

The Rise of Urban Renewal and the Connie Chambers Project

DOWNTOWN AND LA CALLE

Very little in Tucson's early development history would give reason to associate this place with the idea of equitable housing. It is a place that has endured profound spatial and social conflicts among *Los Tucsonenses* (those of Mexican origin with deep roots in the region), the Hohokam (who hold an even longer claim), and the various other groups that have come to join them or push them aside. This is obviously quite different from the dominant black-white dynamic that is more commonly discussed in other American cities, such as New Orleans or Boston. Tucson's initial growth reflected its Spanish and Mexican origins; Mexican troops vacated the city only in 1856, three years after the territory was annexed under the terms of the Gadsden Purchase. By the 1880s, however, the growing Anglo presence gradually forced the Mexican American population southward from the presidio toward what effectively became a parallel central business district (CBD) located just south of the Anglo one, a new barrio centered around the Plaza de la Mesilla. As Lydia Otero puts it in her book on Tucson's urban renewal impacts, this area, soon known more simply as La Placita, "became the focal point of the displaced Mexican American community." Centered on the commercial area referred to as *la calle*, the new barrio recreated "a landscape that looked and felt like their homes in Sonora or in Tucson before the arrival of Anglos." By the 1940s, the vast majority of Tucson's Mexican Americans occupied the barrios south and west of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, with Anglo occupancy dominating the city to the east.¹

Downtown, located just south of the original townsite boundary and on the *Tucsonenses* side of the tracks, soon became contested territory. Although Tucson's Mexican Americans constituted no more than about 15 percent of the metropolitan area's residents during the mid-1950s, they often formed a near majority of downtown pedestrians, due to the proximity of their residences to the city's center. To Tucson's city officials and most of their

AFTER THE PROJECTS

Public Housing Redevelopment & the
Governance of the Poorest Americans

LAWRENCE J. VALE



consultants, *la calle* and its adjacent residential barrios seemed “outdated” and “marginal,” and this area’s vibrancy and centrality to the *Tucsonenses* community (and to the city’s Chinese and African American residents) merited little scrutiny. Instead, especially following the spate of small, outlying shopping centers built during the late 1950s and the establishment of the El Con Mall three miles east of downtown in 1961, many city leaders came to feel that drastic transformative action would be needed to sustain Tucson’s traditional CBD as a viable economic center. This conviction intensified once a 1960 plan presciently predicted “spectacular” regional growth that could yield “1,400,000 persons in metropolitan Tucson by the year 2000.” A research team based at the University of Arizona provided a multifaceted analysis of Tucson’s evolving downtown in 1960, concluding that “the survival of retailing in the CBD will depend on the ability of the CBD to develop as a center of other activities.” They suggested greater reliance on making downtown Tucson a center of office jobs, but also sought “some other source of strength” and hoped that “planned nuclei of recreational and cultural establishments might achieve this.” Notably, they even recommended that the city “set aside an area devoted to the preservation of Tucson’s Spanish and Mexican heritage,” pointing out that this held “rich potential for the tourist industry.” Moreover, almost in passing, they added that razing these areas “and relocating residents to other parts of the community may substantially interfere with the well-established shopping pattern in the downtown area.”²

Despite such suggestions and warnings, most of those involved with charting a course for Tucson’s center cared little about either the heritage or the purchasing power of its Latinx community. Ultimately, as Otero observes, urban renewal proponents “did not seek to revitalize the area or to improve its retail potential. Instead, they wanted a ‘cleansed’ downtown with a new purpose. City leaders wanted tourists and a ‘new’ breed of people to take pleasure in the new downtown they promised and eventually developed.”³ In Tucson, however, the fitful movement toward slum clearance and urban renewal did not proceed in tandem with the reluctant embrace of public housing. Rather, they occurred almost as alternating impulses, each championed and opposed by different constituencies. As one long-serving Tucson city official astutely noted, “They were separate, with each going its own way.”⁴ Tucson city officials, much like the business community, preferred that the private sector take responsibility for any low-rent housing and did not view urban renewal and new public housing as part of a planned relationship. As a result, public housing came to the fore only in the interregnum between efforts to implement an urban renewal plan.

LA REFORMA AND ITS REFORMS

In Tucson, as in other American cities, passage of the 1937 Housing Act prompted more excitement about slum clearance than about new public housing. Roy Drachman, soon to become one of the city’s most prominent postwar real-estate developers and civic leaders, championed the slum clearance effort in 1939, as head of Tucson’s chamber of commerce. He remained deeply disappointed that the efforts yielded more units of public housing than cleared slums. According to Tucson Housing Authority executive director William Walsh, the city destroyed fifty slum dwellings as part of the exchange for what became 160 new public housing apartments. For Tucson’s persistent critics of public housing, such limited clearance stopped well short of what the city needed. And, like Drachman, these detractors also insisted that the private sector ought to be in charge of any replacement housing that might result.⁵

The Tucson Housing Authority (THA) targeted its first foray into public housing to what were then called “Spanish American families.” Prompted by a Chicano member of the THA board, the city named it La Reforma, seeking to recall the period of mid-nineteenth-century liberal reforms in Mexico. The first Tucson-based reforms, however, occurred even before the project was ready for occupancy. As at Boston’s Orchard Park, the entry of the United States into World War II dramatically affected the entry of residents into public housing. Instead of a new enclave of modern dwellings for Mexican Americans, La Reforma housed primarily Anglo war workers. After 1946, as the war workers moved on from its eight large perimeter blocks of brick, single-story housing, La Reforma gradually regained much of its intended constituency. By 1954, Pat McLaughlin could regard her family as “the last of the Anglo families in there.” In 1947, however, La Reforma still housed only a dozen low-income families, prompting the federal government to urge the THA to do more to “oust the higher income tenants.” In 1949, an *Arizona Daily Star* editorial summed up much of the local opposition to using public housing for the poor, questioning why a Tucson taxpayer should have to “support his less frugal or less capable fellows.” Others raised a different issue, noting that the managers of La Reforma refused to admit black households of any income.⁶

The whole concept of public housing remained highly controversial in Tucson. As former housing authority official Cressworth C. (Cress) Lander commented, when it came to public housing, “Tucson was one of those reluctant communities. We had 150 units when most cities had 5,000. The citizens who were running the board at that time kept it segregated.” More pointedly, this board “didn’t want to have housing for poor folks” of any

kind. Roy Drachman (by then a real-estate developer) lambasted public housing as a dangerous form of "socialism." He pointed out that every Russian city had public housing and pointedly questioned "whether we want that here." In a debate with Drachman, William Shaw, executive secretary of the Tucson Citizens' Committee for Better Housing, pointed out that if public housing was socialism, it was no more so than the Federal Housing Administration: "The two programs are the same, the one providing loans for those with middle incomes and above, the other for low income groups." Drachman retained deeply engrained suspicions about Tucson's poor, fearing that there would soon be calls to buy them food and clothing, and arguing that if they were ever to attain "equality of opportunity," they would need to "go out and work for it." Ultimately, he pointed out, "There's always going to be a certain amount of slums. It's unfortunate, but that's the way it is. Everyone can't be rich."⁷ For the time being, Drachman's sentiments won out.

In February 1950 the city council voted down a proposal to build more public housing. Following this rebuff, the council faced complaints from the Tucson Urban League, whose members remained upset that no blacks could live in the segregated La Reforma, and that a planned project for blacks to be known as Crispus Attucks had not been built. This citizens' group felt that the city owed them "Negro housing," even though Tucson was no more than about 3 percent black. That fall, after public housing supporters forced the issue onto the ballot, Tucson's voters rejected the idea of expanding La Reforma by a margin of more than five to one.⁸

Eventually, during the 1950s, La Reforma itself began admitting black families, becoming 15 percent black by 1962. The THA continued to resist using La Reforma to house Tucson's poorest households. Out of 160 households, only 33 received welfare. The THA conducted regular inspections to insure cleanliness and evicted nearly 10 percent of households annually. Reasons for ouster varied from "non-payment of rent, immorality [or] continued disturbances" to the more vaguely termed charge of "non-conformity," revealing a complex mix of cautious economics and paternalist moralism.⁹

PURGING THE TUCSONENSES

With La Reforma a controversial presence, but still safely located a fifteen-minute walk south of *la calle* and the rest of downtown, Tucson city officials continued to debate the matter of slum clearance in the older adobe districts that lay in between. From the late 1930s through the late 1950s, officials pondered whether the area could be rehabilitated or must face wholesale

clearance.¹⁰ Thereafter, as Otero demonstrates in her quietly devastating account of Tucson's urban renewal saga, "Officials would fail to provide city services to *la calle* and would allow building and sanitary regulations to go unenforced. For their part, bankers would deny *la calle's* home owners and landlords access to loans to maintain, let alone improve, their properties." As urban renewal official Don Laidlaw later recalled, starting in the 1950s "There was some zeal on the part of building inspectors to rein in improvements, because the conclusion had already been reached that everything was gonna get torn down—why spend public money on buying back improvements." Local attorney Carlos Robles, engaged in assisting residents fight condemnation orders, concurred: by the late 1950s residents "were told not to improve their property because it had no future."¹¹

The efforts of Tucson's civic leadership to recast the city's Mexican American center took at least three decades to realize. In 1958, twenty years after the first stirrings of slum clearance, city officials proposed clearing 392 acres of the city's core, stretching all the way south to Twenty-Second Street. This first plan proposed to acquire all property in the area at once in order to discourage inflated prices if the project were to proceed in phases. Planners then wished to begin development at the south end of the district, designating the area near La Reforma for "low-cost private housing" intended to rehouse those soon to be displaced from other parts of the urban renewal area (figure 8.1).

Tucson gained approval of its Workable Program and, in March 1961, Mayor Don Hummel appointed attorney S. L. (Si) Schorr as director of urban renewal and gave him substantial authority for preparing the plan. Schorr explicitly counseled property owners to refrain from further investment that "would be a step against the tide in the area." "Naturally," he added, lending institutions understood this, so "satisfactory financing is unavailable." City officials envisioned the urban renewal scheme as a "single long-range project," but in the near term they needed to come up with a plan for relocating the residents. In his memoir, Hummel recalled "innumerable neighborhood sessions" and "good support from residents who lived in the affected areas, on assurances that they would have an opportunity to get improved housing after the land was cleared and redeveloped." Planners knew that they had to comply with federal requirements for rehousing displaced residents, but many in Hummel's own central constituency continued to balk at the very concept of public housing.¹²

In 1961, Schorr authored a report, tellingly entitled *Urban Renewal: A Teamwork of Private Enterprise and Government for Slum Clearance and Redevelopment of the Old Pueblo*—a clear indication of the tightly delimited form of governance constellation still in place for managing Tucson's economic health. The report made the same arguments used throughout the

country about the “cost of slums,” pointing out that the area’s high rates of crime, fires, and juvenile delinquency caused the district to draw disproportionately on city services, thereby placing an unfair burden on Tucson’s taxpayers. Officials claimed that the Pueblo Center district housed 2 percent of the city’s population but accounted for 37 percent of crimes against persons. Instead of “pointless” financial support of “blight” subsidized by those already paying higher property taxes, Schorr’s team promised to make central Tucson “the Southwest’s outstanding cultural magnet and tourist attraction.” The entire report mentioned public housing only twice. The city assumed that nearly all relocatees would find “adequate housing in the normal private market,” but estimated that 12 percent might be able to make use of available units in La Reforma over the next two years.¹³

William Matthews, editor and publisher of the *Star*, responded to Schorr’s report with a rare editorial warning about the cultural costs of the Old Pueblo District Project. He noted that urban renewal advocates object to “wasteful street design” and “plead that structures are too near property lines and that family dwellings are intermingled with business and industrial areas” but forget that this was “the way the Mexicans built their villages.” He wondered: “Must the people of Tucson destroy this remaining area of Mexican life just because the streets are too narrow and buildings old? . . . Maybe someday Tucsonans would look back at urban renewal and wonder why they authorized such a project which wiped out at one stroke what remained of Mexico in Tucson.” As Hummel, a Democrat, reached the end of his third and final two-year term as mayor in December 1961, progress on the Old Pueblo District plan remained stalled. City elections then yielded a Republican mayor, Lew Davis, as well as an all-Republican city council. Davis held mixed opinions about urban renewal, and five-sixths of the new council were openly opposed.¹⁴

On January 12, 1962, the five anti-urban renewal council members “met secretly” and drew up a memorandum asking for the resignations of both Schorr and the city manager. Schorr refused to resign and instead went

Figure 8.1. Continued

way south to Twenty-Second Street, where it reached the La Reforma public housing site, adjacent to the future Connie Chambers project.

Source: Adapted by author and Yonah Freemark from Rachel Stein Gragg, “Tucson: The Formulation and Legitimation of an Urban Renewal Program,” MA thesis, University of Arizona, 1969, fig. 2, p. 37, and from map shown in Roy P. Drachman and Vincent L. Lung, *The Pueblo Center Redevelopment Project*, report presented to the Central City Council of the Urban Land Institute, April 23, 1965 (Tucson: City of Tucson, 1965), between pp. 4 and 5; and S. Lenwood Schorr, *Urban Renewal for Slum Clearance and Urban Development of the Old Pueblo District: Teamwork of Private Enterprise and Government* (Tucson: City of Tucson, 1965), 16

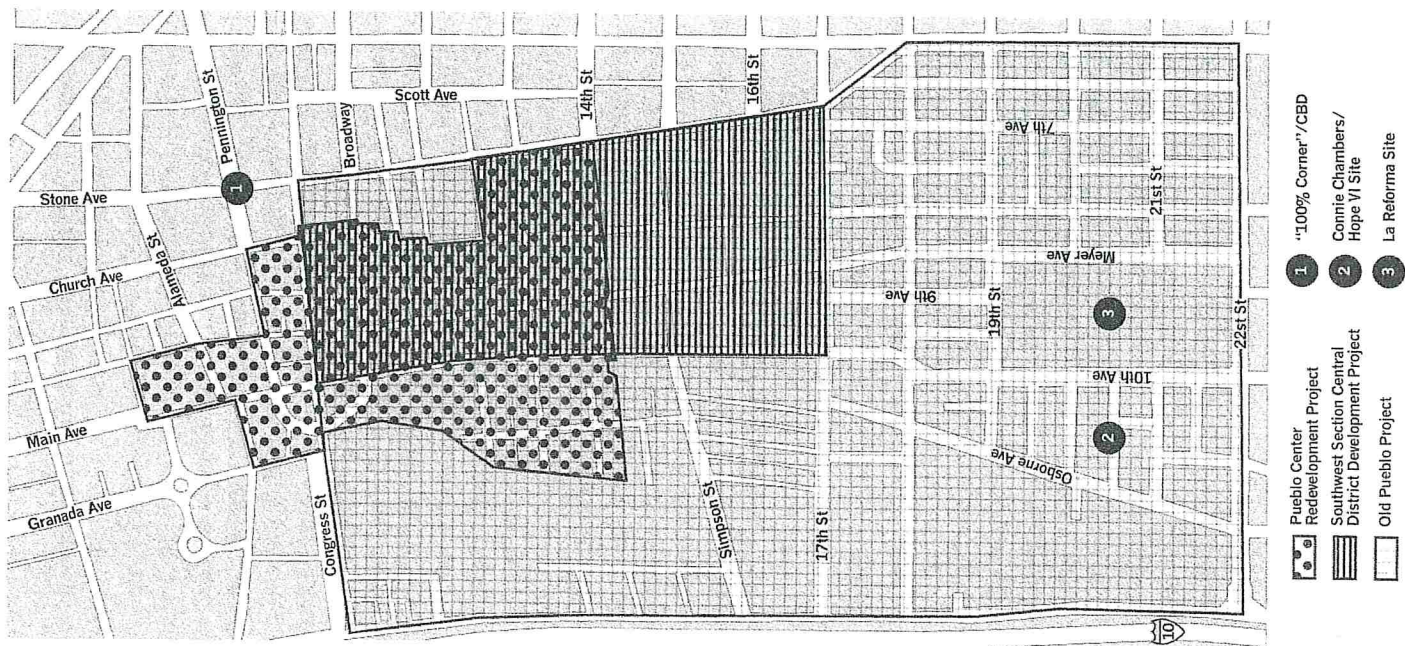


Figure 8.1. Three Versions of Tucson’s Urban Renewal
Although Tucson’s urban renewal plans shifted from 392 acres to 76 acres to 80 acres, each plan targeted the barrios closest to the CBD. The initial proposal extended all the

directly to the press with a markedly reduced plan—only one-fifth of the original size—that he hoped could appease opponents and jump-start a public reconsideration. The smaller project—now less mellifluously called the “Southwest Section Central District Development Plan”—would end at seventeenth Street, thereby stopping short of much of the area of older barrio homes once targeted for replacement by new “low-cost private housing.” Schorr focused this plan on a “convention facility” component and told the city council that the “economic success of a redevelopment plan” depended on this. Even this somewhat more modest plan encompassing “only” seventy-six acres proved too controversial. Schorr’s tactics forced a reluctant mayor and a hostile council into a position of holding public hearings but did little to alter their views. Despite leadership from a new advocacy group, the Citizens Urban Renewal Enterprise (CURE), the plan came under attack in the press. Both the *Arizona Star* and the *Tucson Citizen*, along with many Tucson residents, raised a litany of highly varied objections: urban renewal would raise property taxes, or it would distribute property development rights unfairly or fail to clear enough slums. As Robert Fairbanks points out, such skepticism typified “the war against slums” throughout the region. “The use of eminent domain especially struck a nerve in the urban Southwest,” he stresses, given its “long tradition of suspicion of centralized government and a commitment to rugged individualism.” In Boston, residents objected to particular projects; in Tucson, like New Orleans, philosophical-financial opposition came from those who resisted the entire concept. In May, the council voted to put the urban renewal plan on indefinite hold and allowed the initial federal approval of its “Workable Program” for housing to lapse.¹⁵

