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### CHA mixed-income building has class clash

#### Poor renters and condo owners at odds, but experts say results of the experiment are mixed

By Sara Olkon

Tribune reporter

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Low-income apartment dwellers and middle-class condo owners have shared Westhaven Park Tower since the building opened in 2006 -- an innovative setup that the city hoped would unite residents and exemplify Chicago's \$1.6 billion overhaul of public housing.

Proximity, however, has not led to harmony.

The most recent skirmish inside the 113-unit midrise on Hermitage Avenue on the West Side concerned building security. Another flare-up centered on the proper use of the lobby: Public housing residents -- who make up a third of the building -- saw it as a place to hang out; condo owners did not.



Kathy Quickery, president of the building's condominium association, put it bluntly in a letter to the CHA last month: "After living in the building for three years, I consider the project a failure for homeowners."

The mixed-income building is part of a local and national movement to house poor families side by side with working professionals instead of segregating them in gang-infested, dilapidated ghettos. Critics and supporters of the idea note that there have been conflicts. But they disagree about whether the tower's troubles show that the CHA's overall effort is struggling.

"There's no question there is tension," said Westhaven's developer, Rich Sciortino. He said "95 percent" of the problems stemmed from residents and "problematic" guests who live in four of the 34 CHA units. "The remaining 30 are just as upset about the nuisance. Nobody wants to live in that environment."

Mark Joseph, a professor at Case Western Reserve University who studies Chicago's integrated communities with colleagues at the University of Chicago, said results of the effort are mixed in Chicago and nationally.

The "developments have been very successful at attracting market-rate buyers and renters, particularly in areas seen as an attractive location," Joseph said.

Westhaven Park Tower, built after Henry Horner Homes public housing complex was razed, features

landscaped walkways, central air conditioning and great views of downtown.

"Many of the [CHA] residents never felt like they would live in a place like that," Joseph said. "On the other hand, there are things that have increased the stress level. ... Some feel others are watching them, making assumptions about them, identifying them as a cause of some of the issues of the development."

At Westhaven, residents and owners complained that hostility has marred the spirit of the building.

Lester Roper, a public housing resident, described the relations between some owners and CHA residents as "very antagonistic."

"It's a hum ... you definitely feel it," Roper said.

He believes the disagreement cuts along racial lines. Most of the CHA residents are black, and the condo owners and their renters are more racially diverse.

But Antwan Dobson, an owner and former condo president who is African-American, argues the problems have been more about lifestyle differences. Dobson, who was raised by a foster parent on the West Side, said he understands isolation and struggle.

"They've been so confined to a couple of blocks," he said of public housing residents. "I try to teach them the socially acceptable lifestyle."

Sometimes the lesson isn't welcome. Dobson played a central role in what grew into one of the first big skirmishes between owners and CHA residents at Westhaven. In fall 2006, Dobson, then condo president, said he received calls from real estate agents who complained that residents were lounging for long periods of time in the lobby, making the building less attractive to buyers.

"This is not Starbucks," Dobson said of the lobby. "It's a place of transition."

He confronted some residents, but many bristled and kept meeting there.

Then Dobson, with help from a caretaker, removed the lobby furniture and locked it in a room restricted for use by condo owners.

About a week passed before Sciortino said he stepped in, talked to residents and worked with the condo board to return the furniture.

"I thought that was a very heavy-handed way of dealing with this," Sciortino said of the removal.

An elderly CHA resident shook his head when asked about the incident.

"They stopped people from sitting down," said the resident, who did not want his name used, fearing repercussions from CHA officials for speaking out. "You ain't allowed to hang out."

To be sure, not all condo owners are critics. Ruth Terefe, who grew up in Ethiopia, said she would buy her home again. Her disappointment stems not from the mix of neighbors but from a steep rise in condo fees. When she bought in April 2006, she paid \$270 per month. Now, for six months, Terefe said she must pay \$620 to cover for owners struggling or in foreclosure.

She said the mixed-income community at Westhaven Park "works but it's not the ideal situation."

"I'm concerned about how other buyers might perceive it," she said.

Matt Aguilar, a CHA spokesman, defended the mixed-income model used at Westhaven and 14 developments across the city.

"We know from residents' stories and available data that mixed-income communities work," he wrote in a prepared statement. "They are a unique and important part of their neighborhoods, attracting diverse populations due to their great value and locations."

The 79 condo units sold out in 2006, Sciortino said, with owners paying on average \$225,000 per unit. Neither he nor CHA officials would say how much the agency -- or residents -- pay to rent the 34 units.

Concerns about security, in part because of the neighborhood's former reputation, were at the root of the most recent dust-up.

This spring and a year earlier, condo owners railed against CHA officials when they signaled they would stop paying a \$15,000 yearly supplement for a lobby security guard.

Quickery, who is white, said some public housing residents and their guests were responsible for "99 percent" of incidents, including domestic disturbances, and have been spotted sleeping overnight in trash collection rooms and stairwells.

CHA officials disagreed.

"All records we have received indicate that our public housing residents have not caused any significant problems at the property nor created a need for additional security," Tim Veenstra, CHA's senior vice president, wrote in April in a letter to the developer.

Crystal Palmer, a longtime public housing leader and a tower resident, said homeowners were taking the wrong approach.

"This is an opportunity for the homeowners and the public housing residents to unite," she said. "But the homeowners are going at this the wrong way. Everyone wants security."

Earlier this month, CHA officials met with condo owners and again agreed to pay the security supplement.

"We look forward to our continuing partnership and to a successful and peaceful environment for all residents," Aguilar said.

The repeated friction at Westhaven has left some residents wary. Dobson said he questions his decision to invest in the building.

"I don't think they intentionally oversold the place," he said, referring to the building's marketing efforts. "I just think the adversities weren't all thought out."

[solkon@tribune.com](mailto:solkon@tribune.com)

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