



# COMMUNITY BY DESIGN

*a methodology for post-occupancy evaluation*



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2008 SENIOR PROJECT



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*danny yadegar, 2008*





TO MY BEST FRIEND *Amelia*  
THE MOST SELFLESS PERSON I HAVE EVER MET



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# acknowledgements

*I would like to give a genuine thank you to everyone who contributed, knowingly or not, to making this project the most educational journey I have ever embarked on.*

*Many thanks to the residents of Mandela Gateway, for using their voices and sharing their lives with me.*

*Gracias to my papa John, for constantly emphasizing the importance of following my passion.*

*To my mother Nilou, for instilling in me a love I can only hope to share with the rest of the world.*

*Danno, your cooperation has been unyielding, and our time together insightful.*

*And to my incredible professors Patsy and Mark, for sharing their passion with the world. My vision is a product of your own, and I thank you for years of inspiration*

*We are all authors of this paper.*



# preface

Throw the dictionary away. Ignore the colorful images with children running through open fields. Ask yourself, “How would you define community?” It’s a difficult question to answer and one many designers often have difficulty answering for themselves, let alone for the residents whom they design for. The truth is that we all have different meanings associated with the word “community”. Our personal experiences lead us to have unique understandings of how a community should be built. This spatial layout works while this one doesn’t, these people should be included while those cause problems, and this is how involved the citizen should be.

Differences in our visions abound, it should not be assumed that our ideas are entirely unrelated. While we may have differences on the appeal of certain elements, a good portion of what is found to be desirable holds true from person to person. There are few that would argue against a beautiful environment conducive to positive social interaction. Where this place is created, whom it should serve and how it should be designed, however, are issues of greater disagreement. It is the search for areas of intersection, the collection of community-building principles that are undeniably beneficial, which became the impetus of this paper.

While studying abroad in Madrid, I witnessed an event in my neighborhood that changed my understanding of community for the rest of my life. While walking home from my university one sunny afternoon, my thoughts were interrupted by a barely audible wail just across the street. An elderly man, in stepping off the curb, had gotten his cane stuck in a drain inlet. His fall was a gentle one, almost as if in slow motion, but any collision at that age requires considerable attention. As he recovered from his fall and sat himself on the sidewalk, for a moment, time came to a standstill.

It was not the fact that people stopped to assure the man’s wellbeing that impressed me – I would well hope that this would be the case anywhere else in the world – yet instead it was the amount of their time, the amount of their lives, people were willing to give up in order to see him on his way: Two bystanders helped him to his feet as the waitress across the street brought bread and water; The florist offered his chair as a woman from upstairs hurried a moist towel to his forehead; I offered his cane at his side, while a well-dressed businessman ended his conversation to dial 911. The general questions they asked him were expected. Continuing to discuss the incident moments after the ambulance had taken him away, a good half hour after the mishap began, was something I would never have

anticipated. Every single person who was there from the start was there until the very end.

I am grateful for what I saw that day because it proved to me that strangers and compassion are, in fact, compatible entities. I will not speculate whether or not such an incident could ever play out the same way in the United States. At the time, however, my conscious understanding of social interaction, something engrained in me from my upbringing in the States, revealed unfamiliarity with the neighborhood's response. Here was something that seemed so natural, so organically correct, and yet my consciousness acknowledged it as unusual. Intrigued by the disparity between what I expected and what actually happened, I became motivated to spread the camaraderie I experienced.

A design philosophy takes a lifetime to establish. My design philosophy will take two. As an economist-gone-landscape architect-going-urban planner, I have developed an eclectic skill set to encourage the camaraderie our society needs. I am a firm believer that our behavior is largely determined by our environment, yet my confidence in the capacity of physical design has been humbled by the realization that even a perfectly designed site can become a complete failure if designed with improper social context.

Employing the benefits of community participation in the design process is cornerstone to the development of healthy communities and consistently produces a design that better represents the needs of its users. Committed to the creation of beautiful places with involved citizens, I consider myself a community planner.

Using research to promote a design philosophy is a skill this project seeks to share. In my particular case, I want to research current community-building strategies to determine the best strategies to use. I have realized, as my project develops, just how different people's ideas of "community" actually are. Establishing a common terminology is something designers often take for granted. While today's design rhetoric uses "community" to suggest any desirable environment, this paper provides my definition of the word in order to harmonize my understanding with that of other people and create a platform from which to promote its creation.

Creating "community" will be the focus of my first post-occupancy evaluation (POE), the methodology for which is the content of this project. It is the hope that this document will inspire others to conduct similar evaluations and learn as much as I have in the process of beginning one. Enjoy.

Danny Yadegar

6.15.2008

# introduction

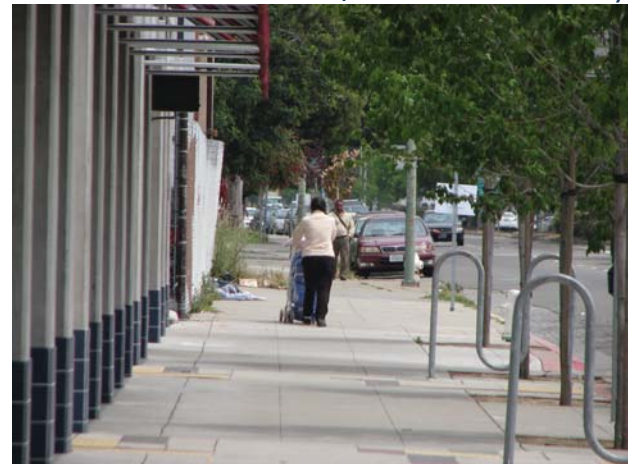
By making the process of post-occupancy evaluation more accessible, it is the hope that this report will encourage others to conduct evaluations themselves. This document will serve as the basis for future post-occupancy evaluations of my own, with the evaluation of Mandela Gateway in West Oakland comprising my first. With the help of this project, my evaluation of Mandela Gateway is now well underway.

This document is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 is a single page, dedicated to the outline of the methodology I have established. It can be referred to as an index when reading through the paper. Chapter 2 is the bulk of the document, going through the steps one by one and describing the process in greater detail. In order to add clarity to the steps, preliminary work from my own post-occupancy evaluation of Mandela Gateway complements the methodology. Chapter 3 is not a part of the methodology, yet instead a look back at the whole process and a collection of lessons gathered from personal experience. While conducting a post-occupancy evaluation for the first time can seem intimidating, this project hopes to make the process more approachable.

*courtyard, west block of Mandela Gateway*



*7th Street streetfront. Mandela Gateway*





# methodology outline

- I. Identify your Focus
- II. Choose a Place to Evaluate
- III. Understand the Involvement of Stakeholders
- IV. Read Literature on the Stakeholders, the Place and the Focus
- V. Initial Observations
- VI. Interview Stakeholders
- VII. Behavior Mapping
- VIII. Design and Test Survey
- IX. Administer Survey
- X. Hold Community Meeting(s)
- XI. Establish a Community Vision





## i. identify your focus

THE PURPOSE OF A POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION IS TO PROVIDE THE ANALYSIS OF AN EXISTING ENVIRONMENT WITH THE INTENT TO GIVE INFORMED SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE DESIGNS. THE RESEARCH FOCUS OR THE POE NARROWS ITS SCOPE TO CONCENTRATE THE EVALUATION ON AN ASPECT OF THE ENVIRONMENT THE RESEARCHER IS ESPECIALLY CONCERNED WITH. THE FOCUS CAN BE INTANGIBLE, BUT MUST PROVIDE SOME OBSERVABLE MANIFESTATION THAT CAN BE RECORDED.

ONCE A FOCUS HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED, IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEFINE THE TERMINOLOGY THAT WILL BE USED IN THE EVALUATION. A LIMITED VOCABULARY IS USED IN THE DESIGN INDUSTRY, BUT THE MEANINGS DESIGNERS INDIVIDUALLY ATTRIBUTE TO THE SAME WORDS ARE IN ACTUALITY DIVERSE. AS EVALUATORS, WE TAKE CAUTION TO DEFINE OUR TERMINOLOGY SO AS NOT TO CONFUSE RESEARCH WITH RHETORIC.

The word “community” gets thrown around a lot these days. With patterns of sprawling suburban development and decaying city cores lined up in the crosshairs, planners are in the hot seat for answers. In response, they are vehemently promising one word – community. It’s easy to sell the public on the merits of community, but designers must understand the needs of their site’s users in order to transform their community vision into a reality. While the terminology designers use may be consistent, the conglomerate of concepts underlying that one word is often more complicated than Russian

democracy. Almost as if a concession, the word “community” has become a selling point, and with its exploitation has come its dilution.

For example, in the Charter of the New Urbanism, a set of design principles written in the mid 1990s, a collection of world-renown planners and architects try to guide development in a healthier, more appropriate direction. In the preamble to this document, “community” is the most common word (spare articles “and”, “the”, and “of”). In the case of BRIDGE Corp., a large-scale developer

of affordable housing, the final line of their homepage reads, “Above all, BRIDGE builds communities.” It is difficult to associate “community” with something negative, so it’s no surprise that the word is commonplace in an industry committed to positive change. To the credit of those who use it, however, “community” has several meanings. The first implies a physical location.

*courtyard, east block of Mandela Gateway*



*corridor, west block of Mandela Gateway*



## COMMUNITY OF PLACE

The words “neighborhood” and “community” are often used interchangeably. In this manner, “community” serves strictly as a geographical reference to a particular place. The “neighborhood of West Oakland” is just as easily described as “the West Oakland community.” In the following excerpt, taken from R. Gifford’s *Environmental Psychology*, the author makes an obvious switch between the two words as if they meant the exact same thing.

*“Measuring Neighborhood Satisfaction – Personal, social, physical, and cultural factors influence satisfaction with a community. However, before each of these influences are described, we should consider how to assess community satisfaction. How would you measure neighborhood satisfaction (Gifford, 2002, p. 268)?”*

I refrain from using “neighborhood” in such a context because of the social implications it may carry. Gifford talks about “community satisfaction” with reference to social, cultural and physical factors, but neighborhood is typically used to simply refer to a strictly geographical context. In measuring neighborhood satisfaction, it is unclear what realms of social life he is including. While “community” can be used to signify a geographical location, and be compared to “neighborhood” in this regard, adding social and cultural factors to the word suggests a completely different definition.



