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**Public Housing Risks and Alternatives:**

# **Uniacke Square in North End Halifax**

**by Jim Silver**

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# Public Housing Risks and Alternatives: Uniacke Square in North End Halifax

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## Introduction

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Large 1960s-style inner-city public housing projects are being torn down all across North America, replaced at least in part by market housing that is beyond the financial reach of the former tenants. Thousands of low-income public housing rental units are disappearing; tens of thousands of low-income tenants are being displaced. In most cases this return to the bulldozing of the 'urban renewal' era of the 1960s is part of the "war of places" (HRM April 2004) engaged in by cities in competition with each other for capital that is mobile, and for skilled workers who seek a particular style of urban life. Cities are reconfiguring themselves to meet these kinds of competitive demands, and in many North American cities the result is the gentrification of downtown and neighbouring spaces that has placed public housing projects and their tenants at risk.

Uniacke Square in North End Halifax is one such case. Located immediately north of the Halifax central business district and three short blocks from the Halifax harbour, Uniacke Square is home to the kind of spatially concentrated racialized poverty that has become common in urban areas in the past 30 years. It is a con-

tradictory space: stigmatized by many Haligonians as a place of drugs, vice and violence; yet with a strong sense of community and enough strengths that, were a deliberate and strategic program of public investment in community-led revitalization to be undertaken, it could become a model for healthy and vibrant, albeit low-income, communities.

In this paper I examine the case of Uniacke Square, in the context of the forces currently shaping downtown Halifax and other urban centres, the experience of inner-city public housing projects elsewhere in North America, and the conditions leading to gentrification in neighbourhoods close to central business districts. I argue that these forces are at work in North End Halifax, and are placing Uniacke Square and its tenants at risk. And I consider the alternative, which is public investment in the form of neighbourhood revitalization that is built on the strengths of, and undertaken with and in the interests of, low-income tenants. This community-led, community-building approach, I argue, is preferable for low-income people in an era when affordable, good quality, low-income rental housing is in perilously short supply.

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## The Case of Halifax

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Halifax is the capital of Nova Scotia, and effectively the economic and cultural centre of Atlantic Canada. Built around Halifax harbour, the second largest natural ice-free port in the world, the city is home to two world-class container terminals, is a major multi-modal transport hub that is the gateway to Canada for the movement of freight from the east, and is the headquarters of the east coast Navy and Coast Guard. Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is home to six universities and the largest and most sophisticated health facilities in the region, boasts an attractive downtown harbour-front with a well-maintained historic district, offers a natural environment in its surrounding areas that is exceptionally attractive, and is a major tourist centre (HRM 2006: 83). City leaders are now seeking to position Halifax for the world of the twenty-first century, hoping to build on the strengths of the city in order to attract mobile businesses and skilled, upper-income people with purchasing power and a desire for a sophisticated urban lifestyle. Other cities are doing the same (see Hackworth 2007). In the case of Halifax this involves, among other measures, a concentrated effort to promote “central city revitalization” and “capital city image enhancement and promotion”, and to “...provide a high quality living environment, a wide range of civic and cultural amenities and a vibrant arts and entertainment scene” in order to “...attract well-educated individuals who are willing to pay...” for such a lifestyle (HRM April 2004: 13). Those developing this kind of urban strategy, intended to position Halifax favourably in the “war of places” (HRM April 2004: 2) being fought between global cities in the

late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, identify Halifax’s relatively high ranking in the “talent index” and “bohemian index” as strengths to build upon. Halifax ranks fourteenth in North America in the “talent index”, which measures the proportion of the population over the age of 18 years who hold a university degree. Halifax ranks first in this index among similarly sized cities in Canada, and second (after Ottawa) among cities of any size in Canada. On the “bohemian index”, which measures the proportion of the population employed in artistic and creative occupations, Halifax ranks seventh in North America and second in Canada (after Victoria) among similarly sized cities (HRM April 2004: 13-14). These characteristics, the promotion of which is based on the work of Richard Florida (2002), are seen as strengths that Halifax should build upon to create a vibrant downtown and sophisticated urban culture attractive to mobile, upper-income individuals and knowledge-based companies.

This way of thinking about Halifax and its future is consistent with what elsewhere has been called the “neoliberal city” (Hackworth 2007). In the neoliberal city, downtowns and urban cores once abandoned as part of the mid-century process of suburbanization are now being revitalized and reconfigured, with the result that “...the inner city of many large cities is now dominated by tony neighbourhoods, commercial mega-projects, luxury condominiums, and expensive boutique retail shops” (Hackworth 2007: 99). Integral to this neoliberal spatial reconfiguration of twenty-first century urban centres is the process of gentri-

fication, which takes place at least in part to meet the needs of the kinds of people that Halifax and most other urban centres now seek to attract, but which places at risk such structural legacies of mid-twentieth century Keynes-ianism as inner-city public housing projects. Hackworth (2007: 149) describes this process as follows:

“...gentrification is the knife-edge neighbourhood-based manifestation of neoliberalism. Not only has it created a profit opportunity for real estate capital, but it has also created a high-profile ideological opportunity to replace physically Keynesian managerialist landscapes of old—represented by public housing, public space, and so on—with the entrepreneurial privatized landscapes of the present”.

Crump (2002: 582) makes a similar argument: “the demolition of public housing erases from the landscape the highly stigmatized structures of public housing, aiding in the *reimagining of the city* as a safe zone for commerce, entertainment and culture”.

This is precisely the risk faced by the low-income tenants of Uniacke Square, located, as they are, immediately contiguous to a downtown Halifax that city leaders and planners seek to revitalize in ways consistent with the privatizing thrust of neoliberalism. All that is public is at risk of being made private. The consequences are likely to be similar to what has happened in other urban centres: a process of gentrification that serves the interests of the more well-to-do at the expense of those who are poor. This is a particularly dangerous trend at a time when low-income rental housing is everywhere in short supply.

## **The Shortage of Low-Income Rental Housing**

Rental housing has been in declining supply all across Canada for years. This has been especially the case for low-income renters—those most in need of affordable housing. Kent (2002: 9) has recently called affordable housing “...the greatest of urban deficiencies”. Private developers have not invested in low-income rental units for many years because the profits that can be earned are too low (Carter and Polevychk 2004: 7). For example, rental housing was 27 percent of all new housing constructed in Ontario from 1989 to 1993; it was 2 percent of new housing built in Ontario in 1998 (Layton 2000: 79). “While construction began on more than 30,000 rental units every year during the 1970s in Ontario, this figure had fallen to approximately 2,000 by the end of the 1990s” (Le Goff 2002: 4). The result has been “a dramatic decline in the availability of low rent units” across the country (Pomeroy 2004: 7). And since 1993 the federal government has largely abandoned the production of social housing, with the result that there are now long waiting lists in most cities for access to social housing (CCPA-Mb 2005:15; Carter 2000: 5 and 11; Hulchanski 2002: 8). Canada now has “...the smallest social housing sector of any major Western nation...” other than the USA (Hulchanski 2002: iv; Hulchanski and Shapcott 2004: 6). The result is that in Canada, the “ultimate housing problem” is the shortage of low-income rental housing (Hulchanski 2002: 17). As a recent study by the Toronto Dominion Bank (Drummond, Burleton and Manning 2003: ii) noted: “...the overall supply of rental housing in Canada has stagnated in recent years, and has actually been receding at the lower end of the rent range—the segment of the market

where lower-income individuals with affordability problems are concentrated”.

A shortage of low-income rental housing plagues Halifax as well. This has been the case for decades (Stephenson 1957: 36 and 46). In 2001, 44 percent of renters in the Halifax Regional Municipality paid 30 percent or more of their income on shelter, “...which is one of the highest in the country” (HRM March 2004: iv), and the proportion of Nova Scotian households paying more than 50 percent of their income on housing is the highest in the country (Fairless 2004). The income of renters in the HRM is less than half the income of home-owners, the number of new rental units being built is low and does not meet the demand, and the demand is growing as more people choose to live close to downtown Halifax (HRM March 2004:10-12). The provincial government of Nova Scotia has not implemented policies or programs to adequately address this problem, and the withdrawal of the federal government from provision of social housing in 1993 has meant that “since the mid-1990s, there has been virtually no production of new housing in HRM [there has been some, but it has been minimal J.S.] due to a lack of funds from senior levels of government”, and worse, “funds are not available to maintain existing affordable housing units”, putting further pressure on the supply of low-income rental units (HRM March 2004: 40). Thus, for example, there were 961 applicants on the waiting list for the 184 units at Uniacke Square in North End Halifax as of November 30, 2007 (Fleming, personal communication, January 10, 2008).

Gentrification is a major factor in this process. The authors of the Toronto-Dominion Bank study (Drummond, Burleton and Manning 2003: 11) argue

that : “...gentrification pressures caused much of the decline in affordable rental housing supply in many Canadian CMAs”. Layton (2000: 140 and 147) adds that: “Canada’s urban centres ... lost a minimum of 13,000 units of rental housing between 1995 and 1999 owing to demolition of often perfectly sound housing units, or its conversion to condominium ownership out of the range of those in need of affordable housing”. The result is that “...as gentrification moves through communities, there is a net reduction of low-cost housing”. Le Goff (2002: 10) concurs: “In the past few years many affordable rental units have been converted into condominiums or renovated into high-end housing”. When this happens in areas like North End Halifax, it removes what Ley (1996: 26) refers to as “...the historic inner city role of providing affordable housing”, thus making worse what is already the “ultimate housing problem”.

