

“You don’t have a problem, until you do”:
Revitalization and Gentrification in Providence, Rhode Island

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a mixed methods approach to investigate the extent of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods, in order to contribute to policy-relevant research on gentrification in weak market contexts and in Providence, specifically. While Providence has not been the subject of many investigations on the subject of gentrification, this paper finds evidence of gentrification in Providence, with gentrification defined as a process in which low-income neighborhoods experiencing substantial rent increases also experience gentrification-associated demographic change. This paper finds that gentrification in Providence is limited to select neighborhoods and is of a more limited extent and pace than that which has been documented in strong market cities.

Additionally, this paper conducts a qualitative analysis of the rationales that form the rationale basis for community development work in Providence, and finds that within Providence’s current weak market conditions, revitalization activities have not needed to and have not sought to actively manage displacement risks. Finally, this paper finds that anticipated economic growth could catalyze a rapid increase in gentrification and displacement pressures which practitioners are not currently prepared to manage. Based in these findings, this paper recommends that Providence practitioners undertake to create a pro-active, comprehensive, context-specific ‘development without displacement’ strategy to manage neighborhood change in Providence.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Providence: A Mid-Sized, Postindustrial City	7
<i>Economic Downturn and Resurgence</i>	7
<i>Weak Housing Market and Housing Affordability Challenges</i>	7
Research Questions	9
Methodology and Findings	10
Implications and Impact	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
Gentrification	13
<i>Defining Gentrification</i>	14
<i>Revitalization, Gentrification, and Displacement</i>	15
<i>Gentrification and Housing Market Context</i>	16
Gentrification in Providence	17
Weak Market and Older Industrial City Typologies	18
Literatures in Conversation	20
Chapter 3: Assessing Neighborhood Gentrification in Providence	22
Methodological Approach	22
Qualitative Methods and Analysis	23
<i>Qualitative Methods</i>	23
Interview Participants.....	24
Interview Structure and Questions.....	25
Limitations.....	26
<i>Qualitative Analysis</i>	27
Perceptions of Gentrification in Providence Neighborhoods.....	28
Perceptions of Gentrification in Providence in Comparison to Other Cities.....	30
Quantitative Methods and Analysis	31
<i>Quantitative Methods</i>	31
Defining Gentrification.....	32
Neighborhood Classifications.....	34
Demographic Change.....	35
Limitations.....	37
<i>Analysis of Rent Increases and Demographic Change by Neighborhood Type</i>	39
Neighborhood Classifications.....	41
Rent Growth.....	42
Demographic Change.....	46
<i>Gentrification at the Census Tract and Neighborhood Level</i>	56
Synthesis of Findings	59
Chapter 4: Revitalization Rationales, Gentrification, and Displacement	62
Methods	63
<i>Definitions</i>	63
<i>Analysis</i>	63
<i>Limitations</i>	64
Analysis of Revitalization Rationales	65
<i>Blight Reduction</i>	65
<i>Historic Preservation</i>	69
<i>Housing Market and Housing Production</i>	71

<i>Economic Development</i>	73
Managing the Impacts of Revitalization and Gentrification	76
<i>Displacement Risks in Current Conditions</i>	77
<i>Projecting Future Conditions</i>	79
A Shifting Landscape	81
Chapter 5: Recommendation: A Development Without Displacement Strategy for Providence	84
Making the Case for a Development without Displacement Strategy	84
Development Without Displacement Literature	86
Development Without Displacement Agenda for Providence	87
Specific Policy Recommendations for Providence	89
Conclusion	93
Chapter 6: Conclusion	95
Works Cited	97

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a resident of Providence, RI, a student of urban planning, and an observer of urban environments, I have been living in a puzzle. In the six years since I moved to Providence in 2011, to start an urban farm, discussion of gentrification in US cities has proliferated in news media, think pieces, and in academic literature. Reading about rampant gentrification in Brooklyn and in the Bay Area, for example, I knew that I was not observing the same phenomenon in Providence.

And yet, and the question mark of gentrification, is also a puzzle when viewed from within Providence. I have seen hints of the gentrification phenomenon in Providence. In the last 3-4 years, I have observed upscale restaurants and boutique hotels opening in Providence at a more accelerated pace than even in the preceding few years. This observable increase in upscale restaurants, an amenity that caters people with disposable income, is evidence of Providence's economic resurgence and may also be an indicator of gentrification. Yet, in my own experience (admittedly, as a person privileged to have a safety net which enables housing stability), rents do not appear to be increasing substantially, at least as compared to the many accounts of skyrocketing housing costs in cities around the country. These observations drew me to investigate what has already been written on the topic of gentrification in Providence. While very little academic work has been written about gentrification in Providence, a quick Google search for 'gentrification Providence' reveals that local newspapers – The Providence Journal, The Brown Daily Herald, and the College Hill Independent – are littered with concerns about gentrification.

This combination of observed factors presents a puzzle and led me to the question: *Are neighborhoods in Providence gentrifying?* Cities like Providence, cities that have experienced population decline and have weak housing markets, have been variously grouped into typologies including weak market cities, low demand cities, forgotten cities, and second and third-tier cities. Cities like these are popularly considered to be in need of as much economic development and reinvestment as possible. Yet, in Providence, revitalization may contribute to gentrification and enhance housing

affordability issues. My thesis research is motivated by a desire to understand the interplay of these priorities and processes in Providence.

Providence: A Mid-Sized, Postindustrial City

Economic Downturn and Resurgence

Since the mid twentieth century, Providence has experienced an economic downturn and subsequent resurgence. A former manufacturing hub, Providence was one home to some of the country's largest textile, jewelry, and tool factories (Jerzyk, 2008, 416-417). Providence suffered from manufacturing employment losses and population decline starting in the 1940s (Kodrzycki et al., 2009). In this time period, Providence also experienced a rapid demographic transition, with a school population, for example, that went from 77% white in 1968 to 19% white in 1999 (Jerzyk, 2008, 419). Beginning in the 1990s, under Mayor Buddy Cianci, the City undertook major downtown revitalization efforts and has rebranded itself as the "Renaissance City."

Providence is commonly understood to have succeeded in rebounding from the worst of its economic and social challenges it faced at its worst. For example, a 2009 paper by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston identifies Providence as one of ten "resurgent cities," among 25 cities which were identified as peer cities of Springfield, MA (Kodrzycki et al., 2009). Resurgent cities are those which "have made substantially more progress than other cities with similar challenges and opportunities in improving living standards for their residents, and are recognized as vital communities in a broader sense by experts on urban economic development and policy" (Kodrzycki et al., 2009, 1). Additionally, Providence has received a number of recent accolades, including being named the "coolest city you haven't been to yet" by GQ (2015), "the country's best small city" by Architectural Digest (2014), and the number one overall city in Travel and Leisure's 2015 America's Favorite Cities ("America's Favorite Cities," 2015; Cochran, 2014; Vaughan, 2015).

Weak Housing Market and Housing Affordability Challenges

Although Providence has made significant improvements, including its much-lauded downtown revitalization, the city still struggles with a weak housing market and

significant affordability challenges for its many low-income residents. Providence's population reached its peak of over 250,000 in 1940 and declined by nearly 100,000 until the population stabilized after 1980 (Nesi, 2011). As shown in Figure 1, below, the city's population today is slightly less than it was in 1970. At the same time, there are nearly 3000 more housing units and significantly a higher vacancy rate than in 1970.

Thus, while housing costs have increased since 2000, the population, housing stock and vacancy rate trends, together would suggest that there is adequate housing supply to accommodate population growth and, thus, that gentrification and displacement could not pose much of a threat. However, the state of Rhode Island was particularly hard hit by the housing market crash and foreclosure crisis, with foreclosures particularly impacting the supply and availability of affordable multifamily housing (HousingWorks RI, 2012, 2016b). At the same time, Providence and Rhode Island as a whole have seen very low levels of new housing production. Between 2007 and 2010, alone, the number of building permits issued decreased from 93, an already low level of production, to 13; production levels have increased some since 2010 (City of Providence, 2015; Taveras & Department of Planning and Development, 2014). The continuing impact of the foreclosure crisis and the minimal rate of new housing construction, combined with the fact that the city's housing stock is very old and of substandard quality, may mean that the vacancy rate for habitable units is actually lower than it appears and could (City of Providence, 2015).¹ Taken together, these factors may explain why housing costs increased between 1970 and 2015 amidst otherwise seemingly stagnant or stable trends.

As housing costs rise, the family poverty rate and the rent burden rate were, in 2011-2015, higher than ever before during the 1970 to 2015 period. The City of Providence identifies the greatest housing needs as affordability and inadequate supply of public housing, among others (City of Providence, 2015). Issues of affordability are enhanced by the distribution of household income; a full 40% of Providence households earn less than 50% of area median income and these households are more likely to be cost burdened or severely cost burdened than higher-income households (City of Providence, 2015). For such low-income households, any increase in housing costs may lead to housing cost burden and housing instability. Thus, the very low-incomes of a

¹ As of 2013, 56.3% of the city's housing units had been built before 1939 (City of Providence, 2015, 128).

large share of the population, combined with a housing market constrained by chronically low levels of production, means that increased housing demand in specific revitalizing neighborhoods could pose a greater displacement risk to lower income households than the citywide population, housing unit count, and vacancy trends would suggest. This is the context that underlies my investigation of revitalization and gentrification in Providence neighborhoods.

Table 1: Providence Population and Housing Market Trends, 1970-2015 (Inflation-Adjusted Values)

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2011-2015
Total Population	179,223	156,804	160,728	173,618	178,042	178,680
Unemployment Rate*	4.4%	9.2%	9.2%	9.3%	-	12.7%
Family Poverty Rate	13.3%	15.3%	18.3%	23.9%	-	24.0%
Rent Burden Rate**	28.9%	35.9%	40.2%	37.5%	-	44.8%
Housing Units	68,171	67,513	66,794	67,915	71,530	71,080
Vacancy Rate	7.4%	10.9%	11.8%	8.1%	12.3%	13.5%
Median Gross Rent	-	\$604	\$825	\$724	-	\$913
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Units	-	\$115,661	\$195,555	\$139,748	-	\$177,100

- All income, rent, and housing unit values are inflation adjusted to 2015 dollars
- *Unemployment rate means the percentage of the population above 16 years that is in the civilian labor force but is unemployed
- **Though rent burden is typically defined as the percentage of renter households spending more than 30% of household income on housing costs, here it is defined as above 35% in order to have uniform data for all Census years
- “-” Indicates that data was unavailable
- Data sources: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 Censuses; 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Research Questions

I am studying processes of revitalization and gentrification in Providence neighborhoods. I am pursuing this topic because I want to understand, in Providence’s context – a weak housing market with low levels of housing production and very low household incomes – how neighborhood revitalization efforts relate to the phenomenon of gentrification and if the benefits of Providence’s ongoing revitalization are inclusive of the city’s low-income populations and neighborhoods. This research can help readers better understand how neighborhood gentrification in weak market cities may differ from gentrification in strong market cities, and how revitalization and uneven development may contribute to gentrification and housing affordability challenges even in cities with weak housing markets. This research may, then, help improve context-sensitive policy

approaches to revitalization, gentrification, and anti-displacement work in Providence, and in the context of low demand cities generally.

To do this, I use a mixed-methods approach to explore: the extent of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods; the relationship between revitalization rationales in Providence and understandings of gentrification; and the perceived level of risk posed to low-income residents due to gentrification and displacement. I define gentrification as gentrification-associated demographic change in low-income neighborhoods experiencing above average rent increases. Gentrification-associated demographic change means those demographic changes – such as an increase in the white share, share of adults with a college degree, and household income growth – that are typically associated with an influx of households of higher socioeconomic status than the existing residents. I structure my research in response to the following research questions:

1. To what extent has neighborhood gentrification occurred in Providence?
2. According to practitioners, how do the revitalization rationales at work in Providence perceive and seek to influence gentrification and displacement in Providence neighborhoods?
3. To what extent *should* revitalization actors in Providence seek to manage impacts of revitalization/gentrification on low-income residents?

I pursue the answer to these questions using a mixed methods approach described in brief below and in greater depth in the introductions to Chapter 3 and 4.

Methodology and Findings

To answer the research questions outlined above, I undertake a mixed methods study. I engage in analysis of quantitative data, gathered through one-hour interviews with community development, housing, and planning practitioners in Providence, and quantitative analysis using US Census Bureau data from the 2000 Census and the American Community Survey 2011-2015 Five Year Estimates.

In Chapter 2, I present a literature review of the following bodies of literature: literature on gentrification with a specific focus on the relationship between revitalization and gentrification and on what has been written about gentrification in different market contexts; literature on gentrification in Providence; and grey literature on weak market and older industrial city typologies which include Providence. In Chapter 3, I pursue the

answer to Question 1 using both qualitative and quantitative analysis. In order to assess the extent of gentrification, I take practitioner perceptions of gentrification as evidence and I assess the extent of rent increases and gentrification-associated demographic change in Providence's low-income neighborhoods. In Chapter 4, I address Questions 2 and 3 through an in-depth analysis of practitioner interview commentary. In answer to my research questions, I find:

- 1) Both qualitative and quantitative analysis suggest that some neighborhood gentrification change has occurred in Providence, but its pace and extent is less than in strong market cities.
- 2) Current weak market conditions have had a dampening effect on revitalization activities that could have otherwise catalyzed gentrification and displacement, and on revitalization, gentrification, and displacement, generally.
- 3) Given current market conditions, current revitalization activities have not needed to and have not been seeking to manage displacement risks beyond ongoing efforts to build affordable housing into revitalizing neighborhoods.
- 4) Practitioners anticipate impending economic growth, which could catalyze a rapid increase in gentrification and gentrification-related displacement pressures. They warn that, given that current revitalization rationales are calibrated to more stagnant economic conditions, Providence is not adequately prepared to manage these impacts.