A PUBLIC HOUSING INTERREGNUM

With the urban renewal plan in protracted limbo, in December 1962 the THA cautiously requested an additional two hundred units of public housing to supplement La Reforma. Support from a variety of church and civic leaders buoyed the housing authority, but, as the *Star*’s headline aptly warned, a “Housing Battle” loomed. THA chairman Edmund Arriaga pointed out that Tucson lagged well behind Phoenix in public housing supply. He tried to put the best possible spin on the city’s previous experience with La Reforma. In the first sixteen years that it had operated under the auspices of THA, Arriaga pointed out, 424 out of the 904 who had called it home had “rehabilitated themselves” to the point where they could move on to other housing. In this way, the THA sought to reassure Tucsonans that public housing residents should be regarded as responsible and upwardly mobile, thereby making additional housing less of a moral risk.¹⁶ A *Star* editorial

urged the council to “go slow on expanding public housing.” Instead, the paper called for opponents to “come forward with a clean capitalist plan,” adding, “Think what a feather it would be in Tucson’s cap if housing, along with other problems, could be faced and met by private enterprise!”¹⁷

Many city officials viewed any talk of public housing as a barrier to gaining approval for urban renewal programs, even though the Public Housing Administration in Washington required a Workable Program for relocation. By July 1963, while still stressing a central role for private enterprise, the council agreed to move forward with two hundred more public housing units. THA executive director Cornelius (Connie) Chambers promised that Tucson’s new Workable Program would entail corresponding condemnation or demolition of two hundred substandard housing units, adding that those in the cleared areas would have “first choice in the new buildings.”¹⁸

In the winter of 1964–1965, the THA began its arduous effort to acquire 13.5 acres of land immediately across from the La Reforma project. The city had owned the previously undeveloped southern part for decades, but the mostly residential northern part was far from vacant. By August 1965, the THA succeeded in negotiating the purchase of thirty-two out of the forty-five properties it needed but had to litigate the remaining thirteen cases. In addition to homes, the future Connie Chambers site also housed the Lee family’s Westside Market. As Ronald Lee, a Chinese American, recalled, “The city took the Westside property; they just took everything.” Although his family was able to open a new store on Twenty-Second Street, more than thirty years later he described displaced neighbors as still “bitter about the way the way they were treated.” As Lee saw it, “There was a lot of dissension when the city came in to take over and build Connie Chambers on our land but no resistance because we weren’t educated on how to fight it. In those days, the government talked and you listened, and you couldn’t do anything about it. You just got run over.”¹⁹

PUEBLO CENTER REDEVELOPMENT, REVIVED

Meanwhile, with the plan to double the size of La Reforma public housing in progress under the auspices of the THA, in late 1964 Mayor Davis and the city council separately revived the urban renewal plan, now called the Pueblo Center Redevelopment Project. Tucson’s third version of an urban renewal plan now targeted eighty acres to the west and southwest of the CBD. The new incarnation curtailed the southern spread of the first two plans still further, stopping at Fourteenth Street, while adding some land on the north. It still focused on plans for a new community center, government facilities, a transportation center, and shopping areas, but now contained no

residences, apartments, or public housing of any kind. Although residential structures comprised 70 percent of the buildings on the existing site, the city sought to supersede such land uses and, by extension, such land users. Just south of Fourteenth Street, the city proposed a sunken new east-west highway, the Butterfield Stage Route, which, if built, would have further separated the urban renewal area from the remaining barrios.

Although many elected officials still preferred a form of “private” urban renewal that did not entail federal funding, the business community showed renewed interest in a bolder plan. The Build America Better Committee of the National Association of Real Estate Boards produced “An Action Program for Tucson,” which drew sharp contrasts between modern Tucson and the “mud huts a stone’s throw from the central business district,” and stressed that the commercial center of *la calle* had “no future.” If it were to be “cleared of present structures and completely redeveloped,” the realtors opined, this could “open the heart of the city to view by creating a magnificent new entrance from the freeway to downtown.” Tucson Broadcasters, an organization representing twelve radio and three television stations, spoke out strongly in favor of a community center that could host conventions. Roy Drachman, as chairman of the Citizens Committee on Municipal Blight, and Vincent Lung, Tucson’s assistant city manager and coordinator of community development, obtained “an expert stamp of approval” from key officials of the Urban Land Institute in April 1965—the same organization that would jump-start plans for redevelopment of St. Thomas in New Orleans three decades later. Tucson’s ULI consultants agreed that the proposed community center and cultural facilities would give the downtown area a necessary “shot in the arm.” Moreover, at a time when Tucson faced signs of economic decline, reactivating the demolition and construction industry enabled backers to see urban renewal as “instant industry.”²⁰ Buoyed by new supporters, the council voted to reinstate the urban renewal program and create a new Department of Community Development.

On March 1, 1966, Tucson’s voters approved the city’s plan to borrow up \$14 million to support the Pueblo Center Redevelopment Project. Still controversial, the project passed by a margin of 10,193 to 7,129. The surprisingly low number of total votes reflected both a 32 percent turnout and the more salient fact that the city permitted only those 55,000 citizens who owned Tucson real estate and paid property taxes to cast ballots. In short, only about 3 percent of the Tucson’s population of 300,000 actually voted to approve the plan. Moreover, the various citizens’ committees associated with urban renewal planning since the 1950s had all failed to include membership from citizens who actually lived in the communities targeted for clearance. Taken together, especially given that more than 80 percent of those to be displaced

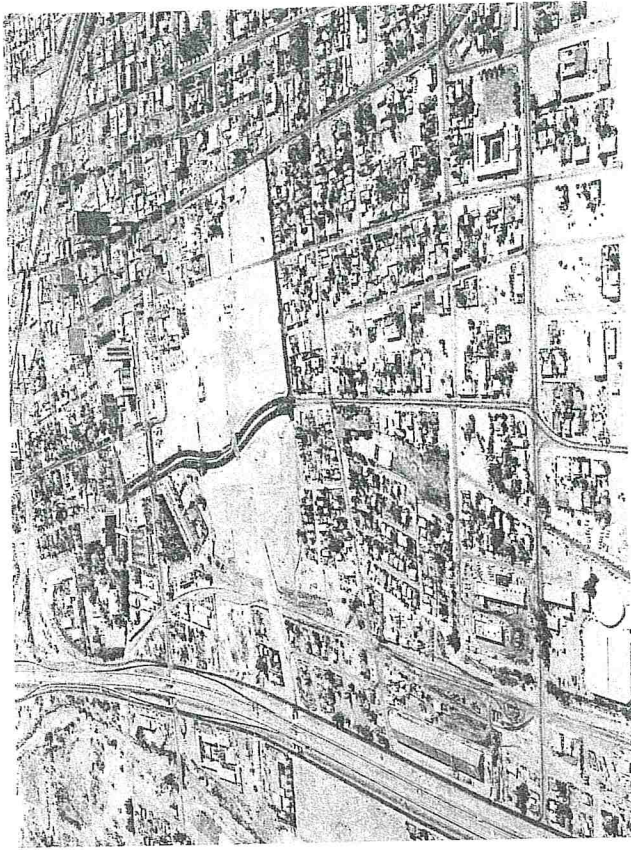


Figure 8.2. Tucson’s Urban Renewal Clears Eighty Acres of the Downtown Barrio. An aerial photograph taken in 1969 shows the extent of Tucson’s urban renewal clearance south of the downtown.

Credit: Photo © Fred Wehrman photography, 1969, files of Lydia Otero.

were renters, very few of those most directly affected by the proposed purge had much of any opportunity to weigh in on it. Ultimately, Tucson’s civic leadership cared most about altering negative aspects of the city’s image, so it made no sense to consult those judged responsible for that negativity. As Drachman put it,

We must have a convention facility so that we can develop a more complete image as a place to visit. We must expand our cultural facilities. We must do something to clean up and clear out the unsightly near-downtown slum areas.

Cleaning up and clearing out meant removal of a population that was 91 percent Mexican American, African American, or Chinese. Although drastically scaled down from the gargantuan 392-acre original vision, the Pueblo Center project nonetheless cleared 80 acres of the downtown barrio, said to be the most densely populated place in Arizona (figure 8.2).²¹

Not coincidentally, the deeply racialized project targeted the commercial center of the *Tucsonenses* community and also displaced a substantial percentage of the city’s other nonwhite residents. The city’s *Final Relocation Report* gave the transition the best possible spin, insisting that “human

renewal was linked with the goal of physical renewal.” The report immediately made clear, though, that this essentially meant replacing one set of humans with another, leading to the “upgrading of the families, individuals, and businesses in the target area.” “By the mid-1960s,” Otero observes, “la calle’ had become synonymous with ‘old,’ ‘dilapidated,’ and ‘dangerous.’” In other words, its denizens faced a catch 22—they were forbidden to improve their homes and businesses and then victimized for the failure to do so. In this way, over the course of two decades of manipulated disinvestment, the area’s designation as a “slum” became a self-fulfilling prophecy. If Tucson’s leaders had termed the area merely “blighted,” Arizona law would have required redevelopment to be primarily residential, but, because of the “slum” designation, the district could be redeveloped for any purpose (figure 8.3). Because the changeover of the community could be couched in the language of “highest and best” land uses, and because “social evils” could be replaced by “carefully designed facilities,” city officials had no need to deploy the language of race.²² Confronted with the center of a community, city officials preferred to substitute a community center.

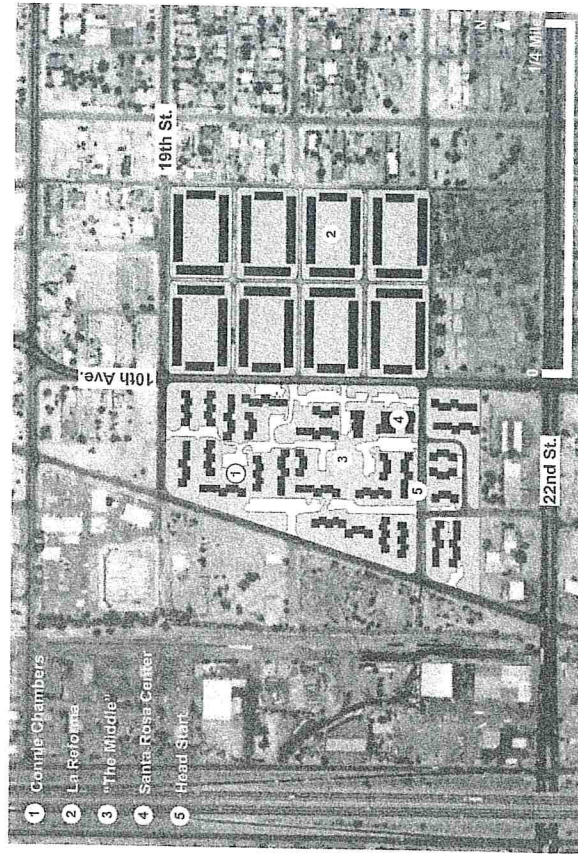


Figure 8.3. Connie Chambers and La Reforma Public Housing Developments. Residents often referred to the Connie Chambers development, completed in 1967, as New Reforma, since the courtyard dwellings of La Reforma were located just across the street.

Credit: Map produced by author with Kristin Simonson and Jonathan Tarleton.

Seeking to reclaim the affection of suburbanites and attract new visitors, the Tucson Community Center (TCC) opened in 1971. Later renamed the Tucson Convention Center, its arrival epitomized the fiscal imperatives of urban renewal, since it focused on the city-region as a whole.²³ To the promoters of Greater Tucson, the city-region’s economic future seemed to reside in enhanced tourism and convention business and cultural programming, not to mention the perpetually elusive efforts to regain downtown retail vibrancy. As Schorr had put it in 1961, “Because we do not live in a neighborhood only but in a *total* city, it is in the interest of every Tucsonian to have a sound downtown area.” Still, as Fairbanks has shown for other cities in Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico, even when cities are dominated by a business elite, urban renewal proponents experienced increasing difficulty making arguments that projects would be good for “the city as a whole.”²⁴

In Tucson, many of those forced from the hundreds of homes and businesses demolished by the urban renewal process resisted their eviction, forcing the city to file condemnation suits on 117 different parcels. About half of those who owned properties accepted the buyout money offered as the result of appraisals, even though these marked the low point of valuation following two decades of disinvestment and did not take into account the enhancements likely to result from the forthcoming new construction. A court ruling in 1969 eventually determined that some of the increased property values due to accrue from neighboring new civic facilities ought to be factored in when making appraisals, but this interpretation came far too late for most owners to obtain fair value for their homes and businesses. And, as Otero points out, because renters made up the overwhelming majority of affected residents but had no legal standing to sue, “No court records document their dissatisfaction.” Moreover, as attorney Carlos Robles observed at the time, even those owners who could have fought the city did not do so, partly due to cultural and language barriers: “When the city threatened suits against them if they didn’t move, they left without going to court. They thought there was something criminal about courts. They didn’t understand that these were civil cases.” As Hector Morales, the Ward 5 city councilor at the time, later recalled, “I tried to stop urban renewal. I had families come to me, and I tried to help them. But the council refused to give them a break.”²⁵

The city’s *Final Relocation Report* candidly recounts that “many site residents” distrusted the relocation staff. First, they resented the long period of uncertainty that had preceded demolition and blamed the staff that “symbolized this project.” Second, many of those who owned property in the urban renewal project area complained about the “prices and methods” used to acquire their homes, especially since the appraisers came from out of state. Some in the barrio, residents protested, were rewarded because they proved adept at negotiating good prices, while others failed to obtain

enough compensation to be able to purchase a comparable home elsewhere. Ultimately, out of nearly three hundred households that still needed to be relocated once the clearance finally moved forward, forty-four were able to purchase their own homes. Much of this limitation, presumably, had to do with low incomes, but urban renewal officials matter-of-factly stated the larger problem: "Tucson loan officers were often reluctant to extend loans to project residents." Cress Lander, who served on the housing authority board during this period and soon became the long-serving head of the city's Community Services Department, pointed out that the relocation of homeowners from the barrio proved to be one of the project's greatest shortcomings. "When they had urban renewal they basically bought out all of the Hispanic and black and low-income people around Meyer Street. They were supposed to get a new form of FHA deal that [meant] they could have a new house for only seventy to eighty dollars a month in payments." Unfortunately, "The administration at that time allowed the developers to sell these houses to just anybody in Tucson," so the "good deals" did not go to the intended beneficiaries. Instead, as Lander recalled with frustration, the FHA program "ended up serving higher-income people," and these loans enabled just twelve families from the razed part of the barrio to purchase a home.²⁶

As for renters, the city's first priority was to protect their landlords. Fearful that well-founded rumors about property sales to the City of Tucson would cause "tenants to vacate units early in the project," landlords got the city to delay notifying tenants about the need for them to vacate until after the property had been duly acquired. The city still gave tenants ninety days to relocate and proudly noted that "there were no evictions." That said, finding new homes for those departing households that asked for assistance proved to be "one of the biggest problems faced by the relocation staff." Despite optimistic predictions about the availability of inexpensive housing made at the time the city applied for urban renewal funding, once relocation began, "this anticipated housing supply shrank drastically," due to competing demand from new employees in the aircraft and mining industries, as well as from university students and winter visitors. The urban renewal staff also soon discovered that "Tucson realty companies usually did not handle rentals for low-income families or individuals" and that market sales prices "were often out-of-reach for low-income project residents." Moreover, despite Tucson's antidiscrimination ordinance passed in 1965, many black relocates faced considerable resistance from potential landlords.²⁷

The relocation staff interviewed some of the families who chose substandard housing in an effort to understand why. One Mexican American woman with seven children moved into a windowless home with a sagging

kitchen floor and unventilated bathroom so that she could remain nearby in the barrio:

Although public housing was strongly suggested, she adamantly refused to move. Uneducated herself, she felt a strong allegiance to the local school and did not wish to move to another school district. Also, as in many poverty families, possessions such as chickens and a garden are highly valued. One cannot raise chickens in public housing. Therefore, this mother chose to remain in the substandard home that she could afford on her low income.