### **The Destruction of Public Housing**

It is in the context of this shortage of low-income rental housing, this “ultimate housing problem”, that tens of thousands of units of subsidized public housing are being destroyed across North America, making a bad situation for low-income people still worse. The destruction of public housing is best understood as the other side of the coin that involves “central city revitalization” and “capital city image enhancement” (HRM April 2004: 13). Along with this creative process goes the destructive process of removing the public housing that does not fit with the “image enhancement” sought by the competitive twenty-first century city, nor with the needs of the mobile, upper-income individuals for whose so-

phisticated consumption tastes urban downtowns are being revitalized and reconfigured. For those who see urban downtowns in this way, public housing is considered a relic of a now outmoded past. Such an interpretation is reinforced by the negative stereotyping and stigmatization to which inner-city public housing projects and their residents are constantly subjected. In this “war of spaces”, Uniacke Square and its tenants are at risk. This is the case for public housing throughout North America.

Large inner-city public housing projects in the USA and Canada are the products of the urban renewal era of the 1950s and 1960s. Low-income inner-city housing, usually labeled “slum housing”, was bulldozed in the name of “progress”. Knock down “slums” and build new housing and the problems associated with poverty would be solved, it was then believed. In many cases, however, residents would have been better served if neighbourhoods had been retained and communities kept intact by means of housing renovation. In their place there arose concentrated blocks of public housing, often laid out in a distinctive design with the street grid system removed and replaced by large open spaces. In bigger cities public housing projects took the form of row upon row of towering, multi-story blocks in the midst of wide-open spaces, a design inspired by Swiss modernist architect Le Corbusier (Hall 1988). In St. Louis, for example, the Pruitt-Igoe project consisted of thirty-three eleven-story buildings; in Chicago, Robert Taylor Homes, the world’s largest public housing project, comprised “a two mile stretch of twenty-eight sixteen-story buildings containing over 4,300 units, completed in 1963” (von Hoffman 1996: 433).

These public housing projects soon became home to the poorest of the poor, and in the USA, to disproportionate numbers of African-Americans. It has been argued that public housing became a means of *confining* African-Americans to inner cities, while Whites fled to the suburbs, thus “preserving racial ghettos” and spatial segregation (Hirsch 1983). The same, as will be seen, could be said to be the case for Uniacke Square. In Chicago, of the fifty-one public housing projects approved between 1955 and 1966, 49 were in Black-dominated inner-city neighbourhoods (Biles 2000: 150). White suburban neighbourhoods fought to keep African-Americans out (Fuerst 2003; Biles 2000; Hirsch 1983), confining them largely to inner-city neighbourhoods. The result was the spatial concentration in inner-city neighbourhoods of racialized poverty. Chicago’s Robert Taylor Homes originally housed some 27,000 people “of whom approximately 20,000 were children, all were poor, and almost all were Black” (Biles 2000:149). By 1998, of the 11,000 tenants then in Robert Taylor Homes, 99 percent were Black, 96 percent were unemployed, 84 percent earned less than \$10,000 annually, and 70 percent were under the age of 21 years (Biles 2000: 265). This is spatially concentrated racialized poverty.

Nevertheless, in the early years these public housing projects worked well. People were happy with their new and improved accommodation. Most public housing projects placed a cap on the proportion of tenants on social assistance, often at 25 percent, thus creating mixed-income communities in which most residents, although low-income, were working. In a study based on interviews with seventy-nine people who lived or worked in Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) projects in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s,



Fuerst (2003: 2) shows that CHA projects:

“Helped thousands of Chicagoans escape slum housing conditions and enter a world that offered first-rate housing, a close-knit community, and the positive pride that comes from a shared experience. In short, public housing and the CHA once worked—spectacularly well”.

However, by the mid-late 1960s most large inner-city public housing projects were acquiring a distinctly negative reputation, and were increasingly seen as being home not only to concentrations of racialized poverty, but also to drug-dealing, gangs and violence. What caused this transformation?

The problems that came to characterize inner-city public housing projects were not caused by public housing as such. They were caused by changes in public policy, and by broad socio-economic forces. First, public housing gradually became home to the poorest of the poor, whose need for good quality, low-rental housing was least likely to be met by the private for-profit housing market. With what were likely the best of intentions, the very poor were admitted in ever-larger numbers, so that public housing increasingly became “housing of last resort”. This was worsened by amendments to the US Housing Act in 1969, 1970 and 1971, that required that families whose incomes rose above a certain level had to leave public housing projects, which therefore became housing *only* for the poor. It is the resulting spatial concentration of poverty that is the problem, not public housing as such. This was made worse by the fact that broad, socio-economic forces, especially suburbanization and de-industrialization, increased

the numbers of poor people in inner cities, and reduced the opportunities available to them. Inner cities throughout North America suffered from the process of suburbanization, which resulted in the ‘hollowing out’ of the inner city—those most able to move did so; businesses and social infrastructure followed—leaving behind those least financially able to move. This was followed by the dramatic economic restructuring of the past 30 years and more, which included a de-industrialization which removed from inner cities the very kinds of decently paid jobs that would otherwise have enabled many of those now among the poor to pull themselves out of poverty.

The result was that most large public housing projects were located in inner-city neighbourhoods that were suffering the effects of post-war suburbanization and de-industrialization. Those in the worst circumstances—and particularly women with children—were directed to public housing, which thus became “housing of last resort”, the new, late-twentieth century poorhouses. Querica and Galster (1997: 538) refer to the “dramatic spatial transformation of America’s urban landscape during the last four decades”, which “left many public housing tenants in inner city areas with few opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Moreover, public housing developments found themselves in neighbourhoods with ever greater concentrations of poverty and the attendant social consequences”.

High proportions of those left in the ‘hollowed out’ American inner cities were, and are, African-Americans. They, in particular, have been adversely affected by

these broader socio-economic changes. Public housing, it is argued by some, served to confine them, in their poverty, to the inner city, enabling the maintenance of late-twentieth century urban, de facto segregation:

“The loss of manufacturing jobs devastated African-American communities and as social problems associated with joblessness spread, the spatial isolation of large public housing projects... acted as a spatial containment polity” (Crump 2003: 181; see also Venkatesh 2000: x; Popkin et al 2004).

A stigma increasingly became attached to public housing. In many peoples’ minds public housing came to be seen as the *cause* of the problems. Often the argument had to do with design. The distinctive design of inner-city public housing projects, with the absence of through streets and narrow walkways between buildings and wide-open spaces used by drug dealers, came to be seen to be the problem. In the early 1970s Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis was dynamited, on the grounds that it and others like it were “human disaster areas” (von Hoffman 1996: 436, referring to Rainwater 1970). In the late 1970s and especially 1980s public expenditure on maintenance and repair of public housing projects was reduced, the physical condition of existing units deteriorated, security worsened, and a bad situation became ever worse. The stigma long attached to public housing projects deepened, adding to the despair of many of those who lived there, and the growing stigmatization became a convenient cover for those determined to privatize and gentrify public housing.

### **Stigmatization, Privatization and Gentrification: HOPE VI**

The means for achieving this objective in the USA was HOPE VI—Home Ownership for People Everywhere—launched in 1993. HOPE VI arose from the work of the Congress of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, established in 1989. The Commission produced a National Action Plan calling for a ten-year strategy “to eliminate severely distressed public housing by 2000” (Turbov and Piper 2005: 7).

This objective was premised on the belief that the concentration of poverty in public housing projects was the problem, the solution for which was knocking down parts of large public housing projects and replacing them with mixed-income market housing. The result has been “a massive demolition and reconstruction effort” (Querica and Galster 1997: 549). The hope has been to create new, healthy, mixed-income neighbourhoods; many low-income people have been displaced in the process.

Many claims have been made about the success of HOPE VI. For example, Henry Cisneros, former US Housing and Urban Development (HUD) director and key promoter of HOPE VI in the 1990s said: “We are replacing the worst of the housing units ... that have, for too long, been the settings for our children’s urban nightmares.... Instead of mammoth apartment buildings, small-scale townhouse-style housing is being constructed” (quoted in Hackworth 2005: 45).

But what is really happening is the mass demolition of low-income rental units. Hackworth (2005: 35) argues that only about half of the new units being con-

structed will be available to and affordable by "...the residents whose homes were originally demolished". In Chicago, for example: "Over 8,200 units have been or are scheduled to be demolished, but only 2,821 public rentals are planned for replacement as part of the six HOPE VI grants the city received between 1994 and 2000" (Hackworth 2007: 58). Vale (2002: 1) adds that:

"On the basis of HUD data, researchers estimate that 11,000 units of public housing are being demolished each year, most of these previously occupied by residents earning less than 30 percent of the area's median income. When replacing these apartments with 'mixed-income communities', housing authorities are mixing in only about 4000 public housing units—and most of these are targeted to households with higher incomes than those of current housing residents".