*residents of Mandela Gateway*



## COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE

Another common usage of the word is as a synonym for “population”. When a group of people is not necessarily anchored by a physical location, “community” is used to suggest their commonality despite their dispersion. A Washington Post article, titled “Black Community Is Increasingly Protective of Obama” , demonstrates this usage. In reading the article one will realize that the author is not referring to a small neighborhood of Blacks, yet instead to the entire Black population of the United States. The word “community” is used to suggest the presence of a common interest in a way that “population” cannot. In the case of this particular article, the common interest would be for Blacks to be more cautious about the people Obama surrounds himself with. We hear people speak of the “Jewish Community”, the “International

Community” or the “Gay Community” and it is understood that they are referring to an entire population, but this usage is inextricably linked to some underlying suggestion of common interest. While this definition is closer to the one I would like to use, it remains shy of a fundamental element I would like to introduce.

## COMMUNITY OF COMPASSION

The “community” I would like to advocate places the needs of its population as the highest priority. Residents of this community look after each other because they know someone is looking out for them. Property managers in this community make decisions in the best interest of the residents, because they realize a happier population is easier to manage. Designers of this community take time to learn the needs of individual residents, because an informed design acknowledges that environments are for people. This ideology of community integrates the elements of physical locality and human coexistence and complements them with the idea that a community’s strength depends entirely upon the strength of its members. The best way to empower residents and encourage them to help others is to satisfy their individual needs first.

The capacity for people to accomplish a vision as a group depends on how compatible their goals are as individuals. “Attachment (to the community) is not merely a function of time: it grows through positive social interaction and the compatibility of the community with the resident’s purpose in life (Gifford, 2002, p. 273).” A vision shared by all will more likely become reality than a collection of different visions. For this reason we must be specific in our intent when we use the word “community”; We must establish a vision that everyone can share. But a communal vision cannot be created without individual goals, and goals will go unaccounted for if they are not expressed. Designers must create a comfortable forum for residents to express their opinions and facilitate the goal-setting process. By doing so, shared interest and common values will surface and a vision for the community can be created together.

There are four principles of community I believe to be undeniably beneficial to the health of our species:

1. **Continuity** – permanence validates benevolence towards the community’s future. While a physical locality often anchors such a feeling, community can exist in its absence.

*“When confidence about a community is high, residents will stay and improve it. When most residents are pessimistic about the future of their community, it is difficult to encourage residents to stay (if they have any choice), let alone renew, renovate, or revitalize it (Gifford, 2002, p. 267).”*

2. **Diversity** – a diverse population is conducive to collaboration. When members of a population have different lifestyles, their differences lead them to be better in some things and worse at others. Where someone’s greatest need is someone else’s greatest skill in a diverse culture, this great might be left unfulfilled in a homogenous one. Diversity also promotes understanding.

*“Loss of cultural diversity is worrisome for the same reasons as the decline of genetic diversity, because any subculture might have specialized forms of habitation key to future resilience (Hester, 2006, p. 184).”*

3. **Sociability** – it is human nature to want to feel more secure in our environment. We understand our situation better by speaking to others, and a healthy community will encourage this to happen. Isolation reveals a complete lack of sociability, while sharing with strangers reveals the highest level of sociability possible.

*“Just as important as the physical context, and a complement to it, is the social, economic, and cultural networks that spring up in a neighborhood setting (Calthorpe, 2001, p. 33).”*

4. **Participation** – community depends upon the contribution of its members, but getting people involved requires true optimism. Participation also helps establish a sense of ownership. Simply by coming together to do a common task, members of the community will be more likely to defend the environment they helped build.

*“Participation...brings people together to talk about common problems... (it) establishes connections between people and their physical surroundings and creates a sense of community among those engaged in the planning process. It provides an opportunity for people to learn how their own space and material needs intersect with those of other individuals (Sommer, 1969, p. 122).”*

*Satara and friend, residents of Mandela Gateway*



Observing existing communities, one will notice varying levels of the mentioned principles. How people interact with one another or how much effort they put into their environment is often a reflection of how much they value their community. “Community”, as discussed in this paper, exists only in the fulfillment of all four principles.

Unfortunately, community is not a quantifiable entity. Unlike a neighborhood with definitive boundaries or a population of a particular size, a community often blurs geographical lines and touches people belonging to various populations. The strength of a community is most readily observable through its effects, but the cause of these effects is something only community members can understand. Outsiders must rely on people from the community to describe what they experience in their own terms in an effort to better understand how the community functions. The best way for designers to learn, in this condition and in most, is to listen.



## ii. choose a place to evaluate

THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF ENVIRONMENTS THAT IMPLORE OUR STUDY. IN DETERMINING WHICH OF THESE ENVIRONMENTS WILL YIELD THE MOST INFORMATIVE EVALUATION, AN EVALUATOR MUST CONSIDER BOTH HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR FOCUS AND WHAT THEIR CAPACITY TO EVALUATE IT WILL BE. AS EVALUATORS WE MUST CONSIDER WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO US IN ORDER TO BEST UNDERSTAND THE PLACE: UNIQUE OBSERVATION METHODS, RELATIONS TO PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN, RELATIONS TO PEOPLE WHO USE THE PLACE, ETC. IN TERMS OF THE SITE, WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT THE PROJECT WILL CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFUL DATA TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH FOCUS. IS THE SITE REPRESENTATIVE OF A TYPE OF ENVIRONMENT? WILL ITS EVALUATION BE OF INTEREST TO OTHERS? HAVE PEOPLE HAD SUFFICIENT TIME TO EXPERIENCE THE ENVIRONMENT AND ESTABLISH THEIR OPINIONS? THE OVERARCHING OBJECTIVE IS TO FIND A PLACE THAT WILL SUPPLY A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF DATA IN THE ORDER OF WHAT IS BEING STUDYING.

In seeking to evaluate the capacity for design to foster community by looking at a particular project, I found Mandela Gateway to be an excellent choice. HOPEVI, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) urban renewal program geared towards rehabilitating the nation's most dilapidated housing, acknowledges the importance of support services in addition to reshaping the physical environment.

*"It asks stakeholders to think about the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of their communities, not just the housing. It challenges them to integrate social services such as health care, day care, security, and*

*after-school programs with job training, local retail, and transportation – to think holistically about their problems and their possibilities (Calthorpe, 2001, p. 254-255)."*

HOPEVI uses the creation of a more suitable environment, both physical and social, in order to provide a better opportunity for its public housing residents to become self-sufficient and active in the community. The principles it advocates are almost identical to the principals of community I advocate myself.

Through its ideology and its process, HOPEVI responds to each of the four principles of community. The entire process of revitalization is a testament to continuity, a commitment to repair the damage caused by decades of inappropriate housing programs. The process of changing the physical shape of public housing by demolishing decrepit complexes and designing new ones on the same site shows a continued dedication to the neighborhood. The program's policy towards building mixed-income communities lessens the concentration of poverty and puts people in contact that may not be so otherwise. This diversity it promotes is beneficial for low-income residents as much as it is for others. Sociability is bred into its designs with the requirement for, "comprehensive services that empower residents", and participation is mandated through a participatory design process with community meetings. Although I knew that applying a federal ideology on a site-specific scale might come with considerable challenges, it was exciting to discover a design philosophy so consistent with my own. I began researching the Mandela Gateway's history to better understand its development.

In a sense, the development of Mandela Gateway owes its greatest thanks to the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989. The tragedy took the lives of 70 people with the collapse of the Cypress Freeway, but in the wakes of the freeway's removal, West Oakland is gaining

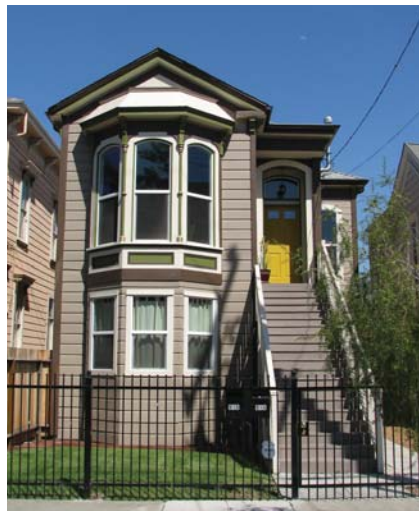
momentum towards revitalization. In the footprint of the freeway now exists an extensively landscaped boulevard by the name of Mandela Parkway, terminating to the South at 7th Street. Straddling both sides of the parkway at that very intersection are located two modern buildings anchoring the entrance to the Parkway. Together, they are aptly named Mandela Gateway.

West Oakland is a poor neighborhood, with a wealth of culture and opportunity. Over half of the households in West Oakland earned an income of less than \$30,000 in 2000, compared to 26% in Alameda County as a whole. The life expectancy in West Oakland for the year 2000 was 71.6 years, over 7 years lower than the county's as a whole. Demographically speaking, 89% of the population is a minority, with a total of 7% of residents being White. Of the minority population, over 70% are African-American. The poverty levels are unmatched anywhere else in the County. The statistics do not match up, however, to the potential of the area. What housing is not found in apartment complexes is almost entirely comprised of colorful, eclectic Victorians nearly a century old. The area is positioned adjacent Emeryville, which has experienced tremendous growth in the past years. The closest BART station headed westbound to San Francisco is located on the major thoroughfare of 7th Street, also well serviced by the public bus system, AC Transit.

## Neighborhood Context



*houses with typical Victorian architecture. West Oakland*



*extensively landscaped median. Mandela Parkway, West Oakland*



The construction of Mandela Gateway was only made possible by the removal of the development there before it, a 46-unit public housing complex by the name of Westwood Gardens. It was identified by the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) to provide some of the worst units in the nation's stock of public housing, and HUD justly recommended OHA to apply for a HOPEVI revitalization grant in the late 1990s. A local urban planning group, Calthorpe and Associates (CA), was hired to draft a grant proposal in the hopes of anchoring federal funding as a basis to go after private investors. The grant was approved in 1999.