An elderly, single, black veteran also chose to remain in the area, even though it meant living in a substandard dwelling with inadequate heating or plumbing. When queried, he explained that the new home was "private, quiet, and close to the central business district," and rented for only twenty dollars a month. "I'm satisfied," he noted, "and it is just about what I can afford to pay." As the relocation report put it, "His comment could be the words of any of the residents who moved to substandard housing." In the end, Tucson city officials seemed to understand why some displaced residents preferred to move into other substandard housing rather than try life in public housing. Private housing, however low in quality, "represents a social environment comparable to that of the old home. The substandard homes are primarily located close to the central business district with cheap restaurants, stores and taverns nearby." Such private homes also provided greater perceived freedoms, since they had "none of the aura of regulations linked with public housing." Taken together, the paucity of written accounts about the purging of the *Tucsonenses* community does not tell the whole story. As Lydia Otero observes, "Although those displaced by urban renewal did not come together in large numbers to protest, many opposed their removal in ways that remain undocumented."²⁸ And collective memory has remained a form of resistance.

THE RISE OF CONNIE CHAMBERS

The Connie Chambers Homes project, designed by the firm of Edson and Goldblatt, opened in the fall of 1967, just as the nearby downtown demolition ramped up. Named in memory of the former THA executive director who had died in 1965, the THA promised to give priority to those displaced from the urban renewal area. With two hundred new units becoming available, plus additional vacancies at the adjacent La Reforma, the resource at first seemed to be an appealing way for the 161 families and 120 individuals forced out of the Pueblo Center Redevelopment area to find new homes that were little more than a ten-minute walk from the razed parts of the barrio.

By August 1967, sixty-six families from the urban renewal zone had applied for residence in what they usually called "New Reforma," but soon became known as "the projects," or "The Pjays." THA executive director Paul McCoy conceded that "not all families from the urban renewal area will qualify for residence in the housing project" but insisted that "we will have room for all those who do qualify." Once again, the availability of public housing depended on what it meant to "qualify." On the surface, the THA framed qualification around issues of residency and income. Households needed to have lived in Arizona for a year and within Pima County for at least six months, and they needed to have incomes lower than \$3,000 unless they were supporting an unusually large number of children. Rents, which included utilities, varied from \$28 to \$78 per month, depending on family size. Tucson's urban renewal staff expected "public housing to be "a major relocation resource," and estimated that fully 40 percent of the "site occupants" would go there. To the surprise of many, however, only thirty-six families from the barrios razed to build the community center or the new public housing itself actually moved into either Connie Chambers or La Reforma by 1970.²⁹

The housing authority did not retain records of these early tenants, but the *Final Relocation Report* issued by Tucson's redevelopment agency coupled with various newspaper accounts and oral histories provide some sense of the variety of reasons why public housing officials resisted some tenants and some tenants resisted public housing. First off, for 120 lodgers and other single individuals purged from the barrio, "family" public housing simply was, by definition, not a viable alternative. Many larger households presumably failed to meet income or residency requirements. Although public housing rents sometimes compared favorably to what was available elsewhere in the barrio, a survey of displaced households conducted by the Tucson Redevelopment Agency in 1965 had found that "the average monthly income of the non-white residents was less than \$100 per month," suggesting that public housing rents could be out of reach, especially for larger families.³⁰

The public housing option simply held no appeal for many people, either because its social environment seemed both isolating and socially disruptive, or because its design bore little relation to preferred modes of living. As resident Sarah Valencia complained to a reporter in 1970, "There is no quiet here, always disorder, confusion, mischief. And vandalism, always they are breaking things, windows, cars. There are too many children running around." She much preferred her old home in the barrio, even though "the roof leaked and the wallpaper was falling off." At least there she had her old friends, whereas "none of them moved [to Connie Chambers], and I only see them once in a while." Another woman said she was dissuaded from public

housing by a friend who pointed out that her children would have no yard to play in and that "everyone lived too close together, and there was a lot of stealing going on." The relocation staff interviewed twelve of the thirty-six households that moved into public housing. Respondents discounted the problem of excessive regulations or inspections, and most found modern plumbing and spaciousness of their public housing apartments "definitely a physical improvement over their old homes." That said, ten of twelve complained about what the staff termed "the children problem"—groups of kids "uncontrolled by parents, [who] roam noisily about late at night annoying neighbors and each other." Many objected to "feuds between neighbors that sometimes led to actual fights." A social worker noted that the combined population of La Reforma and Connie Chambers included 1,615 legal residents but estimated the real total closer to 2,000 due to the presence of extra "relatives and illegitimate children." At base, urban renewal officials blamed the parents and the conceptual design of the project: "Because families are concentrated in a small area, parents themselves have problems with neighbors and there is little energy left to control the children. . . . While public housing has represented physical upgrading for many project families," its "close, community living" has also "presented new interpersonal living problems." Such commentary provided little insight given that most households had presumably come from markedly denser living environments elsewhere.³¹

Connie Chambers nonetheless did mark a significant environmental shift (figures 8.3–8.4). In contrast to the barrio composed primarily of one-story structures, much of the Connie Chambers architecture contained two-story parts. This increased the perception of density, even though the project offered large expanses of open space between buildings. At least La Reforma had been organized around internal courtyards, a more culturally familiar form for the project's Mexican American majority.

At the time Connie Chambers opened, the THA board remained aloof and suspicious of its low-income tenants. This quickly changed once the mayor appointed Cress Lander to the board. But Lander, an African American who had good relations with both the business community and the civil rights community, soon found himself "out of sync" with the rest of the board. Lander recalls that the board supported midnight inspections of public housing apartments so that "they could see if a man was living in the house" but was not on the lease. Lander objected to a level of paternalist intrusiveness that "made it difficult for people to live a normal life," a surveillance that he notes was made possible by a project design that "wanted everything open." Lander refused to allow inspections to happen and took steps to acquaint the board with the actual clientele. When he first joined, the board used to meet over a "nice dinner" on the tenth floor of the Pioneer

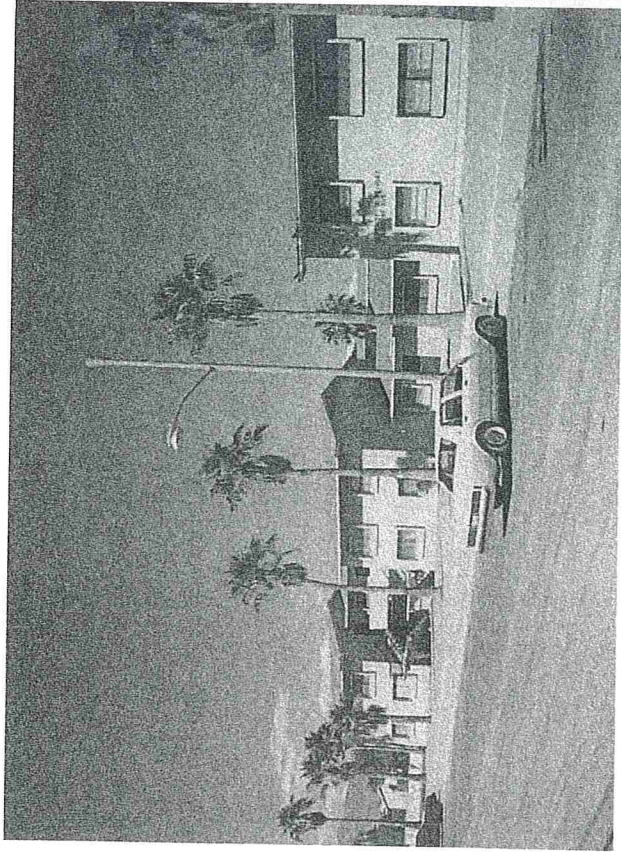


Figure 8.4. Connie Chambers Project: Palms and Problems
Despite its appearance as a motel-like complex fringed by palms, many in Tucson considered Connie Chambers to be a dangerous place to live in or visit.
Credit: Courtesy of Poster Frost Mirto, Inc.

Hotel. This was an elite institution well distant from both the agency headquarters and the public housing, and “there was no way for a public housing resident to appear before the board. They didn’t allow people to come with any kind of grievance or statement or recommendation. They were shut out. I told them that they couldn’t meet in the Pioneer Hotel and be the board for the Housing Authority.” Lander insisted that they meet instead at the Connie Chambers site so that residents could take part. Early in 1968 at Lander’s urging, newly elected mayor Jim Corbett, a Democrat, forced just such a meeting and attended it himself. Paul McCoy, the THA executive director in charge of La Reforma and Connie Chambers, then “got up and said that ‘there’s a nigger in the woodpile’ because we were being forced to move the meetings down to the project,” Lander recalled. “The mayor was there and asked for his resignation. Not only did the mayor ask for his resignation but the rest of the board all resigned, all except me.” Mayor Corbett then named Lander board chairman and filled the remainder with new people. According to the *Citizen*, this was all no more than a “temporary uproar,” caused by Democrats seeking to replace McCoy with a “closer political friend.” McCoy actually remained in his post, while the THA board

quietly embarked on various reform efforts. At Lander’s urging, by summer 1968 the THA finally appointed a bilingual employee at a project whose occupants were two-thirds Mexican American, created a tenants’ council “to allow tenants some voice in the affairs of their projects,” invited a tenant representative to attend THA meetings, and added a nighttime foot patrolman.³² Hardly the same story as the contemporaneous “tenant-oriented majority” in Boston, but still hinting at progressive politics, even in Tucson.

Despite Lander’s leadership, project-based public housing remained a contentious issue. Completion of the additional concerns about whether this Rosa barrio south of downtown reignited concerns about whether this represented the right development direction for such a centrally located neighborhood. As early as 1972, the city began asking HUD for permission to “close out” La Reforma, and, in 1974, a *Star* editorial stated that building the two projects had delivered “an instant ghetto.” The *Star* favored dispersing the residents and replacing both projects with middle-class homeowner-ship opportunities targeted to “non minority” families so as to “bring a new balance to the neighborhood and its schools and bring an economic lift to the neighborhood and to downtown, just a few blocks away.” With Tucson’s leaders having already purged the poorest from the urban renewal area, the paper wished to see the remainder of low-income households moved out as well.³³

Meanwhile, the city continued to consider new ways to upgrade residential areas located beyond the bounds of the Pueblo Center clearance. Even after the Pueblo Center renewal plan cleared eighty acres, the city and its consultants never abandoned the larger aim of eliminating all substandard housing. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, the city set out plans for a broader program of “community renewal.” As a report by the planning firm of Candebut, Fleissig titled “Preliminary Proposals for Area Treatment” put it in 1968, “The Community Renewal Program represents an ongoing continuous effort to replace, maintain, conserve and develop portions of the Tucson community to provide a good living environment for its residents.” This meant that residents of the barrios spared by the first phase continually felt under siege and distrustful of the city’s motives, unsure what “treatment” their “area” would receive. In 1968, the Community Services Department’s consultants conducted nearly a thousand household interviews to determine the “prevalence of social problems.” They defined such problems with an aggregate rank based on poverty, low education, broken homes, welfare cases, overcrowding, presence of the elderly, renter status, and unemployment. Not surprisingly, they found that a key concentration of “#1 rank problems” remained in the barrios just south of the urban renewal clearance, in the vicinity of La Reforma and Connie Chambers. In addition to economic, educational, and environmental factors, the city’s list

of “blight indices” also included factors such as “population with Spanish surname as a percent of total population” and “Negroes as a percent of total population.” Even if race and ethnicity did covary with many indicators of socioeconomic distress, labeling minority status as itself a marker of blight is as revealing as it is impolitic. With “social problems” duly racialized, Tucson officials embarked on an effort to use public housing as a means to scatter the barrio.³⁴

SCATTERING PUBLIC HOUSING

With about four hundred Tucson households on the waiting list for public housing (a modest number but still larger than the entire stock), the city sought to acquire additional units without building new projects. This philosophical preference for deconcentration both anticipated and mirrored the larger federal effort to shift more of the nation’s subsidized housing onto a certificate and voucher basis through the Section 8 program introduced in 1974. Section 8, however, relies on the private market, whereas Tucson’s leaders wished to scatter the city’s publicly owned stock as well.

Cress Lander began working directly for the city in 1969 as head of the Model Cities division of the Community Planning and Development Department and gradually took on increased leadership roles. He was chiefly responsible for the decision to incorporate Tucson’s housing authority into the city’s Community Services Department in 1971 and headed the combined department all the way until 1992. His move to make the THA part of city government had several repercussions. First, since those who had crafted Arizona’s enabling legislation for housing authorities distrusted the very concept, Arizona law denied them the power to own land; moving the THA into a larger community services city agency that had no such restrictions made new property acquisition much simpler. Second, moving the THA into this particular city agency set public housing on a much more spatially integrated course, embedding it in larger questions of neighborhood well-being in ways that differ from most other cities. In this way, Tucson’s approach to poverty governance retained—and enhanced—the role of the public sector. Instead of a THA concerned with projects, Tucson’s public housing would be based in an agency concerned with economic development at larger community scales. For Lander, however, taking control of the city’s public housing portfolio offered the opportunity to shift away from the old “project” mentality completely.³⁵

For both social and political reasons, Lander wanted Tucson’s public stock to grow in a scattered manner. As he phrased it, “I had a plan to decentralize housing, and that’s what we were able to do. We were able to get units

into all of the councilmanic wards in Tucson.” With sites scattered across the city, “We used to brag that we had 1,500 units and the mayor didn’t know where they were.” Eventually, Tucson managed to distribute its housing into four hundred different sites, many of them no more than a single house. As Lander observed, “When we had fifteen hundred units and the mayor didn’t know where they were, then we didn’t *have* public housing—unless the people living in it told the people next door that they were living in public housing.” Tucson’s urban renewal proponents had scattered the residents of the barrio unwillingly; Lander’s second-generation scatterplot purported to do so more proactively, focused on diversifying the city’s neighborhoods. Because Tucson’s public housing chiefly housed Mexican Americans, blacks, and Native Americans, scattering it “had a big effect on the desegregation of the schools.” Although Tucson nominally had integrated schools, having neighborhood-based schools in substantially segregated neighborhoods meant that, basically, “the schools were still segregated.” Moving low-income non-Anglos all over town helped alter schools as well as housing.³⁶

THE END OF LA REFORMA

With public housing projects politically unpopular and Tucson headed down a new policy path of scattered-site development, the ultimate fate of La Reforma—whether the new part or the original—soon looked bleak. It had taken thirty years to build 360 units of project-based family public housing and, within five years, the city had already commenced serious discussions about how to get rid of it. This, too, would take nearly thirty years to accomplish. As the city explored HUD’s willingness to let it tear down the older portion of its “instant ghetto,” residents also joined the fray. In 1972, a group calling itself “La Reforma Angry Tenants,” claiming to represent both parts of the development, publicly threatened a rent strike to protest inadequate maintenance. They complained about “leaky stoves, furnaces, and water heaters [that] present a health as well as a fire hazard.” They added that “cracks in walls, holes in floors, [and] inadequate plumbing make living itself a hazard.” The disgruntled tenants objected to unchecked vandalism, drinking, and drug use within the two projects and resented being charged extra for broken windows since these were “items over which they have no control.” They also objected to policies that raised their rent immediately after they left welfare or got a better job, commenting that “we want to live better, but how can we when we keep getting hit down each time we raise our heads?” They “insisted” on a six-month delay in such rent increases. As tenants fumed about conditions, many others in the city schemed to get rid of the problems by getting rid of the projects. By 1975, the Tucson Trade

Bureau proposed the "removal" of both La Reforma and Connie Chambers, even though it recognized that a mass relocation project could result in "resentment, increased social problems and community disruption." A *Citizen* editorial praised the trade bureau for exercising "the kind of initiative required from the community to keep the ball rolling toward a vigorous, healthy inner city."³⁷

As the wrecking ball swung closer to La Reforma, housing officials blamed lack of funding for its maintenance woes. To Cress Lander, upkeep "was always the battle." It was "one thing to get your subsidy in terms of the rent," he noted, but the "other big battle was to get some money for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the housing." Eventually, in 1979, Tucson again applied to HUD for permission to shut down the old part of La Reforma, promising to clear the site and replace the lost units with scattered-site public housing. In addition to skeptics at HUD, Lander faced many local critics who resisted the idea of tearing down such a major source of well-located public housing. "A lot of people thought it was a real nice place, but it wasn't," Lander insists. "La Reforma looked like a million dollars" because it was brick construction, but he contended that it was structurally unsound due to a lack of steel reinforcement caused by materials constraints during the war. Part of the problem, he asserted, is that the concrete floors had been built too thin, only one to three inches, and once they cracked, all sorts of problems ensued. The city provided HUD with city and federal engineering reports to demonstrate that such shortcomings made it "unsuitable" for housing and "not feasible" for renovation. Tucson's housing and community development officials also considered the current *policy* to be structurally unsound, since it "contributes to undue concentration of low income families in the area which is inconsistent with city and HUD objectives." Lander justified the closure mostly in physical design terms but also recognized the social struggle that this entailed. "We just had to get rid of people a little bit at a time," he recalled, but Lander and other Tucson officials felt certain that scattered-site public housing offered better options than projects. Ultimately, HUD acquiesced, and demolition commenced in November 1983. It proved easier to disperse buildings than people. AAA Demolition happily sold off the La Reforma salvage, characterized as being in excellent condition—"mission tiles, 2 million kiln-fired Red Jumbo bricks, clear lumber with a decorative V-groove that was used for the ceilings, wood doors, evaporative coolers, and gas heaters."³⁸

With La Reforma's tenants relocated, the city struggled to redevelop the empty site. Emily Nottingham, who began working for the city in 1978 and would eventually be in charge of its housing and community development programs, took part in the disposition of La Reforma. "We didn't want the property to be an abandoned nuisance," she recalled. The city

wished to "redevelop it for the private market and bring some more private sector investment in and get rid of the 'donut hole' in the neighborhood." Unfortunately, the city initially sold the site to a poorly capitalized developer who went under, and subsequent development efforts also faltered.³⁹

Just as Tucson's downtown barrio had given way to overstated hopes of a private sector revival under the banner of urban renewal, public housing renewal seemed the next logical step. La Reforma fell first, but the demise of Connie Chambers would not be far behind.

