size and detail. The largest homes are clustered along several parkways that cross the neighborhood. Three of these run east–west and two run north–south. The western part of North Park Hill was developed in the 1920s with the housing stock similar in characteristic to that of South Park Hill, but having few houses as large as the boulevard houses. The housing in the eastern part of North Park Hill and Northeast Park Hill was developed in the 1940s and 1950s as spare starter homes, and largely marketed to World War II veterans. Also in Northeast Park Hill is the neighborhood's largest concentration of rental housing, consisting mostly of single-story two- to four-unit dwellings.

Sales data for 1993 from the city assessor's records show a significant difference in the age, size, and price per square foot (see exhibit 6). The southernmost census tracts, where houses were built in the 1920s and 1930s and average 1,500 square feet, exceed the city's average in size, age, and price by more than 20 percent. The northernmost census tracts, where houses are less than 1,000 square feet and were built in the early 1950s, are on average valued at 40 percent less than the city average. Real estate agents report that the newer, smaller homes in the northern parts of the neighborhood are harder to sell. This situation is changing rapidly and dramatically. It should be noted that the population of the northern two census tracts (41.01 and 41.02) has been more than 90 percent African-American for at least two decades.

Although racial steering is not as overt as in the past, the Denver Community Reinvestment Alliance, a coalition of nonprofit and civil rights groups, has recently found continuing discrepancies in mortgage lending practices on the basis of race. By 1989 most real estate agents and landlords were sufficiently aware of fair housing laws that they almost never blatantly refused to show an advertised apartment or house for sale. But more subtle forms of discrimination were still found to exist.

Marketing within Park Hill itself, judging by increased property prices, may be on an upward trend, precipitated by two events initiated by Park Hill activists and GPHC. The first of these is the moving of the Denver airport away from middle and north Park Hill, resulting in the end of 30 years of constant airport noise. According to real estate agents, the relocation of the airport is one reason for dramatically higher prices in areas

Exhibit 6

House Sales Data for Park Hill, 1993

Census tract*	Median Sales Price	Percentage of Denver Average	Mean Square Footage	Percentage of Denver Average	Dollars per Square Foot	Percentage of Denver Average	Mean Year of Construction
41.01	$40,000	45.98	921	72.63	$49	57.63	1952
41.02	$52,500	60.34	922	72.71	$59	69.59	1953
41.03	$86,000	98.85	1,263	99.61	$76	89.94	1928
41.04	$56,900	65.40	1,042	82.18	$63	75.02	1945
42.01	$120,000	137.93	1,633	128.78	$104	123.03	1922
42.02	$127,000	145.98	1,458	114.98	$102	120.69	1935
City	$87,000	100.00	1,268	100.00	$84	100.00	1942

* Census tracts included are: Northeast Park Hill, 41.01 and 41.02; North Park Hill, 41.03 and 41.04; and South Park Hill, 42.01 and 42.02.

Source: Denver Assessor's Office

previously plagued by airport noise. The second event is Denver's current economic boom, which has raised prices throughout the metropolitan area. Hence, members of all races and ethnicities looking for more affordable housing are buying homes they did not previously consider in northern parts of Park Hill. Some of these houses have experienced deferred maintenance (that is, they need repainting or reroofing and require lawn care). More buyers are now willing to purchase and repair them. Property tax assessments in 1997 skyrocketed, based on "sold" prices for 1996. Houses valued at less than $100,000 are rare. The year-2000 census is likely to show a loss of low-income people as homes sell at high prices to higher income couples and families. Landlords are selling off rental homes for high profits, eliminating low-income renters.

Meeting basic housing needs, rather than promoting diversity and stability, is often the primary concern of assisted housing providers operating in Park Hill. Two community development corporations have investments in Park Hill. The Denver Housing Authority (DHA) is active in the community through the Section 8 rental certificate program and as owner of dispersed site units in the neighborhood. GPHC has had a mutually supportive relationship with both nonprofit providers, but its relationship with DHA has been marred by differences in mission.

The Northeast Denver Housing Center (NDHC) had its initial contact with Park Hill through a purchase/rehabilitation/resale program, which bought low-cost or foreclosed properties at deep discounts, rehabilitated these units, and sold them to low- to moderate-income first-time home buyers. More recently, NDHC has directed its energies toward purchasing, rehabilitating, and renting multifamily housing at low cost or through Section 8 programs. NDHC also has a homeownership and foreclosure-prevention counseling service.