Even before the grant was approved, however, the design process was well underway. A major component of HUD's philosophy is empowering the residents it serves, and involving them through the design process is a requirement for its grants. A series of three community meetings was held in the dates leading up to the grant proposal, in order to receive design feedback and hear residents' comments. At the first meeting, Calthorpe Associates gave a detailed presentation of the proposed site plan and explained everything from unit size to circulation. Many Westwood Garden residents voiced concern regarding their relocation, the need for more open space, and the lack of a community room for meetings. Calthorpe Associates, the firm facilitating the meetings, recognized their

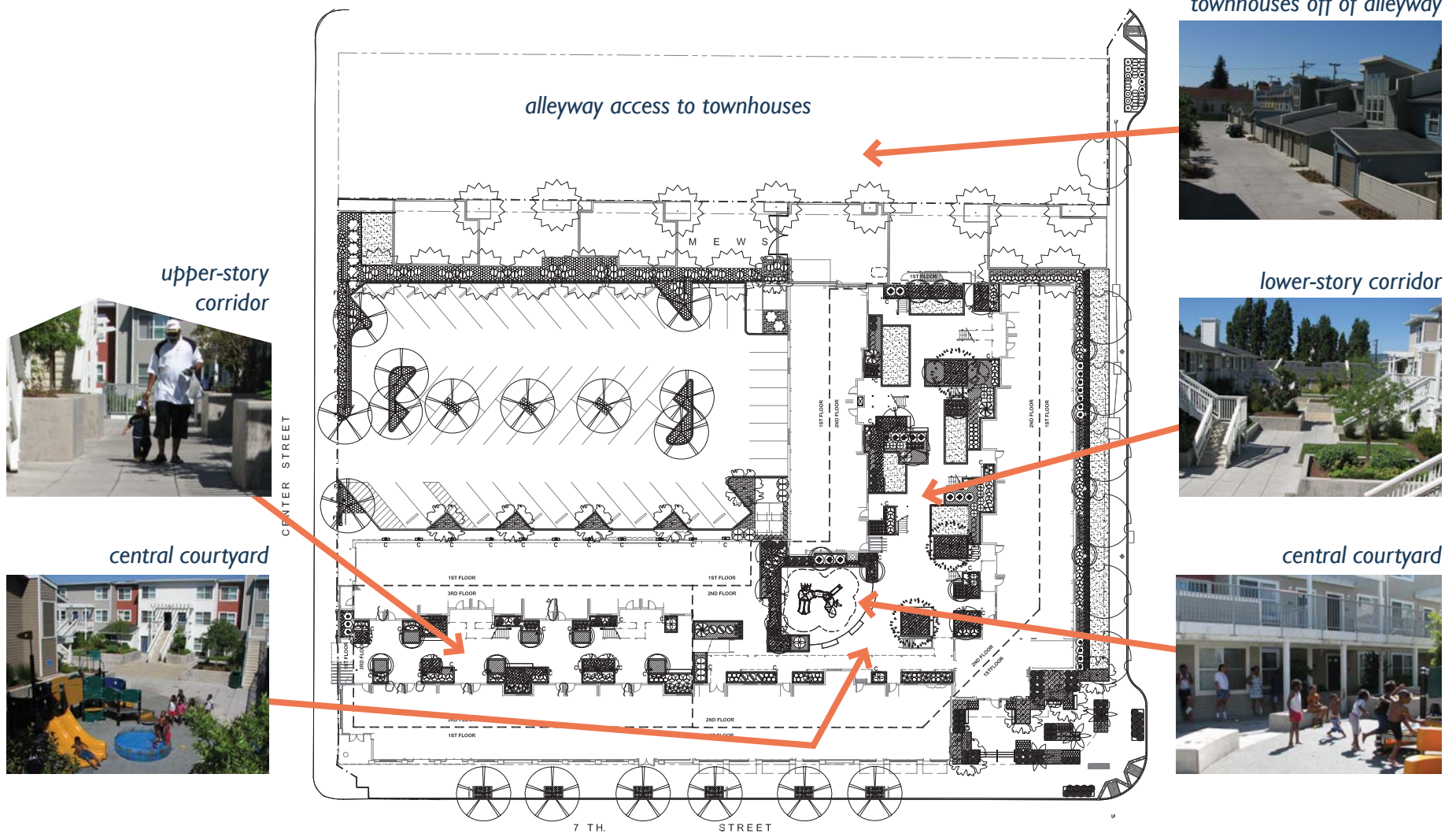
concerns and incorporated them into several redesigns of the site, revealed at subsequent community meetings. The need for support services, such as job training and childcare, and the recognition of the area's cultural fabric were mentioned consistently throughout the meetings. Translators were available to provide interpretation for Cambodian residents.

Although Calthorpe and Associates conducted the community meetings and became most familiar with the nature of the project, a completely different team was responsible for the final design of the site. Once the grant was approved, OHA opened the project to the development industry and put in a request for proposals. BRIDGE housing, one of California's leaders in affordable housing development, won the contract, and with their selection came a design team the company was more familiar working with. Michael Willis Architects and the landscape firm PGAdesign, both with offices based out of Oakland, finalized the drawings to be taken to construction. The design was completed in 2003, with construction beginning shortly afterwards.

A plan of the site, scaled at 1": 64', is provided with photographic callouts to convey its character and sense of place. Arrows point to the location pictured in the photograph.



# Western Block, Mandela Gateway



*townhouses off of alleyway*



*lower-story corridor*



*upper-story corridor*



*central courtyard*



*central courtyard*



units facing 8th Street



alleyway access



upper story corridor



# Eastern Block, Mandela Gateway

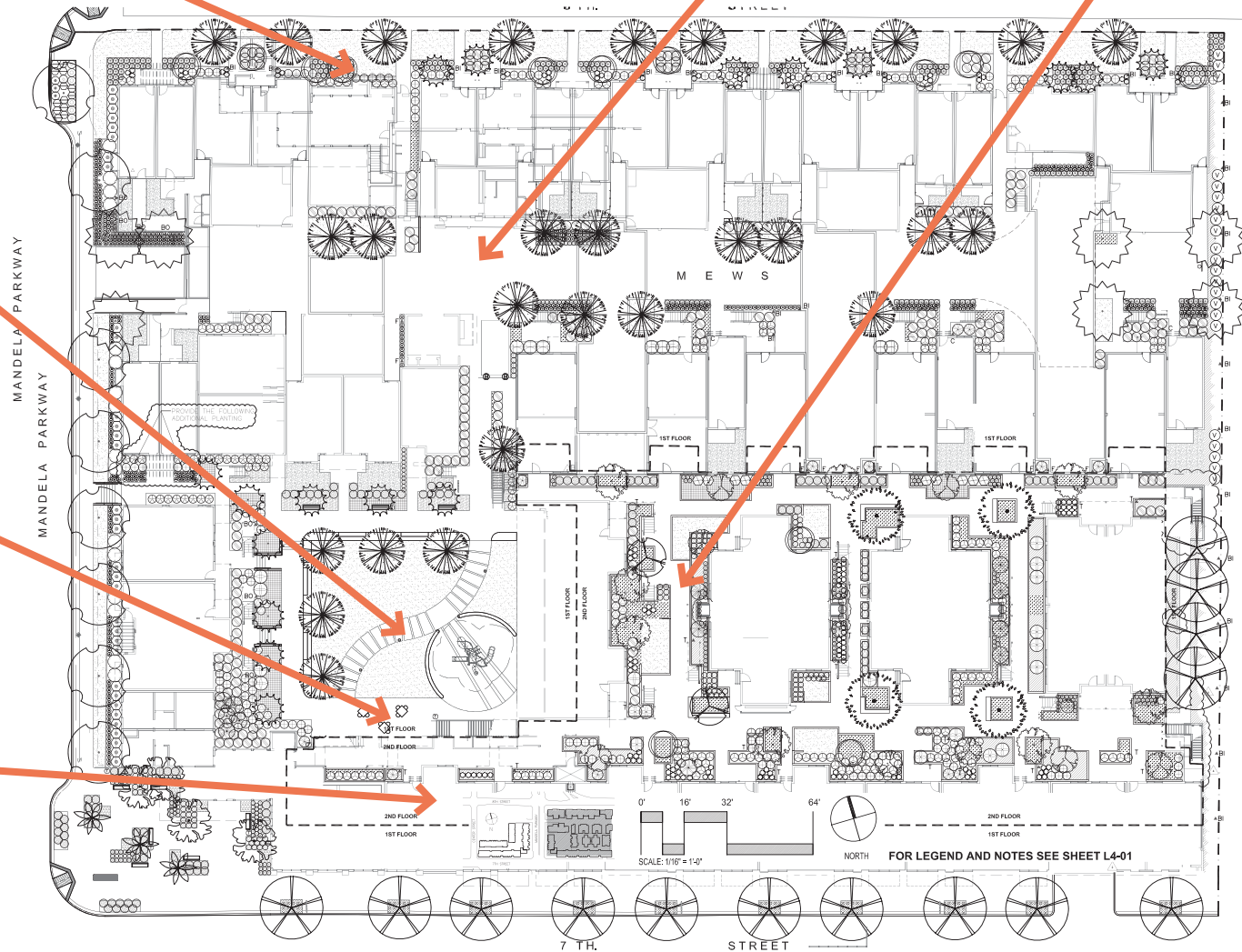
central courtyard



central courtyard



community room



## iii. understand the involvement of stakeholders

A DESIGN WILL GO THROUGH AN ELABORATE HIERARCHY BEFORE IT REACHES THE CONSTRUCTION STAGE.

UNDERSTANDING THE TWISTS AND TURNS THAT THE DESIGN EXPERIENCES AS IT GOES THROUGH THIS HIERARCHY WILL SHED LIGHT ON WHO HAS GREATEST CONTROL OVER THE ENVIRONMENT'S CREATION. OFTEN THE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES OF ONE STAKEHOLDER ARE LARGELY DETERMINED BY THE OBJECTIVES OF ANOTHER STAKEHOLDER THEY HAVE ALLEGIANCE TO. ONLY BY RECOGNIZING THESE INTER-PARTY COMMITMENTS AND HOW THEY CAME ABOUT CAN ONE UNDERSTAND THE SITE'S DESIGN PROCESS.

AMONG THE STAKEHOLDERS THAT CAN BE EXPECTED ARE A DEVELOPER, LENDERS AND DONORS, AN URBAN PLANNER, AN ARCHITECT, A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT AND EITHER PROPERTY MANAGEMENT OR MAINTENANCE.

ONCE A LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS SPECIFIC TO YOUR SITE BEEN ESTABLISHED, THEIR EXACT INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROJECT AND HOW THEY BECAME INVOLVED SHOULD BE DETERMINED. IF THE PROCESS, IN ANCHORING FIRMS TO WORK ON SPECIFIC PARTS OF THE PROJECT, WAS NOT HIGHLY COMPETITIVE, CHANCES ARE SOME KIND OF ALLEGIANCE EXISTS.