9 The Fall of Connie Chambers and the Rise of Posadas Sentinel

THE FALL OF CONNIE CHAMBERS

With La Reforma demolished by 1984, the city gradually turned its attention to Connie Chambers, its largest remaining family public housing development. As with most other urban public housing developments, residents recall its history with a mixture of nostalgia and clear-eyed skepticism. It is therefore easy to understand both the CSD's interest in redeveloping the project and the reluctance of others to see this happen. In 2000, during the HOPE VI transformation process, a local nonprofit worked with ten Connie Chambers youth to produce a bilingual collective memoir, entitling it *Don't Look at Me Different / No Me Veas Diferente*, intending it to counter stereotypes by presenting "Voices from the Projects." Based mostly on interviews with residents, the memoir provides a balanced historical account, emphasizing the lingering pride of residents about the strengths of their community without glossing over serious shortcomings and dangerous conditions. Taken together, residents recall an early period of stability, with little evidence of turf battles between the La Reforma and Connie Chambers sides of the development. Into the 1970s, they describe a world of "two-parent families [with] everybody looking out for each other" and an active Connie Chambers Neighborhood Association.¹

A key turning point came in February 1975 with the murder of twenty-one-year-old Connie Chambers resident Bobby Ray Harris, gunned down in the project's Santa Rosa Center gym in front of one hundred witnesses. Carrie Bryant Joe, who lived in Connie Chambers as a youth from 1979 to 1982, remembered the lingering effect of the Harris killing, especially since the killer had come from the La Reforma side. "A lot of people back then were real close and when that happened it made things a little bit more complicated and worse." The murder put a "burden on the families" and left people "scared to socialize with people outside the area." By the early 1980s, Arnold Moreno recalled, "Everything was changing. The people in the neighborhood weren't the same anymore. There was more alcoholism

than anything else. More drug addicts." Ismael Galindo, whose family moved into Connie Chambers in 1980, remembered the nighttime comradeship in the "Middle," the area at the center of the project where Coleta Avenue intersected Twentieth Street and "where everybody hung out when the sun went down, tagging on walls, getting drunk, getting high." He also recalled the danger—"all the gunshots, police sirens, and the helicopter lights flashing through the windows nightly." "Everybody from the pjays got along well," he continued, "but anybody from another neighborhood wasn't allowed to walk through the projects. If anybody was caught walking through at night, that person would get beat down by whoever was hanging out in the Middle." At the same time, however, Galindo praised the availability of the Santa Rosa Center, with its indoor gym and many programmed activities. Adolfo (Chico) Figueroa recalled block parties and Thanksgiving football, but also rampant drug use and car break-ins. He resisted the notion that Connie Chambers residents constituted a "gang" but acknowledged that outsiders "weren't welcomed." "They'd come here to start trouble, they wouldn't come here to get along." Repeatedly, residents blamed most of the "trouble" on "outsiders" intent on vandalism. To curtail graffiti, in 1986 the CSD hired Chicano artist Alfred Quiroz to supervise project youth in painting seven murals he designed with them on "key walls" of the development. The murals depicted everything from mountains, jungles, and beaches to Aztec wind gods and internationally collaborating astronauts. One depicted five faces, representing the unity of the project's Anglo, Chinese, Native American, Chicano, and African American residents, and another proudly called out the name of the "10th Avenue Projects" (figure 9.1).²

Seeking funds from the federal Public Housing Drug Elimination Program in 1991, the city presented a dire picture of Connie Chambers, noting that fully 42 percent of households had vacated the development in the preceding year. The CSD evicted a few of those households, but a larger number had simply "abandoned their homes." Most tenants who left did not explicitly document their reasons, but the CSD blamed drug-related crime: "Because the neighborhood has become a dangerous area to live in, tenants will not stay, even if their need for housing is critical." With the arrival of crack cocaine in the late 1980s, the Tucson police department documented an upsurge in arrests on Connie Chambers property, rising from an already-high 300 in 1987 to 566 by 1991. Police reported a "call load" of more than one hundred per month throughout this period. By 1991, larceny, assault, narcotics arrests, vandalism, disorderly conduct, and liquor violations each occurred on a weekly or near-weekly basis in the development. Seeking to discourage drive-by drug trafficking, the CSD posted signs against trespassing and loitering and installed gates across several thoroughways to create a series of dead-ends. More generally, city

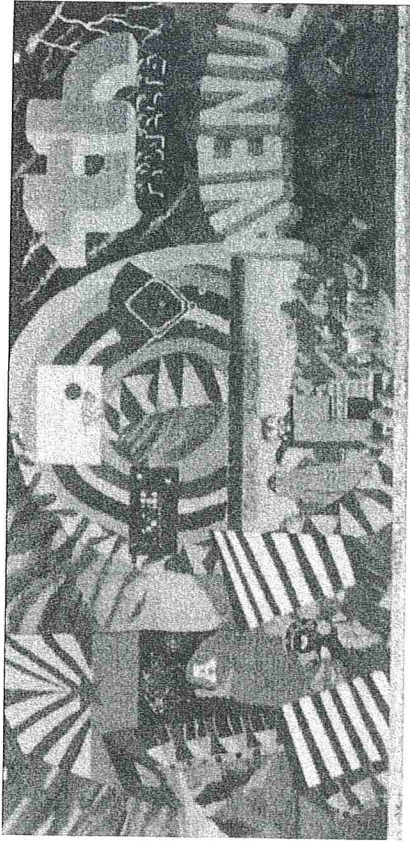


Figure 9.1. 10th Avenue Projects Mural, Connie Chambers

The Community Services Department asked Chicano artist Alfred Quiroz to work with youth from Connie Chambers to create a series of murals as a means to discourage graffiti, including this one calling out the name of the “10th Avenue Projects.”

Source: Charlene Vega (2000), youth photographer, *Voices, Inc. From Don't Look at Me Different / No Me Veas Diferente*, 133.

leaders came to regard Connie Chambers itself as a dead-end and sought out alternatives.³

When Cress Lander retired as director of the CSD in 1992, his colleague Emily Nottingham succeeded him on an interim basis. As she put it, the CSD started to focus on Connie Chambers in the early 1990s, because it “was our one development that felt like ‘the projects’”:

Although occupied and relatively well maintained, it had its own little gang, the Pjays. It was referred to as “the projects,” and the neighborhood didn’t like it. There were a lot of tenant complaints and tenant-to-tenant disagreements. We didn’t think it was functioning well.

Karen Thoreson, who came to Tucson as CSD director in 1993 after having headed the housing authority in tony Boulder, Colorado, reacted even more harshly. “Connie Chambers frankly just offended me,” Thoreson recalled. “It was old public housing and in poor repair. It was crime ridden, but you couldn’t do anything about it.” Just as bad, directly east of the site she found the aftermath of La Reforma, “a big vacant lot full of broken glass where folks would shoot up and drink beer. It was just a disaster, just disgusting.” She blamed the public housing, past and present, for causing disinvestment in “everything around it.” Thoreson, with Nottingham now as her deputy, immediately thought to try for a HOPE VI grant but didn’t think the city would qualify.⁴

Initially, the department tried to get funding from HUD’s MROP (Major Reconstruction of Obsolete Projects) program but failed twice. In 1994, the department launched a community development effort to assess the larger Santa Rosa neighborhood because, even without money, “at least we could plan.” Thoreson and Tucson planner William Vasko worked closely with a team led by architect-planner Corky Poster from the University of Arizona’s Roy P. Drachman Institute for Land and Regional Development Studies (a community outreach unit named after the legendary developer and university benefactor). Among many questions, Poster’s team asked, “What is the future of Connie Chambers?” and “Can we end its isolation?” Without specifying just who this “we” should be, the planners recognized that they operated on contested terrain. They asked: “Can we construct a future for Greater Santa Rosa that satisfies the legitimate concerns and interests of its diverse populations? Is there room in the area for everyone to win?” The plan stopped short of answering such questions. As Emily Nottingham put it, Poster was involved in “a lot of shuttle diplomacy” due to the “lack of a shared vision” and high level of “discord in the neighborhood unrelated to Connie Chambers.” The plan—much of which would eventually be implemented—proposed multiple alternatives for placing housing and community facilities on the former La Reforma site, including a new Drachman School and community center. It also envisioned an enhanced commitment to in-fill housing in the broader neighborhood, led by nonprofit organizations, as well as investment of “substantial and sustained capital and maintenance resources” to sustain Connie Chambers. The plan also proposed a variety of economic development and social services initiatives, but stopped short of proposing resources or asserting consensus.⁵

The Community Services Department, because it was more than a housing authority, remained committed to broader community development efforts. The CSD, in collaboration with Poster, successfully applied for a HOPE VI planning grant in 1995, targeted to both Connie Chambers and its surrounding environs. To prepare the application, Poster and CSD teamed up with TAG Associates, the Boston-based housing consulting firm led by Jeff Lines. Indicative of the ways that many HOPE VI constellations share stars and histories, decades earlier Poster’s roommate at Harvard had been Harry Spence, and Lines had served as chief financial and administrative officer for the Boston Housing Authority during Spence’s receivership. Spence led Poster to Lines, but “Once they got the grant,” Lines recalled, “the mayor and the housing authority wanted it to be local. Corky was local.”⁶ Poster and the CSD public sector leadership remained in the driver’s seat and continued to pursue a broad neighborhood vision.

As Emily Nottingham framed it, “We really did want to do neighborhood work as well as public housing work.” Like her deputy, CSD director

Thoreson wanted large-scale transformation, even if some of it proved unrealistic. "We had really big goals for that neighborhood," she recalls. "I thought I could stop teen pregnancy and change graduation rates over a short period of time." Short of that, she wanted to use HOPE VI to "help change the residents' lives, and then to bring investment to that neighborhood, while we invested in affordable housing development throughout the neighborhood."⁷⁷ Thoreson's idealism notwithstanding, CSD's top-down approach ensured that middle-class values would continue to come into conflict with the preferences of low-income residents.

As part of the \$379,000 planning grant, Poster and the CSD deployed a bilingual team of neighborhood residents and students to conduct two surveys, one involving Connie Chambers residents and the other soliciting the opinions of those in the surrounding barrios. Based on responses from one hundred Connie Chambers residents (a 50 percent return), the planning team drew several important conclusions. Most important, perhaps, they estimated that 45 percent of the households wished to remain in the neighborhood following redevelopment. The actual question as posed read, "if you had the opportunity to move into a new or rehabilitated public housing unit, where would you rather live?" It then gave two choices: the "same neighborhood" or some "other neighborhood." Ambiguity is encoded into both the question and the answers, since respondents might welcome "new" but not "rehabilitated" public housing or might be unclear about whether this referred to a new multifamily project or one of Tucson's scattered-site homes. Similarly, they might view staying in the "same neighborhood" as meaning a return to the current site of the project itself or might interpret "neighborhood" as referring to the broader environs. Given the considerable interest voiced in leaving the neighborhood, Poster and the CSD judged that retaining eighty public housing units on-site (a number reduced to sixty as of June 1996) would be sufficient to house all those who wished to remain. As Thoreson put it, the mix of units proposed for the site "represented what the residents said." She insisted, "We were really committed to involving the residents in this plan, and not simply shooing them away."⁷⁸

The second survey, conducted in the surrounding barrios, revealed less reticence about such shooing. Most respondents, especially those answering in English, offered disparaging comments about the physical presence of Connie Chambers, though many remained uncertain about how many public housing residents ought to remain on-site or in the neighborhood following redevelopment. Clearly, however, many neighbors wanted change: "Tear it down." "Low-income housing should be dispersed throughout Tucson." "Get rid of Connie Chambers." "It should be leveled." "Get rid of the Riffraff." "Transform the area so that it resembles the rest of the neighborhood." "Split it up, take it to a different neighborhood in the city." "Rip it down, [it's

a] bad idea [to have] all poor people together." "Get rid of it and place them in low cost housing in different parts of the city." "Everyone should move." Or, most succinctly, "Bulldozer!"⁷⁹

TENANT ORGANIZING

In dealing with its constituency both within and beyond Connie Chambers, Tucson's Community Services Department needed both to organize residents and to appease neighbors. HOPE VI sagas range from developments with strong and active residents' councils to situations where a housing authority essentially has had to invent a resident group to talk to for the purposes of demonstrating necessary community involvement. The Connie Chambers to Posadas Sentinel story is closer to the latter mode. Olga Osterhage, who oversaw the redevelopment for CSD, acknowledged that "we were more on the weak end. We worked to form a residents' council during the time of the planning grant. There was a lot of apathy there. They definitely didn't feel united for a cause." Determined to use HOPE VI as a vehicle for transformation, the CSD itself had to court resident "involvement"—a far cry from the proactive insistence of Edna Bynoe at Orchard Park or the withering demands of Barbara Jackson at St. Thomas. Osterhage and her colleagues sought to identify "born leaders." Emily Nottingham, then the CSD deputy director, concurred with Osterhage: "We tried to form a tenant council early on because we wanted them to have a voice. We spent a lot of time putting on barbecues, things to invite tenants to, to become organized themselves." All in the department also praise Grace Johnson, a single parent in her twenties who, CSD director Thoreson said, "was really a champion." Johnson, as president of the residents' council beginning in January 1996, "became the spokesman." She told the *Star*, "I want to be optimistic. I want to believe that the federal government and the city have our best interests at heart." Johnson and her two-year-old daughter did not intend to make Connie Chambers a permanent home, but Johnson wanted to use her remaining time at the development to help the CSD "make it better for people." She sometimes struggled to gain participation but doggedly "knocked on door after door asking people about their concerns and recruiting them to come to public meetings."⁸⁰

As the CSD quickly found out, however, the city did not hold a monopoly on the wish to organize tenants. Neighborhood activist Pedro Gonzales, who spent his youth as a Connie Chambers resident after his family was twice displaced from homes in the urban renewal area, emerged as a persistent critic of the city's intentions and tactics. As the HOPE VI process took hold, Gonzales did his own organizing, and remained deeply suspicious of the organizing

done by the city. Gonzales and his family had doggedly lingered in the neighborhood and retained strong connections to Connie Chambers. "Because we'd lived there, they knew the family," Gonzales pointed out. "They trusted me, and a lot of the elderly there knew my mom and my dad. They called us and we went over there and talked to them. They were telling us that the city wanted to get the money and move them out." Gonzales took it upon himself to "make sure that the city didn't do what they did in the sixties to us." As Gonzales saw it, the city formed a "hand-picked committee" of residents, the "ones they could manipulate." "They made this young mother, Grace Johnson, the president, and they used her. To this day, I don't know what she got out of it, but she really went to bat for them." Gonzales said the city promised tenants money to start small businesses and played up the possibility of homeownership. "That was the thing they were selling us," he commented. "Our whole argument was that these were just false promises." It is certainly true that the city's HOPE VI team raised expectations about both resident businesses (related to property maintenance and entrepreneurship training) and homeownership early on. In the resident survey, for instance, the CSD noted, "Under HOPE VI, home ownership might be a possibility for some residents." Not surprisingly, fully 90 percent of respondents expressed interest in this. Subsidized homeownership in the adjacent neighborhoods did indeed become a notable part of the HOPE VI strategy, but nearly all of it was financially beyond the reach of Connie Chambers residents. The mythic pull of homeownership also held sway because the Tucson CSD and press continued to translate the HOPE acronym as "Homeownership Opportunities for People Everywhere" even though HUD's original version actually read "Homeownership and Opportunity," and had already been more realistically transmuted into "Housing Opportunities."¹¹

Whatever their prospects for future homeownership, Connie Chambers residents continued to debate the extent of existing problems in the development. Although many chose to exit, those who remained tended to be less critical of its conditions than were city officials who needed to play up its deficiencies in order to obtain federal funding. When surveyed in 1996, three-quarters of respondents from Connie Chambers expressed support for the on-site management, and most also approved of building maintenance. At the same time, however, the vast majority complained about plumbing deficiencies and pest infestations, including health problems resulting from application of pesticides. Beyond such matters, residents most resented the stigma of being saddled with "the reputation of the Projects." Citywide, the turnover in Tucson's public housing approached 25 percent annually, far higher than in most cities.¹² Clearly, this bore little resemblance to cities where public housing residents held multigenerational attachments to particular projects.