Hope Communities owns rental units all across metropolitan Denver, including 94 units in Park Hill. The founders of Hope Communities have always stressed their commitment to neighborhood diversity. This commitment is demonstrated in their Elm Court development in Park Hill, with African-American, Hispanic, and Anglo residents. Hope Communities rental complexes offer a range of supportive services for their tenants, including education programs, homework tutoring, and a variety of counseling and upward mobility services.

GPHC and other neighborhood and fair housing organizations have frequently criticized DHA for unfairly affecting those very communities that have been most supportive of its mission. It seems to many that because Park Hill residents have not resisted dispersed public housing, they have been taken advantage of by DHA, which has placed a disproportionate share of subsidized units in Park Hill. This has contributed to increased segregation—both racial and economic—in four nearby schools. This trend raised concerns among middle-class homeowners. DHA has responded, saying that it must comply with HUD guidelines for setting an upper price limit on housing units, and because house prices below this limit are readily found in Northeast Park Hill, it has no control over how individual renters choose to use their Section 8 certificates.

In the early 1990s, fair housing advocates in the city reached an agreement with DHA and HUD not to locate more units in affected neighborhoods, which include Northeast and North Park Hill. However, GPHC continues to be skeptical of DHA's commitment to this agreement and fears that in the absence of a metropolitanwide fair share initiative, Park Hill will remain under resegregative pressures exerted by DHA. The real estate market is beginning to price DHA out of Park Hill, however. The absence of affordable housing may ultimately become the biggest Park Hill issue.

Safety

Safety—or the perception of safety—is a key issue for the health of the neighborhood. For several years, neighbors have joined together to fight crime occurring in pockets of the neighborhood, and results have been mixed. Part of the concern about safety is attributable to the infamous 1993 summer of violence, during which high-profile, gang-related murders occurred in Greater Park Hill. Much of the media coverage specifically linked these murders to Northeast Denver, Northeast Park Hill, or Park Hill. Such coverage heightened and intensified a citywide perception of the neighborhood as a dangerous area. Community block-organizing and community policing efforts have corrected these perceptions, producing a more positive image of Park Hill's safety record. Since 1993 crime rates in the neighborhood have dropped.

Gang activity is evident in Greater Park Hill. Greater Park Hill is generally considered the territory of various factions of the Bloods gang; there are also some Crips factions, although most Crips live outside the neighborhood. Fights between gang factions have occurred, including several during the summer of 1993. According to two of the community officers in Greater Park Hill, serious gang activity has been greatly reduced in the neighborhood since 1994 for the following reasons:

- Police actions resulting in the incarceration of many violent offenders, although lack of jail space limits the arrest rate of juvenile offenders.
- Community involvement, specifically community programs through GPHC and several Greater Park Hill churches that encourage parents to participate in educational and other activities with their children.

A number of organizations are involved in attempts to maintain a safe living environment, including GPHC, PHSN, and the Denver Police Department. In response to the 1993 summer of violence, GPHC volunteers began a block- and sector-organizing program, forming groups of blocks (sectors) and training residents to respond to the needs of their neighbors, especially in the areas of crime and safety. The organizing of blocks into sectors required neighbors to meet one another, exchange telephone numbers, and confer about crime problems, as in the neighborhood watch program. Currently, 171 blocks

are organized into 31 sectors in the neighborhood (7 blocks in the northernmost section, 49 blocks in the central section, and 115 blocks in the southernmost section).

Education

The maintenance of good-quality, successfully integrated public schools continues to be an important issue for the neighborhood. In 1962 Park Hill had a growing school-age population. That year the board of education placed 27 mobile classrooms in Denver, of which 25 were at the predominantly African-American schools in Park Hill. In 1968 school board member Rachel Noel successfully introduced a plan to integrate six intentionally segregated schools in the Park Hill area. When a newly elected antibusing board rescinded the Noel resolution in 1969, Park Hill community members filed a lawsuit.

In 1973 this lawsuit resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling that school districts that had never been segregated by law could be forced to desegregate citywide if a significant portion of their students had been segregated by school board actions (*Keyes* v. *Denver Board of Education*). The Keyes ruling formed the basis for most school desegregation orders in cities outside the South.

