

Moved Out to Where?

Initial Relocation Destinations of Former Public Housing Residents in Atlanta A Preliminary Brief

*Georgia State University Urban Health Initiative**

December 1, 2009



Packing up at the Bowen Home on-site public library as demolition began. June 2009.

***Contacts: Dr. Deirdre Oakley, 404-413-6511; doakley1@gsu.edu; Dr. Erin Ruel, 404-413-6530; eruel@gsu.edu; Dr. Lesley Reid, 404-413-6521; lesleyreid@gsu.edu**

Background

By 2010 the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) will become the first city in the Nation to eliminate traditional public housing. In early 2007 the agency announced plans to demolish the remaining 10 family public housing communities as well as two senior high rises, affecting some 10,000 residents. There are currently no plans to build replacement housing.

These plans reflect on-going national housing policies to deconcentrate the poverty long associated with public housing. In 1992 the HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) Program was created by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to transform public housing by replacing these communities with mixed-income housing, where about one-third of the new units are set aside at the income levels of former public housing residents. The AHA has been at the forefront of such efforts building 10 nationally acclaimed mixed-income projects between 1994 and 2004.

The current AHA initiative is not another HOPE VI program. The loosening of regulations in the mid-2000s governing the demolition and disposition of public housing authorized under Section 18 of the 1937 Housing Act has enabled housing authorities to carry out demolitions without the obligation to replace even a portion of the eliminated housing units. Because relocation relies solely on voucher (formerly Section 8) subsidies to private market rental housing for those who qualify, measuring the effectiveness of this initiative hinges upon what types of neighborhoods residents end up in and how their lives are impacted over time.

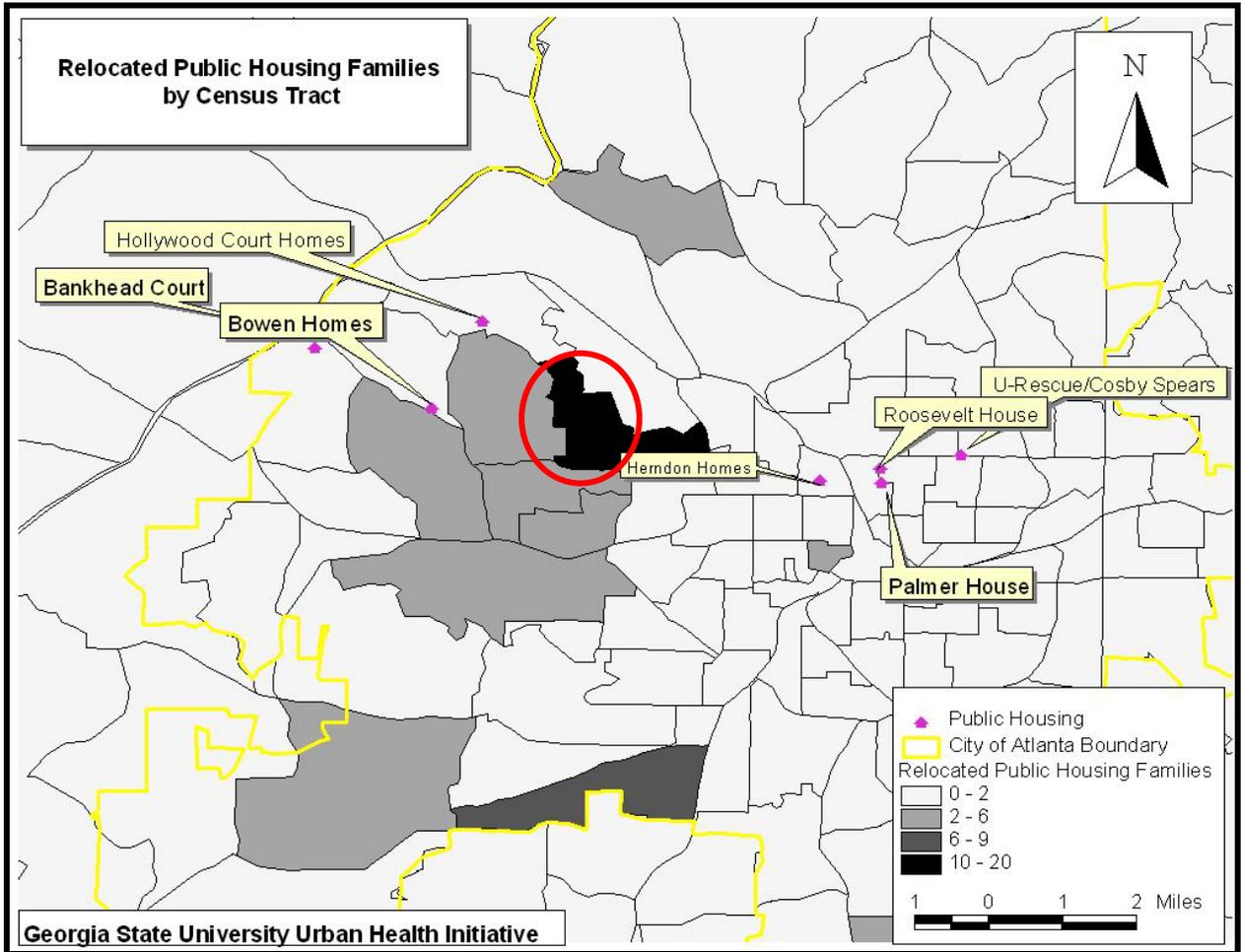
The Georgia State (GSU) Urban Health Initiative is following 300 residents from six of the public housing communities earmarked for demolition including four family communities (Bankhead, Bowen, Herndon and Hollywood) and two senior high rises (Palmer and Roosevelt Houses). In addition, we are following 70 residents from Cosby Spear, a senior high rise currently not slated for demolition. The purpose of our study is to follow this cohort over time (with Cosby Spear as a comparison site) to examine how relocation impacts their lives: Do they end up in better neighborhoods and have improved, more stable living conditions? How is their health and overall well-being affected by relocation?