ORGANIZING AGAINST THE TENANTS AND AGAINST THE CITY

Just as some in the community sought to help the tenants organize, others took the opportunity to organize against them—either explicitly through hostility to public housing or implicitly (and often ambivalently) through support for alternative neighborhood visions and investments. The initial challenges to the Posadas Sentinel HOPE VI planning process came from community groups: the Santa Rosa Neighborhood Association (with jurisdiction for the area between Eighteenth and Twenty-Second Streets that included Connie Chambers) and the Barrio Historico Neighborhood Association (covering the swath of gentrifying barrio between the Fourteenth Street edge of the urban renewal site and Eighteenth Street). Because HOPE VI had been rooted in a "Comprehensive Community Development Plan for the Greater Santa Rosa Area," these groups understandably claimed jurisdictional relevance. Both organizations gained seats on the Project Advisory Committee set up by the city, which had representation from nearly a dozen neighborhood organizations and service providers. The overall mix of opinions yielded a tense atmosphere. As the *Tucson Weekly* put it, "The neighbors are ticked, City of Tucson officials are defensive, and everybody seems to be dancing ever so gingerly around questions of race, culture and integration. . . . Improving Connie Chambers and installing services for the poor, neighborhood residents argue, will only bring down their housing values by increasing poverty levels."¹³

During March 1996, David "Chance" Reyes, as president of the Santa Rosa Neighborhood Association, and Mary Lou Heuett, as president of the Barrio Historico Neighborhood Association, escalated their concerted campaign to steer the HOPE VI project toward their own interests. As work on the planning grant progressed, they sent five letters in a single two-week period to the CSD complaining about various aspects of the process. They insisted on conducting their own survey of neighborhood residents because the one being implemented by Corky Poster and the CSD had ignored fifty-one of the fifty-two questions the associations wished to have asked. Poster responded that, even though the draft questionnaire had been shared with the Project Advisory Committee well in advance, the associations had submitted their "dramatically different" questions only after the questionnaires had already been delivered to the printer and had provided no Spanish translation. As a result, the contested neighborhood received dueling surveys, leaving the CSD frustrated by what it considered to be a misrepresentation of its intentions for the project. In May and June, the associations campaigned directly to the mayor and council, providing them with the results of their survey. The survey deployed a series of leading questions, such as, "Do you support the continued presence of Connie Chambers as a concentrated

public housing project in its current location?" and "Do you think Connie Chambers residents in poverty should be given the choice of participating in the Section 8 Program (where residents are allowed to live in the location of their choice)?" Not surprisingly, the 122 respondents overwhelmingly indicated disapproval of Connie Chambers, affirmed that "concentrated public housing increases crime in the neighborhood," and expressed the wish to have public housing residents leave the area. Reyes and Heuett, joined by architect Jody Gibbs of the Centro de Arquitectura y Urbanismo para la Comunidad, reported some of the survey's findings back to neighborhood residents. Their letter blasted the city for ignoring the results of the survey while "instead planning what appears to be a massive Urban Renewal Project encompassing 18 square blocks." They claimed that the enormous amount of money the city intended to spend on the project would be enough to give more than \$50,000 to every resident of the area—an alternative use of funds that "would immediately solve the problem of poverty and home ownership."¹⁴

In July, still seeking to stop Tucson from receiving a HOPE VI implementation grant for the CSD's current plan, the neighborhood associations, joined by Gibbs, took it upon themselves to write a four-page letter directly to HUD secretary Henry Cisneros and three key HUD officials responsible for administering HOPE VI. They wished to "inform" HUD that the city's plan (which contained sixty on-site replacement public housing units) "is not supported by the residents of the neighborhood." Stressing that the neighborhood was predominantly minority and that it had five times the number of poor people as Connie Chambers itself, the neighborhood associations argued that the HOPE VI project merely "reconstructs on the same site yet another concentrated public housing project" where public housing residents "would stand out like a sore thumb." They claimed that Tucson's Community Services Department "has refused to listen to input from the neighborhood associations, has failed systematically and consistently to notify neighborhood residents of public meetings, and has controlled information and agendas to block the concerns and proposals from the neighborhood." If public housing residents were to remain in the neighborhood, they preferred that they be scattered across it, not housed on the old Connie Chambers site. The proposed plan, they claimed, would threaten the viability of the new school and adjacent community center. They attached their survey of neighborhood residents showing that "a majority will not use nor send their children to such a center if a concentrated public housing project is located across the street." Moreover, the neighborhood associations claimed, the plan failed to do enough to increase neighborhood homeownership or improve economic conditions. Equally bad, the proposed community center failed to provide the swimming pool that the

neighborhood wanted, and included a drug treatment center that it had resisted.¹⁵

Although three organizations had cosigned the letter to Cisneros, Corky Poster contended that they really only represented the combative spirit of a single person, architect Jody Gibbs. Gibbs and Poster had run the Tucson Design Center together from 1974 to 1984 and had once been "like brothers, very close." Poster explained that Centro de Arquitectura y Urbanismo para la Comunidad, the third institutional cosigner of the letter to HUD, was simply the remnant Spanish version of this defunct community design center's corporate name; it was an organization that had not actually employed anyone since the 1980s. "Jody uses it when he wants to sign things with other than his name" or "needs to have it in Spanish." Meanwhile, Poster continued, the second signatory was Gibbs's then-girlfriend, archaeologist Mary Lou Heuett, who served as president of the Barrio Historico Neighborhood Association. The third signatory, David "Chance" Reyes, president of the Barrio Santa Rosa neighborhood organization, was a friend of Gibbs's who soon moved back to his native Texas. As Poster saw it, Gibbs simply enjoyed being an obstructionist and wanted to support his "girlfriend that lived in the neighborhood in one of the gentrifying homes."¹⁶

Whatever the in-grown ties behind the complaint letter to HUD, however, it seems clear from the surveys that many more than three people in the neighborhood distrusted the city's affordable housing goals and motives. The CSD was worried enough to hire a Washington lobbyist firm, Bracy Williams & Company, to help with HUD relations and, in Tucson, made the case that the authors of the damaging letter to HUD largely represented only themselves.¹⁷ As August began, the city's HOPE VI proponents aired their side at a two-hour public meeting. CSD representatives stressed "dramatic differences between the urban renewal 30 years ago and the HOPE VI Plan." They insisted that "the plan respects people's desire to stay in the community and improve their quality of life," adding that "this plan is not about displacing anyone, [and] in fact it protects against displacement." The CSD contrasted urban renewal that "demolished homes for a convention center, music hall and La Placita" with the current plan "to demolish obsolete public housing and construct good, affordable housing for low income people with needed support services." Despite such arguments, Tucson's city council initially refused to approve the CSD's \$15 million HOPE VI application, citing fears about excessive costs to the city, concerns from neighbors about gentrification pressures, and the inadequacy of plans for economic development and job creation. Following further negotiations, however, two weeks later the council relented, and the CSD submitted the plan to HUD.¹⁸

Tucson duly received its HOPE VI implementation grant in October 1996, and an exultant CSD director Karen Thoreson declared, "It's going to eliminate our only family public housing project. There will never be a project in Tucson again. That's good. Projects have stigmatized the residents and the whole neighborhood." Others, in the neighborhood, however, were not ready to give up their fight. The Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC), a community advocacy group founded according to the confrontational organizing principles of Saul Alinsky (and therefore not unlike STICC in New Orleans), also took a strong interest in Connie Chambers and its environs. The mayor, city manager, and council agreed to let Angie Quiroz of PCIC be cochair of the advisory board for the project, along with Eb Eberlein, a teacher and musician who lived three blocks away from the development. The CSD met regularly with the advisory board, but—as is already clear from the actions of the neighborhood associations—some of the advisers quickly moved toward radically different ideas.¹⁹

PCIC's intervention, led by Pedro Gonzales, carried multiple objectives, some of them explicitly aimed at protecting Connie Chambers from perceived city malfeasance, and some centered on strengthening the political position of the larger barrio. Gonzales distanced his stance from the gadfly role of Jody Gibbs and his colleagues:

It was really hard to tell where he was coming from. He was working with the Santa Rosa Neighborhood Association even though he didn't live here. I'm not sure what his agenda was. At times, I found him very [much] for the families; at other times, he sounded against. We were never sure where he was coming from, so we ignored him and tried to get him out of our way.

Gonzales argued that what the city called the Greater Santa Rosa Plan had little respect for the long-term low-income residents of the barrio, because the planners dealt chiefly with the neighborhood associations that were composed largely of gentrifying Anglo newcomers. "They were having meetings with the *associations*, and they were excluding us from the conversations. I started attending the meetings and becoming very vocal." Karen Thoreson and Corky Poster had "no interest" in hearing my perspective, Gonzales asserted. "They actually treated me more like an outsider." That was one of his "big fights" with them. "You're not going to treat me like that in my neighborhood," Gonzales retorted. "This is mine, not yours." As Gonzales saw it, "They were able to pimp the newcomers, get them to buy into that [project], but they didn't get buy-in from the longtime residents here." Gonzales also bristled at the notion that Connie Chambers "declined." That sort of interpretation, he argued, takes responsibility away from the city. "It never really went downhill," Gonzales claimed. "The city *ran* it down. The city was the

landlord, and just like with La Reforma, they neglected it, wouldn't fix the coolers, the heaters. They really wanted to frustrate people, and that's how people wound up leaving."²⁰

Gonzales questioned nearly everything the CSD proposed during 1997 and argued that Connie Chambers did not need to be razed. "They were saying the foundations were bad," he comments, but "We actually had pro bono structural engineers come in who said the structures were sound." Gonzales championed the development's existing social structure as well: "We talked to a lot of the families. The families didn't want to leave." From the start, PCIC expected that it would be able to name the project manager for the implementation grant, and when Karen Thoreson told them it would be Olga Osterhage (then second in command at the public housing program), they reacted with "hostility." They insisted on interviewing her to make sure her Spanish was fluent. "It was a strange start for me," Osterhage drily comments. PCIC asked the city to scrap the idea of using the HOPE VI grant to build public housing and instead argued that the funds could be better spent on job training. Osterhage gently explained that 100 percent of the grant could not be diverted to this purpose, and this led to "some friction." As Poster narrated it, "Pedro Gonzales was trained by the Alinsky Industrial Areas Foundation people. They targeted this [HOPE VI project] and said it was culture-cide." Poster countered critics such as Gonzales by citing the findings from the earlier interviews with residents. "Look, the people we're talking to say they want to move out of this neighborhood. You're speaking for them, but when you actually talk *to* them, they say they don't want to stay." Dueling interpretations of residents' preferences remained unresolved.²¹

As usual with HOPE VI, winning the grant did not necessarily grant the win to the original proposal. The CSD still needed to obtain consensus on what the city would actually build. When the CSD readied its implementation plan for approval by Tucson's mayor and council on October 13, representatives from the PCIC came to the meeting and demanded that the residents first be able to put the plan to a vote. They questioned, "Why are they just being told that this is the plan?" They marched in with signs saying, "Let Them Vote, Let Them Vote." This action seems to have caught the CSD staff completely off guard. "We didn't even think to have them vote," Osterhage recalled. The city had held many gatherings with residents on topics including design of the new homes, community facilities, infrastructure, and economic development, and "We told residents that they could be part of all of those groups." In all, Osterhage estimated, the community services staff had convened "over a hundred meetings" during the summer of 1997 and felt entirely ready to have the plan move forward.²²

After the PCIC's intervention at the council meeting, the CSD readily agreed to put the plan to a vote of residents, using an independent community development organization, Chicanos Por La Causa, to conduct the poll in mid-October. As the voting date approached, another group calling itself the Inner City Forum (El Foro de los Barrios Centrales) handed out flyers urging Connie Chambers residents to vote down the plan and "demand that the City draw up an alternative," citing a version of options proposed by Jody Gibbs and the neighborhood associations (figure 9.2). "The current plan," the handouts changed, "just like the Urban Renewal of the 1960s, will drive most Connie Chambers residents out of the area, destroy houses that could serve other needy low income families, and raise property values and rents in the area which will drive additional low income minority families out of the neighborhood." The flyers contained provocative block-print drawings urging the need to struggle against class-based eviction and depicting the

suffering of "Rich People in Hell" that would result from such policies. On the day of the vote, Osterhage remembered, "We just stayed in our offices, but we had calls from residents saying PCIC was at their door telling them to vote no, and they were feeling a little intimidated." To Osterhage, they were telling residents "if they voted to approve the plan, they were going to end up on the street, and that it was a plan to get rid of poor Mexicans on that side of town." As someone determined to do the right thing for residents, she was nonplussed: "Why would I do that?" she wondered aloud. PCIC told Connie Chambers residents "not to trust us, that we had ulterior motives. They said it was 'son of urban renewal,' and that we were going to just start knocking on doors and telling people they had to leave. Some people were told that we were not going to build anything back." To those residents who asked her, Osterhage said, "Just vote what you think. You saw the plan." Out of 181 eligible households, 107 cast a vote, and nearly 80 percent of them (84-23) voted to support the city's plan.²³

The vote of confidence did not surprise Osterhage: "It was the trust issue—that what we were saying in the plan was what we were going to do." Pedro Gonzales, by contrast, saw not trust but intimidation. Because "HUD insisted on 'participation' from the people," Gonzales claimed, the city embarked on schemes for "buying the people" by "feeding them at the meetings" and "offering vouchers to go to Target." Moreover, he charged, the CSD tried to make the prospect of remaining at Connie Chambers as unappealing as possible: "They started harassing them about their yards; they didn't help when their coolers or heaters weren't functioning right. They really frustrated the people. They were doing everything they could, but people didn't want to go." To architect Corky Poster, with the numbers on his side, the result of the vote proved the fundamental irrelevancy of the neighborhood opposition, revealing it to be "more grandstanding than anything else."

There wasn't any sophistication in that opposition that carried to the next level. There wasn't a public housing constituency, a political auxiliary. Those folks were scattershot. That vote was a critical thing. Once that happened, all the air went out of that balloon entirely, and people just got real quiet. They kept speaking for the residents and saying, "They don't want this project." And then they voted and said, "Yeah, we do, actually."

PCIC and Pedro Gonzales moved on to "other wars," but Gonzales steadfastly maintained that "Corky Poster and the city are a bunch of liars" who "manipulated the people."²⁴

Meanwhile, some of "the people" strongly resented negative portrayals of project life in the Tucson media during the waning days of Connie Chambers. Although acknowledging a difference in scale, the *Star*

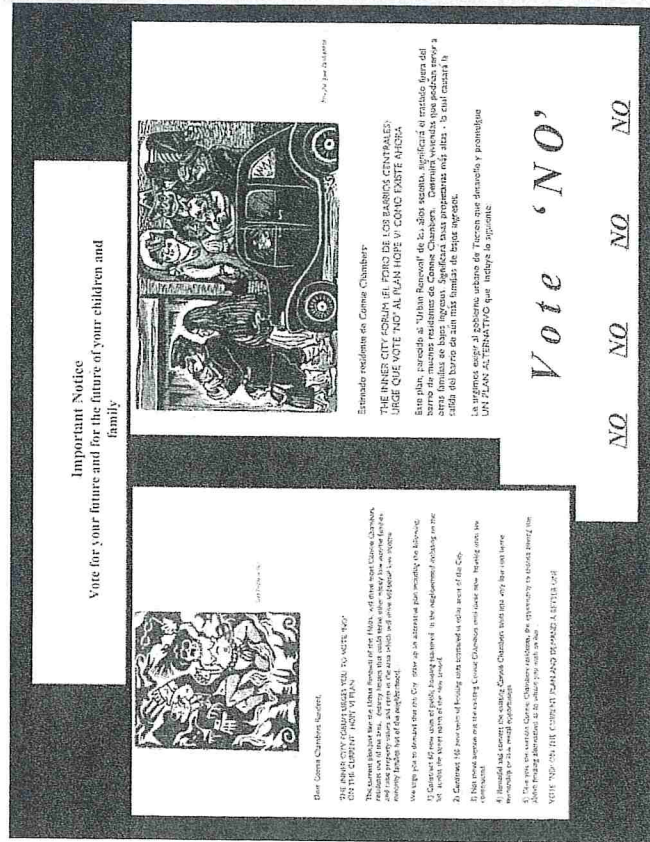


Figure 9.2. Anti-HOPE VI Flyer from Tucson's "Inner City Forum" Tucson's "Inner City Forum" urged Connie Chambers residents to vote down the HOPE VI plan with this flyer distributed in October 1997. Promising that rich people would end up in hell for having evicted poor Mexicans, neighborhood activists urged residents to fight for alternatives.