Finally, I use the findings from Chapters 3 and 4, combined with a value proposition – that low-income people have a right to be able to remain the city, neighborhoods, and homes in which they reside – to recommend that Providence community development practitioners undertake to create a pro-active, context-specific ‘development without displacement’ strategy for Providence.

Implications and Impact

My research has three intended audiences. First, the research addresses a gap in gentrification literature, which has tended to focus on strong market cities, by specifically examining how gentrification and gentrification-associated demographic changes in a

weak market context resemble or differ from these processes in strong market cities. I hypothesize that it is possible for processes of gentrification to begin in cities that are not fully revitalized/resurgent, though these processes look different from strong market contexts.

Second, through the case study of Providence, this research project may also contribute to the policy community focused on revitalization in weak market cities like Providence, and which does not always consider the consequences of uneven development and gentrification in low demand contexts. Economic revitalization has often been posited as the most important intervention, but my research may suggest that even in weak market cities, policy makers should pay attention to pockets of gentrification and stay focused on affordable housing and other anti-displacement policies in order to extend the benefits of a newly thriving city to its lower income.

Finally, I hope that this research contributes to policy conversations about revitalization, gentrification, and affordable housing in Providence. My research may challenge the assumptions that revitalization activities in Providence are a rising tide that lifts all ships or that gentrification and displacement are not risks relevant to Providence's context. Instead, my analysis suggests that gentrification-associated displacement risks may accelerate and should be taken seriously and managed carefully. As the title of my thesis suggests, the relationship between revitalization and gentrification is a balancing act. With projected economic and population growth on the horizon, this research posits that this may be the critical moment between "you don't have a problem" and "you do."

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My personal observations and local news coverage of development controversies suggest that gentrification in Providence is a topic worth exploring; existing academic bodies of literature do not adequately address the topic, however. The proposed research topic will be informed by the following literatures: literature on gentrification with a specific focus on what has been written about gentrification in different market contexts; literature on gentrification in Providence, Rhode Island; and grey literature on weak market and older industrial city typologies which include Providence. By bringing these literatures into conversation, I show that there is a need for context-conscious inquiries into gentrification in weak market cities, and in Providence in particular.

Gentrification

The proposed research draws on the extensive literature on gentrification which dates back to 1964 when Judith Glass first coined the term (Brown-Saracino, 2016). Literature on gentrification spans a few common topic areas: defining gentrification (Beauregard, 2010; Clark, 2010; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008; Smith & Williams, 2010), theorizing stage models of gentrification (Clay, 2010; Hackworth & Smith, 2010; Kerstein, 1990), empirical studies measuring gentrification in particular cities (Ding, Hwang, & Divringi, 2015; Hyra, 2014; NYU Furman Center, 2015; Tighe & Ganning, 2016) or in the United States as a whole (Baum-Snow & Hartley, 2016; Ellen & O'Regan, 2008, 2011; Jun, 2013; Mckinnish, Walsh, & White, 2010), empirical studies measuring displacement (Freeman, 2005), gentrification and displacement policy responses (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, 2015; Urban Displacement Project, 2016; Weinstein, 2015). For the purpose of this research, I am most interested in the literature's treatment of definitions of gentrification; the relationships between revitalization, gentrification and displacement; and gentrification and market context.

Defining Gentrification

Much of the literature on gentrification has been concerned with defining the phenomenon, as a necessary component of efforts to identify and measure instances of gentrification. Gentrification is generally understood as a process by which reinvestment in historically disinvested low-income neighborhoods increases housing costs. Still, nearly every paper that discusses gentrification begins by establishing its own definition. There is broad consensus, stemming from the work of Neil Smith (1987) that central city neighborhoods are vulnerable to gentrification when a “rent gap” exists between the current rent value and potential rent value; the upgrading inherent in revitalization and gentrification allows the rent gap to be closed (Bates, 2013; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Smith, 1987). Still, definitions vary on the causes, indicators, and consequences of gentrification. The following definitions of gentrification demonstrate the broad range of definitions of gentrification employed in the literature:

- “Rapid rent growth in low-income neighborhoods” (NYU Furman Center, 2015)
- “A process in which low-income households are displaced by rising costs as higher income households move into a neighborhood” (Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, 2015)
- “The influx of high-income, highly-educated people and/or capital into formerly disinvested, low-income neighborhoods” (Urban Displacement Project, 2016)
- Displacement of low-income households both forced and through future exclusion, physical upgrading, and changing neighborhood character and social fabric (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001)
- Shift in tenure, increase in down payment and decrease in FHA financing, influx of households interested in urban living, and increase in high income serving amenities (Turner & Snow, 2001)

These definitions illustrate a range of complexity and demonstrate a key difference among commonly used definitions: displacement is sometimes considered synonymous with gentrification and other times considered a consequence of gentrification. More generally, demographic changes such as those relating to the income, age, educational attainment, and race or ethnicity are varyingly considered to be causes of gentrification, part of the definition of gentrification, a consequence, or, lastly, an accompanying

characteristic of gentrification. Physical displacement, as well as political, social, and cultural displacement, are among the commonly identified consequences of gentrification (Hyra, 2016).

Revitalization, Gentrification, and Displacement

While not all gentrification literature explicitly covers the distinction between revitalization and gentrification, it is an important point for my inquiry. For those authors who did define the two terms, the general distinction is that, while both involve processes of reinvestment and physical upgrading, gentrification causes residential displacement while revitalization does not (Bates, 2013; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Levy, Comey, & Padilla, 2006a; Reece, 2004). For instance, Bates (2013) writes that “the key distinction between revitalization and gentrification is the negative consequence of involuntary residential displacement” (Bates, 2013, 4). Involuntary displacement is typically defined as the displacement of existing residents of a neighborhood due to physical or economic causes, as opposed to exclusionary displacement through foreclosed housing opportunity (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Marcuse, 1985). Kennedy and Leonard (2001) assert that revitalization includes three kinds of upgrading which are also present in gentrification – physical, commercial/economic, and social – but that these changes are either small enough in scope, or equitable, so as to not cause displacement or permanent alteration of neighborhood character and social fabric (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001, 6).

Thus, researchers agree that revitalization is distinct from gentrification in that it does not cause displacement, especially involuntary displacement. However, as noted above, there is not a consensus among researchers about the relationship between gentrification and displacement, and displacement has been notoriously difficult to prove or measure (Ellen & O’Regan, 2011; Freeman, 2005; Hyra, 2016; Marcuse, 1985; Mckinnish et al., 2010; Zuk et al., 2015). For example, Freeman (2005) writes that “although displacement has become synonymous with gentrification...there is relatively little in the way of persuasive empirical evidence that suggests this is indeed how gentrifying neighborhoods change” and finds, in his own empirical study that displacement plays a “minor role” in the changes that take place in gentrifying neighborhoods (Freeman, 2005, 464). According to Hyra (2016), the lack of causal

evidence linking displacement and gentrification does not mean that gentrification does not contribute to a reduction in affordable housing opportunities (Hyra, 2016, 173). The lack of clarity around proving displacement, however, does complicate the distinction between revitalization and gentrification, which seems to hinge on this matter.

According to Zuk et al (2015), concerns about predicting and measuring displacement began to dominate literature on gentrification in the early 1990s (Zuk et al., 2015, 24). Displacement remains the defining concern of much gentrification literature and especially grey literature that proposes anti-displacement or ‘development without displacement’ policy solutions (Bates, 2013; Chapple & Zuk, 2016; Cravens et al., 2009; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Levy et al., 2006a, 2006b; Lubell, 2016; MACDC Gentrification Learning Community, 2016; Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2011, 2015a; Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, 2015; Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities, 2015; Phillips et al., 2014; Zuk et al., 2015). I will discuss the development without displacement concept and literature further in Chapter 5 of this paper.

Gentrification and Housing Market Context

For the purposes of the proposed research, I am concerned with how the existing research addresses gentrification in different housing market contexts. Much literature on gentrification is written about, or just assumes, a strong market context in which gentrification and neighborhood demographic change occur rapidly and dramatically.

Early gentrification literature is often conscious of housing market context but makes a distinction between revitalization and gentrification, implying that low demand cities are in need of and experience revitalization rather than gentrification. Kennedy and Leonard (2001), for example, suggest that cities such as Cleveland and Detroit, which were “attracting some higher income residents into their cities and experiencing modest levels of community revitalization,” were not threatened by displacement or gentrification, which were defined synonymously (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001, 2). This paper was written, however, at a time when the “back to the city” movement had not yet begun and when central city population growth was an exception rather than a norm.

Some more recent literature acknowledges that the intensity and impact of

gentrification may vary depending on market context (Zuk et al. 2015, Center for Transit-Oriented Development 2013, Chapple & Zuk, n.d.). Zuk et al. (2015) question the policy-relevance in low demand contexts of existing research given that empirical studies of gentrification in multiple US cities have not been sensitive to market context. There are also many studies of gentrification in individual, weak market US cities, such as studies of St. Louis (Tighe & Ganning, 2016), Philadelphia (Ding et al., 2015), and Cleveland (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001), among others. However, these studies do not necessarily situate their inquiries with respect to housing market context. Additionally, some recent papers suggest that uneven development patterns may result in gentrification and dramatically rising housing costs within specific neighborhoods even in weak market cities (Lubell, 2016; Tighe & Ganning, 2015, 2016). According to Tighe and Ganning (2016), studies have shown that some neighborhoods in weak market cities such as Buffalo, St. Louis, Detroit, and Cleveland have experienced gentrification and decreases in housing affordability (Tighe & Ganning, 2016).

Perhaps the gentrification literature that is most conscious of market context is literature which proposes policy approaches to reducing the displacement impacts of revitalization and gentrification (Levy et al., 2006a, 2006b; Lubell, 2016; Mallach, 2008; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001). I discuss this literature further in Chapter 5.

Gentrification in Providence

Providence has been the subject of few scholarly studies on the subject of gentrification. Those that I could find are housing policy papers (Jerzyk, 2008) or cover the relationship between gentrification and artists' communities (O'Sullivan, 2013; Salkind, 2013). In *Gentrification's Third Way: An Analysis of Housing Policy & Gentrification in Providence*, Matthew Jerzyk (2008) argues that development and gentrification processes in Providence's Olneyville neighborhood provide evidence that it is "possible for a city to experience gentrification without its detrimental byproducts" (M. Jerzyk, 2008, 416). He substantiates this claim with interviews with Olneyville residents and community leaders. Mary Therese O'Sullivan (2013) argues that, just as in other cities, artists who at first found Providence affordable were eventually displaced as housing costs increased due to gentrification. I could not find any quantitative analysis of

gentrification in Providence neighborhoods such as those that exist about other cities. I also did not find any grey literature reports that discuss gentrification in Providence.

Interestingly, gentrification in Providence has received much more attention in local news outlets. A Google search for ‘gentrification Providence’ yields eight local news and opinion pieces or blog entries on the subject within the first two pages of results. Subjects covered include public controversies over mill redevelopment projects in the mid 2000s (Donnis, 2006; Paulino, 2008); Providence’s economic resurgence (Mooney, 2016); neighborhood revitalization in the West End (E. Jerzyk, 2014); fears about gentrification in relation to Mayor Elorza’s EveryHome abandoned property program (Brook, 2016; Samih-Rotondo, 2015; Talerico, 2016); and Brown University’s role in gentrification (Comberg, 2017).

Thus, while coverage in local news outlets suggests that there is fear or recognition of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods amongst community members, there is no consensus on the existence, extent, or character of gentrification processes in Providence within scholarly or grey literature.

Weak Market and Older Industrial City Typologies

Cities like Providence, cities that have experienced population decline and, today, have weak housing markets, have been varyingly grouped into typologies including but not limited to, weak market cities (Brophy & Burnett, 2003; Furdell & Wolman, 2006), low demand cities (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2008), “forgotten cities” (Hoyt & Leroux, 2007), Gateway Cities in Massachusetts (Kodrzycki et al., 2009; Muro et al., 2007), and distressed, older industrial cities (Fox & Axel-Lute, 2008; Vey, 2007). These city typologies are most often written about in grey literature on community and economic development approaches to dealing with the challenges facing these city types. Here, I give a brief explanation of the literature’s treatment of the challenges facing these city types, proposed policy approaches, the positions on gentrification taken in this literature, and the relative position of Providence.

Grey literatures on city typologies that include Providence emphasize that while many cities in the United States experienced economic growth during the 1990s, cities of this type did not (Brophy & Burnett, 2003; Fox & Axel-Lute, 2008; Kodrzycki & Muñoz,

2013; Mallach, 2005; Vey, 2007). According to reports, “weak market cities,” which are defined by stagnant or declining populations, are most challenged by population loss and stagnant economies (Brophy & Burnett, 2003; Mallach, 2005). Other challenges cited include decreasing home values, decreasing tax base, fewer and worse amenities and services, vacant and abandoned property, low-incomes, erosion of physical and social capital, slow economic growth, high unemployment, and concentrated poverty (Brophy & Burnett, 2003; Kodrzycki & Muñoz, 2013; Mallach, 2005; Vey, 2007).

In making recommendations for community and economic development approaches to revitalizing cities of this type, authors assert that states should put energy and resources into revitalizing weak market cities because they possess a lot of assets and are a currently untapped engine for economic growth (Fox & Axel-Lute, 2008; Vey, 2007). For example, within the grey literature about Massachusetts’ Gateway Cities, policy prescriptions tend to prioritize rebuilding local economies in support of the state economy and rebuilding the middle class (Kodrzycki et al., 2009; Muro et al., 2007).