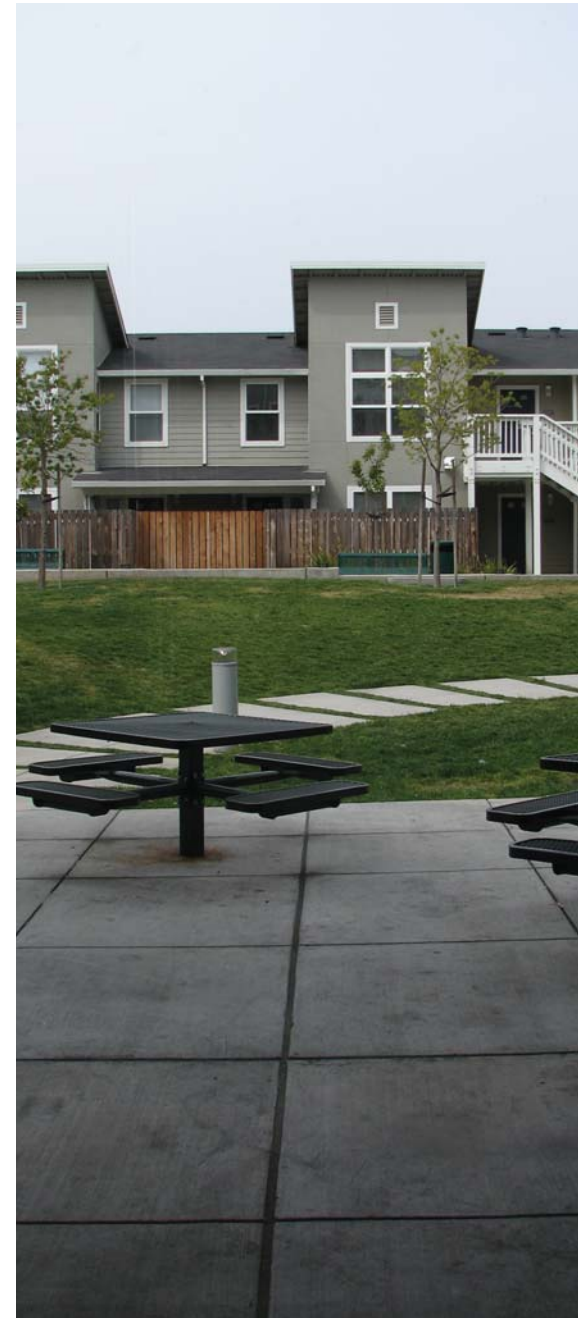
AS SHOWN IN THE FOLLOWING PROJECT PROFILE, COUPLED WITH OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION, SHOWING THE LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS IS EASIEST ACCOMPLISHED WITH A LIST.

As an example, the project profile for Mandela Gateway reveals the impressive number of parties involved in the project's completion. A tremendous amount of coordination was most likely required in order to satisfy the needs of each of the nine lenders, ranging

from a local housing authority to private investor to federal home-ownership program. The introduction of a design team brings a whole another set of objectives to the table, adding to the complexity of the project's dynamic.

## PROJECT PROFILE

Project Name	Mandela Gateway
Location	Oakland, CA (West Oakland)
Design	1999-2003
Construction	2003-2004
Grant Proposal	Calthorpe Associates, Telesis Corp.
Lenders	The City of Oakland, Oakland Housing Authority, HUD, Federal Home Loan Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, The Related Company, World Savings, Fannie Mae, CalHFA
Developer	BRIDGE Housing Corp.
Architect	Michael Willis Architects
Landscape Architect	PGA Design
Property Management	John Stewart Company
Project Cost	\$51.8 Million
Project Size	Approximately 5 acres
Land Use	168 rental units, 14 homeownership townhouses, 20,000 square feet of commercial/retail space
Open Space	26% of site in community open space (34% including roadways)
Project Density	33 dwelling units/acre
Community Amenities	Community room, children's play areas, computer learning center, excellent access to public transportation



## iv. read literature on the stakeholders, the place and the focus

A VAST DISCREPANCY OFTEN EXISTS BETWEEN THE OBJECTIVES OF RESIDENTS AND THAT OF DESIGNERS. BETWEEN DESIGNERS THEMSELVES, HOWEVER, THIS VERY DISCREPANCY EXISTS AS WELL. SIMILAR TO THE CAPACITY OF A COMMUNITY, THE CAPACITY OF DESIGNERS TO ACCOMPLISH A UNIFIED VISION WILL RELY ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL GOALS. REVIEWING THEIR COMPANY PROFILES WILL REVEAL WHAT THEIR PRIMARY OBJECTIVES ARE, AND THOSE OBJECTIVES ARE PERFECT ONES TO EVALUATE THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF DURING A POE. A COMPANY'S WEBSITE IS AN EXCELLENT WAY TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR WORK AND SEE WHAT THE COMPANY'S ALL ABOUT. PROJECT PROFILES ARE ALSO TYPICALLY FOUND ON A COMPANY'S WEBSITE. IF ONE EXISTS FOR THE SITE BEING EVALUATED, THIS MAY BE THE BEST AVAILABLE DOCUMENTATION OF SPECIFIC DESIGN OBJECTIVES. THEY ARE ALSO A GOOD SOURCE TO LEARN ABOUT THE STAKEHOLDER'S STANCE WITH REGARDS TO THE RESEARCH FOCUS. OUTSIDE THE REALM OF STAKEHOLDERS IT MAY ALSO BE POSSIBLE TO FIND PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS OF THE PLACE UNDER OBSERVATION. THERE IS ALWAYS MERIT TO A SECOND EVALUATION, BUT PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS MAY HAVE ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED WHAT YOURS SEEKS TO DO. AS WITH ANY RESEARCH PAPER, CITING INFORMATION ON YOUR FOCUS WRITTEN BY A CREDIBLE SOURCE WILL INCREASE THE CREDIBILITY OF YOUR WORK.

My review of websites for stakeholders involved in Mandela Gateway was primarily devoted to understanding their use of the word "community". The intent was not only to interpret their definition, but also to gather how they encouraged community through their design philosophy and, more specifically, at Mandela Gateway. While I was less successful at gathering information specific to Mandela Gateway, the general company profiles were extremely informative.

Every single website I visited discusses "community", with the exception of the Oakland Housing Authority who instead mentions the objective "to promote the civic involvement and economic self-sufficiency of residents and to further the expansion of affordable housing within Oakland." A selection of stakeholder statements is included in the appendix.



## v. initial observations

THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF ENVIRONMENTS THAT IMPLORE OUR STUDY. IN DETERMINING WHICH OF THESE ENVIRONMENTS WILL YIELD THE MOST INFORMATIVE EVALUATION, WE MUST CONSIDER BOTH HOW IT RELATES TO OUR FOCUS AND WHAT OUR CAPACITY TO EVALUATE THEM WILL BE. ON OUR OWN BEHALF WE MUST CONSIDER WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO US IN ORDER TO BEST UNDERSTAND THE PLACE: UNIQUE OBSERVATION METHODS, RELATIONS TO PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN, RELATIONS TO PEOPLE WHO USE THE PLACE, ETC. IN TERMS OF THE SITE, WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT THE PROJECT WILL CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFUL DATA TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH FOCUS. IS THE SITE REPRESENTATIVE OF A TYPE OF ENVIRONMENT? WILL YOUR EVALUATION BE OF INTEREST TO OTHERS? HAVE PEOPLE HAD SUFFICIENT TIME TO EXPERIENCE THE ENVIRONMENT AND ESTABLISH THEIR OPINIONS? THE OVERARCHING OBJECTIVE IS TO FIND A PLACE THAT WILL SUPPLY A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF DATA IN THE ORDER OF WHAT IS BEING STUDYING.

My initial observations at Mandela Gateway were entirely positive. Kids were running around in the courtyard without a parent attending, the traffic of the corner's busy intersection was buffered by building layout, the landscape was well-maintained and several front doors were left open. Considering the violent crimes that continue to plague the area, the serenity of Mandela Gateway seemed unreal.

*the community room at Mandela Gateway*



The following is an excerpt from my journal on the project, taken from the day of my initial observations: "I won't lie: I came here with the intention of being highly critical of this place, but the design is amazing! It has a community room, a computer lab, laundry facilities, large courtyards, clean architecture, a safe environment protected from the neighborhood. In a neighborhood struck by a dearth of affordable housing, this place is paradise. It takes affordable housing to a whole another level." The only negative element I could find was the fact that the playgrounds looked far too small for the kids that were playing around them. Besides that, the physical design was beautiful. The social environment of the place would require a closer look.

*children biking and playing with action figures.  
west courtyard, Mandela Gateway*



*children keeping themselves entertained  
east courtyard, Mandela Gateway*





## vi. interview stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS ARE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS RESEARCH EFFORTS AND GET VERY SPECIFIC ANSWERS. EACH INTERVIEW SERVES AS AN EXPERT TESTIMONY REGARDING THE SITE AND ONE, SPOKEN BY ONE OF FEW INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN PROCESS, ARGUABLY NO ONE ELSE IS BETTER POSITIONED TO PROVIDE. STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD BE ASKED TO IDENTIFY THEIR MAIN OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE AND WHAT SPECIFIC STRATEGIES THEY USED TO ACCOMPLISHED THOSE OBJECTIVES. THEN THE EVALUATOR CAN INQUIRE ABOUT THE STRATEGIES USED IN REGARDS TO THEIR RESEARCH FOCUS. WITHIN REASON, ANY QUESTION UNSATISFACTORILY ANSWERED THROUGH LITERATURE AND INITIAL OBSERVATIONS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED HERE.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEE THE INTERVIEW IN THE EYES OF THOSE ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS. AS PROFESSIONALS, IT IS IN THE INTERVIEWEE'S BEST INTEREST TO UPHOLD THE REPUTATION OF THEIR FIRM. AS EVALUATORS, HOWEVER, WE WOULD LIKE THE MOST HONEST INFORMATION ATTAINABLE. UPON HEARING "POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION", DESIGNERS BECOME INSTANTANEOUSLY DEFENSIVE. AVOID USING THESE EXACT WORDS IN A SITUATION WHERE IT MAY CAUSE TENSION. INSTEAD, FAMILIARIZE THE INTERVIEWEE WITH THE RESEARCH GOALS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO BECOME INVOLVED AND/OR GIVE SUGGESTIONS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR RESEARCH.

FINALLY, PERSONABILITY THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS WILL GO FAR. ALLOW FLEXIBILITY IN SCHEDULING BY CONTACTING STAKEHOLDERS EARLY IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS AND SETTING UP INTERVIEWS. CONSIDERING THIS MAY BE THE ONLY INTERVIEW WITH THEM, MAKE SURE TO SCHEDULE IT WITH ENOUGH TIME BEFOREHAND TO DEVELOP A LIST OF QUESTIONS TAILORED TOWARDS GETTING THE SPECIFIC RESPONSES NEEDED. THE PROFESSIONALISM OF THE INTERVIEW IS ENTIRELY AT THE INTERVIEWER'S DISCRETION, AND SOMETIMES A MORE NATURAL, CASUAL DISCUSSION WILL YIELD MORE HONEST ANSWERS.