Crump (2003: 185) observes further that:

"As the widespread demolition of inner city public housing projects proceeds throughout the United States, the built environment of the inner city is being remade. Public housing is rapidly being replaced by new urbanist townhouses, intended to re-engineer the class and racial structure of the city by bringing middle class European-Americans back to the inner city".

This is precisely the risk faced by Uniacke Square and its low-income residents. And the danger signs come not only from the US experience. They can also be discerned in the historical experience of North End Halifax in the 1960s. There is the risk that the wrongs committed and the damage done then, in the name of "urban renewal" and purportedly in the interests of low-income North End residents, are about to occur again.

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## The North End of Halifax and Uniacke Square

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Although in the nineteenth century some of the Halifax elite located their mansions on Brunswick Street overlooking the harbour, for the most part the historic North End was home to the working class that laboured in the area's naval dockyards and railway and associated industries. As Erickson (2004: xiii) has observed: "While most industrial capitalists lived in the South End, the vast majority of industrial workers lived in the North End" in relatively modest housing. Gottingen Street became the heart of the North End, the "People's Street", bustling with shops and activity of a wide variety of kinds. The 1917 Halifax Explosion leveled much of the northerly portion of the North End, and out of its destruction Thomas Adams, inspired by the "garden city" approach to town planning, built the Hydrostone district with its modest and attractive row houses and boulevards, located to the west of Needham Hill which is where the monument to the Explosion now stands. The southerly part of the North End, and Africville at the northern tip of the peninsula overlooking the Bedford Basin, were largely spared.

Two decades later the Second World War created an economic boom—as times of war have always done in this naval city—experienced in the working class North End in the form of a dramatically increased demand for housing. As Erickson (2004: xvii) describes it:

"To house the necessary workforce, owners of nearby North End dwellings carved them up into flats, apartments and rooms. As a result, the housing stock, already frayed from

decades of use and neglect, deteriorated even more".

From this North End neighbourhood with its deteriorated housing stock, many thousands of residents would relocate to the suburbs in the years following the Second World War, in a process of suburbanization replicated throughout North America (Jackson 1985).

Also relocating, but in their case forcibly and not to the suburbs, were the 400 African-Nova Scotian residents of Africville, located at the northernmost tip of the North End, beyond the paved roads. Settled by people of African descent since at least the early nineteenth century, Africville could be interpreted through two distinctly different lenses. The most commonly used lens saw Africville as a slum, comprised of crumbling shacks without running water and modern sewage facilities, and home to various forms of sin and debauchery. The other lens saw Africville, at least until the last decades of its existence, as a tightly-knit community centred on the Seaview African United Baptist Church, located in a near-rural setting where residents fished in and enjoyed the magnificent view of the Bedford Basin, and lived largely independent lives. Whatever the lens, to many it was where they wanted to live; it was home.

In the 1960s every resident of Africville was removed, some forcibly and all against their wishes. The City wanted the land on which they resided, and justified their forced relocation by reference to that which was negative about Africville.

The City had for decades abused the residents of Africville. In the nineteenth century they ran rail lines through the community, in some cases mere feet from existing homes. They located a “night soil” depository and the Rockhead Prison near the community, and later added the Infectious Diseases Hospital, oil storage tanks and a slaughterhouse. In the 1950s an open refuse dump was located beside Africville, approximately 350 feet from the western-most homes. Yet by the 1960s the community still did not have running water, nor sewers, nor paved roads. “Images of badly peeling paint, outhouses, heaps of scrap metal and abandoned cars allowed Haligonians to brand Africville a shanty town or slum” (Erickson 2004: 135; see also Clairmont and Magill 1999; Stephenson 1957), and served as the justification for the forcible relocation of residents and the bulldozing of their homes. The City wanted the land for industrial use, and the northerly extension of harbour facilities (Clairmont and Magill 1999:137-138; Stephenson 1957: 30). Many moved into the newly-constructed Uniacke Square, on Gottingen Street to the south of Africville, in the heart of the North End.

A better alternative was possible. Governments could have invested in Africville, bringing services up to the level of the rest of Halifax, and building creatively on the unique strengths of the community. Residents of Africville had a strong sense of themselves as a community; few were on social assistance; most raised healthy families in their modest homes; music was an important part of the lives of many. It cannot be an exaggeration to say that racism played a powerful role in the historic under-investment in, and the ultimate bulldozing of, this unique community. It is deeply ironic

that the Uniacke Square to which many were relocated now faces the very real possibility, as will be argued below, of suffering a similar fate, even though, as was the case in Africville, a better alternative is possible.

### **The Post-War Decline of Gottingen Street and Area**

By the time Uniacke Square was built—in 1966, in the near North End between Gottingen and Brunswick Streets, in part to house the Africville relocatees—Gottingen Street and the surrounding area were well along the path of a precipitous post-war process of decline. The character of the decline, similar in almost all important respects to what happened in many other North American inner cities, is shown by Table One (*next page*).

The decline of the North End Gottingen neighbourhood as revealed in Table One, particularly since 1961, is dramatic. Population declined in real terms—in 2001 it was just over 40 percent of its 1951 level; and declined relative to Halifax as a whole—from almost one in ten to about one in seventy-five (1.3 percent). People were leaving the North End in large numbers, many for the expanding suburbs. Persons per household declined sharply, from just over 4 in 1951 and 1961, to just under two in 1996. Although this turned around in 2001 to two and one-half, it still suggests that it was families with children who were disproportionately among those leaving the North End. This is confirmed by the decline in the proportion of the population in the Gottingen neighbourhood 14 years of age and under from 27 percent in 1951 to 16 percent in 1996 (Melles 2003:95). The proportion of those renting grew to just under 90 percent, compared to Halifax as

a whole at less than 40 percent. The proportion of those employed dropped sharply, from approximately two-thirds in 1951 to less than half in 2001—and this is reflected in the relative drop in average household income, from 60 percent of that in Halifax as a whole in 1971 to just 48 percent of Halifax as a whole in 2001, and in the growth in the proportion of those in Gottingen with incomes below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut Off, from 58 percent in 1981 to 65 percent, or almost two-thirds, in 1996, with a subsequent drop to 59 percent in 2001—a relative decline consistent with the experience in Canada as a whole (Silver 2007b:183).

Another indicator of the decline of the North End is to be found in the changing character of Gottingen Street itself. In 1950, Gottingen Street was the pulsing and thriving heart of the North End. Within a span of four blocks at the south end of Gottingen, closest to downtown,

there were a total of 130 retail and commercial services located on the street. These included ten different restaurants and cafes; two movie theatres; a combined total of nineteen physicians, dentists, lawyers and tailors: “Gottingen Street was the place to shop, dine and be entertained in the city” (Melles 2003: 14). Yet over the 50 year period to 2000, the total number of retail and commercial services located on that four-block area of Gottingen Street declined from 130 to 38, a total only slightly greater than the 35 vacancies by 2000, while the number of social and community services located there grew from one in 1960 to 19 in 2000.

“The abundance of social agencies, vacant buildings and vacant land evident by the year 2000 has changed the form and function of this four-block commercial district. In fact, one can no longer consider this portion of Gottingen Street a true commercial district.... The social agencies attract

<b>Table One: Gottingen Indicators to 2001</b>							
<b>Population</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>
Gottingen	11,939	13,070	7584	5194	5580	4494	4943
Halifax	133,931	183,946	222,637	277,727	320,501	332,518	359,190
Pop'n Gottingen as % of Halifax	8.9%	7.1%	3.4%	1.9%	1.7%	1.4%	1.3%
<b>Persons/household</b>							
Gottingen	4.1	4.3	3.7	2.3	2.1	1.9	2.6
<b>% employed</b>							
Gottingen	68%	75%	58%	56%	60%	51%	46%
<b>% tenant-occupied</b>							
Gottingen	78%	76%	83%	87%	87%	87%	89.5%
Halifax	45%	45%	50%	44%	42%	40%	38.2%
<b>Avg household income</b>							
Gottingen	n/a	n/a	\$6196	\$13,431	\$23,390	\$22,389	\$27 209
Halifax	n/a	n/a	\$10,293	\$23,807	\$46,786	\$48,015	\$56 361
Gottingen as % of Halifax	n/a	n/a	60.2%	56.4%	50.0%	46.6%	48.3%
<b>Incidence of low income</b>							
(%) Gottingen	n/a	n/a	n/a	58%	55%	65%	59.3%
(%) Halifax	n/a	n/a	n/a	35%	34%	40%	36.5%
<i>Source: Melles, 2003</i>							

only service users while the under-utilized spaces discourage any [other] type of street activity—a complete transformation from its previous expression and multi-purpose utility” (Melles 2003: 93).

This dramatic commercial decline, which accompanied the loss of population, is shown in Table Two.