Some of this literature, such as Gateway Cities literature, looks at cities in the context of whole state and regions and so ignores uneven neighborhood development and the potential for gentrification (Kodrzycki et al., 2009; Kodrzycki & Muñoz, 2013; Muro et al., 2007). According to Brophy and Burnett (2003), gentrification does not pose a substantial risk to low-income residents of revitalizing neighborhoods in weak market cities as long as multi-faceted strategies are used to maintain affordability and economic opportunity (Brophy & Burnett, 2003, 21). Other literature on weak market and older industrial city typologies acknowledges that gentrification may happen in select pockets of weak market cities (Mallach, 2005; Vey, 2007). Some authors take gentrification to be a sign of successful revitalization (Vey, 2007, 38). In other instances, researchers recommend that policy makers in weak market and older industrial cities should “get out in front” of revitalization and, by doing so, policy makers in these cities have an opportunity to ensure that benefits accrue to existing residents instead of displacement (Mallach, 2005, pp. 37; Vey, 2007, pp. 61–62).

Among these literatures, Providence is included within weak market and distressed older industrial city typologies, but there is ambivalence about Providence’s status. According to Vey (2007), Providence is one of 65 economically distressed cities

in the United States, most of which are older industrial cities with populations less than 250,000 (Vey, 2007, 8). Similarly, studies conducted by Wolman, Ford, and Hill (1994) and Furdell, Wolman, and Hill (2005) consider Providence to be economically distressed, as it falls within the bottom third of economic health indicators (Kodrzycki & Muñoz, 2013, 21). In contrast, Kodrzycki et al. (2009) find that, among distressed cities, Providence is a resurgent city that has succeeded in revitalizing (Kodrzycki & Muñoz, 2013, 18). Still, the researchers acknowledge that Providence struggles with severely distressed neighborhoods and high levels of poverty, suggesting that the benefits of revitalization have not reached Providence's most vulnerable residents (Kodrzycki et al., 2009). Thus, Providence is perceived to have achieved a certain amount of revitalization but to struggle, still, with economic distress and neighborhood blight.

Literatures in Conversation

Looking at these bodies of literature together, I find there to be gaps that are critical to my inquiry. Gentrification literature has tended to ignore housing market context or to focus on strong market contexts. Gentrification research that focuses on weak market contexts is a relatively new field of study. Thus, firstly, although studies suggest that uneven development and reinvestment can fuel pockets of gentrification amidst a weak market, I was not able to find any empirical studies of this type about Providence. Second, on the subject of gentrification in Providence, I found much in local media outlets to confirm my hypotheses that gentrification is underway in some Providence neighborhoods but little academic literature on the topic.

Finally, grey literature on weak market and older industrial city typologies focuses on revitalization and economic development. Where this literature does acknowledge the potential for neighborhood gentrification where and when revitalization succeeds, it suggests that policymakers should take a preemptive approach to preventing displacement. Coverage of Providence in these literatures suggests that it is among few distressed weak market and older industrial cities that have achieved a measure of success in revitalization.

I believe, then, that the case of Providence is the point where these literatures meet. Providence begs the question: what does gentrification look like in neighborhoods

in a weak market city that have successfully revitalized? Is it recognizable as gentrification in strong market cities? In practice, do Providence's policymakers recognize the need, or the opportunity, to address gentrification and displacement risks "early in the process, rather than wait until it is too late," as Mallach (2005) suggests, or do they still believe, like Brophy & Burnett (2003), that "fear of gentrification is overstated in these locations" (Brophy & Burnett, 2003, 21; Mallach, 2005, 37)?

Thus, my research aims to contribute to planning, development and housing policy in low demand housing market contexts through a context-conscious exploration of gentrification in one specific weak market city: Providence, Rhode Island. To do this, I use a mixed methods approach to assess the extent of neighborhood gentrification in Providence and to compare it to gentrification in New York City, a prototypical strong market context; to understand the extent to which revitalization rationales are defined in relation to gentrification and displacement, and the extent to which practitioners perceive gentrification and displacement as threats to the wellbeing of low-income residents of Providence; and, finally, to recommend a 'development without displacement' agenda for Providence.

Chapter 3: Assessing Neighborhood Gentrification in Providence

In this chapter, I take a mixed methods approach to answering my first research question: *To what extent has neighborhood gentrification occurred in Providence?*

My approach to answering this question is twofold. First, I explore qualitative data gathered through interviews with community development, housing, and planning practitioners in Providence to understand practitioner perceptions of the extent of gentrification according to practitioners. Second, I use quantitative data from the 2000 Census and the 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates to assess gentrification between 2000 and 2015, defined as demographic change associated with increasing socioeconomic status in low-income neighborhoods experiencing above average rent increases. Thus, I identify low-income Providence census tracts that have experienced above average rent increases and then assess the extent of gentrification-associated demographic changes.

In this chapter, I first describe the methodological approach to this research question and the specific methods used for the qualitative analysis. I then discuss the qualitative findings regarding the extent of neighborhood gentrification in Providence, according to practitioners. Next, I explain the specific methods used to undertake the quantitative analysis and explore the quantitative findings. I conclude with a synthesis of what the qualitative and quantitative findings show, together.

Methodological Approach

I take a mixed methods approach, which incorporates both qualitative data gathered through interviews with community development practitioners and quantitative data published by the United States Census Bureau, to assessing the extent of neighborhood gentrification in Providence. Using mixed methods approach is appropriate for answering my question because of the nature of the question and because of the context.

My research question centers on the phenomenon of gentrification, a contested concept with a multiplicity of definitions that is notoriously hard to measure. Thus, a

mixed methods approach can help pick up on subtleties that might be missed by one or the other method. Second, a mixed methods approach is useful because my particular research question is about assessing gentrification in Providence, a weak market context. As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2 of this paper, methods for defining and measuring gentrification have most often been developed in relation to strong market contexts. As I am interested in how gentrification in a weak market context might differ from gentrification in a strong market context, a mixed methods approach helps to add texture to the particularities of gentrification in Providence.

Qualitative Methods and Analysis

Qualitative Methods

To operationalize a qualitative approach to my research question, I ask: *To what extent has neighborhood gentrification occurred in Providence according to community revitalization practitioners working in Providence?* To answer this question, I conducted semi-structured interviews with practitioners working in Providence in the fields of community development, housing, and municipal planning, between February and March 2017. Through interviews, I aimed to understand practitioners' assessments of the existence, extent, and character of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods.

To answer the research question, I sought to draw out and analyze interview commentary that substantiates interview participants' perceptions of the extent of gentrification in Providence. Given that the interviews were loosely structured, with questions that varied based on the evolution of each conversation, the analysis presented here is based on my interpretation of practitioner commentary. I did not code the interviews or undertake a quantitative analysis of the qualitative data (to enable me to say, for example, that 15 out of 17 participants responded 'x'). I organize the data that speaks to this question in two categories: practitioner commentary that discusses evidence of gentrification and commentary that discusses comparisons of gentrification in Providence to gentrification in other cities or to generic concepts of gentrification. Below, I describe my qualitative methods including methods used for the selection of interview participants, interview structure, and limitations.

Interview Participants

In selecting interview participants, herein referred to as ‘interview participants’ or ‘practitioners,’ I hoped to have representatives from all of the different types of organizations and agencies working in the municipal planning and development, community development, and affordable housing fields. I contacted an initial list of practitioners from the organizations and agencies I was aware of and selected additional practitioners through the snowball sample method, wherein I asked interview participants for recommendations of additional practitioners to speak to. Out of the 21 people I contacted with requests for interviews, I conducted a total of 17 interviews. The interview participants (name, place of work, title) are listed below. The 17 interview participants represent a wide range of organizational types in the relevant fields, but they are not fully representative of the planning and development, community development, and affordable housing fields.

Public Sector

1. Peter Asen, City of Providence, Director of Partnerships and Intergovernmental Affairs
2. Ray Neirinckx, Rhode Island Office of Housing & Community Development Housing Resources Commission (RIHRC), Coordinator of the Office of Homeownership and of the Office of Community Development and Technical Assistance
3. Allen Penniman, City of Providence Department of Planning and Development, Principal Planner
4. Thomas Deller, formerly at City of Providence Department of Planning and Development, former Director
5. Anastasia Williams, Rhode Island General Assembly, Representative of District 9

Private Sector

6. Jane Driver, Armory Revival Company, Principal Broker; West Broadway Neighborhood Association, Board Member

Non-Profit Sector

7. Julius Kolawole, African Alliance of Rhode Island, Executive Director
8. Xander Marro, The Dirt Palace, Co-Founder; ONE Neighborhood Builders, Board Member
9. Clark Schoettle, The Providence Revolving Fund, Executive Director
10. Umberto Crenca, AS220, Founder
11. Kyle Bennett, United Way of Rhode Island, Director of Policy and Research
12. Fred Ordoñez, Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), Executive Director

13. Christopher Rotondo, Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), Organizer for the Tenants and Homeowners Association
14. Frank Shea, ONE Neighborhood Builders, former Executive Director
15. Kari Lang, West Broadway Neighborhood Association, Executive Director
16. Scott Wolf, Grow Smart Rhode Island, Executive Director

Academia

17. Taino Palermo, Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies Community Development Program, Program Director

Interview Structure and Questions

The methods related to interview structure and interview questions described here apply to both the content covered in this chapter as well as in Chapter 4. In February and March 2017, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one-hour, and participants were not compensated. Each participant signed a consent form where they were asked for their consent for the following: to have the interview recorded; for information from the interview, including name, title, and/or direct quotes, to be included in publications resulting from the study.

I asked each practitioner a variation on the questions listed below, as well as relevant follow-up questions. Because the initial request for interview made the interview participants aware of the subject of the interview (revitalization and gentrification in Providence neighborhoods), issues of gentrification and displacement often came up even if I did not ask about them directly. In general, due to the controversial nature of the subject matter, I tried to wait for the participants to raise these ideas and to use those moments as an opportunity to ask follow-up questions. I found that this approach was more likely to yield an open, contemplative conversation, whereas direct questions early in the conversation may have sometimes been perceived as accusations.

1. Can you tell me about your history of living and working in Providence, as well as what you do in your current position?
2. Could you talk about how Providence or specific neighborhoods have changed during the time of your work?²
3. From your point of view, what does revitalization mean in the context of Providence?

² Given that interview participants were aware of the subject of my research, revitalization and gentrification in Providence, this question generally elicited responses about neighborhood revitalization and gentrification.

4. Are there particular organizations or circumstances that have been particularly influential in the neighborhood revitalization or gentrification you have observed?
5. What have you observed to be the priorities of key actors (the City, CDCs, historic preservationists) in relation to revitalization?
6. [In reference to specific things/other cities mentioned during the course of the interview] Where do you think Providence is in the spectrum of gentrification risk? In the spectrum of gentrification-related displacement risk?
7. To what extent are efforts to manage or mitigate neighborhood change, gentrification, and displacement, relevant and feasible in the Providence context?
8. Are there other pieces of the development/revitalization/gentrification puzzle that you think are important and that we've haven't touched on yet?

Limitations

Here, I discuss the limitations to my qualitative analysis as well as the expected impacts of these limitations. First, it must be noted that my qualitative analysis exclusively uses data gathered through interviews with people who relate to revitalization and gentrification through their professional roles. While most of the interview participants do live in Providence, this research does not incorporate the perspective of residents who do not also work in community development, housing, or planning. The impacts of revitalization and gentrification are felt most acutely by low-income residents of revitalizing and gentrifying neighborhoods. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that I have not intentionally sought to include first-hand experiences of gentrification in my data.

Secondly, there are a number of limitations related to ways in which the practitioners I interviewed may not be representative of the full range of community development, housing and planning practitioners in Providence. For instance, the range of practitioners interviewed does not represent all of the work happening in Providence that influences revitalization and gentrification. The private sector is under-represented, as I did not interview anyone working in private housing development. Additionally, I feel that CDCs are underrepresented given the prominence of CDCs in the community development and affordable housing fields in Providence. Of the three most prominent CDCs currently operating in Providence – ONE Neighborhood Builders (ONE NB), West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation (WEHDC), and SWAP – I was only able to

interview someone from ONE NB.³ Finally, of the handful of neighborhood associations that were mentioned by interview participants, I only interviewed someone from the West Broadway Neighborhood Association (WBNA).

Additionally, I did not consider geographic focus when selecting interview participants. The practitioners interviewed work at a variety of geographic scales – including those with statewide, citywide, neighborhood specific scope – and I did not attempt to achieve a balance of geographic scopes. More significantly, the participants are not necessarily representative of work, or neighborhood change processes, happening in all of Providence’s neighborhoods. Because I am using the qualitative data to assess the existence of gentrification, and the character of the particular gentrification seen in Providence, I do not think that incomplete geographic representation invalidates my findings.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the blurry line between the personal and the professional for the practitioners I interviewed. The practitioners spoke on their own behalf but from within their professional roles, and not as official representatives of their organizations or agencies.

Qualitative Analysis

In this section, I explore that parts of interview participants’ commentary that consist of their evaluations of the extent to which they have observed neighborhood change processes in Providence that they would consider to be gentrification. I present two main findings. First, practitioners do definitively perceive the phenomenon of gentrification to have happened and be happening in Providence neighborhoods. Second, I find that practitioners perceive gentrification in Providence to be different from gentrification in strong market cities because it has occurred at a slower pace, has a lesser intensity and poses less displacement pressure, and because the real estate development landscape in Providence is unique. Taken in sum, there is widespread agreement that some gentrification has occurred in specific, limited Providence neighborhoods, but that this gentrification is more limited has occurred at a slower pace when compared to strong market cities.

³ These are the three CDCs that were most frequently mentioned in my interviews.