## Stakeholders Contributing to Design Input

Stakeholder interviews regarding Mandela Gateway have been productive. My casual approach, including interviews over lunch, has removed a significant portion of the edginess I encountered in my earlier interviews. All stakeholders have been extremely receptive to criticism and, when presented with preliminary findings, are eager to learn more. My impression is that the value of evaluative research is understood amongst those in the design industry, but the time to actually conduct POEs is hard to find

*view of Mandela Gateway from BART platform, West Oakland*



Oakland Housing Authority

CALTHORPE ASSOCIATES  
URBAN DESIGNERS. PLANNERS. ARCHITECTS



Michael Willis Architects



PGA design INC



Stakeholders Contributing to Design Input

## vii. behavior mapping

BEHAVIOR MAPPING IS A SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION TECHNIQUE USED TO DOCUMENT HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT. WITHIN A GIVEN AMOUNT OF TIME, AN OBSERVER RECORDS THE DIRECTION, GENDERS, AGES, AND ACTIVITY ASSOCIATED WITH EACH GROUP. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MORE SPECIFIC TO THE RESEARCH MAY ALSO BE BENEFICIAL. AFTERWARDS, THESE BEHAVIORS ARE DRAWN ON A PLAN-VIEW MAP OF THE PLACE IN ORDER TO BRING ATTENTION TO PATTERNS AND HELP DETERMINE WHICH AREAS HAVE THE MOST ACTIVITY.

IDEALLY, THE TIMES OF THE DAY THAT BEHAVIORS GET RECORDED ARE AS DIFFERENT AS POSSIBLE. IF ONE OBSERVATION IS IN THE MORNING, THE ONES FOLLOWING IT CAN BE IN THE AFTERNOON AND AT NIGHT. IF BEHAVIOR IS OBSERVED ON A WEEKEND, SUBSEQUENT OBSERVATIONS SHOULD AIM FOR A WEEKDAY. DEPENDING ON THE TRAFFIC OF THE SITE AND HOW MANY LOCATIONS HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO OBSERVE FROM, THE AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT AT EACH LOCATION WILL CHANGE. A TYPICAL STRATEGY FOR BEHAVIOR MAPPING IS TO CHANGE THE VIEW OF THE SITE AS FREQUENTLY AS POSSIBLE. RECORDING PERIODS OF 5 MINUTES ARE TYPICAL, ALTHOUGH SOME SITES MAY NOT REQUIRE LOCATION CHANGES AT ALL.

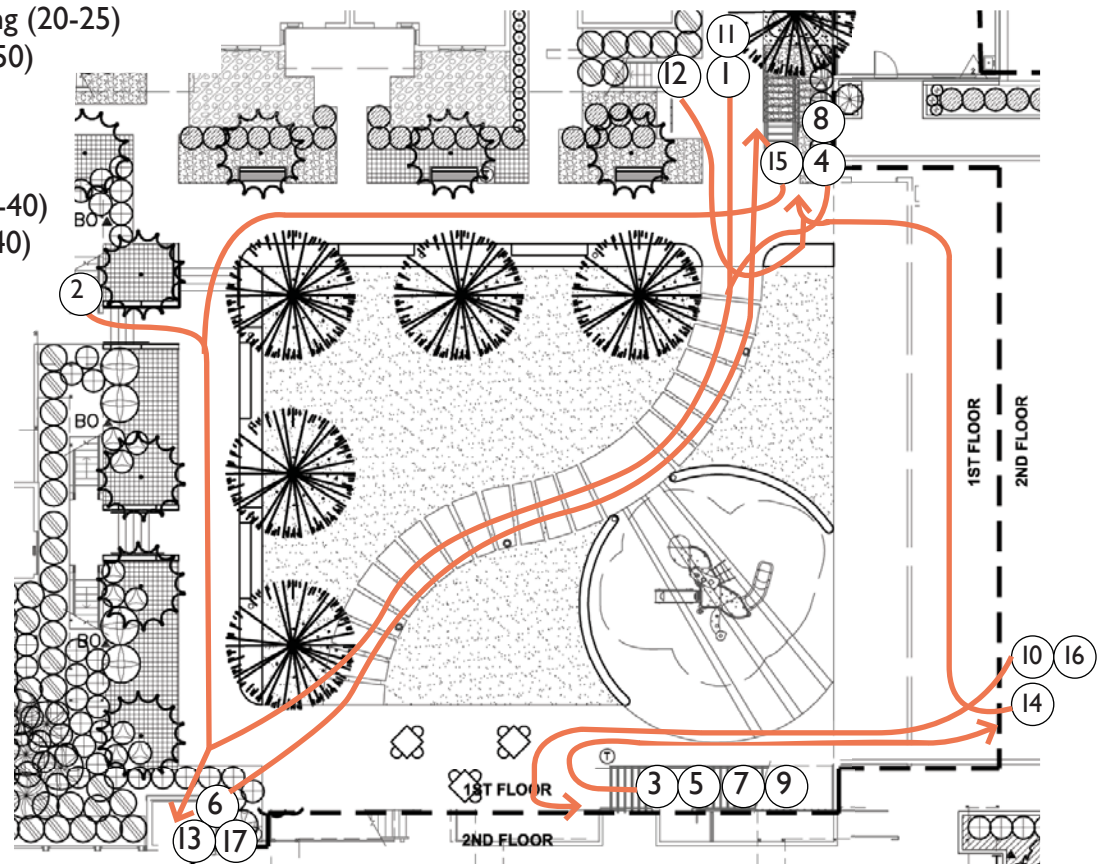
The layout of Mandela Gateway uses buildings as a buffer between the persistent traffic of a busy intersection and its secure, central courtyards. With the goal of providing maximum visibility for child supervision, the units surrounding the courtyards are oriented with windows looking over the common open space and all entrances

and exits visible from most angles. As a result, I was able to conduct my behavior mapping in its entirety from a single point at each courtyard. A sample of the observations from my initial behavior observations are included on the following page.

## Behavior Mapping

Observation number	Group size	Description
1	2	Latino father with daughter
2	2	Black mother with daughter
3	3	Arabic-speaking mother with two sons
4	3	Black mother with two daughters
5	2	Black mother with son
6	1	Asian man, elderly (60+)
7	1	Asian woman, young (20-30)
8	1	Asian boy (5-10)
9	3	Black mother with son and daughter
10	1	Black woman, young (20-25)
11	1	Asian woman (40-50)
12	1	Asian man (40-50)
13	1	Black man (20-30)
14	1	Asian man (30-40)
15	1	Arabic woman (30-40)
16	1	Black woman (30-40)

17 groups of people were observed from 8:15-9:15am on the morning of Tuesday, June 3, 2008. A large population of those observed were mothers taking their children to school. The singles and elderly of the complex have the luxury of leaving a little later, since they don't have to. 10 out of 17 groups observed were leaving the complex. Type of activity would typically be recorded, but walking was the sole activity observed on this morning.



## viii. design and test survey

AS A METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION, THE SURVEY IS INDISPENSABLE. IT PROVIDES UNRIVALED ANONYMITY, AND CAN BE COMPLETED AT THE RESPONDENT'S CONVENIENCE. SURVEYS ARE CHEAP, AND EASY TO ADMINISTER. WHILE THE INTERVIEW OBTAINS FOCUSED ANSWERS FROM STAKEHOLDERS, THE WELL-DESIGNED SURVEY TARGETS AND COLLECTS SPECIFIC DATA FROM THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE TO A SITE — ITS USERS.

BOTH THE FORMAT AND THE CONTENT OF A SURVEY MUST BE DESIGNED WITH EXTREME PRUDENCE. A SURVEY THAT HAS AN ILLOGICAL PROGRESSION OF QUESTIONS AND USES AMBIGUOUS PHRASING WILL FRUSTRATE RESPONDENTS AND HURT THE CHANCE OF THE SURVEY'S COMPLETION. INSTEAD, A SURVEY MUST FOLLOW A CLEAR AND CONCISE THOUGHT PATTERN, BE SPECIFIC IN ITS TERMINOLOGY, AND CONVEY A SENSE OF PROFESSIONALISM. QUESTION TYPES SHOULD BE GROUPED TOGETHER (MULTIPLE CHOICES TOGETHER, SHORT-ANSWERS TOGETHER, YES-NOS TOGETHER...) AND INSTRUCTIONS SHOULD BE AS EXPLICIT AS POSSIBLE. HASTILY DESIGNED SURVEYS WILL QUICKLY BE WRITTEN OFF.

THE CONTENT OF A SURVEY, SIMILARLY, DETERMINES THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS THE SURVEY WILL HAVE IN ADDITION TO THE QUALITY OF DATA IT WILL ACQUIRE. IN A GENERAL SENSE, THE SURVEY'S MAIN GOAL IS TO DETERMINE THE ENVIRONMENTAL SATISFACTION OF ITS USERS. IT IS KNOWN AS A "NEEDS SURVEY" BECAUSE IT ASKS RESPONDENTS TO CONSIDER THEIR NEEDS AND THEN RATE HOW SUCCESSFULLY THEY HAVE BEEN MET. POE HAS INTEREST IN BOTH PHYSICAL NEEDS AND SOCIAL NEEDS. QUESTIONS SHOULD ALSO PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE RESEARCH FOCUS AND STAKEHOLDER OBJECTIVES, ASKING RESPONDENTS TO EVALUATE HOW BOTH AFFECT THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT. REQUESTING DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS ENCOURAGES RESPONDENTS TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS AND TAKE STEPS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE.

AFTER A SURVEY IS CREATED IT IS IMPORTANT TO TEST IT FOR ERRORS, CONFUSING PHRASING, AND THE FOCUS OF QUESTIONS. QUESTIONS SHOULD BE REPHRASED TO ASK FOR DESIRED ANSWERS AS SIMPLY AS POSSIBLE. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE EVALUATOR TO HAVE OTHERS REVIEW THE SURVEY IN ORDER TO GIVE IT A TIME TRIAL AND DETERMINE IF ITS LENGTH IS REASONABLE. LONG SURVEYS DO NOT GET RETURNED.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON SURVEY DESIGN, JOHN ZEISEL'S BOOK, INQUIRY BY DESIGN, IS AN EXCELLENT RESOURCE.

The survey for Mandela Gateway residents aims at measuring environmental satisfaction with three main elements of housing: physical design, social services, and strength of community. General questions about overall satisfaction precede more specific questions aimed at learning residents' preferences in terms of communal facilities, neighborhood offerings, services beyond traditional housing, and levels of interaction. The survey is broken up into sections, under the elements listed above, with each section following a careful progression of thought and terminating with a 1-10 rating. Responses are made into yes/no questions or multiple choice wherever possible in order to make the survey less burdensome.