### **The Bulldozers of Urban Renewal**

While a part of the explanation for the decline of Gottingen Street and the surrounding North End neighbourhood was the powerful impact that suburbanization had on inner cities almost everywhere in North America in the post-war period, another part was the particularly destructive impact of the “urban renewal” era of the 1960s on North End Halifax. The area immediately south of the North End and below Citadel Hill, around Jacob Street, was bulldozed in the 1960s and Scotia Square—a large retail/commercial/residential complex—was erected, located a stone’s throw from the Gottingen Street entrance to the North End, and attracting business away from Gottingen Street. The 1600 people displaced in this process were

relocated to Mulgrave Park, a large public housing project opened in 1962 and located north of Uniacke Square between Gottingen and Barrington Streets. Gottingen itself was re-configured from the “Main Street” of the North End to a traffic corridor re-designed to move cars rapidly from across the harbour in Dartmouth, over the A. Murray MacKay Bridge—one foot of which was planted where Africville had been located—to downtown and back. To achieve this, parking was banned on Gottingen Street and residential buildings behind and to the east of Gottingen were bulldozed, and the 660 people who had lived there were relocated, to create off-street parking lots (Melles 2003: 39; see also Stephenson 1957: 25-28).

Thus several urban renewal processes were going on at the same time in the 1960s, each having a dramatic effect on the North End. Africville was bulldozed at the North End’s northernmost tip, its residents forcibly relocated to the more central and southerly areas of the North End—many to Uniacke Square, opened in 1966. At the other end, the area immediately south of the Gottingen Street entrance to the North End was similarly bulldozed, many of its former residents relocated to Mulgrave Park. Thus two of

	<b>1950</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Retail	95	104	69	49	36	28
Financial	2	4	3	3	1	nil
Professional	19	13	9	5	5	1
Restaurants/cafes	10	13	11	7	6	8
Entertainment	4	4	3	6	6	1
Community/social services	nil	1	4	10	13	19
Vacant buildings	1	9	9	30	25	35
Vacant lots	2	1	nil	2	5	6
No return			2	11	7	16
Total retail/commercial	130	138	95	70	54	38
<i>Source: Melles 2003: 93.</i>						

the large public housing projects now located on Gottingen Street, Mulgrave Park and Uniacke Square, were "...born out of destruction of neighbourhoods" (Melles 2003: 41) that was everywhere a central and defining feature of urban renewal. As was the case elsewhere (Silver 2006b), these neighbourhoods were de-

finied as "slums" by people in positions of authority, who viewed them from the outside and who had little if any intimate knowledge of the lives of their residents, and who were unable or unwilling to see the many strengths that were there to be seen and to be built upon. A different and better alternative was possible.



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## Gentrification

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Gentrification, the concept, entered academic discourse in 1964, in the work of British sociologist Ruth Glass. Glass observed that after decades of inner-city disinvestment—the consequence in part of the post-war phenomenon of suburban sprawl—older working class neighbourhoods in London were being resettled by middle class or higher-income groups, and the original residents were being displaced.

“One by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period—which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation—have been upgraded once again.... Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed” (Glass 1964: xviii).

Writing some 25 years later, American anthropologist Elijah Anderson described a similar process in New York City:

“The Village can increasingly be described as a middle- to upper middle-class oasis. It is at present beset by the forces of *gentrification*, with developers, speculators, and more privileged classes gradually buying up properties inhabited by less well-off people of diverse backgrounds. Gambling on a

steady rise in property values, many old and new residents hope the area will become ‘hot’, trendy and expensive” (Anderson 1990).

All the elements of a definition of gentrification are to be found in these passages: the movement of money into older, core area neighbourhoods, ie., reinvestment in real estate; the movement of new and different groups of people into, and older, usually lower-income groups of people out of, such neighbourhoods; and the resulting creation of neighbourhoods with a different social character. This process is not confined to London or New York. “Gentrification today is ubiquitous in the central and inner cities of the advanced capitalist world” (Smith 1996: 38). North End Halifax is one such instance.

The literature contains references to neighbourhood characteristics that correlate with gentrification. Neighbourhoods that become gentrified tend to have proximity to the central business district, or to an ‘elite’ district, and architecturally interesting housing capable of renovation. They may have commercial facilities capable of being transformed into the kinds of shops and boutiques often associated with gentrified neighbourhoods (Beauregard 1986; Ley 1996). More broadly, gentrified neighbourhoods require “...an economy that supports the production of gentrifiers”, that is, an economy that produces “...a substantial body of professionals and managers working for government and for universities, hospitals, and other institutions. Gentrification is limited or absent in such cities as manufacturing centres, where advanced white-collar services are weakly

established” (Ley 1996: 24-25). These characteristics describe Halifax and its near North End.

Gentrification is not inevitable in any given neighbourhood, even those ‘vulnerable’ to the process. That this is so is in large part because gentrification is a *political* process. There are contending forces at play in any potentially gentrifiable neighbourhood. Some of these forces may see the “exchange value” in a neighbourhood, that is, they see the neighbourhood as a place to make profits, while others see the “use value” in a neighbourhood, that is, they see the neighbourhood as a place to live, as a community (Logan and Molotch 1987).

The result is political conflict between those who see a neighbourhood as a place to make money, and those who see a neighbourhood as a place to live. The outcome of this conflict is a product of the relative strengths, skills and tenacity of the contending forces. This neighbourhood-level political conflict occurs within the context of broader socio-economic forces: The movements of capital in search of profits; the socio-economic forces and policy decisions shaping a city’s course; the shifting character of social class as the consequence of broad socio-economic change; and the role played by the state. In the process of gentrification, a neighbourhood becomes ‘contested space’—some forces promote and some oppose gentrification.

Thus it becomes important to identify the players contesting this space. Who sees the North End Halifax neighbourhood as ‘exchange value’, and seeks to make profits from it? Who sees the neighbourhood as ‘use value’, and seeks to revitalize it without displacing existing residents? In whose interests does the local state act, and how?

## **“The Condos Are Coming”: Gentrification in North End Halifax**

### *a. qualitative indicators*

People interviewed in and around Uniacke Square in May 2007<sup>1</sup> made it clear that they believe a process of gentrification is underway in the neighbourhood. Most said things like: “property values are just going through the roof”; “gentrification is going so fast right now”; “this is a prime piece of real estate” because real estate is all about “location, location, location”; and “the condos are coming”. For example, The Brickyard is a brand new condo development on Brunswick Street, where Alexander School was once located, about a block from Uniacke Square. Units start at just over \$250,000. It features “modern amenities for a contemporary urban lifestyle”, and is for “those who enjoy the convenience and verve of city living” ([www.domusrealty.ca/en/home/homelistings/thebrickyard/default.aspx](http://www.domusrealty.ca/en/home/homelistings/thebrickyard/default.aspx). Accessed July 21, 2007). Located two

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1. Interviews were conducted with fifteen individuals who live and/or work in and around Uniacke Square in North End Halifax, May 14-18, 2007. These individuals were identified with the assistance of Darcy Harvey of Community Action on Homelessness, at whose invitation I had spoken on public housing in Halifax in September, 2006. At that time I also spoke, at their invitation, at the first-ever Uniacke Square Tenants’ Association conference. During that trip I met almost all of the fifteen people subsequently interviewed. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The project as a whole, and the interview format, were approved by the University of Winnipeg Senate Ethics Committee. In some cases in what follows I have identified particular interviewees; in others I have cited the interviews generally. All those interviewed are identified at the end of the References section of this paper.

streets down from the Brickyard, facing the harbour, is "Spice", another condo development offering "...loft style condominiums in the heart of downtown" (<<http://www.novacorpproperties.com/new.html>> Accessed July 21, 2007), and intended "to get young executives to live downtown again" (Sloane, personal interview, May 16, 2007). Units start at \$179,000. Further west on the other side of Gottingen Street is a home that has been flipped three times, completely gutted, and in May 2007 was listed for sale at \$650,000. There are houses in the neighbourhood that would now sell in the \$250,000–\$300,000 price range (Sloane, personal interview, May 16, 2007). A woman who grew up in the Uniacke Square area is reported to have referred to: "the recent quadrupling of the price of houses on the street where she grew up" (van Berkel 2007).

TransGlobe, a Toronto-based property management services firm, has purchased many rental properties in Halifax, starting in 2005, including the re-named Ocean Towers directly across the street from Uniacke Square. People are being displaced from Ocean Towers because rents "skyrocket when TransGlobe takes over a building" (Grant, personal interview, May 16, 2007). While the average rent in all of Peninsula North in 2006 was \$734 (CMHC 2006), apartments listed as available in Ocean Towers July 21, 2007 were renting from \$760 to \$1750 per month, while another nearby TransGlobe building on Gerrish had apartments available from \$875 to \$1600 per month ([www.gotransglobe.com/residential/form\\_search\\_results.asp?loc=Halifax#](http://www.gotransglobe.com/residential/form_search_results.asp?loc=Halifax#), accessed July 21, 2007). It is clear that TransGlobe is seeking to move Ocean Towers upscale. The building, located a mere two blocks north of Spice and The Brickyard, offers a magnificent view of

the Halifax harbour, and TransGlobe has added a fitness room and wireless services (*Chronicle Herald*, April 29, 2006: D5), plus stadium-style lights deliberately intended, according to TransGlobe's President, to make Ocean Towers appear to be a part of the downtown. "In the future, when people start thinking about Halifax, I think the city has expanded over Ocean Towers" (Bornais 2006).