Perceptions of Gentrification in Providence Neighborhoods

As evidence of gentrification in specific Providence neighborhoods, practitioners most often discussed a historical example of gentrification in the Fox Point neighborhood and contemporary neighborhood gentrification in the West End neighborhood. According to practitioners, the Fox Point neighborhood has already undergone gentrification (Palermo, Wolf, Rotondo, Neirinckx). According to participants, the process by which the Cape Verdean residents of Fox Point were pushed “over the bridge” into the neighboring town of East Providence constitutes an instance of both gentrification and displacement. Cape Verdean residents were displaced by an influx of Brown University students who were able to pay higher rents for poorly maintained apartments and group houses (Wolf, Rotondo).

Neighborhood change in the West End, Providence’s largest neighborhood, is by far the most commonly cited example of contemporary gentrification in Providence, and practitioners say that it is the most advanced instance of gentrification (Palermo, Wolf, Rotondo, Schoettle, Bennett, Ordoñez, Asen, Lang, Williams). Christopher Rotondo describes it as “middling level gentrification” and Scott Wolf describes it as “the neighborhood that has transformed itself the most in the last 15 or 20 years and where there’s probably the most, at least, potential for displacement due to gentrification” (Rotondo, Wolf). In contrast to the process of gentrification in Fox Point, gentrification in the West End has been initiated primarily by college-educated, young adults who purchased and renovated historic homes (Rotondo, Palermo, Schoettle). Gentrification in the West End is largely in the Armory Historic District where reinvestment has been concentrated and which, historically, had a large African American population. According to Clark Schoettle, Executive Director of the Providence Revolving Fund, the Armory Historic District boundaries informally demarcate gentrification, although he has observed that people are starting to buy and fix up houses in the areas outside but closest to the district. It was also noted that home prices in the Armory District are higher than ever before (Schoettle, Lang).

Even in the West End, Providence neighborhood that most exemplifies gentrification according to practitioners, gentrification has occurred slowly and over a long period of time (Schoettle, Asen, Lang). Additionally, neighborhood change in the

West End has not been a single upward trajectory; even in the midst of its revitalization the neighborhood has experienced periodic setbacks in relation to the real estate boom and bust cycle (Schoettle, Lang). Some participants suggest that the slow pace of change has been advantageous because there has been less displacement and the neighborhood has maintained a greater diversity of incomes than it might have if it changed faster. This suggests that gentrification in the West End/Armory has been limited, or not full stage gentrification, and could suggest that the neighborhood has had enough housing stock to accommodate an influx of higher socioeconomic status households without entirely changing the demographics of the neighborhood.

Despite the slow pace of change, some practitioners pointed to a number of gentrification impacts in the West End, including cultural exclusion and increased policing. Representative Anastasia Williams, a West End resident since 1969, said that “gentrification has been rapidly coming through this neighborhood faster than we would like it to happen” and has significant consequences for the community (Williams). Practitioners described the rebranding of the West End as the ‘West Side’ as evidence of cultural conflict in a gentrifying neighborhood (Palermo, Asen, Williams, Ordoñez, Bennett). Kyle Bennett, who grew up and lived for a long time in the West End, described his worry about that the rebranding could cause long-term residents to feel that “it’s no longer their place because someone else has come in and planted their flag” and to “get dislocated, and disconnected from the growth and development that’s happening here.” Lastly, gentrification in the West End has also meant increased criminalization, according to Fred Ordoñez:

Besides no longer being able to afford to live there, being displaced and creating concentrated poverty someplace else, gentrification also means increased hyper policing for the residents that have been there for generations. New speed bumps, music ordinances, nuisance ordinances and increased racial profiling from newer residents calling the police and city officials because of their fear and aversion of the race and culture of the neighborhood they just moved into. (Ordoñez)

Thus, although change in the West End – the neighborhood that practitioners perceive to be *the most* gentrified – has happened slowly and over a long period of time, the cultural and policing consequences of newer residents provide solid evidence of gentrification.

In sum, the housing, planning and community development practitioners I interviewed for this research believe that neighborhood change processes in some

Providence neighborhoods – Fox Point, in the past, and the West End, today – qualify as gentrification. They suggest that the pace of gentrification has been influenced by the boom and bust cycle and that gentrification in the West End, while definitive, has occurred relatively slowly. The comparisons made between gentrification in Providence and gentrification in other cities, reviewed next, coincide with this understanding.

[Perceptions of Gentrification in Providence in Comparison to Other Cities](#)

Comparisons made to other cities suggest that practitioners understand gentrification in Providence to be different from gentrification in hot market cities like Boston and San Francisco, which were the most frequently referenced cities. Participants articulated these differences as having to do with the pace, intensity of gentrification and displacement pressures, and type of real estate development.

According to participants, gentrification in Providence has happened slower than their perceptions of gentrification in other cities (Asen, Schoettle, Driver). Jane Driver, a local real estate agent and WBNA board member, compared Providence to San Francisco, saying, “It’s not like San Francisco where you have crazy horrible stuff going on. It’s been much more gradual in Providence.” As described above, many practitioners noted the long time frame of gentrification in the Armory District which, according to one estimate, took nearly 30 years.

Practitioner commentary also suggests that gentrification in Providence has been of a different quality, and lesser intensity, than in other cities. For example, Schoettle comments that incoming wealth into the Armory District wasn’t as blatant as in other places:

So it wasn’t like a lot of bigger cities, where gentrification sort of takes hold. I would say the Armory District has been gentrified, but it has taken 30 years and even so it’s still gentrified in a very sort of funky way– it’s not gentrified by people driving BMW convertibles and being super rich. It’s gentrified by lots of white, and mixed, college-educated kids that want to live in the city, and it’s a cool place to live. And I guess that’s gentrification, but it’s different. (Schoettle)

Christopher Rotondo says gentrification in Providence is at a lower scale and “not gentrification in the sexy sense of a San Francisco,” which, he says, makes it harder to campaign around but might make the impacts easier to mitigate. Finally, Scott Wolf perceives that gentrification and displacement pressures have been comparatively easy to manage, because the “development scene has not been that robust” due to a lackluster

economy. It is also the weak market context that has enabled some instances of neighborhood revitalization without negative impacts for low-income residents more possible (Penniman, Wolf). In particular, participants suggested that there has been revitalization in the South Side and in Elmwood, which have not resulted in noticeable displacement, due to the relatively weak market.

Finally, participants note that real estate development in Providence has been of a different type than is typically associated with gentrification in other cities. Speculative real estate development in Providence's low-income neighborhoods has been most commonly initiated by small-scale developers who were priced out of Boston markets (Shea, Marro). Rotondo calls Providence's investors "small mom and pop scummy investor types who would scoop up foreclosed properties and abandoned properties." Additionally, real estate development in Providence does not fit the model of large-scale condominium development and has been focused, instead, on redevelopment of historic mill buildings.

Taken together, practitioners perceive that gentrification in Providence has happen to a lesser degree and with less intense development, housing, and displacement pressures. Many practitioners believe that these differences are largely due to Providence's comparatively weak market. Next, I turn to a quantitative analysis of neighborhood gentrification, using US Census Bureau data, in order to complement the qualitative findings about gentrification in Providence.

Quantitative Methods and Analysis

Now, I turn to a qualitative approach to answering the question: *To what extent has neighborhood gentrification occurred in Providence?* I first review the methods used to classify Providence neighborhoods into three neighborhood types and to measure gentrification-associated demographic change citywide and in the three neighborhood types and then discuss my findings.

Quantitative Methods

In this section, I conduct a quantitative analysis of the extent of gentrification by examining rent growth and gentrification-associated demographic change in Providence's

low-income neighborhoods between 2000 and 2015. For this analysis, I use data from the 2000 Census and the 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Defining Gentrification

In this paper, I define gentrification as a process in which low-income neighborhoods that are experiencing substantial rent increases also experience gentrification-associated demographic change (demographic change that is commonly associated with gentrification). Gentrification is commonly defined as a process by which higher socioeconomic households move into a neighborhood that was formerly occupied by lower socioeconomic households; rent increases are not always considered to be a condition of gentrification. In the definition employed in this research, I consider rent growth to be the primary condition of gentrification and some gentrification-associated demographic changes to be a condition. I use this definition because, firstly, it is important for the purposes of my research to adopt a relatively non-deterministic definition that would leave more room to observe divergence from the typical gentrification concept given Providence's weak market context (Clark, 2010; Lees et al., 2008; Smith & Williams, 2010).

Secondly, Providence's weak market conditions and population trends, explored in Chapter 1, suggest that Providence neighborhoods may be able to accommodate some population growth and some influx of higher socioeconomic households without introducing enough housing competition to displace lower income residents. However, high rates of poverty and housing cost burden among Providence households, and a supply of housing that is constrained by the extremely slow pace of housing production, mean that low-income Providence residents are vulnerable to displacement when housing costs do increase. Thus, I use a definition to one in which above average rent growth is a *condition* of gentrification in low-income neighborhoods but it is not a sufficient condition. As defined in this paper, gentrification is occurring in those low-income neighborhoods that experience above average rent growth *and* at least some of the demographic changes typically associated with an influx of households with higher socioeconomic status. The six demographic changes examined in this paper are change in: young adult share, share of adults with a college degree, nonfamily household share, white share, Hispanic/Latino share, and average household income.

To operationalize this definition, I adapted the definition of gentrification and methodology used by the Furman Center (2015), in *State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods in 2015*. The Furman Center defines gentrification as “rapid rent growth in low-income neighborhoods” (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 4). In this definition, rapid rent growth – defined as rent growth above the median neighborhood rent growth – is the single criterion that distinguishes gentrifying low-income neighborhoods from non-gentrifying ones. The researchers find that gentrifying neighborhoods experienced the demographic changes such as an increasing share of white residents and residents with a college degree – changes that, in this paper, I call gentrification-associated demographic changes – at a higher rate than other neighborhoods. Still, the Furman Center does not consider these demographic changes are not a *condition* of gentrification.

However, unlike in New York where claims about gentrification are well supported, my inquiry is based in the premises that there is not adequate empirical literature to substantiate claims of gentrification in Providence. It is entirely possible, for instance, that Providence neighborhoods could experience rent growth (and low-income residents could suffer displacement from rising housing costs) due to constrained housing supply rather than to an influx of high socioeconomic status residents with an ability to pay higher housing costs. It is possible, too, that a certain Providence neighborhoods could experience an influx of higher socioeconomic households without triggering full-on gentrification, due to moderate residential vacancy rates. In Providence, then, rent growth alone is *not* a sufficient indicator of gentrification. Thus, I consider low-income Providence neighborhoods that sustained rapid rent growth as those most likely to gentrifying and I evaluate if the demographic trends in these neighbors resemble the demographic trends associated with gentrification. I ask:

- a. To what extent did low-income Providence neighborhoods sustain above citywide rent increase between 2000 and 2015?
- b. To what extent did low-income Providence neighborhoods that sustained above average rent increases also experience demographic changes commonly associated with gentrification between 2000 and 2015? And how did demographic change in these neighborhoods compare to change in other neighborhoods?

To answer these questions, I assess if demographic change in low-income neighborhoods experiencing substantial rent growth (potentially gentrifying neighborhoods) differs from demographic change in other Providence neighborhoods. I use the demographic change experienced in New York City gentrifying neighborhoods, as measured in the Furman Center report, as a ready point of comparison to a strong market city.

Neighborhood Classifications

I use census tracts as a proxy for the neighborhood and I divide Providence's census tracts into three types based on the Furman Center methodology: the higher income neighborhood type, potentially gentrifying neighborhood type, and non-gentrifying neighborhood type. Below, I define each category and justify the modifications made to the Furman Center's New York City neighborhood classifications to which I compare Providence neighborhoods in my analysis. All rent values, from both the 2000 Census and the 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates are inflation-adjusted to 2015 values. Going forward, '2011-2015' denotes data taken from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, which is an estimate of sample data collected over the 5-year period.

The higher income neighborhood type includes those census tracts that were in the top 60% of census tracts in the Providence-Fall River-Warwick RI-MA Metropolitan Statistical Area (Providence-Warwick MSA) with respect to median family income in the year 2000. This definition differs from the Furman Center's definition – SBAs in the top 60% with respect to average household income – in two respects (NYU Furman Center, 2015). Firstly, I sort census tracts based on median family income rather than household income in order to capture some of Providence's wealthiest census tracts, which have large student populations. Tracts 36.01 and 36.02, which approximate the College Hill neighborhood where Brown University is located, have very high median family incomes but very low median household incomes and so would not have been categorized as higher income if the criteria were based on median household income.

Second, I define higher income neighborhoods as those census tracts within the top 60% of MSA median family incomes instead of the top 60% of city median incomes. Gentrification is a process in which “neighborhoods that start off predominantly occupied by households of relatively low socioeconomic status... experience an inflow of higher

socioeconomic status households,” and, as such, neighborhoods that are higher income are not considered to be *gentrifiable* (NYU Furman Center, 2015). Providence households have low-incomes compared to New York households and categorizing the top 60% of Providence census tracts as higher income would miss the point.⁴ In 2000, median family incomes in the top 60% of Providence census tracts ranged from \$36,849 to \$203,164, with a median value of \$53,882.⁵ Using my definition, the “higher income” category only includes 8 census tracts, with 2000 median family incomes that range from \$72,644 to \$203,164, with a median value of \$104,518, which is a more accurate higher income categorization.⁶

The *potentially gentrifying neighborhood type* includes those census tracts that were low-income in the year 2000 and experienced rapid rent growth during the 2000-2015 period. Low-income neighborhoods are those census tracts that were in the bottom 40% of Providence-Warwick MSA census tracts with respect to median family income in the year 2000. Rapid rent growth is defined as a census tract that sustained a percent increase in median gross rent that was more than 5 percent greater than citywide rent growth, or greater than a 33.3% increase.⁷ This differs from the Furman Center’s method, in which gentrifying neighborhoods are low-income neighborhoods that experienced rent increases higher than the median neighborhood, or greater than an approximately 18% increase (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 5).