Luckily I was able to spend some time amongst residents before I formed my questionnaire. It gave me a better understanding of what residents were concerned about and, more importantly, how

to approach them when surveys were ready to distribute. The environmental psychologist Robert Sommer has this to say about survey design:

*"The needs survey will be more meaningful when the designer has spent some time among the occupants and knows how they think and express themselves. It would be extremely difficult to conduct a needs analysis in a specialized building without knowing the technical vocabulary of the residents (Sommer, 1969, p. 76)."*

Sommer makes the important point of acknowledging that the survey must breach the language barrier between resident and designer by using the language of residents to answer questions shared amongst designers. Mine does so by using the simplest language possible. It is currently being reviewed by the developing company responsible for Mandela Gateway in order to be approved by their President of Property Management. Approval, although great for credibility, is not expected. The survey is found in the appendix.

## ix. administer survey

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE MOST INFORMATIVE AND GREATEST NUMBER OF RESPONSES POSSIBLE, EVALUATORS MUST PROVIDE AN INCENTIVE FOR RESIDENTS TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY. IN THE LIKELIHOOD THAT FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS PREVENT THE DELIVERY OF MATERIAL CONCESSIONS, IT IS THE SURVEYOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO APPEAL TO SOME NON-MATERIAL NEED OF THE PEOPLE THEY SURVEY. THE BEST CONCESSION COMES AT THE INTERSECTION OF WHAT THE EVALUATOR CAN OFFER AND WHAT THOSE BEING SURVEYED NEED. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORS, THE ABILITY TO EXPRESS AN ANONYMOUS OPINION, AND THE CHANCE AT A STRENGTHENED COMMUNITY ARE NOT MONETARY OFFERINGS BUT SHOULD INSPIRE SIGNIFICANT INTEREST IN RESPONDENTS.

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION CAN BE DONE WITH VARIED LEVELS OF AGGRESSIVENESS. WHILE KNOCKING ON DOORS IS EFFICIENT IN REACHING EVERYONE IN AN ORGANIZED FASHION, IT IS A METHOD OF COMMUNICATION COMMONLY UNAPPRECIATED. WHEN POSSIBLE, THE SACRED SPACE OF THE HOME SHOULD BE RESPECTED AND PEOPLE APPROACHED ONLY IN MORE PUBLIC AREAS. THERE IT IS MORE SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE TO APPROACH A STRANGER, AND PEOPLE WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO LISTEN. ANOTHER MEASURE OF AGGRESSIVENESS IS HOW QUICKLY EVALUATORS REQUEST OTHERS TO COMPLETE THEIR SURVEY. EXPECTING PEOPLE TO CARE ABOUT YOUR SURVEY REQUIRES A GESTURE THAT YOU CARE ABOUT THEIR RESPONSE FIRST. CONVEY THE FACT THAT THE SURVEY SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND THE WELFARE OF ITS RESPONDENTS BY ASKING HOW THEY ARE DOING AND INTRODUCING YOURSELF AND YOUR PROJECT BEFORE YOUR SURVEY.

USE WHATEVER MEANS AVAILABLE TO SURVEY THE MOST DIVERSE SAMPLING OF RESIDENTS POSSIBLE.

COLLECTION IS EASIEST DONE THROUGH AN ON-SITE MANAGER. IN THE CASE THAT AN ON-SITE MANAGER IS NOT AVAILABLE TO TAKE SURVEYS, OR THAT SURVEYS CONTAIN HIGHLY SENSITIVE INFORMATION, IT IS BEST FOR THE EVALUATOR TO RETURN TO THE SITE ON A REGULAR SCHEDULE AND OFFER VISITS AS DAYS FOR COLLECTION. ANOTHER TECHNIQUE IS TO COLLECT SURVEYS AT THE LATER COMMUNITY MEETING, AN EXCELLENT WAY TO HAVE ATTENDEES COME WITH THOUGHTFUL CONTRIBUTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET THE INFORMATION OF THOSE YOU SURVEY, AS WELL AS PROVIDE YOUR OWN CONTACT INFORMATION. A FOLLOW-UP CONTACT A FEW DAYS AFTER SURVEYS WERE REQUESTED WILL INSPIRE A COUPLE MORE.

Residents at Mandela Gateway have been, for the most part, enthusiastic about completing the survey. While at first reluctant to speak to an unfamiliar face in the complex, especially considering I was moseying about without purpose, they become eager to share their opinion once I inform them of my project. Most residents have a mouthful to say, not all of which is negative. I have taken an active effort to learn as many names as possible, and casual conversation is always used before I offer the survey. While it is offered completely optionally, only one resident has asked me not to leave one with him.

My distribution method put the respect of residents and on-site management as its first priority. Residents of Mandela Gateway were only contacted in public spaces, I never entered the property

without someone else opening the door for me, and management approved the survey.

Due to my spontaneous appearance on-site, collecting the surveys has been difficult. My phone number is provided on the back of each survey and residents call me when the survey is complete. I call the number back and arrange a pickup at my next visit. In order to assure the privacy of those wishing anonymity, unit number is used to reference who has received surveys. Once collected, the survey is placed in pool with other anonymous responses and disassociated with a specific apartment.

Surveys continue to trickle in at a very slow pace. I look forward to improving my survey distribution and collection abilities.



## x. hold community meeting(s)

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE MEETING(S) IS TO SHARE THE FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION AND PROVIDE A FORUM FOR SITE USERS TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE THEIR ENVIRONMENT. WHILE THE POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION IS CONDUCTED TO SATISFY RESEARCH NEEDS, ANY SUCH RESEARCH SHOULD HAVE THE INTENT TO PROGRESS THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN. IF THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF RESEARCH IS TO IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTS, THE LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH PRESENTS ITSELF AS AN EXCELLENT PLACE TO INITIATE CHANGE. THE COMMUNITY MEETING IS AN EFFORT TO EMPOWER COMMUNITY MEMBERS, USING THE DATA THAT THE EVALUATION HAS PROVIDED, WITH THE WILL TO INITIATE SUCH CHANGE WHILE BUILDING THEIR CAPACITY TO DO SO. ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY VISION IS THE FIRST STEP IN INITIATING A CONCERTED EFFORT AT CHANGE.

THERE ARE CERTAIN GENERAL PROCEDURES THAT ANY COMMUNITY MEETING SHOULD FOLLOW, THE FIRST OF WHICH IS PROVIDING AN INCENTIVE TO COME. A COMMUNITY MEETING WILL BE FRUITLESS WITHOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS. ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO ATTEND REQUIRES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS AND PREFERENCES. CONSIDER WHAT YOU CAN OFFER THE COMMUNITY, BE IT FOOD, ENTERTAINMENT, SOCIAL SERVICES OR SIMPLY A FIRM COMMITMENT TO CHANGE, AND OFFER IT IN RETURN FOR PARTICIPATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY MEETING. MAKE SURE PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU ARE OFFERING, AND HOLD THE MEETING AT A TIME WHEN PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE TO ATTEND. CREATIVITY IN YOUR METHOD OF NOTIFICATION AND YOUR INCENTIVE TO COME ARE SURE TO BRING GREATER RESULTS.

BEGIN WITH PERSONAL INTRODUCTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO ESTABLISH AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE TO SHARE THEIR OPINIONS. KNOWING ONE ANOTHER, IF SUCH IS NOT ALREADY THE CASE, ELIMINATES

FEELINGS OF JUDGMENT AND YIELDS A MORE OPEN DISCUSSION. KEEPING PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED IS ALSO CRUCIAL TO EFFECTIVELY CONVEY INFORMATION AND TO STIMULATE CONVERSATION. USING PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES, WHERE EVERYONE AT THE COMMUNITY MEETING PARTICIPATES IN ACTIVITIES, IS A GOOD WAY TO MAKE IT HARD FOR PEOPLE TO DOSE OFF. FINALLY, USE TERMINOLOGY THAT PARTICIPANTS WILL UNDERSTAND. IT IS A COMMON COMPLAINT THAT DESIGNERS AND RESIDENTS “SPEAK DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.” TAKE STEPS TO ELIMINATE THIS LANGUAGE BARRIER WITH THE GOAL OF HAVING BOTH MEETING PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS BI-LINGUAL BY THE MEETING’S END. WHILE A COMMUNITY MEETING IS TYPICALLY PRESENTATIONAL IN FORMAT, MORE INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS ARE AN EXCELLENT WAY TO INSPIRE COMMUNITY INPUT AND INVOLVEMENT. THEY PROVIDE AN INSIGHTFUL GLIMPSE OF THE COMMUNITY’S ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER AND MINIMIZE THE NEED FOR A FACILITATING AUTHORITY.

Being that community planning is the topic of my research, the organization and the process of conducting a meeting are as educational to me as the results it produces. While a community meeting is a good way to gauge the strength of a community, it is an even better way to strengthen the community while its members are all congregated. Similar to the process of Mandela Gateway’s construction, the planning of my meeting seeks to involve all parties in the hopes that the result will be something that everyone involved is proud of. I am currently in the process of organizing a community meeting at Mandela Gateway.

It is my intent to have the results of this community meeting approved by the stakeholders in the project, and minutes for this meeting have been sent to the authorities of the authorities of those in charge of property management. Getting their blessing on my procedure has required more time than anticipated. While I considered holding a meeting without their approval, it is important for me to have my results recognized by all parties involved to add credibility to my research. By doing so, a lack of activity in response to resident concerns will not only be documented but a conscious choice acknowledged by all. The agenda for this meeting has been supplied in the appendix.

## xi. establish a community vision

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND ASKING ABOUT THEIR ENVIRONMENT WILL NO DOUBT INSPIRE DIALOGUE; USING THAT DIALOGUE TO FUEL THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY VISION THAT ITS MEMBERS CAN BE PROUD OF, HOWEVER, REQUIRES A MORE CONCERTED EFFORT. THIS IS THE FINAL STEP OF POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION. CREATING A COMMUNITY VISION REQUIRES PATIENCE, COMPASSION, AND COMPROMISE. IT REQUIRES PATIENCE BECAUSE IT DOES NOT MATERIALIZE INSTANTLY. IT REQUIRES COMPASSION BECAUSE INDIVIDUALS MUST RECOGNIZE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY ARE PART OF A LARGER COMMUNITY. FINALLY, IT REQUIRES COMPROMISE BECAUSE PEOPLE WILL BE FORCED TO ACCEPT CERTAIN DECISIONS THEY ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH IN RECOGNITION THAT WHAT'S BEST FOR THEM MAY NOT BE WHAT'S BEST FOR THE COMMUNITY. WITH THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY VISION COMES A LIST OF ESTABLISHED OBJECTIVES AND PROPOSED CHANGES. PRIORITIZING THEM ACCORDING TO THEIR LEVEL OF NEED AND THEIR FEASIBILITY GIVES SHAPE TO THEIR EXECUTION.