Credit: Inner City Forum, files of Olga Osterhage, Tucson Community Services Department

compared “problem-riddled” Connie Chambers to the “worst of the worst public housing,” such as “Cabrim-Green in Chicago.” Its reporter called the project “outdated and troubled by gangs” and derided its appearance as a “no-frills military barracks,” an “isolationist . . . clump of buildings that sticks out from the rest of the downtown-area neighborhood.” A *Star* editorial called Connie Chambers “a crime-plagued symbol of ‘project’ housing” that “effectively warehoused the poor in . . . ghettos.” The *Tucson Weekly’s* writer disparagingly maligned a landscape of “weed-fringed dirt” where “laundry hangs like wilted wildflowers over faltering balconies, and clusters of trash skitter up windswept drives.” Residents did their best to counter such portrayals, including “An Open Letter to People Who Are Against Public Housing,” from young Connie Chambers resident Aracely Carranza. If Connie Chambers was not a “pretty place,” she argued, it was not the fault of residents: “Yeah, they might look ugly from the outside. But why? Because you guys make them look like that. We weren’t the architects. On the inside, the projects look pretty because we decorated them our way, our taste.”²⁵

FROM CONNIE CHAMBERS TO POSADAS SENTINEL

Armed with its \$15 million HOPE VI implementation grant, the city embarked on plans to make the project look very different. Architecturally, Corky Poster delivered an attractive low-rise landscape of 120 highly varied pastel homes that exuded the feel and low density of the surrounding barrios, while providing a more modernist twist (figures 9.3–9.5). No two homes look alike, even though many share common floor plans. The development draws on a variety of cottage styles and flat-roof Sonoran influences. With six different roof forms and nearly a dozen color schemes intermixed, the new development resists any attempt to identify it as a single project. This design, carried out at twelve units per acre to mimic what Poster terms “the healthiest acre of the adjacent neighborhood,” promised a dramatic reversal in appearance. Instead of Connie Chambers—“built as if it were a fortress” as “an island of isolated poverty in a neighborhood of historic Hispanic architecture,” the new development stressed integration in all dimensions. Because the old Connie Chambers “looks like ‘the projects,’” Tucson’s HOPE VI application had pointed out, “Everyone knows it and acts accordingly.” Project design, in short, encoded a behavioral politics. The old design encouraged disrespect for property because it lacked “defensible space,” thereby relegating its open areas to “the gangs and criminals, little used in the day and feared at night.”²⁶ By contrast, the new design promised not simply new construction but a reunified street grid and a clear

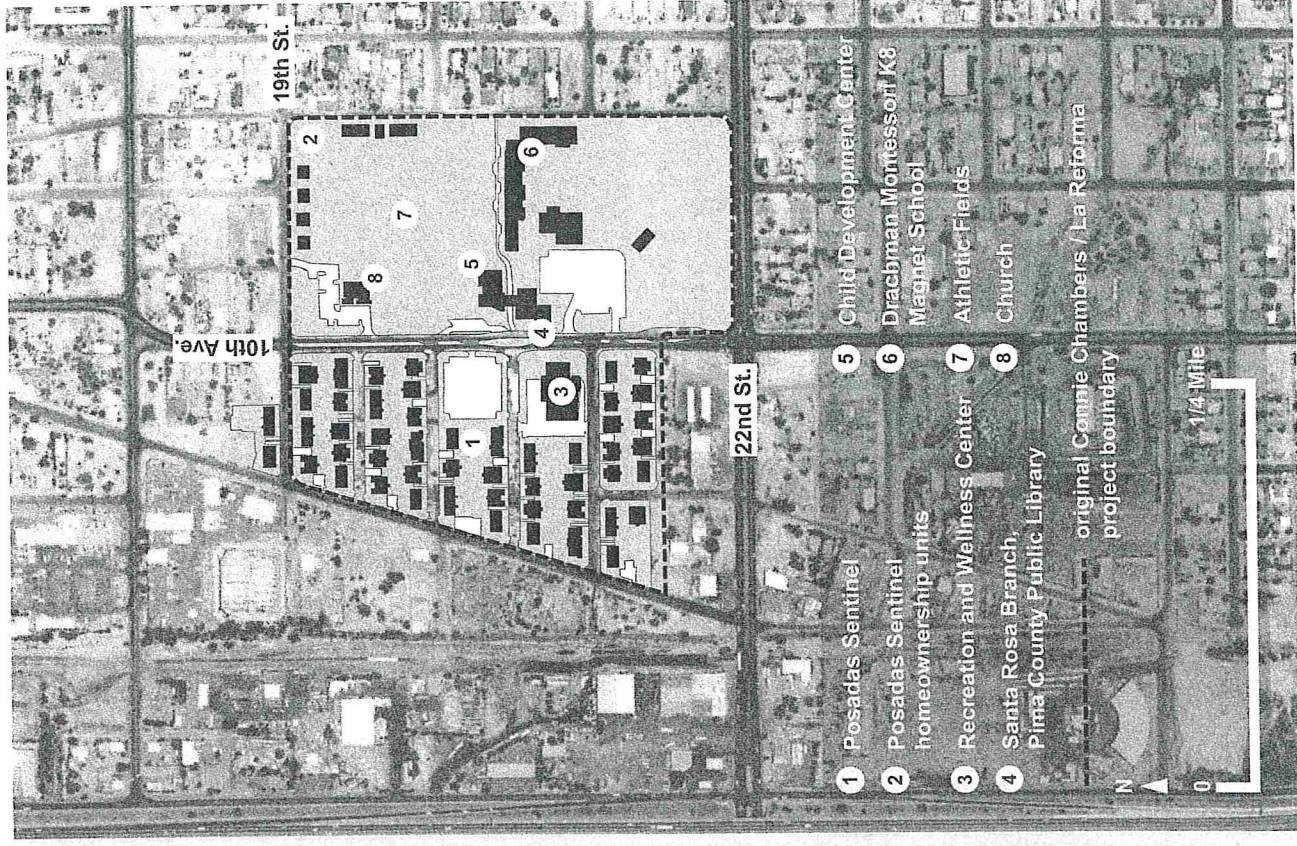


Figure 9.3. Posadas Sentinel and the Drachman School Complex. With the old La Reforma project razed, the HOPE VI grant replaced the Connie Chambers side of the site with Posadas Sentinel and devoted the former La Reforma site to a new school and other community facilities.
Credit: Author with Kristin Simonson and Jonathan Tarleton.

articulation of front and back yards to be maintained by their residents, all part of a welcoming and reassuring familiarity.

Beyond the bounds of the new housing, the CSD worked with several community development organizations that developed more than sixty additional units intended to provide opportunities for affordable homeownership in the immediate neighborhoods. Some of these ownership units occupied land on the original La Reforma site. The rest of that empty tract was dramatically transformed into the new Drachman School, with associated athletic fields and parkland, along with new buildings for a Learning Center / Library and a Child Development (Head Start) Center (figure 9.6), supported by HOPE VI funds. On the west side of Tenth Avenue, the HOPE VI program provided funds for the design of an expanded Recreation and Wellness Center built with city bond money, and located directly adjacent to the homes of Posadas Sentinel.

The CSD wished to honor its commitment to permit all interested Connie Chambers households to remain for the new Posadas, but also wanted to build a very different community from what had gone before. In the old Connie Chambers, single women headed 91 percent of households, and only

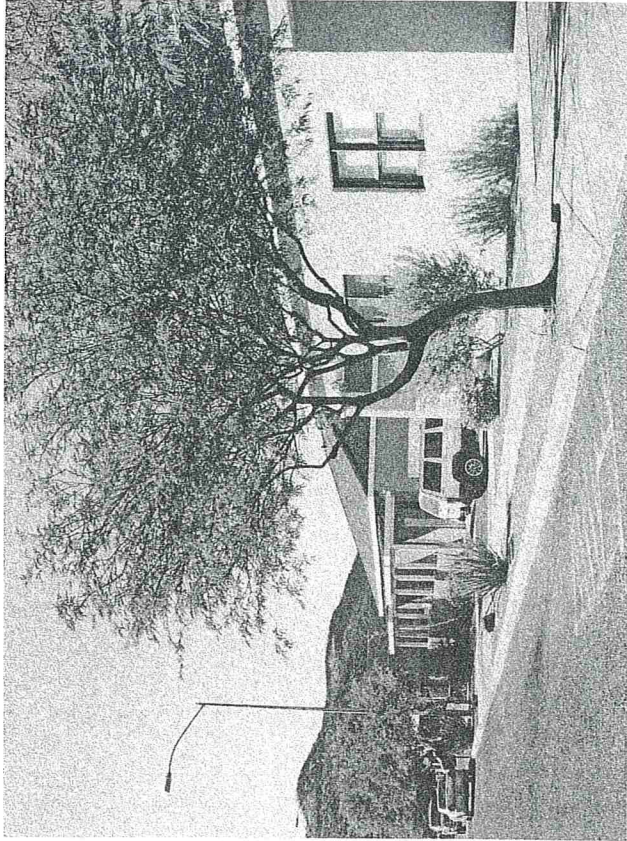


Figure 9.4. Posadas Sentinel Homes
The low-rise homes of Posadas Sentinel evoke the older barrio. Sentinel Peak is visible in the distance.
Credit: Author.

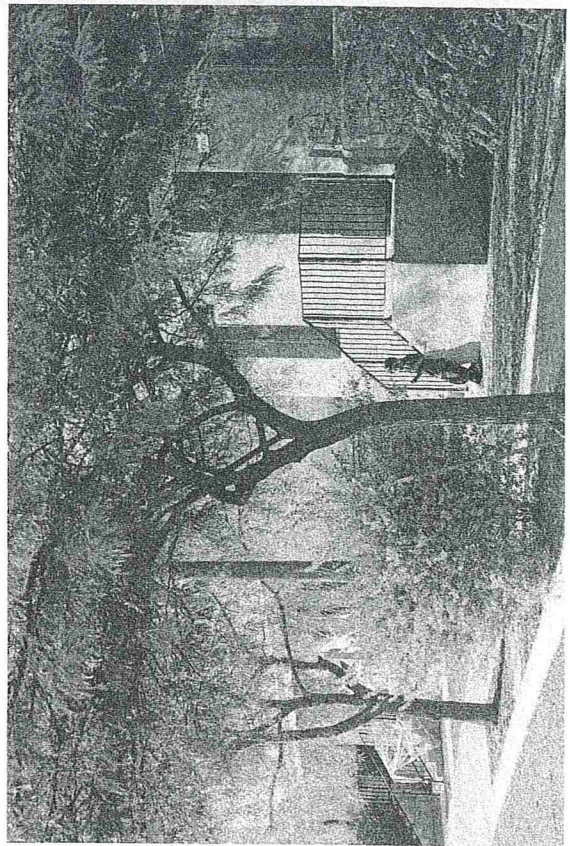


Figure 9.5. Shaded Street in Posadas Sentinel
Posadas Sentinel features a variety of architectural styles and colors.
Credit: Author.

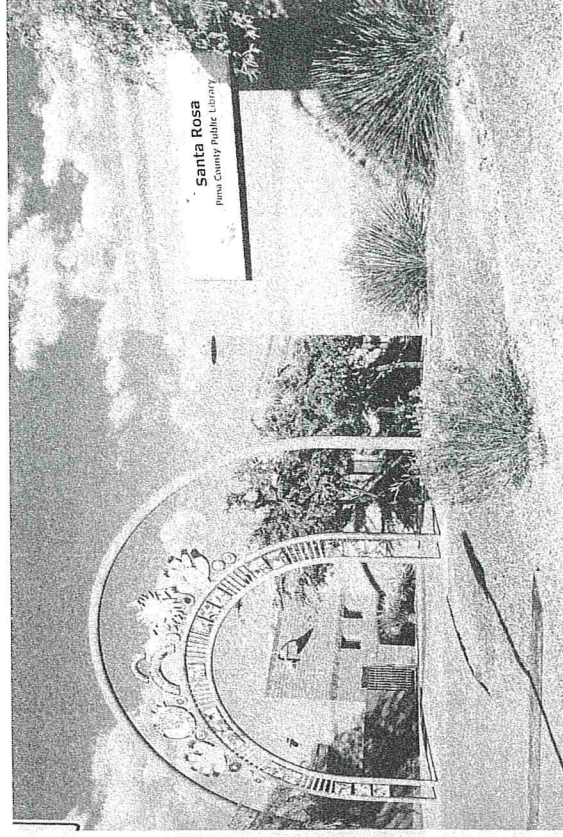


Figure 9.6. Santa Rosa Public Library Branch
In addition to the new housing, the dual transformation of the sites that once held the Connie Chambers and La Reforma housing projects featured a new public library, the Drachman K-8 Magnet School, a Recreation and Wellness Center, and a Child Development Center.
Credit: Author.

one in five families reported that their primary source of income came from employment. The CSD met its twin objectives—responsiveness to the wishes of existing residents and responsiveness to a community and policy environment demanding deconcentration of poverty—in several innovative ways.²⁷

By staging the demolition and development of the project in two phases, the CSD offered every Connie Chambers household the opportunity to remain. The CSD's plan replaced sixty public housing units on-site and mixed in sixty tax-credit units targeted to those with somewhat higher incomes who could afford to pay rents at near market rate. Since only fifty-eight Connie Chambers households initially indicated a wish to remain on-site and wait for new apartments during eighteen months of construction, these sixty units more than covered the expressed demand from current residents. This decision to phase the construction enabled those who wished to stay on-site to then move directly into a new unit at Posadas without having to make an interim move away from the development. Corky Poster observed, "People appreciated the theoretical option [to stay on-site] even though they may or may not have chosen to do that, ultimately. They liked the idea that they were being treated with enough respect, that they just weren't people to be moved around at will, that the school their kid goes to and the relationship they have in the neighborhood were important enough that it actually became a basis for planning, the basis for the staging of the development. It was as much principle as anything else."²⁸ This strategy enabled the CSD to avoid some of the pitfalls typical in other places, where long construction delays and moves to distantly located temporary housing often severely compromised the return rate. Even so, few Connie Chambers households ultimately ended up in Posadas.