Finally, the non-gentrifying neighborhood type includes those census tracts that were low-income in the year 2000, as defined above, and experienced rent growth that was less than the threshold established for the potentially gentrifying neighborhoods category (33.3% increase).

Demographic Change

Having classified all of Providence’s census tracts as belonging to one of three

⁴ For reference, the inflation-adjusted median household incomes in New York City, Providence, and the Providence-Warwick MSA were \$54,490, \$38,231, and \$59,406 in the year 2000, respectively. Data sources: 2000 Census data accessed from Social Explorer. Dollar values inflation adjusted to match 2015 dollars.

⁵ Dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars. Data sources: 2000 Census data accessed from Social Explorer.

⁶ Dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars. Data sources: 2000 Census data accessed from Social Explorer.

⁷ Between 2000 and 2011-2015, the citywide median gross rent increased 26.1% +/- 2.2%. The 33.3% cut-off is 5% greater than the upper margin of the increase in citywide median gross rent.

types – higher income, potentially gentrifying, or non-gentrifying – I evaluate if and how gentrification-associated demographic change in the potentially gentrifying type differs from citywide trends and, especially, from the non-gentrifying type (low income neighborhoods that experienced less substantial rent growth than those classified as potentially gentrifying). Additionally, I assess the extent to which demographic change in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type conforms to changes that are commonly associated with gentrification, and which the Furman Center observed to occur in New York City gentrifying neighborhoods between 2000 and 2010-2014. These demographic changes include changes in: the young adult share of the population; the share of adults with a college degree; the nonfamily share of households; the share of the population that identifies as white alone; the share of the population that identifies as Hispanic or Latino; and the average household income. I examine these particular demographic variables because they are commonly associated with gentrification, as defined by an influx of households of higher socioeconomic status, and because the Furman Center report provides a ready point of comparison on these measures. Data definitions, relation to gentrification, and sources for demographic variables are described below in Table 2.

To find average demographic changes for the three neighborhood types, I follow the methods described in the Furman Center report (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 182). Neighborhood type shares and averages are found by aggregating from the census tract level, weighting by census tract population.⁸ For instance, the Hispanic/Latino share of the population in the higher income neighborhood type is a weighted average of the Hispanic/Latino shares in all of the higher income census tracts; the percentage point increase in the Hispanic/Latino share of the population in the higher income neighborhood type is the difference between the 2011-2015 weighted average and the 2000 weighted average.

⁸ When aggregated to the neighborhood type level, the weighted average is based on the universe for each particular demographic variable. For example, the universe for white share is total population, the universe for share with a college degree is population aged 25+, the universe for nonfamily households is 'total households', and the universe for median gross rent increase is 'renter-occupied housing units.'

Table 2: Data Definitions and Sources

Variable	Definition	Relation to Gentrification	Data Source
Rent	Median Gross Rent (Dollars), inflation-adjusted to 2015 dollars	In this paper, above citywide rent growth is considered to be a condition of gentrification	- US Census (2000), H063 - ACS 2011-2015, B25064
Young adult share	Percentage of the total population that is 20-34 years old	An increase in the share of the young adult population is commonly associated with gentrification	- US Census (2000), SF1DP1 - ACS 2011-2015, S0101
Share of adults with a college degree	Percentage of the total population aged 25+ with a Bachelor's degree or higher educational attainment	An increase in the share of adults with a college degree is commonly associated with gentrification	- US Census (2000), Social Explorer Table SE:T40 - ACS 2011-2015, B15003
Nonfamily household share	Share of households that are nonfamily households	An increase in the nonfamily households share is commonly associated with gentrification	- US Census (2000), Social Explorer Table SE:T20 - ACS 2011-2015, B11001
White share	Share of the total population that identifies as White Alone	An increase in white share of the population is commonly associated with gentrification	- US Census (2000), Social Explorer Table SE:T14 - ACS 2011-2015, B02001
Hispanic/Latino share	Share of the total population that identifies as Hispanic or Latino	A decrease in the Hispanic/Latino share of the population is commonly associated with gentrification	- US Census (2000), Social Explorer Table SE:T15 - ACS 2011-2015, B03003
Average household Income	Mean Household Income, inflation-adjusted to 2015 dollars	A percent increase in average household income is commonly associated with gentrification	- US Census (2000), Social Explorer Table SE:T96 - ACS 2011-2015, S1902

Limitations

There are certain limitations to my ability to assess the extent to which low-income neighborhood in Providence that sustained substantial rent increases between 2000 and 2011-2015 also underwent demographic changes commonly associated with gentrification. First, among these, are issues that have to do with geographic scale. Firstly, I use census tracts to approximate neighborhoods. While this is a common proxy in the urban planning field, Providence census tracts do not necessarily have the same boundaries as Providence's locally defined neighborhoods. Additionally, sometimes neighborhood change occurs at a more granular level than the census tract. Census block groups, or blocks, may be a more appropriate geographic scale for observing neighborhood change but the margins of error are prohibitively large.

Second, there are a few limitations to the meaning that can be drawn from my comparisons between the Providence neighborhood types I have created for this paper and the New York City neighborhood types described in the Furman Center report. Firstly, the Furman Center report describes demographic changes that occurred between 2000 and (2010-2014) and my analysis of Providence is for the 2000 to 2011-2015 period. Still, because the 2010-2014 and 2011-2015 American Community Surveys are both 5-year estimates, which include 4 of the 5 same years, I do not think that this gets in the way of my interpretation. Secondly, the Furman Center report uses sub-borough areas (SBAs) as a proxy for neighborhoods, which have much larger populations than census tracts, which I use. Finally, I use the Furman Center's analysis of demographic change in New York City's gentrifying neighborhoods to draw conclusions about the extent to which Providence neighborhoods that experienced substantial rent increases may be considered to be gentrifying in a manner similar to the gentrification experiences in strong market cities. It must be acknowledged that New York City is only one of many strong market cities in which gentrification has been debated and studied. Still, the demographic changes that the Furman Center observed to have occurred in New York City's gentrifying neighborhood type— higher than average increases in the young adult population, in the population with a college degree, in the white share of the population, in the nonfamily household share, and in average household income – are demographic variables that are commonly associated with the influx of higher socioeconomic households that is definitive of the gentrification phenomenon.

Finally, the descriptive statistics presented here, at both the census tract and at the neighborhood type level, often have high margins of error. This means that the differences observed among neighborhood types and between individual neighborhood types and changes at the citywide level are not always statistically significant. The margins of error are smaller for the neighborhood types than for the individual census tracts, which is one of the benefits of aggregating small geographies. But, because Providence only has 39 census tracts, and the neighborhood types contain 8, 12, and 19 census tracts, respectively, the margins of error are still large, especially for the higher income neighborhood type, which is composed of 8 census tracts. There is not much to be said about this, except that the data used here is the best data there is to evaluate

neighborhood gentrification in Providence. All statistics presented are significant at a 90% confidence level, which is the level of significance used by the United States Census Bureau.

Analysis of Rent Increases and Demographic Change by Neighborhood Type

Here, I explore rent increases and demographic change by neighborhood type to answer my research questions, which are:

- a) To what extent did low-income Providence neighborhoods sustain above citywide rent increases between 2000 and 2015?
- b) To what extent did low-income Providence neighborhoods that sustained above average rent increases also experience demographic changes commonly associated with gentrification between 2000 and 2015? And how did demographic change in these neighborhoods compare to change in other neighborhoods?

In comparison to changes that occurred citywide and in the other neighborhood types in Providence between 2000 and 2011-2015, I find the following about rent increases and gentrification-associated demographic change in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type:

1. *Neighborhood Classification:* Of the 31 census tracts that were low-income in 2000, 39% are classified as gentrifying and 61% are non-gentrifying. Only 8 of all Providence census tracts are classified as higher income in 2000, in relation to all MSA census tracts.
2. *Rent Growth:* Rents increased citywide, and in all neighborhood types, but especially in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type which experienced rent growth greater than citywide rent growth.
3. *Demographic Change:* The potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced increases in all six gentrification-associated demographic variables – the young adult share, white share, nonfamily household share, and household income – at a faster rate than the city as a whole. On every measure except white share, the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced an increase that was not only greater than the citywide increase but also greater than the change experienced in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type.

In comparison to the New York City gentrifying neighborhood type, I find the following about rent growth and gentrification-associated demographic change in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type:

1. *Neighborhood Classifications:* While 68% of New York City's low-income neighborhoods experienced above median rent growth, only 39% of Providence's low-income neighborhoods experienced above citywide rent growth.
2. *Rent Growth:* Both citywide, and in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type, Providence experienced more significant rent growth than New York.
3. *Demographic Change:* On some demographic indicators of gentrification, Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type met or exceeded the demographic changes observed in New York City's gentrifying neighborhood type, including rent increases and increases in the young adult share. In other areas, demographic changes that occurred most rapidly in New York City's gentrifying neighborhood type occurred to a lesser extent in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type. These include the share of adults with a college degree and average household income, which increased most significantly in Providence's higher income tract type.⁹

In sum, I find that Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced very substantial rent growth and also experienced many of the gentrification-associated demographic changes to a greater extent than citywide and than the non-gentrifying low-income neighborhood type. However, on all gentrification-associated demographic measures except the young adult share, demographic changes in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type occurred to a lesser extent than in New York City's gentrifying neighborhood type. This suggests that gentrification in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhoods is categorized more by an influx of younger, college educated residents, than by households with high incomes, and/or that gentrification in Providence is not as advanced as in the country's strong market cities. I explore these findings in more detail, below, first exploring rent increases and then

⁹ Given the margin of errors, while the increases in these shares were largest in the higher income neighborhood type, they are not statistically distinguishable from increases sustained citywide or in potentially gentrifying neighborhood type.

gentrification-associated demographic change. I conclude the chapter with a brief exploration of variation among the census tracts in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type and a synthesis of the findings from the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Neighborhood Classifications

To answer the research question, *To what extent did low-income Providence neighborhoods sustain above citywide rent increases between 2000 and 2015*, I use methods adapted from the Furman Center report, described in full on pages 32-35, to categorize each Providence census tracts as either higher income, potentially gentrifying, or non-gentrifying. As Table 3 shows, I classify 8 of Providence's 39 census tracts, or 21%, as higher income.¹⁰ This means that, in 2000, just 21% of Providence census tracts were higher income relative to median family incomes in all MSA census tracts and, thus, assumed to be less susceptible to gentrification. This means that the remaining 31 census tracts were low-income in 2000 relative to the MSA. 12 low-income tracts are potentially gentrifying, meaning they sustained median gross rent increases between 2000 and 2011-2015 that were greater than the established. The remaining 19 low-income tracts are non-gentrifying, meaning that each tract had median gross rent increases less than the 33.3% cutoff. As Figure 2 shows, the Providence and New York distributions of neighborhoods within the types are quite different.¹¹ While 68% of New York City's low-income neighborhoods experienced above median rent growth and are considered gentrifying, only 39% of Providence's low-income neighborhoods experienced rent growth greater than the threshold to be considered potentially gentrifying.¹²

¹⁰ All median gross rents and median family incomes referred to in this section are inflation-adjusted to 2015 dollars.

¹¹ The difference in the number of neighborhoods that are considered low-income is definitional. The Furman Center defines higher income neighborhoods in New York as those within the top 60% of SBA average household incomes while the Providence neighborhoods that I consider to be low-income are within the top 60% all MSA tracts with regard to median family income.

¹² As described in the Methods section, on pages 32-35, there are differences in the way I define the low-income neighborhood criteria. Additionally and most importantly, here, the rent growth criterion for inclusion in the NY gentrifying tract type is rent growth above the rent growth experienced by the median SBA (> ~18%) and the criterion for inclusion in the Providence potentially gentrifying neighborhood type is more than 5% greater than citywide rent growth (>33.3%). If the Furman Center were to have used citywide rent growth as the cutoff (22.1% in New York), 59% of low-income SBAs would be classified as gentrifying which is still a greater percentage of low-income neighborhoods than are potentially gentrifying in Providence.

Table 3: Comparing Neighborhood Types in New York and Providence

Neighborhood Type	New York	Providence
Higher Income	60%	21%
Low-income	40%	79%
(Potentially) Gentrifying Type	68%	39%
Non-Gentrifying Type	32%	61%

Data sources: New York neighborhood classifications from Furman Center (2015), *State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods in 2015*

Rent Growth

Between 2000 and 2011-2015, the median gross rent in Providence increased 26.1%. This rent increase is notable because it is a significant departure from the 1990-2000 period in which the citywide median gross rent decreased by -12.2%, as shown in Table 4. 31 of 39 census tracts experienced statistically significant rent growth between 2000 and 2011-2015, which is indicated with an asterisk in Table 5, below. All tracts classified as potentially gentrifying experienced statistically significant rent growth, and the 8 census tracts that did not experience statistically significant rent growth are mostly classified as non-gentrifying. Due to large margins of error at the census tract level, the majority of census tracts did not experience rent growth that is statistically distinguishable from citywide rent growth. Of the 7 census tracts that experienced rent growth that is statistically greater than citywide rent growth, 6 are classified as potentially gentrifying.

As shown in Figure 2, all of the neighborhood types experienced substantial rent increases between 2000 and 2011-2015. The potentially gentrifying neighborhood type has the most substantial average rent increase (47.8%) and is the only neighborhood type with an increase in gross rent that is statistically different from, and greater, than citywide rent growth. And, while the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type is, by definition, made up of census tracts that had larger rent increases than the census tracts in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type, the difference between the average rent changes in these two neighborhood types (47.8% and 16.2%, respectively) is statistically significant. The classification of higher income census tracts did not depend on rent growth and, still, the difference between average rent growth in the potentially gentrifying and higher income neighborhood types (47.8% and 24.1%, respectively) is also statistically significant.