This is part of a process by which the North End neighbourhood around Uniacke Square is being consciously remade into a part of the downtown, attractive to people with higher incomes. It is a strategy completely consistent with the objective of "central city revitalization" and "capital city image enhancement and promotion" (HRM April 2004: 13). So too are the expensive boutiques locating along Agricola Street (van Berkel 2007). All of this is part of a process of gentrification that has been underway for at least fifteen years (O'Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007), with the move into the neighbourhood of a substantial artist population and gay population, both typical of the early stages of the gentrification of neighbourhoods (Silver 2006c).

#### *b. quantitative indicators*

It is difficult to generate quantitative indicators of gentrification in the North End because Statistics Canada data are organized in such a way that very small areas, like the North End immediately around Uniacke Square, are subsumed within larger areas and, in the absence of expensive customized data, cannot be isolated. The data that we have are for Census district 10, in which the North End around Uniacke Square is but a part. The result is that the quantitative data that are available do not show the sharp increase in housing prices that is sug-

gested by the qualitative evidence. However, the data for Census district 10 do reflect, albeit in a modest way, the gentrification that the qualitative evidence suggests is well underway.

Table Three shows that the average price of housing of various kinds has been rising faster in North End Halifax than in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) as a whole in the period 1998 to 2007. The average price of detached bungalows, for example, rose by 86 percent in the North End compared to 67 percent in the HRM, while the average price of standard two-story houses rose by 60 percent in the North End compared to 46 percent in the HRM. Table Three also shows that, in addition to rising rapidly, average housing prices in North End Halifax are well beyond the reach of low-income earners and social assistance recipients. The average household income in North End Halifax in 2001 was \$27,209 (See Table One, p.14), and when 2006 data are available it is likely to be in the \$32,000–35,000 range, which could not possibly support a mortgage of \$160,000—the average price of a detached bungalow in North End Halifax in 2007. The case is worse for standard two-story

houses, the average price of which was \$295,000 in North End Halifax in 2007.

Table Four shows that rents have been rising almost as fast in North End Halifax as in the HRM, 30.4 percent compared to 31.2 percent from 1997 to 2006, and that the average North End rent, at \$734, is beyond the reach of the low-income earners and social assistance recipients that comprise the majority in Uniacke Square and surrounding area.

These housing prices and rental rates, and their trends in recent years, strongly suggest that a process of gentrification is well underway in North End Halifax, and that housing is being priced out of the reach of many North End residents. Uniacke Square is being squeezed into an ever-smaller space, and is vulnerable to the forces of gentrification.

### **North End Halifax As a Mixed-Income Neighbourhood**

There are those who would argue that North End Halifax is better understood as a mixed-income neighbourhood, with an already disproportionately high incidence of low-income households, and that the creation of the kind of housing

<b>Table Three: Housing Prices</b>				
<b>Detached bungalow</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>% change</b>
HRM	\$114,000	\$112,000	\$190,000	66.6%
North End	86,000	90,000	160,000	86.1%
<i>NE as % HRM</i>	75.4%	80.4%	84.2%	
<b>Standard Townhouse</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>% change</b>
HRM	n/a	\$92,000	\$164,000	78.2%
North End	n/a	89,000	160,000	79.8%
<i>NE as % HRM</i>	n/a	96.7%	97.6%	
<b>Standard Two-Story House</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>% change</b>
HRM	\$133,000	\$129,000	\$194,000	45.9%
North End	185,000	190,000	295,000	59.5%
<i>NE as % HRM</i>	139.1 %	147.3 %	152.1%	

*Source: Royal LePage. Survey of Canadian House Prices, 1998-2007.*

that can attract modest- and higher-income individuals into the neighbourhood will produce benefits for those who are poor. This is unlikely to be the case, for two reasons. First, it has become far too difficult, in the absence of meaningful government support and funding, to produce significant numbers of new units of affordable housing. Second, the existing literature does not support the contention that those who are poor benefit directly from the presence in their locale of higher-income individuals.

North End Halifax has a higher proportion of social and co-op housing than other Halifax neighbourhoods, a tribute to the hard work of the local community. A good example of current community-based housing efforts is the Creighton/Gerrish Development Association. Established in 1995, it is a non-profit developer that works in partnership with four community-based, non-profit societies. Headed by Grant Wanzel of the Dalhousie University School of Architecture, Creighton/Gerrish builds low-income and affordable housing in the Uniacke Square area. They have constructed a 19-unit apartment building on Gottingen Street for low-income, “hard-to-house” singles that is owned and managed by the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association; six semi-detached, subsidized “affordable” houses on Creighton Street for first-time homeowners with incomes less than \$50,000; and have plans to construct more low-income housing in the area. The strategy is to make it possible for people with a long-time connection to the Gottingen Street

area to stay in, or to return to, the neighbourhood. This is important, community-building work, intended to create “a decent, affordable and pleasant neighbourhood for the people who live there” (Wanzel 2006). The Creighton-Gerrish Development Association has made a particularly important contribution to the neighbourhood in this way.

An especially significant aspect of the work of Creighton/Gerrish, however, is how extremely difficult it is given the severe shortage of government funding and supportive policies and programs. The amount of community effort required, relative to the number of units of social and affordable housing produced, makes it unsustainable as a model for the creation of the numbers of low-income and affordable housing units that are needed. Wanzel himself has described the work as being left “naked, alone and without the financial resources to do so”. “Resourceless, too few housing activists and non-profit developers find themselves fighting too many battles on too many fronts”. Given this, what Creighton/Gerrish has been able to achieve is remarkable: “Creighton/Gerrish is making a difference in the well-being of several families and many individuals”. This is important. But, argues Wanzel, these gains have come as the result of “...a staggering amount of effort: time and energy far beyond any reasonable estimate of what would be sustainable”, with the result that the model cannot be seen as the “...prototype we had hoped it would be. We can learn from it, but it’s not to be emulated” (Wanzel 2006).

<b>Table Four: Rental Rates</b>				
<b>Private apartment average rents</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>% change</b>
Halifax CMA	\$567	\$606	\$744	31.2%
Peninsula North	563	601	734	30.4%
<i>Source: CMHC. Rental Market Report Halifax CMA, 1998-2006.</i>				

A reasonable conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is not only that governments have massively failed Canadians as regards housing, but also that, if it is this difficult to create new units of social housing, such as the 19 units built by Creighton/Gerrish on Gottingen, then it makes good sense to defend the social housing that already exists, such as the 184 units at Uniacke Square. Given the extreme difficulty of creating new low-income rental housing, even by highly-skilled, dedicated and professional developers like Creighton/Gerrish, then the loss of the already existing low-income rental units at Uniacke Square would be an irreplaceable loss. The difficulties inherent in the kind of work being done by Creighton/Gerrish reveal clearly the extent to which Uniacke Square, with its existing, good quality, low-income rental units, is best seen an asset to the community.

Some argue that attracting higher-income individuals into a low-income neighbourhood will benefit the low-income individuals. Several mechanisms are hypothesized to be the means by which low-income individuals will benefit. One often advanced, for example, is that the presence in a low-income neighbourhood of higher-income individuals will add to the neighbourhood's ability to secure needed services. It has been argued as regards the case of the North End of Halifax, for example, that: "Those who are buying the condos and restoring heritage properties are contributing to the demographic mix and add badly needed political clout and savvy" (Wanzel 2006). Yet the empirical evidence provides little support for this contention. Indeed, in a recent and very thorough analysis of the literature on mixed-income housing and its benefits for low-income people (Joseph, Chaskin and Webber 2007: 394) it was concluded that:

"...there are risks for the lower-income residents due to the higher participation of more affluent residents [because] ...the particular needs and priorities of low- versus higher-income residents may differ substantially, and the unequal distribution of power and resources among residents (and among local organizations acting on their behalf) may exacerbate such differences and lead to differential benefits that favor those with more influence.... Increasing the number of higher-income people within a community, therefore, does not ensure that the particular needs of lower-income residents will be met".

These authors argue, consistent with the argument that will be advanced later in this paper, that the needs of low-income residents of public housing projects are best met by investing directly in developing their individual and collective capacities (Joseph, Chaskin and Webber 2007: 394-395). Their analysis of the literature suggests very strongly that neither mixed-income housing nor gentrification offer solutions for low-income residents in areas like the North End of Halifax. Indeed, as will be argued below, gentrification poses a great threat to the residents of Uniacke Square.

### **"This is a Modern-Day Africville": The Vulnerability of Uniacke Square**

Uniacke Square, opened in 1966, relatively quickly took on most of the characteristics so typical of large, post-war, inner-city public housing projects, as described above. It continues to this day to be characterized by spatially concentrated racialized poverty. Many of those in Uniacke Square are among the *very*

poor. Many are single parents, mostly single mothers, and just under one-half in 2001 were on social assistance. A higher proportion of Uniacke's population of approximately 425 people is African Nova-Scotian than is the case for Halifax as a whole. There is some suggestion that when people have opportunities for education or employment they will leave Uniacke Square (personal interviews, May 2007). This is very much the case in other such inner-city public housing projects, where people come into the public housing at a low point in their lives—the projects become “housing of last resort” for those most in need (Silver 2006b)—and they leave when they begin to get their lives together, thus ensuring a steady supply in the public housing projects of those in the most difficult circumstances.