By 2003, as Posadas moved toward full occupancy, only forty-five of the fifty-eight Connie Chambers households that had initially elected to stay on-site and wait still remained in place or had returned. Osterhage attributed this notable attrition to several factors. Some people belatedly realized just what it would mean to "live in the middle of a construction site," while for others this was outweighed by proximity to downtown and their church. Most residents did not have the option to move away from Connie Chambers during the construction phase and then return only when a new unit at Posadas was ready, so their only chance for these homes was to remain there continuously. As Osterhage put it, "They really had to want to stay." Others who decided to leave may well have had some concerns about policies and expectations at the new development: they would need to be financially responsible for paying all utilities (water, gas, and electric bills), could no longer keep a large dog, could no longer hang laundry to dry outdoors (and would therefore have to purchase their own dryer), and could not store any belongings outdoors. Most people who left after construction

started, however, changed their minds because they had little attachment to the neighborhood and saw better alternatives. A more conspiratorial Pedro Gonzales saw it very differently: "They were thinking of the people they wanted there. They didn't want the people that lived there before, even though they're saying that they gave them that option. They're a bunch of liars. They were handpicking the people they wanted there."²⁹

Osterhage acknowledged that critics from outside Connie Chambers sometimes accused the city of "moving [out] all these people with ties to the neighborhood," but she countered this by noting that most residents actually had much weaker ties to the development and the area, as indicated by the high turnover rate and relatively low average length of occupancy—just five years. Some had deep roots in the neighborhood, but many of those living at Connie Chambers resided there only with great reluctance. Most had arrived at the project from a centralized waiting list, and only those in the most "desperate situation" had chosen to move in. Most others preferred to turn it down and just wait until some other opportunity arose. "It was not their choice." Some in the development, however, actively resisted change. Margie Noriega said she "just loved the projects the way they were" and "fought and fought for them not to knock them down." The city, Noriega argued, "had enough money just to get them repaired" but "didn't listen to us at all." Still, she acknowledged that hers was not the majority opinion: "We couldn't win. There was too many people in the projects that just wanted to get out of here."³⁰

FROM CONNIE CHAMBERS TO SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

Most Connie Chambers households expressed the desire to leave. For some, it may well have been due to the sorts of pressures and frustrations with the city that Pedro Gonzales described, but many others left because they perceived genuine advantages to the other options the CSD made available to them. In stark contrast to housing authorities such as HANO that used HOPE VI as a way to reduce their stock of public housing, Tucson's CSD insisted on one-for-one replacement of the units lost on the Connie Chambers site, even as Tucson's housing planners preferred to continue their long-standing practice of scattered-site public housing. The CSD acquired an additional 130 public housing units, many of them in newer subdivisions being built across the city, never purchasing more than a couple of units on any given street (figures 9.7–9.8). They also arranged for 10 units within Tucson House, a development for seniors. In this manner, the CSD replaced all 200 of the units that had once existed at Connie Chambers, but did so in a decidedly nonconcentrated manner.³¹

Because Tucson had managed a scattered-site public housing portfolio since the early 1970s, the Community Services Department knew how to do this effectively. As Osterhage saw it, “You buy units all throughout the town in different neighborhoods, so that a person is not associated with a certain public housing development. They’re associated with the neighborhood in which they live.” She acknowledged that a scattered-site system is “more work for management” and more expensive, but Tucson had been successful with this approach and “wanted to continue that trend.” When purchasing new houses and apartments, the CSD paid careful attention to qualities such as proximity to shopping and schools and availability of public transportation, and included information about these sorts of attributes when sending letters out to prospective residents. Osterhage could point to only three or four homes that suffered from excess isolation, due in each case to the failure to build previously promised public transportation. Taken overall, given that the city now owned several hundred scattered-site units and gave relocating Connie Chambers households a priority for all vacancies, it appears that more than eighty of them chose this option. Osterhage commented that these residents “got the best of the best units, by far.”³²

Emily Nottingham stated that she “personally went out and looked at every proposed house we acquired,” with assistance of Sandy Horvitz of Housing Development Partners. “I was pretty tough on him because I really wanted it to be scattered. I didn’t want more than three or four in a subdivision. I didn’t want them right next to one another.” With the housing market “booming” and no shortage of willing buyers, not all builders cared to have the Community Services Department buy up units for public housing residents or, if they did, wanted them to purchase more than just three or four, or did not wish to have the CSD purchase scattered units across the site. Moreover, because HUD had to approve the feasibility of each house proposed for purchase, the process took a lot of time, and many builders simply lacked the patience to deal with the red tape, given that they had other, simpler alternatives. When this worked out, however, as it often did, the city gained new housing units (what Nottingham called “acquisition without rehab”) in desirable neighborhoods for “less than what it would have cost to build them in consolidated projects.” They were “standard units built for the market, and we didn’t have to oversee a contractor.” She regarded the system as both cost effective and also “community-process effective.” With land prices relatively affordable, and with white racial prejudice against accepting Latinx neighbors arguably less virulent than in cities faced with rehousing large numbers of displaced African Americans, Tucson’s persistent but modestly scaled effort to scatter public housing proved workable.

Still, management of such a scattered-site portfolio has had both upsides and many challenges. Nottingham argued that it has worked out well for

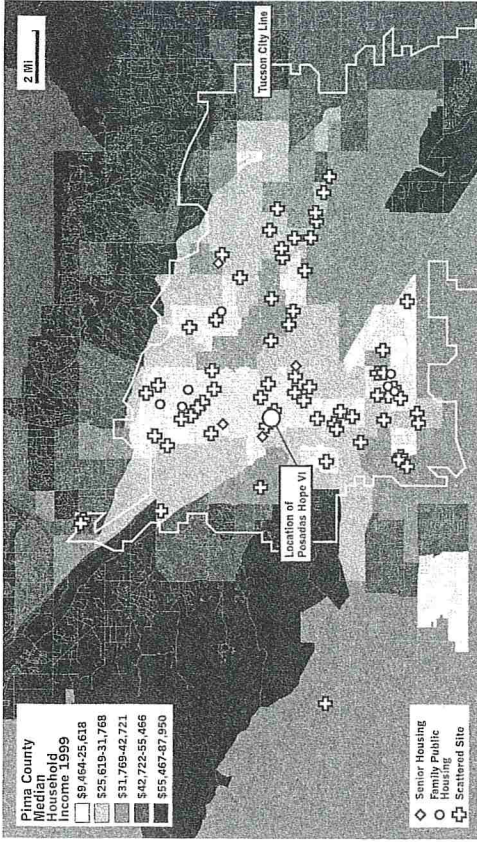


Figure 9.7. Scattering the Barrio: Tucson’s Scattered-Site Replacement Public Housing Given options to move to public housing, much of it in single-family homes located across the city, most Connie Chambers residents took up this option and did not remain to live at the new Posadas. Because most of greater Tucson’s wealthier neighborhoods lay outside the city line in unincorporated Pima County, many neighborhoods across the city proved to be politically plausible sites for low-income housing.

Source: Compiled by author with Carrie Vanderford and Yonah Freemark from address data supplied by the Tucson Community Services Department.

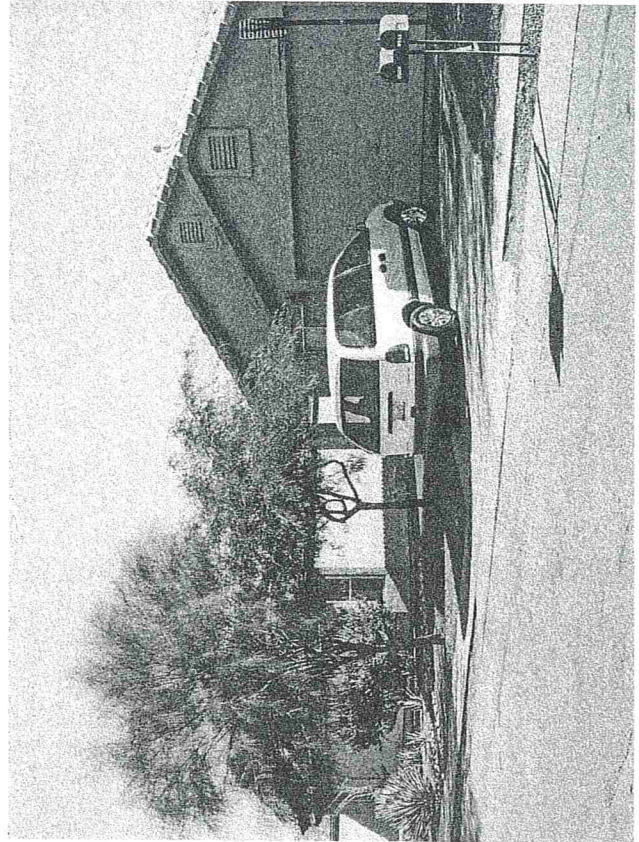


Figure 9.8. Single-Family Replacement Public Housing for Connie Chambers One of the single-family public housing units purchased by the City of Tucson. Credit: Author

residents. They take good care of the units, but it entails a lot of driving around on the part of the manager to look for problems. Sometimes, though, the subsidized tenants face unusual scrutiny, since "each house has four neighbors who know it is public housing, and sometimes can be quick to call in complaints." With "eyes on the prize" watching from either side, from behind, and from across the street, surrounding public housing with private sector homeowners has added its own unofficial form of on-site management. "But this is also how we sell it—we tell neighborhoods, 'You couldn't really have a better neighbor'—if the resident is doing something wrong, you get to call the mayor and the city council person who's very responsive to constituents in a way that a private sector landlord is not going to be. We sell it that way, so we have to mean it when we do."³³

Many residents were pleasantly surprised that they actually had options across the city. "When we started working with the clients, a lot of them thought all we had was Connie Chambers" or that "if we had anything else, it was very similar." To Osterhage, this lack of information about options explains why, at the time of the city's survey in 1996, fully 45 percent of Connie Chambers residents initially told Corky Poster's researchers that they would prefer to remain in the neighborhood.³⁴ With the HOPE VI grant in place, to make sure that residents really did understand their choices, Osterhage embarked on a series of tours. She drove a van around the city seven hours a day every Tuesday to show them the range of available housing. "People were amazed. They would say, 'I didn't know you had single-family homes. I didn't know I could live in this neighborhood.'" Single-family homes constitute fully 40 percent of Tucson's scattered-site public housing options, and the CSD made sure that prospective residents could go see their potential options as often as they needed to, so that they could feel fully comfortable with their choice. Often, family members from different generations did not agree about a particular moving option, and the CSD would endeavor to help them reach consensus. In some cases, "It took a long, long time." Osterhage remembered "weeks where I saw the same families on the tours. That was OK; I understood why it was so difficult for some families to make a decision. Some felt that "this is too good to be true. What are they not telling me?" The second time some residents went out on one of Osterhage's tours, they would bring along relatives who didn't even live with them, who could serve as a sounding board and a reality check about the move they were contemplating.³⁵

The terms of Tucson's HOPE VI agreement stipulated that the CSD would endeavor to place relocated residents in neighborhoods with minority concentration no more than twenty percentage points higher than the city's 38 percent average, but permitted exceptions if the neighborhoods had fewer than 30 percent of residents living in poverty. In practice, most

relocation occurred to neighborhoods that met the rather liberally defined lower-poverty threshold, even if these neighborhood choices did little to reduce ethnic or racial concentration. If they were headed into higher-income neighborhoods, the CSD attempted to educate residents about the sorts of standards they could expect. Osterhage freely admitted that the city's own previous lax standards had contributed to the problem. At Connie Chambers, "Part of it was management's fault. We allowed them to have inoperative vehicles. We allowed them to have that broken window a little longer. We allowed them to hang their laundry on the fence. We weren't there on top of it. So we had to educate them, and say, 'If you're choosing to live in this neighborhood, fine, but know that you won't be able to do this, this, or this.'" At base, the city's housing officials did not want to set up residents for failure. As Osterhage put it, "We didn't want to move them and have them fail, because then we would have failed." The CSD put together a set of neighborhood standards for Posadas Sentinel, but essentially conveyed the same expectations for those moving into scattered-site properties. "There was a lot of handholding, and sometimes other staff not associated with HOPE VI would say, 'You're spoiling these people.'" The move to scattered sites left some former Connie Chambers residents distant from friends and family, but one survey found that the "improved housing conditions and safer neighborhood outweighed the isolation they felt."³⁶

Some residents emphatically agree that they had genuine choices. Roberta Harris, who continued to live at Connie Chambers for more than two decades after her son Bobby's murder, described her experience:

I think HOPE VI was the best thing that came to the projects. I went to every meeting they had. . . . They didn't tell you, "You have to go here, and if you don't go here, you're out." They didn't tell you that. They take you to the apartments, and you look at them, and they tell you about the neighborhood. It was *my* choice. I said, "I think I want to move out. I need to try another area, another place, for a while."

Aracely Carranza's family was one of the few offered a temporary off-site move with an option to return after redevelopment. Writing in 2000, she criticized this process: "They picked a place for us. . . . They just moved us wherever they wanted. . . . But we are coming back." Most of those who initially remained on-site during construction but then decided to leave Connie Chambers permanently did so because they found better options. As Osterhage commented, "Some of it was talking to an old neighbor and seeing, 'Oh, they chose a house, and they're doing well. Maybe I can still find something.'" Once they saw the other choices available, the prospect of waiting around a construction site in a nonrenovated Connie Chambers

Osterhage kept telling Emily Nottingham, “We need to take the property back.” Eventually, in September 2008, the city did so. As one resident put it during a focus group interview, it was like “an apple with a rotting piece; they came in and cut out that piece.”³⁸

To fix the management, the CSD brought in Bobbi Stone, who had proved herself to be an effective public manager of Tucson House, a 408-unit development serving elderly and disabled residents. To Stone, this transition was not easy. The former management company treated her arrival “like a hostile takeover” and was “not very forthcoming with a lot of information that we needed. The on-site manager would spend a little time with us and then just disappear.” Stone found not just disorganized files but social disorganization, as well: “There were people on one street that were afraid to go to their mailboxes because there were gangs right there at that corner of the property every day.” Stone needed to reintroduce a culture of community responsibility. “I would come into work on a Monday,” she recalls, “and there would be beer bottles all over the place on a corner; cases of beer, broken bottles.” Stone would then go from neighbor to neighbor and “would call them to task for lease violations” because they had allowed drinking. “That was very controversial.” Stone credits the turnaround of safety at the development to the willingness of residents to be more proactive in surveilling the territory immediately outside their homes. As Stone put it, “You have a responsibility to your neighborhood, instead of just closing your blinds and ignoring it.” By dissuading large gatherings of gang members from assembling at night, this prevented the situation from escalating to the point where “rival gangs driving by in carloads start shooting at each other. If they’re not gathering there, then that’s not a problem.” The turning point for Stone occurred December 2008, soon after she had arrived, when a sixteen-year-old youth was shot and almost died. “Something had to be done. That’s when I started coming down hard. I evicted one of the main characters in that whole drama. That family was evicted,” along with another one later. In all, the eviction of “three key families” quickly made “a huge difference.” The community policy at Posadas, as revised under Stone’s direction in January 2009, stressed the value of neighborhood solidarity: “Your home does not begin and end at your own front door. When you turn down the street, you are home. When you walk down a sidewalk, you are home. This entire neighborhood is your home.”³⁹

The neighborhood is still primarily home to Hispanic residents, who made up about three-quarters of the population as of 2017. Five percent are African American, nearly 5 percent are non-Hispanic whites, and most of the remaining 15 percent are African refugees, principally from Somalia or Sudan.⁴⁰ Unlike in other cities, at Posadas there is almost no difference in the racial and ethnic breakdown between those living in the public housing

apartment may well have seemed less appealing. For those who initially trusted the city less, it took the successful relocation of others to convince them to explore other options.

Ultimately, Osterhage was “not at all” surprised that so few Connie Chambers residents chose to stay on for the new Posadas. Similarly, Emily Nottingham explained,

We always expected to have a relatively low rate of return. They were getting good relocation choices. We bought brand-new houses in new subdivisions, three-bedroom homes that were more spacious than they’d been living in. Our public housing stock is quite good. They were given a lot of choice about where they could move, and we worked closely with them.

At base, whatever the more conspiratorial accusations of neighborhood critics, Tucson officials seemed genuinely committed to giving Connie Chambers residents a real choice, one comprising several desirable alternatives.³⁷ Still, public housing communities are always worlds of deeply felt ambivalence. Even when city officials believed themselves to be well meaning, this did not always mean that residents believed all promises had been fulfilled.

POSADAS SENTINEL: MANAGING THE NEW COMMUNITY

Posadas Sentinel, completed in 2002, has already faced many challenges, affecting both its tenant composition and its management. Initially, Tucson housing officials decided to place the new Posadas Sentinel under private management, part of the larger effort “to disassociate the development” from the old Connie Chambers, as Olga Osterhage phrased it. They chose the Metropolitan Housing Corporation, already linked to the project as the city’s general partner in the tax-credit financing deal. At first, everything went well with the move-in of residents, and the CSD believed that the management had “capable staff doing a good job.” After a few years, however, the staff changed, and, Osterhage observed, “There was nobody checking on them, making sure there was consistency.” Osterhage received complaints about gang activity and noticed many problems with record-keeping, as well as a broader “unprofessionalism” and “inconsistency in enforcing the rules.”