Citywide, and in each of the neighborhood types, Providence experienced more significant percent increases in median gross rent than New York City did. Most notably,

Providence’s citywide median gross rent increased 26% +/- 2% compared to a 19% increase in New York, and Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhood type had an average 48% +/- 9% increase compared to a 30% average increase in New York City’s gentrifying neighborhood type (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 5). Interestingly, while in New York the higher income neighborhood type sustained the smallest percent increase in rent, the percent increase in rent in Providence’s higher income neighborhood type (24% +/- 12%) exceeded the non-gentrifying type (16% +/- 7%).¹³

The census tracts that make up the different neighborhood types are geographically clustered. Higher income tracts are clustered in the city’s East Side, as shown in Figure 1, which is separated from the rest of the city by the Providence River and which is home to Brown University. Mount Hope is the only East Side neighborhood that does not, largely, fall within census tracts that are classified, in this report, as higher income. Census Tract 24 is the only higher income census tract outside of the East Side, and this includes portions of the Elmhurst and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods. Potentially gentrifying tracts are largely clustered at the center of the city, around Downtown and Federal Hill with census tracts in this neighborhood type extending south to include parts of Upper and Lower South Providence, the southern half of Elmwood, and most of Washington Park; west to include part of the West End and most of Olneyville; and north to include parts of the Smith Hill, Valley and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods. The southern, western and northern most neighborhoods are largely low-income non-gentrifying, including the South Elmwood, Reservoir, Silver Lake, Hartford, Manton, Wanskuck, and Charles neighborhoods in their entirety.

Table 4: Average Percent Change in Median Gross Rent by Neighborhood Type

	1990 to 2000	2000 to 2011-2015	2000 to 2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	-12.2%	26.1%	+/- 2.2%
Potentially Gentrifying		47.8%	+/- 9.0%
Higher-Income		24.1%	+/- 12.3%
Non-Gentrifying		16.2%	+/- 7.4%

- Data sources: 1990 Census, 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars
- Significant changes in census tract boundaries between 1990 and 2000 do not allow for an accurate comparison of 1990-2000 and 2000-2011-2015 rent changes by neighborhood type

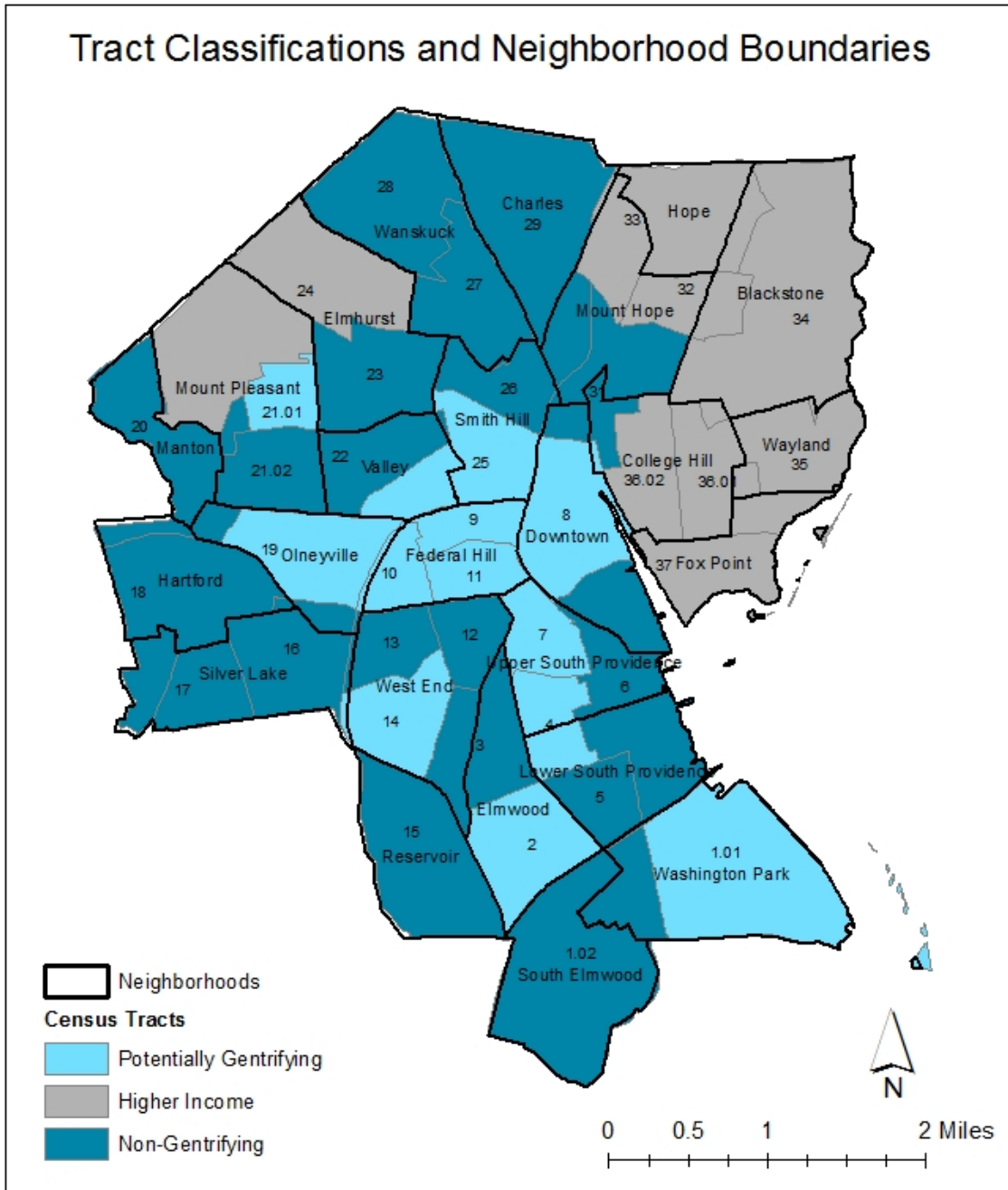
¹³ The average percent change in rent in the higher income neighborhood type is slightly skewed by an outlier, Census Tract 36.02, which sustained a 93% rent increase.

Table 5: Classification of Census Tracts by Neighborhood Type

	% Change in Median Gross Rent 2000 to 2011-2015	% Change in Rent Margin of Error	2000 Median Family Income (2015 \$)
CITYWIDE	26.1%	+/- 2.2%	\$45,617
POTENTIALLY GENTRIFYING TRACTS			
Census Tract 4	66.8%*/**	+/- 19.5%	\$32,057
Census Tract 25	63.0%*/**	+/- 22.1%	\$30,315
Census Tract 8	57.6%*/**	+/- 24.2%	\$48,914
Census Tract 19	54.3%*/**	+/- 10.5%	\$30,072
Census Tract 7	46.2%*	+/- 32.6%	\$25,225
Census Tract 11	39.9%*/**	+/- 10.7%	\$40,529
Census Tract 14	39.7%*/**	+/- 7.4%	\$30,174
Census Tract 1.01	39.5%*	+/- 12.3%	\$49,706
Census Tract 2	37.3%*	+/- 13.9%	\$38,023
Census Tract 10	36.9%*	+/- 11.0%	\$33,943
Census Tract 9	36.7%*	+/- 10.6%	\$34,685
Census Tract 21.01	35.3%*	+/- 20.4%	\$67,801
HIGHER INCOME TRACTS			
Census Tract 36.02	93.2%*/**	+/- 20.4%	\$203,164
Census Tract 33	29.8%*	+/- 7.3%	\$92,789
Census Tract 24	27.6%*	+/- 24.7%	\$80,107
Census Tract 35	22.4%*	+/- 8.2%	\$116,246
Census Tract 32	20.2%*	+/- 14.5%	\$72,644
Census Tract 37	17.9%*	+/- 6.9%	\$86,220
Census Tract 34	14.4%	+/- 30.7%	\$189,680
Census Tract 36.01	8.4%	+/- 12.0%	\$145,826
NON-GENTRIFYING TRACTS			
Census Tract 27	32.4%*	+/- 9.0%	\$28,778
Census Tract 23	30.7%*	+/- 23.4%	\$64,850
Census Tract 13	28.9%*	+/- 11.5%	\$36,160
Census Tract 6	27.1%*	+/- 22.3%	\$30,861
Census Tract 26	25.8%*	+/- 12.0%	\$31,947
Census Tract 3	23.4%*	+/- 11.6%	\$31,859
Census Tract 29	23.2%*	+/- 13.8%	\$51,301
Census Tract 22	20.9%*	+/- 8.5%	\$33,484
Census Tract 17	20.6%*	+/- 11.1%	\$36,849
Census Tract 16	20.5%*	+/- 8.8%	\$41,421
Census Tract 21.02	17.6%*	+/- 8.4%	\$44,603
Census Tract 12	13.7%	+/- 24.8%	\$25,726
Census Tract 28	12.8%	+/- 14.8%	\$42,884
Census Tract 1.02	12.7%*	+/- 10.9%	\$53,882
Census Tract 15	9.8%*/(**)	+/- 4.5%	\$60,886
Census Tract 20	9.7%	+/- 37.3%	\$36,025
Census Tract 18	7.3%	+/- 27.5%	\$37,600
Census Tract 31	-6.6%	+/- 26.0%	\$46,569
Census Tract 5	-7.9%	+/- 55.0%	\$27,194

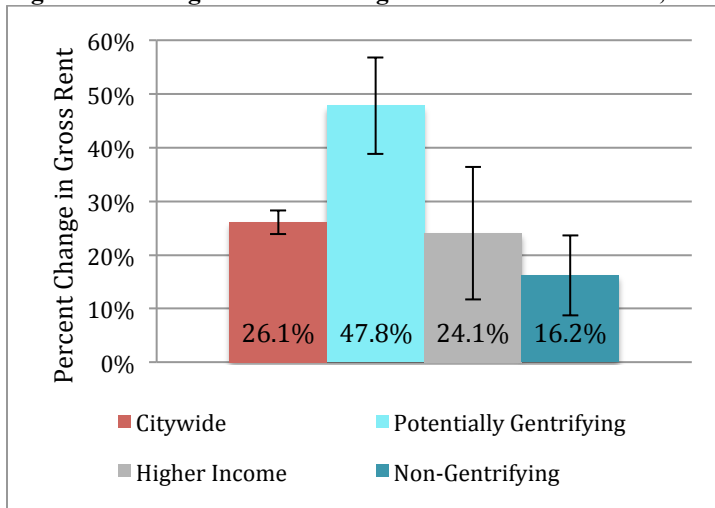
- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars
- * Indicates the tract experienced a statistically significant gross rent increase between 2000 and 2011-2015, statistically significant at a 90% level of confidence
- ** Indicates that the tract's rent growth is greater than citywide rent growth, statistically significant at a 90% level of confidence
- (**) Indicates that the tract's rent growth is less than citywide rent growth, statistically significant at a 90% level of confidence

Figure 1: Map of Tract Classifications and Neighborhood Boundaries



- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Shapefile sources: City of Providence Open Data; US Census Bureau; RIGIS Geospatial Data Catalogue

Figure 2: Average Percent Change in Median Gross Rent, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type



- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars

Demographic Change

Here, I explore demographic change citywide and in the three neighborhood types to assess how demographic trends differ among the neighborhood types and to evaluate the extent to which demographic changes in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type conforms to those changes observed in New York City’s gentrifying neighborhoods and which are typically associated with gentrification.

In comparison to changes that occurred citywide and in the other neighborhood types in Providence between 2000 and 2011-2015, I find the following about gentrification-associated demographic change in Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhood type, as shown in Table 6:

1. *Young Adult Share*: The potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced the most significant growth in the young adult share of the population; the share increase is greater than citywide and than in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type.
2. *Share of Adults with a College Degree*: The share of adults with a college degree increased citywide, and in all neighborhood types, but increased most significantly in the higher income neighborhood type and, secondarily, in the

- potentially gentrifying neighborhood type.¹⁴
3. *Nonfamily Household Share*: The potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced above citywide growth in the nonfamily household share
 4. *White Share*: Citywide, the white share decreased; the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type was the only type to experience an increase in the white share, however this increase is not statistically significant.
 5. *Hispanic/Latino Share*: The Hispanic/Latino share increased citywide and in all neighbor types. Both potentially gentrifying and higher income neighborhood types experienced growth that was below the citywide increase.
 6. *Average Household Income*: Average household income increased in both the potentially gentrifying and higher income neighborhood types and decreased in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type; the share increase is greater than citywide and than in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type.

To summarize, the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced increases in gentrification-associated demographic variables – the young adult share, white share, nonfamily household share, and household income – at a faster rate than the city as a whole. On every measure except white share, the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced an increase that was not only greater than the citywide increase but also greater than the change experienced in the non-gentrifying type. Thus, in comparison to the city as a whole and, for the most part, to the non-gentrifying type, the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type *is* experiencing gentrification-associated demographic changes in addition to the higher than citywide rent increases described above.

In comparison to the New York City gentrifying neighborhood type, I find the following about gentrification-associated demographic change in Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhood type, as shown below in Table 7:

1. *Young Adult Share*: The increase in young adult share in Providence’s potentially gentrifying (PG) neighborhood type is comparable to the 3.5 percentage point increase sustained in New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type.
2. *Share of Adults with a College Degree*: The increase in the share of adults with a

¹⁴ The difference in the increase in share with a college degree in the higher income and potentially gentrifying neighborhood types is not statistically significant.