Many in Uniacke Square were caught in a cycle of poverty from the start, as the consequence not only of their being forcibly removed from Africville, but also being offered few supports in their new housing at Uniacke Square. This lack of social supports—“they didn't provide nothing else but the shelter”, said one long-time resident (personal interview May 2007; see also Clairmont and Magill 1999)—has been typical of such urban relocation schemes in twentieth century North America (Silver 2006b).

When those from Africville arrived at Uniacke Square, not only was there little by way of social supports, but also they faced a wall of racism and discrimination. As long ago as 1957 it was openly acknowledged that “It is only in certain parts of the Study Area [North End Halifax], and not elsewhere in Halifax with the exception of Africville, that negro families can find housing accommodation (Stephenson 1957: 32). Some

residents in a neighbourhood north of Uniacke Square had already said “we don't want Africville people here” (Clairmont and Magill 1999). One early resident said that in the 1960s it was common for African-Nova Scotians to be told by barbers and restaurant staff, “we don't cut niggers' hair” and “we don't serve niggers here”, and he described the Halifax police force at that time as “the most racist police force in Canada” (personal interview, May 2007; see also Kimber 2006 and 1992; Winks 1997: 325, 349). Remarkably, schools were not desegregated until 1955 (Melles 2003: 41), only a decade before Uniacke Square was opened in 1966. African-Nova Scotians living in the North End were effectively denied entry into the various industrial occupations associated with the neighbouring Halifax ship and dock yards and other industries. Young Black men have long since come simply to *assume* that they will not get jobs in these places (personal interview, May 2007), and racism generally continues to be a defining feature of day-to-day life in and around Uniacke Square—“racism is pronounced” in the North End; “there is racism; nothing has changed”—according to many recently interviewed in the city's North End (personal interviews, May 2007; see also Melles 2003: 119-120).

In this context of spatially concentrated racialized poverty, it is perhaps not surprising that violence and drugs and street sexual exploitation are to be found. The Square is known as a place where crack cocaine can be purchased; very young people—pre- or early-teens—are lured into delivering drugs, paid with \$200 sneakers; and some women are “run by the crack... there are women who are driven by the crack” (MacKay, personal interview, May 18, 2007). For some it be-

comes a vicious cycle: severe poverty; low levels of education; lack of self-esteem; drugs; addictions; dealers; violence; need for money to feed the addictions; lack of job opportunities; crime; street sex exploitation. "It's a huge system" fueled by poverty and racism (MacKay, personal interview, May 18, 2007), and as a consequence those who live in Uniacke Square, whether caught up in the cycle or not, are stigmatized.

Yet repeatedly those who live and/or work in the area insist that the image of "the Square" is a false one. A young Black resident of the Square began an interview with an angry denunciation of what he described as "the false negative image" of the area (Morton, personal interview, May 2007). Virtually every other interviewee insisted that the image is largely false, or at least simplistic. The reality, they argued, is more complex: people in the neighbourhood know each other; there is a strong sense of community; there are many strong families; many young people are doing well (personal interviews, May 2007). This is not to deny that there are problems; but the problems are not as severe as the negative image would lead people from outside the community to believe, and there is more to Uniacke Square than problems. In fact, the negative image prevents those from outside seeing the more complex, and more positive, reality. The stigma and stereotypes obscure the strengths in Uniacke Square.

What is more, the image—the stigma and stereotypes—hurt the people who live at Uniacke Square. "The stigma takes its effect", says a long-time resident (Nelligan, personal interview, May 17, 2007). When an African-Nova Scotian goes out and about and is looked at dif-

ferently or something happens, s/he "...wonders if it's because you are Black that you're treated a certain way" (Mendes, personal interview, May 16, 2007). It feeds the lack of self-esteem that is so common amongst people who are the victims of racialized poverty. "Self-esteem is a significant issue for most people" in Uniacke Square and the surrounding area, says a long-time community worker (O'Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007). As a result, many people are reluctant to move far beyond the borders of Uniacke Square, because they know that they are looked at and judged in negative ways (Kimber 2007). It places an invisible wall—the "Berlin Wall", as one resident calls it (Morton, personal interview, May 15, 2007)—around Uniacke, keeping people in. This is the case in many large inner-city public housing projects (see Silver 2007a). For example, the North End Community Health Centre was established in 1971 on Gottingen Street a couple of blocks from Uniacke Square, in part because women in the Square said that they were fed up with taking their children to doctors' offices downtown or in the South End, where they were made to feel unwelcome and were looked down upon (O'Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007). When a television production crew from outside Halifax came to Uniacke Square to film an event, they were told by sources in Halifax that "you better hope that truck's got locks on it". They parked their truck elsewhere. Yet when the event and the filming were over, local residents and children pitched in to help with clean-up and the hauling and loading of equipment, and were told by the television crew that they were more helpful and friendly than anyone in all the other places the crew had filmed (Nelligan, personal interview, May 17, 2007). As was the case with Africville, the



image is at odds with the much more complex, and in many important respects more positive, reality.

Yet the danger is that this negative image, the stigma and stereotypes, may serve as a justification for doing to Uniacke Square what was done to Africville a half century ago, and what has been done to large inner-city public housing projects throughout North America more recently. Bennett and Reed (1999), for example, have argued that in the case of Chicago's Cabrini-Green there was a deliberate strategy to construct an exaggerated and inaccurately negative image in order to justify a "redevelopment" of the project. The reason, in all such cases: others want the land. The method of removal may be different for Uniacke Square than it was for Africville, or for the massive housing projects in Chicago. There is pressure to make at least some of the units in Uniacke Square available for sale to existing tenants. It will be argued by those who want this land for other purposes, that making all or some of the units available for sale is in the interests of the residents, and of the broader community. Home ownership, it will be claimed, will solve many of Uniacke Square's problems. Indeed, a recent Halifax report advocated just that:

"HRM should lobby the NS (Nova Scotia) Department of Community Services to consider selling at least half of the units in Uniacke Square to their current occupants, to create a critical mass of pride of ownership and community stewardship" (HRM April 2004: 11).

The fear of such a sale is a common topic of conversation in and around Uniacke Square. Twenty years ago the Executive Director of the Black United Front of Nova Scotia is reported to have warned

about the threat of "another Africville-type relocation" (Clairmont and Magill 1999: xx). In 2004 the provincial Community Services minister circulated a letter to tenants assuring them that Uniacke Square would not be sold (van Berkel 2005). Yet the local City Councillor says the fear of such a sale continues to be "the biggest issue I hear". People in Uniacke are asking, "What if they sell this place?" (Sloane, personal interview, May 16, 2007). Kimber (2007) quotes Marcus James of the North End Public Library: "A lot of young people won't go south of the Library or north of the Square anymore. They don't feel welcome. The people here see all these \$250,000 condos going up. They know that these kinds of places and low-income housing don't go together. Guess which one goes?". One resident, harking back to the destruction of Africville and linking that to the danger of losing Uniacke Square, said: "History has a way of repeating itself; this is a modern-day Africville" (Morton, personal interview, May 15, 2007).

It is not the bulldozer that poses the danger this time; it is the forces of the market. Once units are made available for sale, market pressures—given the gentrification in the area—will push their prices well beyond what low-income people can afford. Once that which is public becomes private, it is subject to the powerful forces of the market, for sale at whatever may be the going price, like any other commodity. If existing tenants are afforded the option to purchase their units, they will face pressures to sell at prices that will seem to them, as people who are poor, to be a small fortune. Yet once they sell, the units will be lost in future to people of low income, and will become just another part of the rising prices of North End Halifax. Current tenants will have to leave the neighbourhood; the

shortage of low-income rental units, already severe, will be made worse. “We’re desperate for housing stock”, said a social worker in the area (Grant, personal interview, May 16, 2007), and the privatization of Uniacke Square will only deepen that desperation.

Yet, just as was the case with Africville, another solution is possible. In the case of Africville, the residents wanted to stay in their homes and their community, and wanted the city to invest in running water, modern sewage and paved roads—as the city had done in the rest of Halifax. The City replied that it could not afford to do so, and that the bulldozing of Africville and the forcible relocation of its residents was in the residents’ own long-term interests. In the end, the amount of

money spent in bulldozing Africville was roughly equivalent to what it would have taken to bring the community’s services up to the level of Halifax (Kimber 2006). Not taking that option has had tragic consequences.

The same mistake can still be avoided in Uniacke Square. The alternative is to invest in the residents of Uniacke Square, creating opportunities for them, and providing supports to enable them to realize those opportunities, and working with them to revitalize their neighbourhood in ways of their choosing. The result would be, in the long run, that Uniacke Square would be a healthy and pleasant neighbourhood, in which low-income people enjoy affordable, good quality housing.