I was the one who would get calls from residents about illegal activities. They’d say, “I called this in to the office and they’re not doing anything about it.” They would ask why the police had come to make an arrest for drugs, and yet the person was still living at Posadas. They were very slow about getting and acting on police reports.

units and those residing in the tax-credit / market dwellings, though cultural and linguistic barriers remain, especially with regard to the Africans. Since the 1990s, Arizona has been a national leader in refugee resettlement, including nearly eight thousand from war-torn Somalia and Sudan. To the surprise of Posadas management, there are sometimes more serious ethnic and tribal rivalries between the Somalis and the Sudanese, some of whom are also unhappy about having to replay intra-African struggles in Tucson.⁴¹

Olga Osterhage recalled little gang activity during the 1996–2000 period of the HOPE VI grant, but acknowledged that some of this resumed after Posadas opened. To some extent, the new and expanded community facilities have helped, but problems remain. At the time when families needed to decide whether to stay on for a place in the new Posadas or disperse into other housing options, the CSD did not attempt to dissuade any particular families from remaining. In contrast to other cities where housing authorities used the occasion of redevelopment to clear out their most problematic households, in Tucson—for better or worse—city housing officials say, they offered everyone who wished it the full opportunity to remain at the development. Looking back, Osterhage observed that they simply did not know which families had gang ties. “We didn’t have the information that, oh, this family has three PJay family members, and this family has two PJays.” Although the sprawling motel-style Connie Chambers was hardly the Cabrini-Green environment portrayed in the press, in the context of Tucson it had still seemed a daunting managerial challenge. Osterhage blamed part of the information absence on its “being such a *huge*, two-hundred-unit complex, designed with dead-end streets.” As a result, “Management didn’t even know about half of what was happening. If we had known about a family that was causing problems and had proof, we would have taken action then” and not “waited for the new Posadas.” Instead, she noted, “There was not one family where we said, ‘You’re not welcome back.’”⁴²

Unlike many other housing authorities and private management companies implementing HOPE VI grants, the Tucson Community Services Department insists that it made no attempt to keep the former public housing residents from gaining homes in the new replacement development. To the contrary, the CSD and management team did no additional screening to keep particular families out. They simply told them they would need to meet higher standards of behavior spelled out in the Posadas Sentinel Community Policy. The policy set rules against gang activity, stipulated zero tolerance for drug-related criminal activity either on or off the premises, prohibited alcohol abuse, stipulated the terms for “quiet hours,” regulated behavior of guests, outlined which items could be kept or used in outdoor yards, prohibited vehicle repairs on-site, and set expectations for apartment maintenance. As Osterhage commented, “We worked with the families that

were gonna stay. We said, ‘Remember, these are the new rules. We used to let you have two pets and they were bigger than the policy. Not anymore. Before, we said this was a high-crime area, so we said it was OK for you to have a pit bull. Now our policy says no aggressive breeds. It’s different now. If you’re willing to abide by these new rules, you’ll be fine here.’” In addition to the promise of stricter lease enforcement, however, the CSD relaxed certain other expectations. Although, for many years, all other families entering into the public housing component of the development needed to take part in a Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program intended to get them financially stable enough to leave subsidized housing, the CSD exempted the former Connie Chambers residents from participation.⁴³

At the same time, as the introduction of an FSS requirement made clear, the CSD also sought to substantially reconfigure its definition of public housing residents when tenanting the rest of Posadas Sentinel. Corky Poster put it bluntly: “They were clearly cherry-picking residents. They were trying to make HOPE VI successful by picking successful residents, as opposed to making the housing turn residents into successes.” The CSD sought to move public housing away from “housing of last resort” and to view it instead as “temporary housing during a move up to a different market.” In Emily Nottingham’s phrase, “We wanted it to be a ‘new day dawning’ sort of development.” We had been “lazy in our management as far as expectations of tenants, [and] we didn’t want that to be the case in the new Posadas. We wanted to set a new level of expectation, and also a new level of support, so that people could meet those expectations.”⁴⁴

As in Boston at Orchard Gardens, Tucson’s leaders sought to attract a less impoverished constituency to Posadas while still supporting the needs of former Connie Chambers households. Their strategy included several approaches intended to diversify incomes over time. First, the city established a site-based waiting list, meaning that prospective residents could line up for possible entry into Posadas without having to put themselves on a citywide waiting list for something called “public housing.” At the same time, those who were already in the Tucson public housing system did not have the option of requesting a transfer to Posadas. Taken together, this had the effect of attracting many households with higher incomes—incomes that fit well with the tiers established as part of the tax-credit deal. Because the tax-credit housing had been spread across both the Posadas site and eighty of the scattered-site units, and because the city had gained extra points by agreeing to target some of those tax-credit-financed units to those with incomes of below 20, 30, 40, or 50 percent of area median income (instead of the usual higher cap of 60 percent of area median), the CSD could choose how to allocate each type of subsidy. Instead of putting those with the lowest income thresholds on the Posadas site, they elected to put those

with the *highest* income eligibility threshold there, and to place those with lower incomes into the scattered sites. In this way, the city used the variation within its financing structure to help further reduce project-based poverty.⁴⁵

Closely linked to this wish to accommodate more households nearer to the higher end of eligibility for access to public housing, the city also made use of a “work preference” for new entry into Posadas (a preference subsequently adopted throughout Tucson’s public housing system). At Posadas, for those who were not in school, the CSD mandated participation in the FSS program, intended to provide them with a five-year “passage out of poverty” toward employment and sufficient income to exit completely from public housing. Posadas seemed a particularly encouraging site for an FSS program since the development already had an award-winning K-2 elementary school across the street and a Head Start program, as well as a library branch with active programming. In terms of incomes and work status, then, the new arrivals in Posadas were initially not so socioeconomically distinct from the sixty households living on-site in units subsidized solely by tax credits. As recently as 2006, for instance, the FSS and work requirements skewed the incomes of public housing residents at Posadas to fully 49 percent of the area median income, about triple the average incomes of Tucson’s public housing residents systemwide at the time. With the economic downturn and joblessness that followed the Great Recession, however, the incomes of public housing residents at Posadas declined and averaged only about 30 percent of median as of 2017. The incomes of those in the tax-credit portion of the apartments have remained at about 50 percent of the area median.⁴⁶

Indicative of the ongoing economic struggles on the public housing side, the FSS program proved to be a mixed success at best and is no longer a requirement for entry into Posadas public housing. Of the thirty-one graduates of the FSS program during its first ten years, nine (including Grace Johnson) were able to move out of public housing, and six of these were able to purchase their own homes. Five individuals also managed to obtain a certificate or degree while participating in the program. Many others, however, either failed to complete the program or did not gain sufficient economic independence to be able to leave public housing. With the economic downturn after 2008, many households lost their service industry jobs, leading to a large number of evictions from the subsidized units due to nonpayment of rent. Indicative of Tucson’s affordable housing shortage, there is a remarkably high number of other households in line to take their place. The Community Services Department (recently renamed the Department of Housing and Community Development) had expected the demand for the tax-credit-subsidized units to outstrip the demand for the public housing units, but this has consistently not been

the case. As of May 2017, 119 households with moderately low incomes remained on the waiting list for one of the sixty tax credit subsidized apartments (which range from two to four bedrooms). Meanwhile, indicative of the exponentially higher demand for more deeply subsidized housing targeted to those with the lowest incomes, nearly seven thousand households awaited an empty unit in the sixty units of public housing at Posadas.⁴⁷ Clearly, most will be waiting for a very long time.

CONCLUSION: SCATTERING THE BARRIO

In Tucson, never a city to champion public housing in a large way, the transformation of Connie Chambers to Posadas Sentinel has nonetheless been successful in many dimensions.⁴⁸ As elsewhere, however, it has been a significant double struggle both to build public housing and to replace it. In Tucson, these two struggles have been intimately connected, since many in the Chicano community believe that the old urban renewal policy never really stopped. Even as a consensus has emerged that urban renewal brought neither commercial nor residential success to central Tucson, the program still has its defenders. In 2010, a half-century after he directed Tucson’s early renewal efforts, Si Schorr continued to praise Tucson’s “prudent civil decision” to remove “the heart of the blighted and deteriorated slum area.” Schorr sees this as the “stimulus” that prevented further deterioration of downtown, though he laments the private sector’s failure to build more housing. By contrast, the equally long memory of Pedro Gonzales framed urban renewal in religious terms, viewing the legacy of the Tucson Convention Center as a profound moral affront:

I’m a person of God. I believe that when you do bad things to people, bad things happen to you. It’s like Cesar Chavez said, “They will be judged.” What they did here with urban removal with the TCC—that’s why nothing has happened there and nothing *will* ever happen. The way we say it, they left the rattlesnake rattles there. Whatever they try there is never gonna work, because they moved people against their will. And those are God’s people.

Those who work for the city of Tucson must grapple with the perspectives of both Schorr and Gonzales.⁴⁹

Former CSD director Karen Thoreson grasped the anger of neighborhood activists such as Gonzales and PCIC and regarded them as a “legitimate voice.” She credited PCIC for having done many good things in Tucson, but imagined that the “longer history of mistrust” made it impossible for the city to engage productively with them in the Santa Rosa barrio.

The city had plans to just raze that neighborhood. People hadn't forgotten that. The city had so little respect for the people in that neighborhood and the conditions in that neighborhood that they were willing to just get rid of it. That was what fueled all of it. Posadas was characterized as another urban renewal project. I think Pedro knew better, but it served his purpose to keep the anger alive.

For her part, Emily Nottingham fully understands that PCIC and others in the surrounding barrios did not want to see the tenants get used, and that they feared a repeat of the worst aspects of urban renewal. She emphasized that the CSD had a broad mandate: the HOPE VI initiative was "primarily about the residents and the future residents, but we *are* a community development department." This meant that she also needed to worry about "what the neighborhood wanted" and about "how the development should fit in." The objections from neighbors proved personally and professionally frustrating, since "a lot of the residents took the position that 'we don't trust the city so we'll not participate in the discussion, but just fight whatever the city proposes.'" Nottingham insisted that "we honestly wanted to work with them and knew that they had been fighting for thirty or forty years" and did not trust the city.⁵⁰

Albert Elias, who succeeded Nottingham as CSD director in 2008 and at this writing serves as Tucson's assistant city manager, comes from a deeply rooted *Tucsonenses* family and feels the impact of long community memory even more acutely. Elias, who began working for the city's Planning Department in 1984, saw the legacy of urban renewal as "an incredible obstacle that has been a yoke placed on all city actions."

No matter how great of a person you are, no matter how hard you try, it's shaped virtually my entire career with the city. It's always been a factor in anything the city's trying to do in this general vicinity. . . . That's the yoke of working for government. You have to effectively own all these decisions that happened before you.

Elias understands the resistive power of collective memory. Even though it has been well over a half-century since the first stirrings of urban renewal, and one might think "the people have died or gone away," this is actually not the case. As Elias commented, deeply rooted memories of maltreatment and expulsion remain part of the oral tradition of Tucson's Mexican American community: "Their *nana* told the story to their *tía*, and my *tía* told me that twenty years ago, so here we are forty years later and this person who may be thirty years old and never really experienced this has a whole backstory that they're completely aware of because their family and friends have relayed it to them." The new development may have been

named Posadas Sentinel, but some sentinels of the community still saw it as Pueblo Center revisited.⁵¹

The saga of public housing in Tucson's Santa Rosa barrio reveals the complexity of neighborhood reaction. To some, HOPE VI represented merely the latest edition of "Mexican removal," a process with a near-continuous history. Other residents seemed perfectly happy to see a dramatic reduction in the number of public housing residents in their neighborhood but feared gentrification would soon follow, causing their own property taxes to rise to unaffordable levels. They ignored the city's tax abatement plan, intended to prevent just such an occurrence.⁵² Meanwhile, some feared a continued downward trend: building back public housing on the site would recreate the problem of concentrated poverty that had doomed Connie Chambers. At the opposite extreme, others saw no reason to tear down Connie Chambers at all; the buildings simply needed to be repaired and were already "good enough for public housing residents."

Urban renewal purged the poorest; HOPE VI Tucson-style operated more subtly and benignly than its precursor, even though it ultimately led to the same result—at least for those residing in the city's central barrios. Good-hearted people in the CSD such as Olga Osterhage and Emily Nottingham certainly had no wish to "purge the poorest" and did nothing of the sort. Instead, they presided over an innovative system designed to offer genuine choices to extremely low-income households. Because Tucson phased the development of Connie Chambers and offered *all* households the choice to stay on to live in the new Posadas, and because the CSD offered some first-rate relocation options, including many opportunities for new single-family homes in diverse neighborhoods, Tucson's version of HOPE VI achieved its goal of deconcentrating poverty in a much more positive way than most other cities. As Osterhage put it, "The key point is that our other housing is also really good. If our other housing were bad, it would be really hard" to justify this use of the Posadas site for so few Connie Chambers residents. She visited Atlanta and toured their "beautiful" Centennial Place development but quickly realized that this was not the Tucson model. "When I heard they didn't do one-for-one replacement, it felt to me like they used the best property for non-public housing and they did the minimum for the public housing."⁵³ As in Atlanta, Tucson's leaders wished to eliminate "projects," but Osterhage and her colleagues believed this could be accomplished by doing as much as possible for public housing residents.

Tucson's own policies did not succeed in appeasing critics in the neighborhood, but it is significant that far fewer complaints seem to have come from the public housing residents themselves. This remains a major achievement. That said, as in other cities, Tucson's leadership used policy mechanisms

and federal funding to replace a well-located but extremely low-income project community with a much more upwardly mobile alternative.

Despite some legitimate criticism from local activists, Tucson's processes have still yielded a more equitably implemented displacement than the heavy-handed removals that have prevailed elsewhere in cities such as New Orleans. Although still a displacement, it is one that has been accompanied by some careful and humane administration, genuine attention to tenant needs, and respect for tenant choices. At the same time, by replacing half of the on-site units with less deeply subsidized tax-credit units that can command near-market rents, and—at least initially—by shifting the public housing side of the Posadas population toward those who could meet “working preference” and “family self-sufficiency” standards for admission, the CSD deliberately skewed occupancy of this choice location toward a far less impoverished population and thereby facilitated the further gentrification of the surrounding barrios. If the “creaming” of the poor at Posadas had been part of a general policy, Tucson's system would not stand out as a progressive example as much as it does. It is therefore important to note that, despite a system-wide “working preference” in place for several years, Tucson still uses its (admittedly undersized) public housing portfolio to serve those who, on average, earn only 21 percent of the area's median income. Even so, however, Tucson's fifteen hundred public housing units and more than five thousand vouchers, taken together, serve but a small fraction of the more than fifty thousand Tucsonans whose low incomes make them eligible for housing subsidies.⁵⁴

Paradoxically, while Tucson's approach to the Connie Chambers redevelopment exemplifies the Publica Major poverty governance constellation, the overall contribution of Tucson's public sector to affordable housing provision remains disproportionately tiny. Other cities of roughly similar population—such as San Francisco, New Orleans, Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Boston—each devote two to seven times as large a percentage of total housing units to public housing. Correspondingly, Tucson has just twenty-three affordable and available housing units for every one hundred households earning less than 30 percent of the median income—much lower than any of these other cities.⁵⁵ Tucson has succeeded in assembling an excellent inventory of scattered-site public housing over nearly a half-century, but, after the projects have been removed, city leaders still choose to house a very small percentage of the city's poorest residents.

Part V

NONPROFITUS IN SAN FRANCISCO

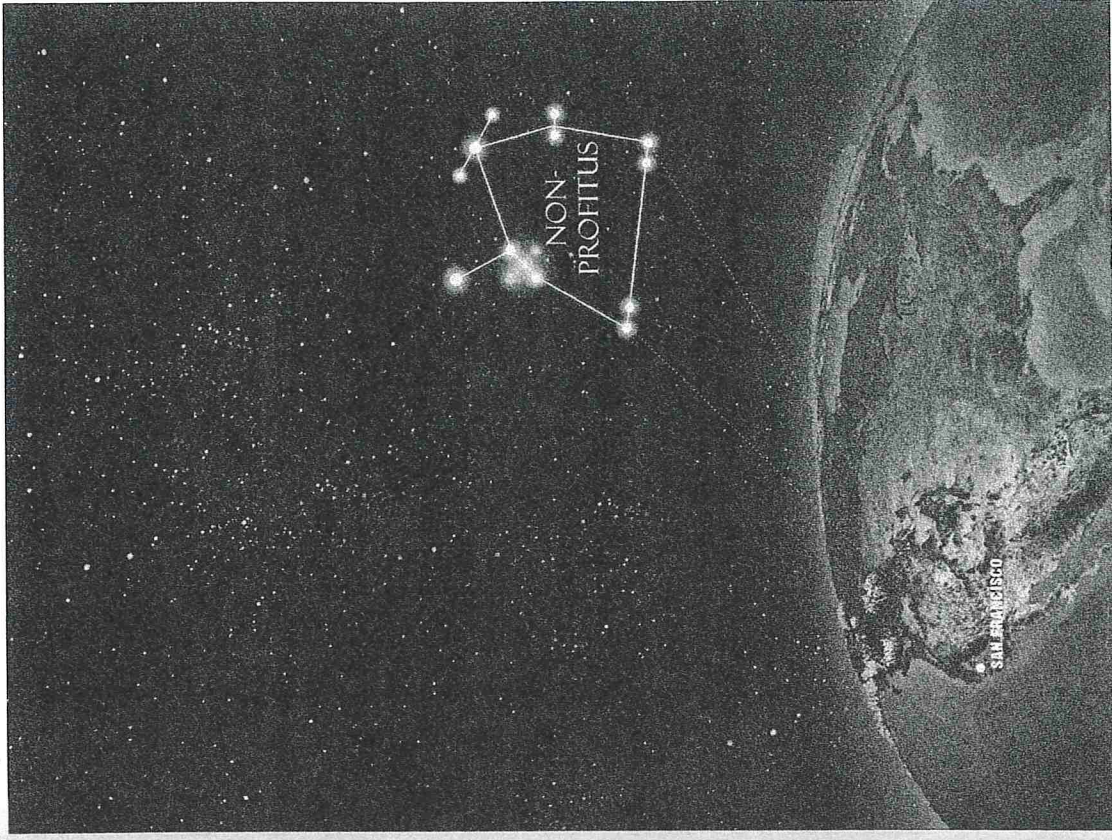


Figure V.1. San Francisco's Nonprofitus Constellation for North Beach Place Viewed from San Francisco, the Nonprofitus constellation shines prominently in the sector of the sky dominated by not-for-profit organizations.
Credit: Author with Suzanne Harris-Brandts.