This brief is a preliminary follow up to our baseline pre-relocation report issued in December 2008. Here we report on initial destination neighborhoods characteristics for the first 200 families and seniors in our cohort who have moved. Not all the seniors have moved yet but are expected to by early 2010.

I. A Snap Shot of Initial Relocation Characteristics

- a.** Of those who have moved so far, only three moved out-of-state and seven outside the City of Atlanta limits.
- b.** Approximately five percent did not get a voucher. The most common reason for this has been a delay in receiving an official record expungement for a non-convicted crime. The percentage of residents in our cohort that did not receive a voucher is significantly lower than for all relocated residents. The AHA has officially stated that 30 percent of those moved did not qualify for a voucher.
- c.** Ten residents in our cohort have passed away and another six are too ill to continue participation. All of these residents reside or resided in the senior high rises.
- d.** Of the 122 census tracts within the City of Atlanta, seniors have moved to only *seven* while families have moved to 63
- e.** Families are not moving very far from their origin public housing neighborhood with the average distance being three miles. The destination neighborhoods are predominantly African American with an average poverty rate of 30 percent (based on 2000 census information). While this poverty rate is high, it is lower than the public housing neighborhoods which had an average poverty rate of 44 percent.
- f.** Despite the reduction in the neighborhood poverty rate for the families, they remain geographically clustered on the far southwest and near northwest sides of the city.
- g.** The census tract where the majority of seniors have relocated to has a poverty rate that is almost twice as high as the origin senior high rises (48 percent) and is not as racially diverse (95 percent African American versus 42 percent).

II. Destination Neighborhoods for Families



Families are clustering on the southwest and near northwest sides of the city, although there are several families who have moved to Buckhead (far northwest) which is the affluent majority white section of the city.

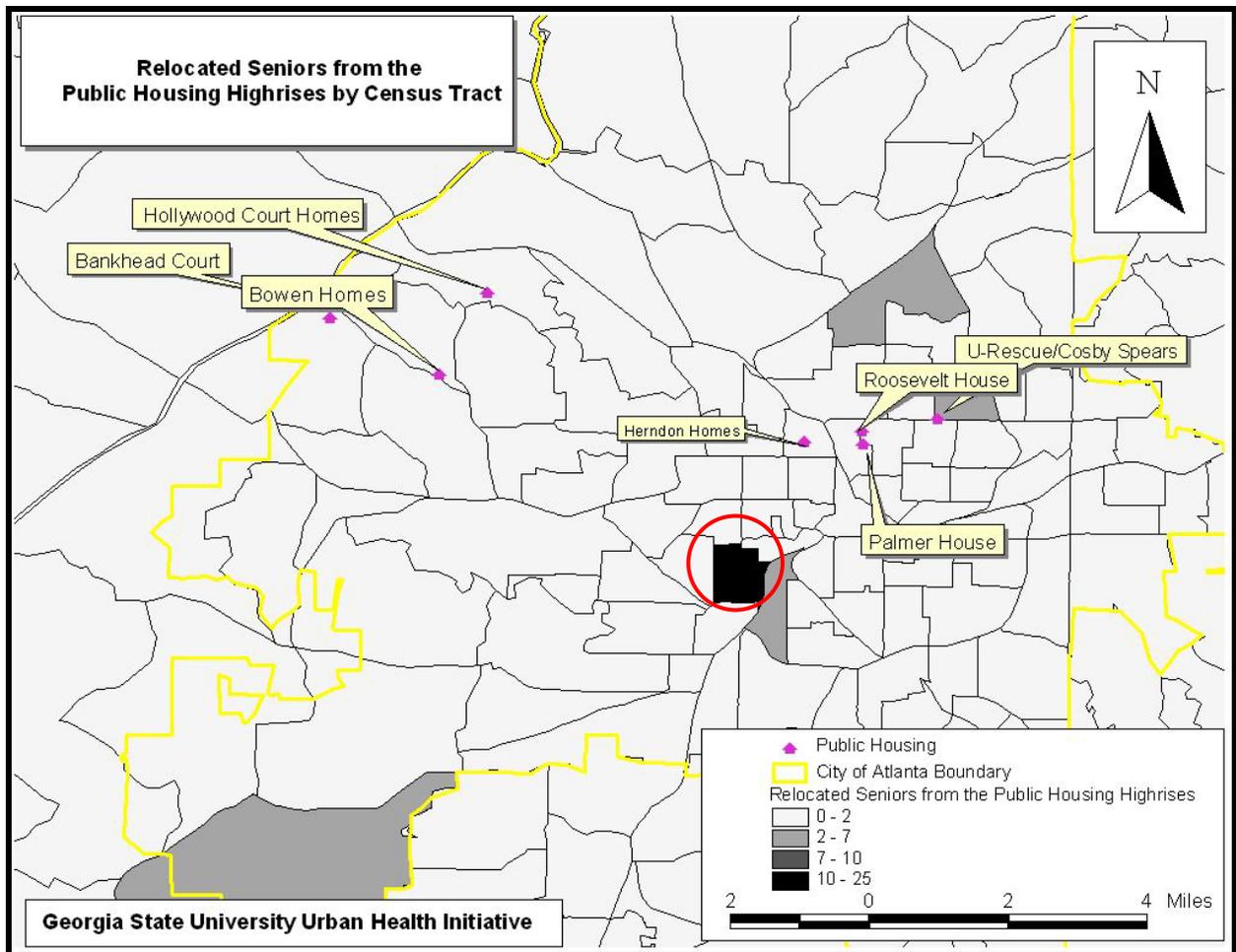
Average Census Tract Characteristic	Family Public Housing	Destination Neighborhoods	Tract w/the Most Relocated Families
Percent Black	94.51	90.35	96.74
Percent Female Headed-HHD	72.53	56.42	72.48
Percent Unemployment	17.44	16.45	19.37
Percent Poverty	44.02	30.01	35.02
Median Household Income (\$)	21,000	27,328	25,592