- college degree in Providence’s PG neighborhood type is significant but slightly less than the increase experienced in New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type.
3. *Nonfamily Household Share*: While the nonfamily household share in Providence’s PG neighborhood type increased slightly, the increase was not notable as that experienced in New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type.
 4. *White Share*: Unlike in New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type, the increase in the white share in Providence’s PG neighborhood type was not statistically significant.
 5. *Hispanic/Latino Share*: Whereas the Hispanic/Latino share decreased slightly in New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type, the share actually increased in Providence’s PG neighborhood type. Still this increase is significantly lower than the citywide increase in the Hispanic/Latino share of Providence’s population.
 6. *Average Household Income*: Average household income increased in both Providence’s PG neighborhood type and New York’s neighborhood type, although the large margin of error in the PG neighborhood type makes it hard to ascertain whether Providence’s increase was in fact smaller or larger than New York’s.

Table 6: Gentrification-Associated Demographic Change by Neighborhood Type in Providence

	Citywide	Potentially Gentrifying Neighborhood Type	Higher Income Neighborhood Type	Non-Gentrifying Neighborhood Type
1. Young adult share	1.6 +/- 0.8	6 +/- 2.6*/**/**	-0.3 +/- 3.1	0.6 +/- 1.7
2. Share of adults with college degree	5 +/- 1	8.0 +/- 1.8*/**/**	10.0 +/- 5*/**	2.8 +/- 1.5*
3. Nonfamily household share	0.2 +/- 1.6	3.7 +/- 2.8*	-3.9 +/- 3.4(*)	0.4 +/- 2.2
4. White share	-3.4 +/- 1.2	1.7 +/- 3.2 (*)/**/**	-1.6 +/- 4.3	-6.0 +/- 2.4(*)
5. Hispanic share	10.2 +/- 0.8	4 +/- 3.6(*)/**/**	3.3 +/- 2.0 (*)/**/**	15.3 +/- 2.8(*)/(**)/(***)
6. Average household income	1.9% +/- 3.3	8.3% +/- 7.0*/**	12.2% +/- 8.6*/**	-6.6% +/- 4.6(*)/(**)/(***)

- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- * Indicates a statistically significant change between 2000 and 2011-2015 that is associated with gentrification
- ** Indicates a change between 2000 and 2011-2015 that is statistically different from citywide change in the direction associated with gentrification
- *** Indicates a change between 2000 and 2011-2015 that is different than the low-income non-gentrifying type in the direction associated with gentrification
- (*)/(**)/(***) Mean the same as above but in the direction *not* associated with gentrification

Table 7: Comparing Gentrification-Associated Demographic Change in New York and Providence, by Neighborhood Type

	New York Gentrifying Type 2000 to (2010-2014)	Providence Potentially Gentrifying Type 2000 to 2011-2015
1. Young adult share	3.5	6.0 +/- 2.6
2. Share of adults with a college degree	12	8.0 +/- 1.8
3. Nonfamily household share	6	3.7 +/- 2.8
4. White share*	3.5	1.7 +/- 3.2
5. Hispanic/Latino share*	-1	4 +/- 3.6
6. Average household Income	6%	8.3% +/-7.0%

- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Furman Center (2015)
- *The change in these shares for New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type are measured between 2000 and 2010

In summary, Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced very substantial rent growth, greater even than that experienced in New York’s gentrifying neighborhood type, and also experienced many of the gentrification-associated demographic changes to a greater extent than citywide and than the non-gentrifying low-income neighborhood type. However, on all gentrification-associated demographic measures except the young adult share, demographic changes in Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhood type occurred to a lesser extent than in New York City’s gentrifying neighborhood type.

Below, I explore the demographic trends by neighborhood type in slightly more detail before exploring variation among neighborhoods within a type and concluding with a synthesis of my mixed methods findings.

Young Adult Share

Between 2000 and 2011-2015, the young adult share of the total population increased most significantly in the potentially gentrifying tract type, as shown in Figure 3. The potentially gentrifying neighborhood type was also the only neighborhood type to experience growth in the neighborhood type’s share of the city’s young adult population, as shown in Table 9. This means that the young adult population became slightly more concentrated in potentially gentrifying neighborhoods. The young adult share trends experienced in Providence’s potentially gentrifying tracts are comparable to New York

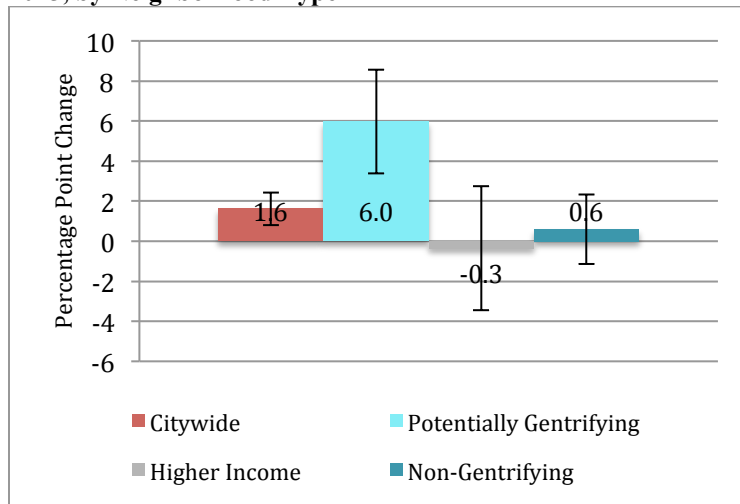
City’s gentrifying tracts (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 10). In both cities, the potentially gentrifying and gentrifying neighborhood type had the greatest percentage point increase in young adult share, relative to the other types. Thus, in regards to the young adult share of the total population, the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type experienced a change that is indicative of gentrification processes.

Table 8: Share of Total Population that is Aged 20-34 by Neighborhood Type

	2000	2011-2015	2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	28.2%	29.8%	+/- 0.8%
Potentially Gentrifying	25.9%	31.8%	+/- 2.6%
Higher Income	35.8%	35.4%	+/- 3.1%
Non-Gentrifying	26.2%	26.8%	+/- 1.7%

Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 3: Percentage Point Change in Share of Total Population that is Ages 20-34, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type



Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 9: Neighborhood Type Share of Young Adult Population (Aged 20-34)

	2000	2011-2015
Potentially Gentrifying	24.2%	28.4%
Higher-Income	27.6%	24.4%
Non-Gentrifying	48.2%	47.2%

Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Share of Adults with a College Degree

Between 2000 and 2011-2015, the share of adults ages 25+ with a college degree increased citywide and in each of the neighborhood types, as shown in Table 10. The share increased in both the potentially gentrifying and the higher income tract types more

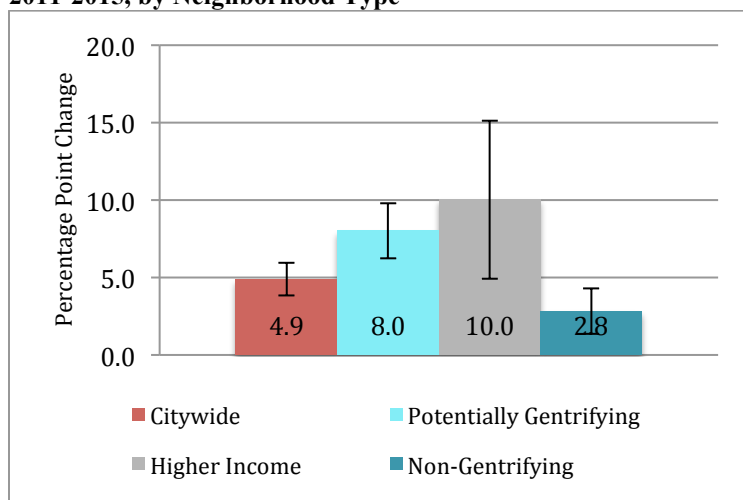
substantially than citywide, while the non-gentrifying tract type sustained the smallest increase. The share's increase in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type was, however, smaller than the increased experienced in New York's gentrifying neighborhood type. At the same time, Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type saw a 14.8 percentage point decrease in the share of the 25+ population with less than a high school diploma – a much greater decrease than the decrease sustained citywide. This can either be explained by education gains made among the population of these neighborhoods with low educational attainment, or by the displacement of these residents. Even with this decrease, the neighborhood type had a notable average 30% of adults with less than a high school diploma in 2011-2015. Taken together, the trends suggest that Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type did not experience as significant an influx of college-educated adults as is commonly associated with the process of gentrification.

Table 10: Share of Population Ages 25+ With a College Degree by Neighborhood Type

	2000	2011-2015	2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	24.4%	29.3%	+/- 1.0%
Potentially Gentrifying	12.8%	20.8%	+/- 1.8%
Higher Income	59.8%	69.9%	+/- 5.1%
Non-Gentrifying	15.5%	18.3%	+/- 1.5%

Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 4: Percentage Point Change in Share of Population Ages 25+ With a College Degree, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type



Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Nonfamily Household Share

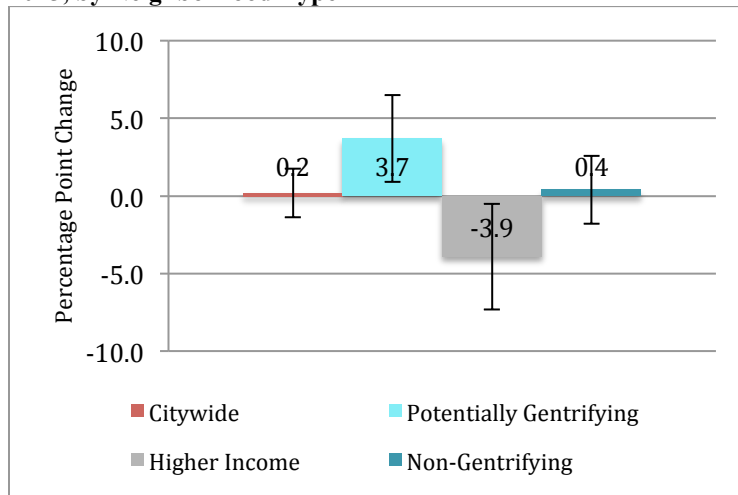
Just as in New York City’s gentrifying neighborhood type, the nonfamily share of households increased most in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type. However, due to the large margins of error, the increase is not statistically distinguishable from change citywide and in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type. Additionally, whereas New York’s higher income neighborhood type sustained a slight increase in the nonfamily household share (+0.3 percentage points), the share actually decreased in Providence’s higher income neighborhood type (-3.9 +/- 3.4 percentage points). Thus, while Providence’s nonfamily households trends do not mirror those of New York, generally, Providence did also experienced a concentration of nonfamily households in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type.

Table 11: Nonfamily Share of Households by Neighborhood Type

	2000	2011-2015	2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	42.5%	42.7%	+/- 1.6%
Potentially Gentrifying	42.1%	45.8%	+/- 2.8%
Higher Income	55.2%	51.3%	+/- 3.4%
Non-Gentrifying	37.3%	37.7%	+/- 2.2%

Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 5: Percentage Point Change in Nonfamily Households Share of Households, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type



Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Share of the Population Identifying as White

Between 2000 and 2011-2015, the share of Providence’s population identifying as white alone decreased from 55% to 51%, as shown in Table 12. The white share

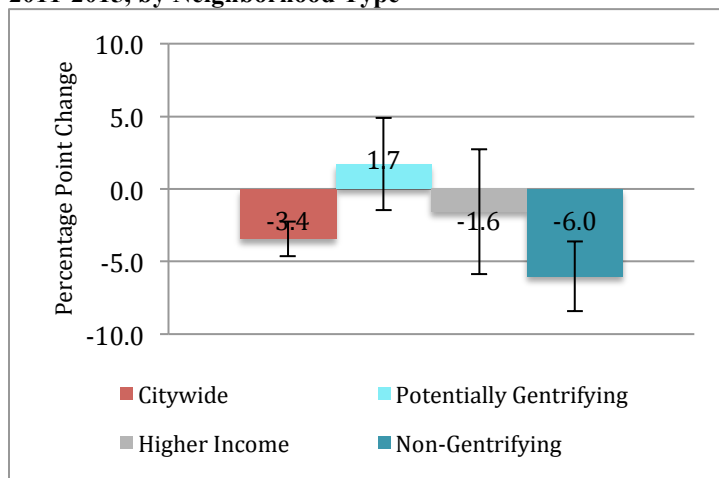
decreased most significantly in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type. Both Providence and New York experienced a citywide decrease in the white share (-3.4 compared to -2.4 percentage points) (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 12). However, while Providence’s citywide decrease in the white share was greater than New York’s, the share increase in the gentrifying neighborhood type was less extreme (+1.7 percentage points compared to +3.5 in New York), and the increase in Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhood type is not statistically significant, suggesting that the white share growth in Providence’s potentially gentrifying neighborhoods is not as extreme as in New York’s gentrifying neighborhoods.¹⁵

Table 12: Share of Population Identifying as White Alone by Neighborhood Type

	2000	2011-2015	2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	54.5%	51.1%	+/- 1.2%
Potentially Gentrifying	41.6%	43.3%	+/- 3.2%
Higher Income	82.1%	80.5%	+/- 4.3%
Non-Gentrifying	49.5%	43.5%	+/- 2.4%

Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 6: Percentage Point Change in Share of Total Population Identifying as White Alone, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type



Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Share of the Population Identifying as Hispanic or Latino

Citywide, the increase of the Hispanic/Latino population is one of the most significant demographic changes that occurred in Providence during the 2000 to 2011-

¹⁵ For white share, New York’s figures are for changes sustained during the 2000 to 2010 period, compared to 2000 to 2011-2015 for Providence.