From 1973 through 1995, Denver Public Schools (DPS) were under court order to desegregate. This resulted in a paired school-busing plan. During this period, many middle-class families (of all races, but primarily Anglo) fled to the suburbs or enrolled their children in private schools or DPS magnet and gifted-student programs.

Recently there have been significant changes to public schools in Park Hill. In fall 1995 DPS was released from Federal court jurisdiction because it convinced the judge of its commitment to equality and diversity, even though, admittedly, equality and diversity had not been achieved. As a consequence, DPS is now subject to State laws that prohibit any assignment of students to promote racial balance and automatically grant students the right to attend any school with space, as long as the students provide their own transportation. In fall 1996 the board of education began to phase out busing for desegregation by returning all students to a so-called *neighborhood school* starting with elementary schools. Two elementary schools in Park Hill were given magnet-school status to integrate them. Early results of these changes have proved to be somewhat reminiscent of 1969: racial isolation, poverty, and overcrowding in the northern end of the city, including Park Hill. In spring 1996 DPS was also awarded a $2.7 million grant, over 3 years, to create a minidistrict within the Park Hill area. In the meantime, DPS finances have deteriorated, causing many services and programs to be severely curtailed. A mill levy (property tax) election to put DPS taxpayers on par with their suburban counterparts failed in November 1995, with only a few precincts, including Park Hill, voting in favor. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that all DPS schools, including those in Park Hill, probably provide a better education than perceived by the public. DPS suffers from a poor reputation and is seen by many as unduly bureaucratic.

There are six public elementary schools in Park Hill, offering kindergarten through fifth grade, with early childhood programs for lower income children. Four of them—Ashley, Park Hill, Phillips, and Stedman (beginning in 1982)—have always been neighborhood schools. The other two—Hallett (Academy of Science and Technology) and Smith (Renaissance Academy)—stopped busing in fall 1995 and began the process of becoming DPS magnet schools. Barrett Elementary, serving some Park Hill children but located just outside the boundary, has become part of the newly forming Park Hill minidistrict. However, during the 1996–97 school year, Barrett will have new service boundaries that do not include Park Hill residents. Two middle schools, Smiley in Park Hill and Gove

south of Park Hill, serve Park Hill residents. Three parochial schools serving elementary, middle, and high school students, are also in the area.

Many Park Hill families opt for DPS special programs or private schools—or leave the neighborhood when children reach school age. DPS estimates that approximately 350 elementary students transfer annually out of Park Hill to magnet and special education programs. Park Hill and its environs also house numerous private preschools and several parochial schools, as well as the University of Denver Law School, Lamont School of Music, and Women's Weekend College. A significant number of Park Hill parents (both African-American and White) send their children to independent and parochial schools for an education that is considered, and may actually be, more academically rigorous. At both the primary and secondary levels, many students attend private schools, and there are often more applicants than spaces. In a sense, these private schools help preserve the neighborhood, for without them, more families might move because of public schools that they find unacceptable for their children.

Because so many families feel they cannot send their children to Park Hill's public schools, the schools do not reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the community. During the 1996–97 school year, Park Hill public schools continued to serve mostly children of color and mostly poor children. When DPS redrew neighborhood boundaries around schools, the opportunity for racial and economic diversity was further decreased. In *The Denver Post* Alan Gottlieb reported that, of the 78 elementary schools in DPS, 27 schools were disproportionately White and 23 disproportionately minority (August 25, 1996).

Park Hill residents continue to address problems associated with the schools. Summer Scholars is a successful 6-week reading and recreation program designed to help children catch up or retain skills during the summer. In its third year, Summer Scholars is community conceived, driven, and supported by more than $500,000 in in-kind and cash contributions each year. It serves about 700 lower income children in 15 schools in northeast Denver by creatively marshaling private and public resources. It was created to fill the gap left in the absence of summer school programs from DPS.

To enhance the quality of schools in Park Hill, concerned neighbors wrote a proposal that convinced DPS to successfully apply for $2.7 million in Federal funds for a 3-year magnet program at all seven Park Hill area elementary schools, especially Hallett and Smith. This program attempts to diversify Park Hill schools both ethnically and economically. The proposal is based on the understanding that at-risk children do better in smaller school districts, smaller schools, and smaller classrooms and when their families feel part of a school community.