Source: Census 2000

The majority are moving to poor, predominantly African American neighborhoods. However, on average, the destination neighborhoods have significantly less poverty (30 versus 44 percent) than the public housing neighborhoods. The unemployment levels are similar (16.45 versus

17.44 percent). There are fewer female-headed households in the destination neighborhoods (56.42 versus 72.53) and the median household income is slightly higher (\$27,328 versus \$21,000). But if we examine the census tract (circled in red on the map) with the most relocated families, the socioeconomic characteristics are very similar to that of the public housing neighborhoods with the exception of the poverty rate, which, while higher than the average for all relocated tracts, is still nine percent lower than the average for the public housing tracts.

III. Destination Neighborhoods for the Seniors



Seniors in our cohort have relocated to only *seven* census tracts within the city and most have moved to one of these tracts (circled in red on the map). The apartment building in this tract is the renovated John O Chiles Senior High Rise now called the Atrium. John O Chiles was a public housing high rise demolished and redeveloped under the HOPE VI program. While it is now a senior mixed income complex, it is in a very high poverty neighborhood.

Average Census Tract Characteristic	Senior High Rises	Destination Neighborhoods	Tract w/ the Most Relocated Seniors
Percent Black	42.57	60.29	95.09
Percent Female Headed-HHD	61.33	56.84	75.59
Percent Unemployment	10.12	16.12	17.01
Percent Poverty	25.09	24.72	48.65
Median Household Income (\$)	34,464	37,281	13,880

Source: Census 2000

Across the seven census tracts that the seniors have moved to the neighborhood characteristics are similar to that of the high rises. However, the destination neighborhoods are less racially diverse – African Americans comprise 60.29 percent of the destination tracts as compared to 42.57 percent in the high rise tracts. In addition the unemployment rate is higher in the destination tracts (16.12 versus 10.12). Thus, the seniors do not appear to be experiencing improved neighborhood conditions through relocation. What’s more, if we examine the census tract where the majority of seniors have moved, the socioeconomic characteristics stand in sharp contrast to the high rise tracts. This tract, which is where the Atrium is located, has a poverty rate of 48.65 percent and the median household income is only \$13,880. It is also far less racially diverse (95 percent African American).

IV. Summary

While the neighborhoods that the former public housing residents from the family communities are moving to have an average lower poverty rate, they are still very poor and predominantly African American. What this implies is that the policy goal of deconcentrating poverty is only partially being achieved. In addition, our analysis indicates a visible geographic clustering of families in six census tracts on the southwest and near northwest areas of the city. This indicates that the policy goal of dispersion is not entirely being met either. In fact, this pattern is suggestive of *reconcentration*. In addition, although the average poverty rate is noticeably lower (30 percent on average versus 44 percent on average) it is unclear what the specific impacts are on improved quality of life.

The neighborhood situation for the former public housing residents from the senior high rises is far clearer cut. First, dispersion is not happening: seniors in our study have relocated to only seven census tracts in the city. Second, across all the destination neighborhoods there appears to be little improvement in terms of neighborhood quality. Third, the census tract where the vast majority of seniors have relocated has a much higher poverty rate is far less racially diverse. For the seniors it appears that instead of poverty deconcentration the reverse is happening. The majority of housing authorities in the country are renovating rather than demolishing senior public housing. Thus, these preliminary trends in Atlanta raise some serious policy concerns about the fate of relocated public housing seniors.