THE POE PROCESS MANDATES A TRANSITION FROM THE EVALUATOR TO THE COMMUNITY. IT IS NOT SUSTAINABLE FOR THE EVALUATOR TO STAY PERMANENTLY AND PROVIDE SERVICES. THEY MUST RETURN TO THE FIELD OF DESIGN TO APPLY WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED. IT IS, INSTEAD, THE COMMUNITY'S RESPONSIBILITY TO HARNESS THE PROCESS THAT POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION BEGINS AND TAKE THE COMMUNITY'S VISION TO THE NEXT STEP.

AS EVALUATORS WE HAVE IT IN OUR BEST INTEREST TO DO GOOD FOR THE PEOPLE WE OBSERVE, BUT THE HARDEST THING TO ACKNOWLEDGE SOMETIMES IS THAT OUR ABSENCE IS WHAT'S BEST. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THE EVALUATOR SHOULD INSTANTANEOUSLY DISAPPEAR ONCE THE COMMUNITY VISION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED, BUT THE VISION SHOULD BE USED AS A VESSEL TO TRANSITION THE EVALUATOR OUT OF THE EQUATION.

IT IS NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THOSE CONDUCTING POEs TO ENSURE CHANGE. IT IS, HOWEVER, THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO REMOVE THEMSELVES FROM THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, ONCE THE EVALUATION IS COMPLETE, AND PUT PROGRESS IN THE HANDS OF OTHERS. THE EVALUATOR MAY CHOOSE TO CONTINUE HIS/HER INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PROJECT, BUT THIS IS AN ACT OF UNEXPECTED BENEVOLENCE. IN THE MORE LIKELY CONDITION THAT THE EVALUATOR CHOOSES TO MOVE ON, IT IS THE ABSOLUTE MINIMAL REQUIREMENT TO DOCUMENT THE EVALUATION AND PUT IT IN ANOTHER'S HANDS.

Mandela Gateway is young. Less than 5 years after its completion, it is expected that residents are still developing an understanding of their environment. It is unexpected, however, that many remain unfamiliar with the simple physical facilities. One child resident was quoted saying, "I didn't even know there was a computer room." Another, "We don't hear about it because that's on that side." Their comments reveal a lack of familiarity for a community built upon the principles of social interaction. While I will not place culpability on anyone for this situation, I will state that the impressive facilities available at Mandela Gateway beg for greater use.

I would like to suggest that the residents become more involved in improving their home, but my progress in the evaluation process does not qualify me to speak on their behalf. They may be satisfied

in the first place. Surveys will reveal whether individual needs have already been met, as well as what unmet needs the residents share. Although not a single survey returned thus far has circled "strong" to describe Mandela Gateway's community, overall satisfaction ratings reveal great contentment. Community "strength", surveys may show, is not a primary need.

I am nowhere near the process of transitioning my evaluation into the hands of residents, but I share the excitement they have in learning about their community. I am firmly committed to the improvement of Mandela Gateway, the first post-occupancy evaluation I have ever conducted, and my interaction with residents has reminded me of the scale I would like to design on – community design.

# challenges and lessons learned

The creation of this methodology was in no way natural. Quite the contrary, it was the result of months of trial and error. The following chapter documents the biggest troubles I have encountered thus far in conducting the preliminary steps of my evaluation for Mandela Gateway. I suspect that each evaluator will have a list of their own challenges, more specific to their own capacities. This list reflects upon my capacity, and has become a primary target for the aspects I would like to improve upon in order to streamline the evaluation process. Each challenge is complemented with a take-home lesson in response to my experiences.

## *Stakeholders are reluctant to be evaluated.*

All of us are. Their professional capacity is being questioned when someone takes a critical look at the product of their labor. Anyone in their position would become defensive. The point that must be made, however, is that post-occupancy evaluation is focused on places, not the people who make them.

While people are inextricably connected to the creation of place, the emphasis is not on evaluating the designers yet instead on the place itself. The goal of post-occupancy evaluation is to make better places, not to criticize designers. Historically POEs have been used to bring attention to places in dire need, so designers expect a barrage of suggestions. But if the criticism is valid, if the analysis is truly in the

words of the place's users and not the agenda of the evaluator, any reasonable designer should respect its results. "Resistance to POE also came from designers who were distrustful of lay opinions about their work...Used insensitively, POE could legitimize uninformed opinions (Sommer, 1969, pp. 136-137)." A post-occupancy is no place for personal discourse.

Establish a good relationship with the stakeholders as early as possible. Their approval of you as an evaluator will make the process easier and improve the credibility of what you have to say. Honesty is appreciated, and they will accept well-founded criticism if it is presented in a respectful manner. In addition, work with them to make the final analysis beneficial to them. See if they have questions they've always wanted to ask and incorporate it into research. This will demonstrate good faith on behalf of the evaluator and help eliminate bias in the information they seek.

## *People will be reluctant to share their thoughts with an outsider.*

They are unfamiliar with the evaluator as a person and thus unfamiliar with his/her objectives. It is unusual for someone to approach us with the sole objective of listening and in the rarity that is the case, expecting a meaningful interaction would be unreasonable. It is uncomfortable to have a one-way dialogue,

especially with a stranger. As evaluators, however, we are not removed from the rest of the population with objectives. Our objective is to listen and observe in order to improve, and improvement is an objective they will most likely share. Making that objective apparent will implore a more enthusiastic response. Wearing clothing of the enterprise being represented will also add clarity to the situation.

### *Surveys have a low rate of return.*

Once the evaluator leaves, the feeling of obligation to return surveys is greatly diminished. If one wants meaningful responses, however, a feeling of obligation is not desired in the first place. Meaningful responses will only come from residents with their own motivation to complete the survey. Inspiring self-motivation in this regard requires creativity.

Evaluators must provide an incentive for the survey's completion, the most obvious of which is a material concession – coupons, money, or a chance at a prize. These things will greatly improve the response rate of the survey. The funding to purchase such concessions, however, is not always at the evaluator's disposal. In the absence of sufficient funding to provide prizes for survey completion, the best incentive a surveyor can provide will respond to the respondent's non-material needs. The ability to voice an anonymous opinion, a

better understanding of those you share an environment with, and progress towards a stronger community are all things money cannot buy, but that survey respondents may take great interest in.

### *The entire process may inspire false hope.*

When people are asked to critically evaluate their environment, they assume that whoever is asking has the capacity to change it. Questions about playground satisfaction will engender the belief that the playground is going to be replaced, while questions about an existing curfew may inspire some to think the curfew will be changed. While the capacity to make change is inherent in all of us, it is important for the evaluator to be realistic with his/her immediate capacity. Participation in a process which yields a result very different from that anticipated can be a frustrating experience.

### *Resources for post-occupancy evaluation are limited.*

This is not a problem encountered with the methodology, yet instead a challenge for the motivation behind POE as a whole. Clients are reluctant to fund a POE when the designer may use the increased knowledge to benefit another client. Designers are so committed to current projects that they are unable to reflect upon projects they have already completed. The benefits of the post-occupancy evaluation have not been recognized to obtain the time and funding

it deserves. With the developing ideology of participatory design and the proven benefits for long-term environmental conditions, it is gaining popularity.

The importance of the post-occupancy evaluation will only be given due credit when clients understand the long-term benefits a POE can provide. If the role of design is to materialize an idea into something tangible, it is the responsibility of the designer to bring that idea into fruition. This process should go well beyond the physical design of spaces and must include the process of post-occupancy evaluation. “A contract for a new building should include a minimum two-year follow-up consulting period in which the designer helps the client get his money’s worth from the building and at the same time collects necessary evaluative information (Sommer, 1972, p. 95).” The benefit of POE is two fold in that clients will get an improved design in the future and residents will inherently benefit from this process. A designer’s ability to convince his/her client that POE will yield great benefit is strongly rooted in their allegiance to one another.

*Mandela Gateway. viewed from 7th Street, West Oakland*







# epilogue

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The post-occupancy evaluation is an invaluable tool. It prioritizes our understanding of the existing environment in an effort to improve the environment we build tomorrow. Used properly, it can articulate a very powerful message and invoke immediate change. Used improperly, however, it can be used to legitimize an improper critique of a very successful project.

Post-occupancy evaluation is part of a growing movement of participatory design. It sees design as a means of accomplishing a set of needs, as opposed to an art form of the powerful. By voicing the opinions of those who use a site, POE provides a subtle reminder that, at the end of the day, design is for people. It reminds us, as designers that in the midst of incessant designing we must remember to reflect, to listen, and to observe. Observing the environment that surrounds us and using it to inform the design process, “addresses the essential purpose of environmental design – to leave the world a better place than we find it (Mark Francis, 1999, p. 68).”

After months of dinner discussions, interviews, dreams on the meaning of “community” and countless visits to the site, I have developed an emotional attachment to Mandela Gateway. The project is demonstrative of a complex and layered effort to improve public housing with minor issues that, considering the scale and number of involved stakeholders, might be expected. The longevity of its successes depends largely on the ability of residents to replicate the intense collaboration of the design effort amongst themselves and harness the project’s capacity to foster their own self-sufficiency. Only then will the project meet the original intentions of HOPEVI, and be brought into full fruition. Only then will Mandela Gateway be, by my definition, a community.

This senior project is only the beginning of a community-building exercise I will be practicing for the rest of my life.



# appendix

## STAKEHOLDER STATEMENTS

### US Department of Housing and Urban Development

HUD's mission is to increase homeownership, support community development and increase access to affordable housing free from discrimination. To fulfill this mission, HUD will embrace high standards of ethics, management and accountability and forge new partnerships--particularly with faith-based and community organizations--that leverage resources and improve HUD's ability to be effective on the community level.

(Source: <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf/2/hudmission.cfm>)

### US Department of Housing and Urban Development, HOPE VI Program

"The specific elements of public housing transformation that have proven key to HOPE VI include:

- Changing the physical shape of public housing
- Establishing positive incentives for resident self-sufficiency and comprehensive services that empower residents
- Lessening concentrations of poverty by placing public housing in nonpoverty neighborhoods and promoting mixed-income communities
- Forging partnerships with other agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private business to leverage support and resources"

(Source: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/hope6/about/index.cfm>)

### Calthorpe Associates

Calthorpe Associates is internationally recognized for its innovative leadership in urban design, community planning, and regional growth strategies. For nearly two decades the firm has assisted private and public clients in shaping new forms of growth and redevelopment – forms that help reestablish a sense of place, scale, history and environmental balance within the built environment.

