Redistribution Through Redevelopment

*LUCINDA PITT, et al.*

*v.*

*CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, VA.*

Case No.: 2:02cv489

Research Conducted for Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law
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Decades of Funding Reports Analyzed:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for sewer, sidewalks, etc.
- HUD Redevelopment funds
- Housing Rehabilitation Funds, etc.
For decades, Portsmouth, Va. used HUD CDBG funding:

- to apply code enforcement selectively;
- to condemn and bulldoze properties inhabited by African Americans;
- Withholding relocation monies;
- Refusing to build affordable housing for the displaced.
Between 1955 and 2004, the City spent

Over $100 Million

- 80% on Clearance
  - All in Black neighborhoods
  - Except one waterfront neighborhood
- Less than 5% spent on Rehabilitation
  - All in White neighborhoods
1995 CDBG Inventory: 651 Landbanked Properties

Black population as % of total
- 0% - 20%
- 20.1% - 40%
- 40.1% - 60%
- 60.1% - 80%
- 80.1% - 100%

Landbanked Property
2002 City Document Shows Some Demolition Targets

Residential Neighborhoods

- Former Midcity Shopping Center
- Shopping center
- Black high school
- I.C. Norcom Site
- Public Housing: 400 units, 100% Minority
- Jeffrey Wilson
List of Addresses of City–Landbanked Properties with Racial Attributes of Neighborhoods

Black population as % of total

- Yellow: 0% - 20%
- Light orange: 20.1% - 40%
- Orange: 40.1% - 60%
- Brown: 60.1% - 80%
- Dark brown: 80.1% - 100%

- Landbanked property

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Shaping the Political Landscape of Portsmouth, Va. 1990-2000
Redevelopment of African American Residents: 1990 to 2000
Redeveloped Neighborhoods are Gutted
Midtown Lands Portsmouth’s First Wal-Mart Supercenter

Retail is finally returning to Portsmouth, and it is “super sized.” For several years Economic Development has worked hard to market Portsmouth to local, regional and national retailers. In May, the world’s largest retailer announced plans to purchase the 23-acre former MidCity Shopping Center site and build a Super Wal-Mart Center – a first for Portsmouth. The mega retailer will open a 204,000 square foot store in 2006 and stock the shelves with groceries, general merchandise, gardening materials and pharmaceuticals.

“It’s the key to the development of Midtown,” Mayor James W. Holley III said. “We’ve been waiting for them to come. It’s going to be like a new beginning there for development.”

Economic Development Director Steven L. Lynch said Wal-Mart’s arrival would make it easier for the city to draw other retailers. “This is now our first step,” he said. “And it’s a pretty strong first step. Wal-Mart’s presence really does strengthen our ability to redevelop the I.C. Norcom site, and the whole retail corridor.”

As part of its Redevelopment Plan for Midtown, the Portsmouth Redevelopment and Housing Authority purchased the mostly vacant MidCity Shopping Center in 2004. Wal-Mart will purchase the property for $3.6 million and spend an additional $920,000 upgrading the site to include moving a sewer main and installing a new traffic light on Frederick Boulevard to accommodate the increased traffic.

Demolition of the old shopping center is nearing completion, and Wal-Mart will begin construction in the fall.
Aerial Photos Show Results of Clearance

Empty Blocks
Illustrated
2006 Aerial
Photos from
Google Earth
(Can use USGS Orthoquads)
Infrared Aerial Photograph Shows Bull-dozed Homes (Vegetative Layer) in Two Redeveloped Neighborhoods

Hattfournville

Southside
Fairwood Homes

was a predominantly-minority neighborhood of 1500 affordable rental units. Purchased in 1984 for redevelopment to create new affordable homes, the new owners were thwarted when the City rezoned the property as office/commercial, specifying that it would not enforce Code. Eventually exposed by the local newspaper, the City then issued 4,964 citations in one day. Between 1980 and 2000, 22 people in house fires – the last a 7-year-old girl.

Photo: The Virginian-Pilot, 2001
Job Creation from Previous Efforts

Employed Residents of Redeveloped Neighborhoods in Military

- Married Women
- Single Women

Percent in the Military
Businesses in Redevelopment Area 2005:
ABC Store, convenience store, closed fast-food restaurant
City Landbanked Lots 2005:
Mowing jobs outsourced to Suffolk, Va company
Redevelopment’s Contribution to a Sustainable Community

Portsmouth, Virginia

Population Trends

110,000
105,000
100,000
95,000
90,000


104,577 103,900 100,565 93,999

Source: U.S. Census
Result for Minority Neighborhoods:

- Loss of homes;
- No moving expenses;
- Disenfranchisement;
- Lower property values;
- No new jobs;
- Threats to Public Health:
  - Stress
  - Crime.
Result of Law Suit:

- $1.8 million settlement for displaced residents
- Establishment of a fair housing center in a nearby Virginia city.