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## An Alternative Way Forward For Uniacke Square

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There has been substantial investment at various times in the post-war period in the Gottingen Street area, but the neighbourhood has continued its long decline (Melles 2003). The problem, at least in part, has been that too much of the investment has focused on “bricks and mortar” (Melles 2003: 88-89). But also, what social investment has been made has not been “deliberate and strategic” (O’Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007), and it has not built on the strengths and involvement of the people who live there. A wide variety of social agencies have located in the area. “Small clusters of opportunities” (O’Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007) have been created. But the agencies do not work together as well as they might (Bohdanow 2006: 38), and there is no overall strategy for transformation. As another neighbourhood worker put it: “There’s gotta be a bigger vision” (Levy, personal interview, May 17, 2007).

Some fear that the lack of vision, the absence of a strategic approach to the area, is deliberate. As one long-time neighbourhood worker put it: “The advantage to government is not to have a plan” (personal interview May 2007). By that he means that it is in the interests of government to allow the neighbourhood to continue to deteriorate, and then blame the residents and the flaws of public housing for the problems, and use that as justification for privatizing Uniacke Square. The resulting privatization and gentrification would make the neighbourhood look better more quickly, would put the land to what some planners would call a “better and higher” use, would increase the property tax rev-

enues of the Halifax Regional Municipality—this has been a major factor in privatization and gentrification efforts in the USA (Slater 2005: 54)—and would be consistent with various HRM plans.

However, there is another, more difficult and necessarily more long-term path that involves strategically investing in the neighbourhood to build the capacities and skills of those who are already there; building on the many strengths in the community; and doing so with and not for the people who live in Uniacke Square.

If such an asset-based approach to community development were to be adopted at Uniacke Square (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993), the starting point would be to identify the assets in the community, and to build on them. This requires shifting from the “deficit lens”—seeing only the problems and the associated stigma and stereotypes—that is so commonly applied to Uniacke Square and surrounding area, to a lens that consciously identifies the strengths, the assets, that exist in all communities, however difficult their circumstances may be.

Perhaps the first asset in Uniacke Square is the strong sense of community that almost everyone interviewed for this project identified immediately. As John Fleming, Senior Property Manager with the Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority and former Property Manager at Uniacke Square, and a man who grew up in the immediate area, puts it, “people know each other”; “it’s a community that comes together”; there are “lots of great people” in Uniacke (Fleming, personal interview, May 14, 2007). Joan Mendes (personal interview, May 16,

2007), Director of the North End Parent Resource Centre said: “Basically, there’s a lot of good families in the community”. Almost everyone interviewed said similar things—that although there are problems and many are serious, nevertheless the negative image of Uniacke is overblown, or at least too unidimensional, and there are many strong people and a strong sense of community in the neighbourhood.

In addition, it appears that the buildings at Uniacke Square are, generally speaking, well-maintained and in good shape. Fleming is adamant that the buildings “are in great shape”, and he adds: “I’m really proud of the housing we have”; “there would be no reason for you not to want to live in them”; and “I fight for that every day” (Fleming, personal interview, May 14, 2007). He fights for that because “I believe everyone has a right to good housing”—in itself an interesting and radical idea given the area’s, and Canada’s, chronic shortage of good quality housing for the millions in Canada who are poor (Silver 2007b). The area Councillor, Dawn Sloane, concurs that the buildings are “in pretty good shape” (Sloane, personal interview, May 16, 2007). Thus they constitute an especially important asset in a city in which low-income rental housing is in short supply, and building new social housing is so difficult.

This is an excellent basis upon which to build: the availability of solid, good quality affordable housing at a time of severe shortage of such housing; and the presence at Uniacke of some strong people, and a strong sense of community.

There are also many strong community-based organizations (CBOs) and social agencies working in the neighbourhood,

and while they are generally underfunded and do not work in as coordinated a fashion as they might, they do good work. What follows is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the important assets available in the Uniacke Square area.

The North End Parent Resource Centre, opened in 1986, is located in four units at Uniacke Square and offers a range of services and supports to low-income parents, and especially to young Black women and mothers. They run a drop-in centre; a Parent Education Project for teen mothers; a childcare program; a support program for pre-teen girls; a collective kitchen; a laundry room that is busy; and offer a variety of short and practical educational opportunities.

The North End Community Health Centre, established in 1971 and located on Gottingen Street, two blocks from Uniacke Square, is “seen as the blueprint for how to run a community health clinic” (O’Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007). It offers much-needed medical services right in the neighbourhood, and does community outreach and community building.

The Halifax North Memorial Public Library is located on Gottingen Street next to Uniacke Square, and is no ordinary library. Like the nearby Gottingen Street YMCA, it offers a range of programs for young people, including a leadership program called “Youth and Community Together 4 Peace” (Kimber 2007), and has long been a gathering place for the Uniacke Square community.

The community itself stages various events: an annual Black basketball tournament that involves local youth; an annual “beautification day” that involves parents and builds community

pride; and the first-ever Uniacke Square Tenants' Association Conference in 2006.

Community-based organizations like Community Action on Homelessness and the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty play an important advocacy role, giving voice in various ways to the interests of low-income residents.

George Dixon Recreation Centre is part of Uniacke Square, and runs a wide range of programs, including youth leadership programs and job opportunities for young people, and a program for women called "Step-up-to-Leadership" that is taught by one of the community police officers.

There is a community police office located in Uniacke Square, and the two officers operate very much in a community development fashion. Constable Amy MacKay, for example, visits local schools and reads to children, walks around the Square and meets and talks with people, voluntarily tutors two children, and teaches the "Step-up-to-Leadership" program at George Dixon. She tells the story of a young boy of about eight years who she feared was at risk of heading down the wrong path. She was hesitant to speak with him for fear that he would not want to be seen speaking with the police. She finally called to him as he was walking one day to George Dixon, a few minutes away. "Can I walk with you?", she asked. He mumbled a gruff "I guess so", and they walked in silence, his eyes to the ground. When they arrived at George Dixon the boy, dressed in baggy clothes and with his hat on sideways in stereotypical fashion, unexpectedly "asked me if he could read me a book... outside where everyone can see me!" (MacKay, personal interview, May 18, 2007). Beneath the tough exterior, be-

neath the image, there was an eight year old boy who wanted to impress an adult, and to show off his reading. The potential in such a boy is limitless; the dangers, should that potential not be nurtured, are considerable.

Women provide leadership in Uniacke Square, as is so often the case in inner-city initiatives and public housing projects (Silver 2007a; 2006a). It was women in Uniacke Square who initiated the process that led to the establishment in 1971 of the North End Community Health Centre (O'Hara, personal interview, May 14, 2007). And in the past year or so the "PEP-Bro Divas", a group of women in Uniacke Square, have emerged as leaders. Six women took a course called "Personally Empowering People", and when they had completed the course the "Divas" wanted to use their new-found self-confidence. "So they said let's just do it" (Sloane, personal interview, May 16, 2007). They started a new incarnation of the Tenants' Association, built a skating rink in the community, were the driving forces in initiating the \$70,000 redevelopment of Dixon field, and organized the first-ever Uniacke Square Tenants' Association Conference in September 2006. As Constable Amy MacKay (personal interview, May 18, 2007) puts it, "These women are strong women". They have been through hard times. They have the kinds of experiential knowledge that is invaluable and irreplaceable in doing community development work in places like Uniacke Square. They have transformed their own lives in ways that are dramatic. And it has spilled over into the community. "Older folks in the neighbourhood are noticing the change" (Sloane, personal interview, May 16, 2007).

The Divas are an example of what is possible, and of the strengths that are in Uniacke Square and can be built upon. They called themselves the “PEP-Bro Divas” because they got their start with the Personally Empowering People (PEP) program; because “we felt that we were strong women in our communities and we took on the role of men”, thus “Bro”; and because “we’re a classy group of ladies”, thus “Divas” (Nelligan, personal interview, May 17, 2007). Their work in the neighbourhood has a clear community development character. Donna Nelligan says that they believed that “if there was a change to be made [it is]... up to the residents”. The formation of the new Tenants’ Association was a “big thing” for the Divas, says Nelligan, and she and the other women grew from the experience. In the case of the redevelopment of Dixon field, the Divas contacted the Director of the George Dixon Recreation Centre, and negotiated over a period of time with City officials, and were successful (Levy, personal interview, May 17, 2007). They wanted a skating rink plus other recreational activities because “our kids were being arrested for minor things... because they had nothing to do” (Nelligan, personal interview, May 17, 2007). The community-building character of the creation of the skating rink is revealed in a story told by Donna Nelligan. Seniors from across Gottingen Street watched the children on the rink, and got so much pleasure from it that they knit hats and scarves and gave them to the children. A connection was made across the generations. More people got involved. Everyone benefitted when the community acted together in ways of their choosing.

For the Divas, the experience has been transformational. It has been “a life-changing experience for all of us”. It has

included “lots of growing and learning”, and the women have bonded so intensely that “we will always be a group” (Nelligan, personal interview, May 17, 2007). In addition, the experience reveals what is possible when opportunities are made available to people to enable them to grow, and when supports are there to enable them to begin to solve their own problems in ways that they determine. This is community development, and the Divas have shown the beginnings of what is possible. Much more could be done if such a method were to be linked to a deliberate and strategic approach to neighbourhood change that emerged from the people themselves, and that was supported with strategic public investment.