(Source: <http://calthorpe.com/Firm.html>)

### Bridge Housing

"BRIDGE creates high-quality, affordable homes for working families and seniors. With over 13,000 homes and counting, BRIDGE has become the leading affordable housing developer in California. We build a range of housing types that not only fit comfortably into their surroundings but also act as the catalyst for revitalizing and strengthening neighborhoods. Above all, BRIDGE builds communities."

(Source: <http://www.bridgehousing.com>)

### John Stewart Company

"Comprehensive housing management is the foundation of the John Stewart Company's diversified housing services. Our goal is to provide secure, service oriented, well-maintained and professionally managed housing that serves the interests of residents and owners alike. Reaching beyond the traditional management services of maintenance and budgeting, we strive to create community environments that foster high levels of physical, social, and emotional well-being among residents. At the same time, we also provide owners and sponsors with financial efficiency, accountability and value-added benefits.

(Source: <http://www.jsco.net/management/>)

### Oakland Housing Authority

"To assure the availability of quality housing for low-income persons and to promote the civic involvement and economic self-sufficiency of residents and to further the expansion of affordable housing within Oakland."

(Source: <http://www.oakha.org/home.html>)

## STAKEHOLDER STATEMENTS

### Michael Willis Architects

"By advocating public participation in the design process and in the built form, MWA has been successful at creating an architecture that can be a unifying force."

"MWA designs enduring structures that reflect the community's values and concerns. Although MWA often takes cues from historic contexts, the completed buildings feel authentic for this era."

(Source: <http://www.mwaarchitects.com/firm/firmcontent.html>)

### PGAdesign

"PGAdesign Inc is a collaboration of landscape architects committed to exceeding client expectations with innovative design solutions that respect our environment. We enjoy teaming with clients and communities to conceive spaces that enrich lives, integrate historic elements and accentuate the intrinsic assets of each site."

"PGA's housing projects contribute to making livable cities; urban environments that foster and support neighborhoods and communities."

(Source: <http://pgadesign.com/index.html>)

## INTERVIEWS

Marie August

*Property Manager, John Stewart Company*

- (Request demographics of residents, including language spoken and total number)
- (Request average length of residency for residents)
- (Determine return rate for residents from Westwood Gardens)
- How would you define "community"?
- How would you define this community?
- Are you an on-site manager?
- Does Mandela Gateway hold regular community meetings?
- Who typically leads these meetings, and what is discussed?
- What types of social services are offered to Mandela Gateway residents?
- Is there reason the basketball hoop has not been repaired in over a year?
- What is the policy of renting out the community room?
- Are events typically held in the community room private or open to all residents?
- If a resident were dissatisfied with something, how would you expect them to complain?
- Have there been any problems with drugs, violence, vandalism or security on site?
- How are such problems addressed?
- What has been the biggest contributing factor to the change in such problems?
- Does the HOPE VI coordinator of the OHA conduct regular performance reviews?
- Does JSC conduct quarterly unit inspections, as specified in OHA's revitalization application?
- How are the central open spaces typically used? When, and by whom?
- Would you agree with my definition of community?
- Do you have a strong sense of community at Mandela Gateway?
- Do you think residents of Mandela Gateway feel a strong sense of community?
- How do you think Mandela Gateway contributes to the larger surrounding community?
- How long is the waiting list for public housing units at Mandela Gateway?
- How long is the waiting list for market rate units at Mandela Gateway?
- What process would I need to go through to conduct a community meeting in the Community Room on May 29, around 7PM?

Dehan Glanz

*Principal, Calthorpe Associates*

- (Have clear site plans available to refresh memory)
- (Clarify development process)
- (Request archived photos of Westwood Gardens)
- How was the scheduling of the public meetings determined?
- Was it considered that meetings during normal business hours would be difficult to attend for those with working class jobs?
- To what level was citizen involvement in the development process required by HUD?
- Did you encounter any difficulties in conducting a community meeting?
- How was resident input incorporated into the design?
- In the first community meeting, dated 29 April, 1999, the roundtable discussions yielded "cultural fabric" and "community history" as social aspects important to respect through the physical design. The cultural emphasis was re-stressed by residents on May 6<sup>th</sup>. How was the site design able to uphold such aspects? (green-space gateway?)
- How was the transition of the design facilitated, once the grant had been awarded to a separate development team?
- Is there anything you would like to ask the residents?
- What prevents Mandela Gateway from being placed on a list of dilapidated housing projects, scheduled for demolition and reconstruction, in a matter of 50 years?

Nicole Thompson

*Oakland Housing Authority*

- How involved is OHA in the social services offered at Mandela Gateway?
- Is property management typically subcontracted to a private enterprise?
- Has this public/private
- How many of the 40 households at Westwood Gardens requested to return to Mandela Gateway upon its completion?
- How many of these residents returned?
- Is there information on where the voucher holders currently reside?
- When does (did) the HOPE VI grant for Mandela Gateway expire?
- Were you able to, "Track residents throughout the life of the grant and to provide them with information on reoccupancy of the HOPE VI site and services that are available to them"?
- Would you say that the participation of WG residents that opted for the Section 8 vouchers is less or more in self-sufficiency programs offered by OHA?
- What kind of incentives does OHA provide to encourage residents with vouchers to attend self-sufficiency programs?
- Have there been any complications with relocated Westwood residents?
- What does the "Resident and Community Services Department" do?
- What does the "HOPE VI Coordinator" do?
- What does the "HOPE VI Community and Supportive Services Program" do?
- Is there documentation of the OHA HOPE VI Coordinators' regular performance reviews?
- Does OHA hold community meetings?
- How would you define "community"?

Rod Henmi

*Design Director, Michael Willis Architects*

- How would you define "community"?
- How can architects use buildings to strengthen community?
- How, would you say, is the site at Mandela Gateway designed to strengthen community?
- To what extent were plans previously created by Calthorpe and Associates used in order to develop a design for Mandela Gateway?
- To what extent were community meetings conducted by Calthorpe and Associates taken into consideration during the design process?
- In designing Mandela Gateway, how did MWA go about engaging the public in the design process?
- How does Mandela Gateway "reflect the community's values and concerns"?
- Would you expect the residents of Mandela Gateway to prefer living in an attractive neighborhood where the people were not friendly, or in an unattractive neighborhood where the people were friendly? Why?
- In hindsight, would you do anything differently in designing the site today?
- If you could speak to the Mandela Gateway residents today, what would you ask them?

Cathy Garrett

*Principal, PGAdesign Landscape Architects*

- Please explain the process by which PGAdesign was hired for Mandela Gateway, and the firm's relationship with BRIDGE and Michael Willis Architects.
- How was community input gathered in the design process?
- How would you define "community"?
- How can landscape architecture be used to strengthen community?
- How does the landscape architecture of Mandela Gateway seek to strengthen community?
- Would you expect the residents of Mandela Gateway to prefer living in an attractive neighborhood where the people were not friendly, or in an unattractive neighborhood where the people were friendly? Why?
- In hindsight, would you do anything differently in designing the site today?
- If you could speak to the Mandela Gateway residents today, what would you ask them?



36. Would you prefer to live in Mandela Gateway with the existing regulations, or a less desirable neighborhood with no regulations?
37. Do you agree with the regulations imposed at Mandela Gateway?  
No Yes
38. Considering some regulations are necessary to help maintain a better living situation, which regulations, specifically, do you think are not necessary at Mandela Gateway?
39. Would you prefer to live in a neighborhood with people who have about the same amount of money as you or with people of different amounts of money? Why?
40. Would you prefer to live in a pretty and attractive neighborhood where the people were not friendly, or in an unattractive neighborhood where the people were friendly? Why?
41. Would you say Mandela Gateway is a friendly place to live?  
No Somewhat Yes
42. Do you get along well with your neighbors?  
No Somewhat Yes
43. About how many people would you say hello to at Mandela Gateway?  
0-5 5-10 10-20 20+

44. About how many people from Mandela Gateway do you feel comfortable enough to invite into your home?  
0-5 5-10 10-20 20+
45. How homes in Mandela Gateway, besides your own, have you been invited to enter?
46. How many people in Mandela Gateway would you go out of your way to help?  
0-5 5-10 10-20 20+
47. Would you be interested in knowing more residents at Mandela Gateway?  
No Yes
48. Would you be interested in attending a community meeting, put together by someone from outside Mandela Gateway?  
No Yes
49. Would you be interested in participating in a community meeting, put together by other residents of Mandela Gateway?  
No Yes
50. How would you define community?
51. Do you feel a strong community exists between the residents of Mandela Gateway?  
No Somewhat Yes
52. Please explain.
53. Using your definition of community, how would you rate the strength of the community that exists at Mandela Gateway?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
horrible very strong

## COMMUNITY MEETING AGENDA MANDELA GATEWAY

- I. Personal introductions
  - a. Go around in a circle and have everyone introduce themselves and describe their strongest memory of Mandela Gateway
  - b. Introduce myself and my senior project
- II. History of Mandela Gateway
  - a. Project development
    - i. Overview of HOPE VI
    - ii. Westwood Gardens Site
    - iii. Citizen participation
  - b. Involved stakeholders
    - i. Ask residents to name all the people involved with the project
    - ii. Once the list is established, show residents the ones they hadn't heard of
      1. US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
      2. Oakland Housing Authority (OHA)
      3. Developers/Social Services (BRIDGE Housing)
      4. Urban Planners (Calthorpe Associates)
      5. Architects (Michael Willis Architects)
      6. Landscape Architects (PGAdesign)
      7. Property Management/Social Services (John Stewart Company)
      8. Residents
- III. Community Mapping
  - a. Break up into small groups, each with small map
  - b. Have residents mark-up maps in groups
    - i. Good places
    - ii. Problem places requiring change
    - iii. Movement patterns (have residents mark their routine that day)
  - c. Join groups and have everyone draw their findings on a larger site map
- IV. Grade the Stakeholders
  - a. Share excerpts from the stated objectives of involved parties
  - b. Have residents rate, 1-5, how successfully the objectives were met
 

1	not at all
2	not very
3	neutral
4	somewhat
5	very
- V. Conclusion
  - a. Discuss the similarity/disparity between designers' objectives and resident needs
  - b. Introduce and distribute survey
  - c. Ask residents what they would change about Mandela Gateway
  - d. Ask residents, if designers were all here together, what would you say?

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# illustration credits

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Sheet L4-02 of Planting Plan, provided by PGA design

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Sheet L4-03 of Planting Plan, provided by PGA design

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Sheet L4-03 of Planting Plan, provided by PGA design

*Dazaun (5). resident of Mandela Gateway*