A Park Hill minidistrict of seven magnet elementary schools was recently proposed by GPHC to promote diversity. The idea was to have an array of magnet programs in the community as fundamental schools, Montessori schools, science-math schools, and performing arts schools. It was hoped that parents all over the metropolitan area would want to move to Park Hill or at least place their children in one of the Park Hill schools. However, DPS refused to fund the schools most desired by the community on the grounds that they were too expensive. Efforts to develop magnet schools are continuing.

Lessons Learned: Past and Present for the Future

Greater Park Hill has survived as a racially integrated neighborhood for 35 years. However, it would be a mistake to think of the neighborhood as stable in the sense of unchanging. Park Hill has experienced several real estate cycles, changing fashions in housing, a society grown more violent, and an urban school system starved for human and financial resources. In the 1960s the neighborhood responded to immoral, if not officially illegal, real estate practices. In the 1970s the community learned to appreciate its diversity. The 1980s allowed White and Black residents to focus on bringing an end to a common nemesis, noise pollution from aircraft—even while their community was becoming increasingly economically polarized. The 1990s have seen a renewed focus on issues that were thought to have been resolved—increased geographic, racial, and economic polarization.

Eight lessons about achieving stable and diverse neighborhoods can be learned from Park Hill:

Leadership, together with organization, does count. Every time Park Hill experiences a threat, individual leaders step forward to address the issues. In the early days, these leaders brought together elements of the religious community to create an organization widely perceived as representative and legitimate. Subsequent struggles have depended on individuals, but the organizational legitimacy of GPHC affords residents a platform. It also helps that Park Hill residents include a large pool of talent and expertise willing to volunteer and become involved.

Leadership must broaden to address changes in the neighborhood. As GPHC has matured, it has faced changing issues. It has benefited from its leadership's continuing commitment to issues affecting the community. The challenge has been not only to appreciate GPHC's experiences, but also to allow for an institutional transformation to respond to constant new challenges.

Race and class count. Integration in Park Hill is no longer a matter of race alone. The community has become increasingly aware of economic disparity in the neighborhood. Hence, a new challenge to GPHC is the design of supportive programs without paternalism.

External threats are easiest to address. Although it is a simplification to call any of the community's effort easy, the internal organization has been most cohesive when battling outside forces such as the real estate industry, airport authorities, or government agencies.

Internal allocations are most difficult. This is the corollary of the conclusion above. Because of the geographic, racial, and economic divisions within Park Hill, neighborhood cohesion has been most difficult when resources have to be internally allocated. This has recently been true for both police protection and public school resources.

HUD policies do not always help. HUD policies and practices that focus on indivi-dual homeseekers and projects sometimes undermine stable, communitywide patterns of integration.

A unified image is important. Park Hill's greatest achievement is the image it presents of itself as one community, to both residents and outsiders. This image has kept GPHC together even in difficult times. The *Greater Park Hill News* and dedicated volunteers are key factors to maintaining the unified image.

Image cannot replace interaction. Despite a common front, the reality of different social worlds defined by race and class cannot be overcome by good press alone. Difficult issues, such as school desegregation and the recent minidistrict project, create tensions. However, these difficult issues serve to introduce emergent leaders to new perspectives and promote greater understanding among the diverse people of Park Hill.

Author

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Notes

1. Between 1980 and 1990, the middle-income group decreased in proportional size by 14 percent to 48 percent of the population. The lower income group increased in its proportional size by 3 percent to 25 percent of the population. The upper income group increased in proportional size by 11 percent to 28 percent of the population. The median income of the neighborhood was $31,462, which was 46 percent greater than that of the city as a whole.

2. Congress for Racial Equality, the NAACP, the Urban League, the Latin American Education Foundation, the Park Hill Action Committee, and the Colorado Council of Churches.

3. The NAACP is a sublettor to GPHC in a small commercial building that is owned by the city of Denver and leased to GPHC for $1 per year.

4. Housing for All focuses on discrimination in housing. It is a Fair Housing Initiatives Program agency that investigates discrimination cases. Although the program is not located in Park Hill, Park Hill volunteers were instrumental in starting the program.

5. CHRB was designed to educate real estate agents about the virtues and business payoffs of promoting diversity in housing. One of its methods has been to put agents on yellow school buses and take them to various Denver public schools to show them that the schools are not nearly as bad as often portrayed in the news media. Park Hill schools have been used for this purpose.

6. Many residents of these northernmost census tracts still support GPHC or are active in both organizations. One current cochair of GPHC lives in Northeast Park Hill, and PHSN's current president officially retains her seat on the GPHC board.

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