There is reason to believe that a part of such a strategy could include a more systematic approach to creating educational opportunities. The fledgling GED program offered at the North End Parent Resource Centre may see six or seven women successfully complete their GED (Mendes and Symonds, personal interview, May 16, 2007). Eight-week Introduction to Computers programs run by the Centre are well-attended. The Divas seized the opportunity to take the Personally Empowering People course, and some are continuing with the Step-Up-To-Leadership program taught by Constable Amy MacKay at George Dixon. Donna Nelligan is taking a two-year Child and Youth Care Worker course, and will bring to this kind of work an invaluable life experience that cannot be taught in a classroom. She is likely to be an outstanding child and youth worker. These examples suggest that when educational opportunities are made available locally, residents of the Square seize upon them (see also Bohdanow 2006).

One approach to building upon this observation, this strength, might be similar to what is being initiated at Lord Selkirk Park, a similarly-sized public housing project in Winnipeg's North End that suffers all of the problems and negative stigmatization experienced at Uniacke Square. At Lord Selkirk Park, after a concerted community effort, an Adult Learning Centre opened in September, 2007, offering the mature grade 12 for adults, and particularly for the significant numbers of single parents in the housing project. The next step in this strategy, now underway, is to build a Family Resource Centre in six units made available by Manitoba Housing, and to attach to it an Early Childhood Education program offered by Red River College and delivered on-site, at Lord Selkirk Park (CCPA-Mb 2007). In several interview-based projects undertaken by the author, people at Lord Selkirk Park have said that they would like to improve their educational credentials and get a job, but the barriers to their doing so—especially the difficulties associated with travel, with childcare, and with an educational system that is still largely Eurocentric and from which Aboriginal people still feel excluded—are simply too great. The Adult Learning Centre and the Early Childhood Education initiative are intended to overcome these barriers, by bringing educational opportunities to the public housing residents, and tailoring them to those peoples' specific circumstances and needs (CCPA-Mb 2007).

As is the case in Uniacke Square, many in North End Winnipeg's Lord Selkirk Park are reluctant to move far beyond the borders of what they call the Developments (Silver 2007a). So the education is being brought to them, located in a large room in the local community cen-

tre in the middle of the Developments, with classes timed so that parents can walk their children to the local school or to daycare and then attend class, and can pick up their children from school and take them home for lunch, and pick the children up when classes are over at the end of the day. The program is specifically tailored to their daily realities. Spaces have been reserved in local childcare centres for those students with pre-school children, and the budget for the initiative includes money for an Aboriginal elder—a high proportion of tenants are Aboriginal—to be present some afternoons of the week, which was a specific request of residents identified in the interviewing leading up to the project. All of the community-based organizations and service agencies in the area—as is the case at Uniacke, there are many—work together in a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), and the members of the CAC are providing a wide range of supports to students. It is intended that when students begin to graduate with their Mature Grade 12 certificate or their Early Childhood Education qualifications, assistance will be provided to them in either finding a job, or moving on to some form of post-secondary education. In addition, it is hoped that many of those who do so will choose to stay in the Developments because it provides good quality affordable housing when such is—in Winnipeg as everywhere else—in short supply. The result, it is hoped, will be the emergence over time in Lord Selkirk Park of a “mixed-income” community built from within. The intention is to change the image of the Developments from its current stigmatized status, as a place that people really do not want to be, to a place where opportunities can be found and supports are available to those who choose to turn

their lives around. As Donna Nelligan (personal interview, May 17, 2007) says, “you have to know that you want to change”, but the evidence available at Lord Selkirk Park strongly suggests that many people want to change, and would do so if realistic opportunities were made available to them, with the supports that they need to succeed.

While an approach to education such as that described above may be a useful part of a Uniacke Square community development strategy, because it appears to be something that residents in the community want, more important than such specifics are the *principles* that might guide a Uniacke Square revitalization strategy. These are the principles that are guiding promising inner-city revitalization strategies elsewhere in Canada (Silver 2008; Silver and Loxley 2007). In this approach the elements of a neighbourhood revitalization strategy emerge from within inner-city neighbourhoods, rather than being imported from without. The process is led largely by inner-city residents themselves, and not outside “experts”, that is, it is a grassroots and not a top-down approach. This is an asset-based approach—it seeks to identify and to build upon community strengths. It is a capacity-building approach—it seeks to support low-income inner-city residents, starting from wherever they may be in their lives and taking however long it may take, in developing the capacities to begin to contribute to solving their own problems. It is a “tailored” approach—programs and institutions and initiatives re-shape their work to fit the particular realities of the people who have experienced spatially concentrated racialized poverty, with all the damage that such a condition can cause. It is a locally-focused approach—hire locally, purchase locally, re-invest locally—in order to build from

within. This approach is rooted in the belief that, when opportunities are created and supports provided, people in low-income communities will respond positively, and neighbourhoods will be re-built from within.

United Way of Halifax Region has initiated an approach very similar to this (Mortimer, personal interview, May 17, 2007; Makhoul 2005). Its philosophical roots are that it is resident-led, is built on a community’s assets, is built on the local knowledge that residents have of their neighbourhoods, and it creates a “space” for generating conversations among residents, so that they themselves can define where they want their community to go, and how they want to get there. Melles (2003) and Bohdanow (2006) have both recently called for the application in Uniacke Square of a similar form of resident-led, asset-based community development.

When an approach consistent with these principles is adopted, and when governments invest in such community initiatives in a strategic fashion—that is, in a way intended to enable people to create positive long-term change in ways of their choosing—then neighbourhoods like Uniacke Square can, even if they remain relatively low-income, be revitalized, and the people who live there can come much closer to realizing their full human potential. This approach has not been adopted in Uniacke Square and the surrounding Gottingen Street area to date. Money has been invested, but its effects have been limited: the investment has been too top-down, too focused on bricks and mortar, insufficiently strategic. The conclusion to be drawn is *not* that investment cannot help, but rather that a particular type of public investment is needed. As Jane Jacobs (1961: 292) has



argued: investment is essential, “indeed it is indispensable... but it must be understood that it is not the mere availability of money, but how it is available, that is all important”. There is much good work being done in the Uniacke Square/Gottingen Street area, but one part of it is disconnected from the other, it is for the most part aimed at amelioration rather than transformation, and it is underfunded. It is not part of a deliberate and strategic approach aimed at building on the many strengths of the neighbourhood. Yet moving down such a path of neighbourhood renewal is distinctly possible, particularly if the kind of community development principles described above are encouraged, and if those efforts are supported by long-term, strategic public investment. This is a choice that can be made now.

Uniacke Square is at a crossroads. It sits in the middle of what has become a very valuable piece of property, located as it is so near to downtown Halifax. Gentrification is well underway in the neighbourhood, and there is a real risk that the process could swallow the Square by offering units up for sale to existing tenants, thereby removing them from the financial means of low-

income people in future. What is now Uniacke Square would become commodified and then gentrified, the neighbourhood would, in some respects, look better, and governments and others would congratulate themselves for having “solved the problem” of Uniacke Square. But it would, in effect, be the Africville “solution”: a community would be destroyed and scattered and the people now living in Uniacke Square would be no better off, and perhaps worse. Certainly low-income people in search of good quality affordable housing in future would be worse off.

But there is an alternative, just as there was with Africville, and that is to invest in Uniacke Square and its people in a strong and deliberate and strategic fashion, working with the residents in the community to build on the assets that are already there, and creating opportunities for people and supports to enable them to take advantage of those opportunities, in ways of their choosing. This is the longer and more difficult option. But it is the only option that will benefit the low-income people who live in Uniacke Square today, and who will want to live there in future.

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## Personal Interviews

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Carvery, Irvine. May 15, 2007. Property Manager, Uniacke Square, and former resident of both Uniacke Square and Africville.

Fleming, John. May 14, 2007. Senior Property Manager, Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority, Halifax, and former Property Manager, Uniacke Square.

Grant, Melissa. May 16, 2007. Community Relations Worker. Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority, Halifax.

Lambert, Gregg. May 14, 2007. Master of Social Work Student, and long-time North End resident.

Levy, Claudie. May 17, 2007. Manager. George Dixon Recreation Centre. Uniacke Square.

MacDonald, Maureen. May 17, 2007. MLA, Halifax Needham.

MacKay, Amy. May 18, 2007. Constable, Uniacke Square office, Halifax Police Service.

Mendes, Joan. May 16, 2007. Director, North End Parent Resource Centre, Uniacke Square.

Mortimer, Peter. May 17, 2007. Senior Director of Community Services. United Way of Halifax Region.

Morton, Tyler. May 15, 2007. Resident, Uniacke Square.

Nelligan, Donna. May 17, 2007. Member, PEP-Bro Divas, and resident, Uniacke Square.

O'Hara, Paul. May 14, 2007. Counsellor/Advocate. North End Community Health Centre.

Sloane, Dawn. May 16, 2007. City Councillor, District 12, Halifax.

Smith, Wade. May 14, 2007. Vice-Principal, St. Patrick's High School.

Symonds, Garfield. May 16, 2007. Retired Principal, Joseph Howe School.