2015 period. In 2000, the Hispanic/Latino population was not evenly distributed, and the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type had the greatest Hispanic/Latino share, as shown in Table 13. Citywide, both Providence and New York City experienced an increase in the Hispanic share¹⁶ but Providence’s increase was much more significant than New York’s (+10.2 and +1.6 percentage points, respectively) (NYU Furman Center, 2015, 12). However, the Hispanic/Latino share increased most significantly in the non-gentrifying neighborhood type between 2000 and 2011-2015. Whereas New York City’s gentrifying neighborhood type actually experienced a small decrease (-0.9 percentage points) in the Hispanic/Latino share, all the Providence neighborhood types including the potentially gentrifying type experienced an increase, as shown in Figure 7. Still, the increase in the Hispanic/Latino share in the potentially gentrifying and higher income types fell well below the citywide increase. When understood in the context of the significant citywide increase in the Hispanic/Latino share, the relatively smaller increase in the potentially gentrifying tract type may still be understood as evidence of gentrification.

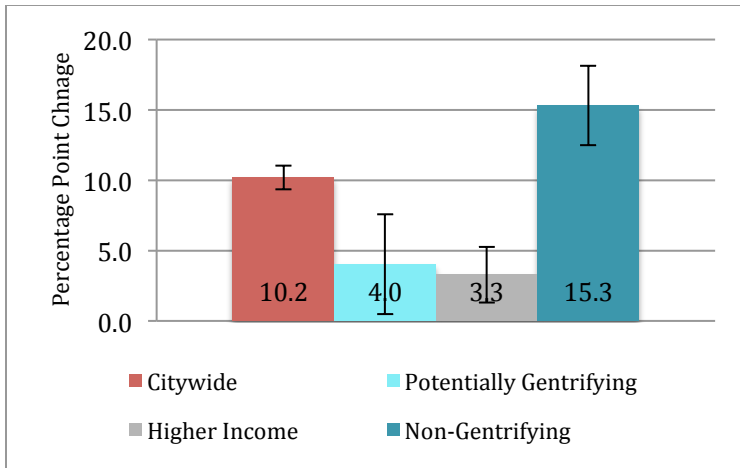
Table 13: Share of Population Identifying as Hispanic or Latino by Neighborhood Type

	2000	2011-2015	2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	30.0%	40.2%	+/- 0.8%
Potentially Gentrifying	42.0%	46.1%	+/- 3.6%
Higher Income	4.5%	7.8%	+/- 2.0%
Non-Gentrifying	34.7%	50.0%	+/- 2.8%

Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 7: Percentage Point Change in Share of Total Population Identifying Hispanic or Latino, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type

¹⁶ For Hispanic/Latino share, New York’s figures are for changes during the 2000 to 2010 period, compared to 2000 to 2011-2015 for Providence.



Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Average Household Income

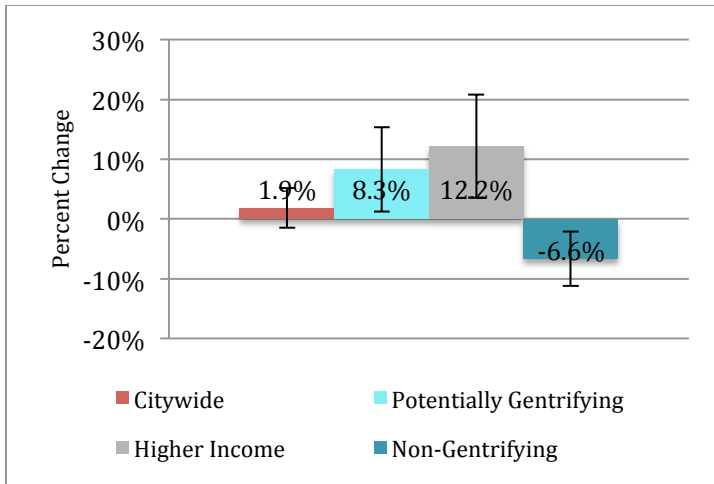
Between 2000 and 2011-2015, the mean household income increased in the potentially gentrifying and higher income neighborhood types, as shown in Figure 8. The average household income for the non-gentrifying type was slightly higher than in the gentrifying type in 2000, and slightly lower in 2011-2015. While the 2011-2015 difference between the two types is not statistically significant, this may indicate that the non-gentrifying tracts type started out better and fared worse than the potentially gentrifying type, with regards to average household income. While income growth in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type distinguishes it from the non-gentrifying neighborhood type, Providence income trends diverge from New York in that the higher income tract type leads the neighborhood types in terms of income growth in Providence. Thus, income trends in Providence's neighborhood types do not necessarily reflect a significant influx of higher socioeconomic households into the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type that is distinct from trends in other neighborhood types.

Table 14: Mean Household Income by Neighborhood Type

	2000	2011-2015	2011-2015 Margin of Error
Citywide	\$59,216	\$60,329	+/- \$1,979
Potentially Gentrifying	\$43,806	\$47,435	+/- \$3,080
Higher Income	\$101,143	\$113,476	+/- \$8,744
Non-Gentrifying	\$48,979	\$45,735	+/- \$2,230

- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Based on dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars

Figure 8: Percent Change in Average Household Income, 2000 to 2011-2015, by Neighborhood Type



- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Based on dollar values adjusted for inflation to match 2015 dollars

Gentrification at the Census Tract and Neighborhood Level

While I have shown that, as a type, the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type shows distinct evidence of a limited form of gentrification – including rent growth that far exceeds rent growth in the city as a whole and a suite of gentrification-associated demographic changes that are occurring more rapidly than in either the city as a whole or in the non-gentrifying tract type – there is much less certainty about gentrification at the individual tract or neighborhood level. At the granular level of individual census tracts, I find that there is a lot of variety among the potentially gentrifying tracts, few of those tracts show multiple demographic indicators of gentrification, and, finally, the census tracts that show the greatest evidence of gentrification do not fully align with the neighborhoods that practitioners perceive to be gentrifying.

I find firstly, that there is significant variation among the census tracts within the potentially gentrifying type. For example, the change in the young adult share in potentially gentrifying census tracts ranged from no change to an increase of 22.6 percentage points. The change in average household income ranged from decrease of -34% to an increase of 99%. Additionally, few individual census tracts experienced multiple statistically significant demographic changes commonly associated with gentrification. As shown in the map on the right side of Figure 9, below, only 9 of 39 census tracts experienced 2 or more of the 6 gentrification-associated demographic changes that I assessed in this research. Of these, 5 also fall within the potentially

gentrifying neighborhood type. This means, though, that just 5 of 12 (42%) potentially gentrifying census tracts – which, again, were low-income census tracts that experienced substantial rent increases – experienced multiple of the gentrification-associated demographic changes. These are Census Tracts 25, 9, 11, 7, and 14, which include portions of the Smith Hill, Valley, Federal Hill, West End, and Upper South Providence neighborhoods, and which are clustered distinctly and closely around Downtown and Federal Hill, as shown in Figure 9, below.

Even while, at the individual census tract level, few of the potentially gentrifying census tracts experienced more than 2 of 6 gentrification indicators, they did experience the gentrification indicators at a much higher rate than the low-income tracts that were classified as non-gentrifying. 17 of 19 non-gentrifying census tracts experienced 1 or fewer gentrification-associated demographic changes at a higher rate than citywide change.

This shows that at least some of the low-income tracts that experienced substantial rent increases, and were classified as potentially gentrifying, did in fact experience more gentrification-associated demographic change than the low-income tracts that experienced lesser rent increases and were classified as non-gentrifying. And, while not all potentially gentrifying census tracts show evidence of multiple gentrification indicators, this is likely due to both the limited nature of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods as well as to the limitations of small-scale geography that has large margins of error. If I ignore the margins of error, I find that 11 of 12 potentially gentrifying census tracts experienced at least 3 of the 6 gentrification-associated demographic changes at a higher rate than citywide changes and 5 of 12 experienced at least 5 indicators.

Finally, at the neighborhood level, my findings do not exactly mirror the perceptions of the practitioners I interviewed. Practitioners suggest that Fox Point already gentrified, that Elmwood and Olneyville are revitalizing and may be experiencing the early stages of gentrification, and that the West Broadway section of Federal Hill and the West End are the neighborhoods currently experiencing the most significant gentrification. In concurrence with the practitioners, I classify Fox Point as a higher income neighborhood, indicating that, as it was once a low-income Cape Verdean

neighborhood, it has already undergone gentrification. I also classify Olneyville (Tract 19) and the southern part of Elmwood (Tract 2) as potentially gentrifying and find that these neighborhoods show 1 gentrification indicator each. In regards to West Broadway (Tract 10), I classify it as potentially gentrifying along with the other two tracts that make up Federal Hill (Tracts 9 and 11). Interestingly, I find that West Broadway only experienced 1 of 6 gentrification indicators while the rest of Federal Hill, an area that did not come up during the interviews, experienced 3 of 6 indicators.

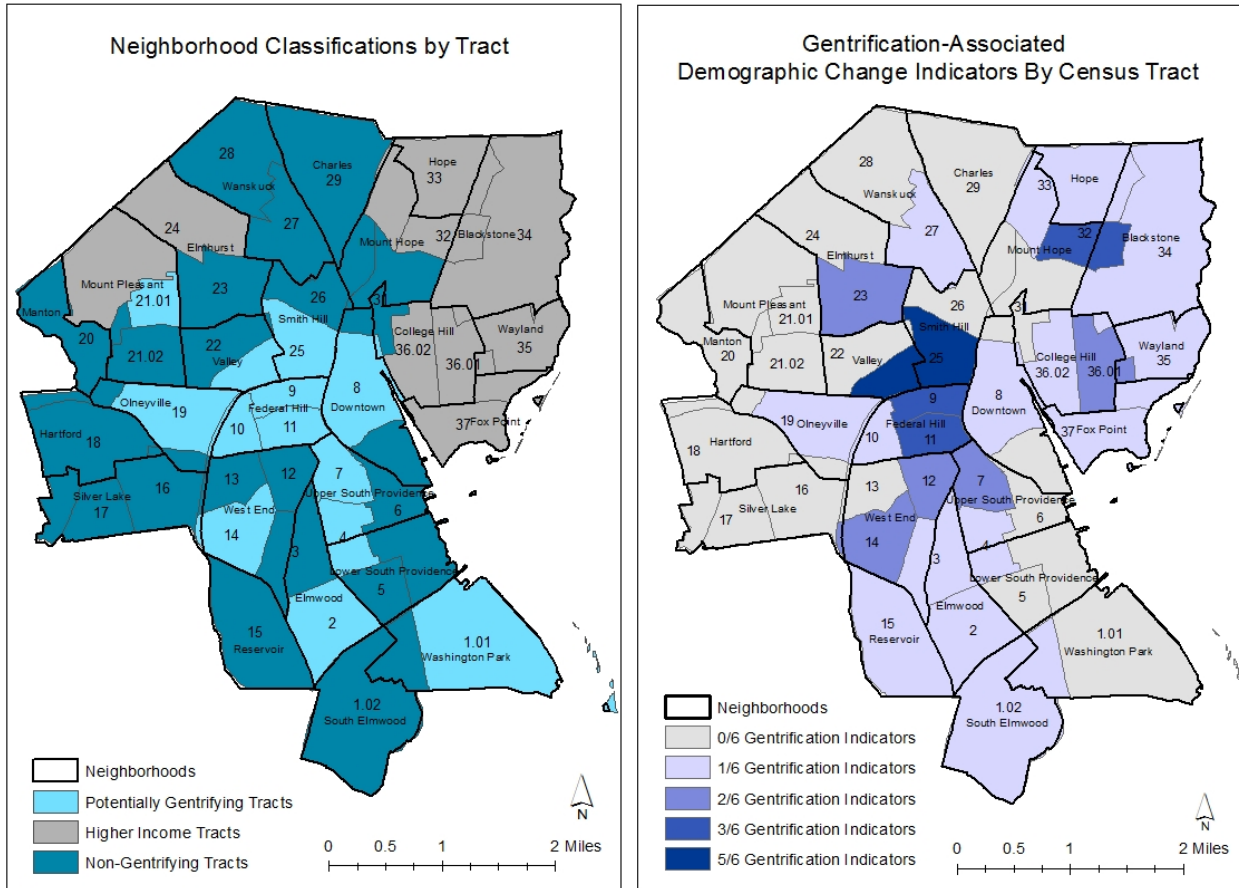
My assessment of gentrification in the West End differs from practitioner impressions to an even greater extent. Of the 4 census tracts that are part of the West End, I only classify Tract 14 as potentially gentrifying based on rent growth, and both Tracts 12 and 14 show 2/6 gentrification indicators. Most surprisingly, Tract 13, which includes the Armory Historic District and according to practitioners is the area that has seen definite gentrification and an unprecedented rise in property values, is classified as non-gentrifying, because gross rent growth in the tract (28.9%) falls below the 33% threshold. Even more notably, Tract 13 did not experience any statistically significant gentrification indicators.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a number of neighborhoods that contain pieces of census tracts classified as potentially gentrifying based on rent growth were not perceived by practitioners as gentrifying neighborhoods or at least were not mentioned. These include Smith Hill, Valley, Lower South Providence, and Washington Park, and the eastern part of Federal Hill. What's more, Census Tract 25, 9, and 11, located in Smith Hill, Valley, and the eastern part of Federal Hill – neighborhoods that were not mentioned by practitioners – show the greatest number of statistically significant gentrification indicators of all census tracts.

Thus, while I have shown that, as type, the census tracts included in the potentially gentrifying neighborhood type are on average experiencing substantially higher rent growth *and* more rapid gentrification-associated demographic change than the city as a whole and than the other types, the quantitative data does not show as certain a picture of gentrification at the level of the census tract. Additionally, the census tracts that experienced the greatest number of gentrification-associated demographic change

indicators did not align perfectly with those neighborhoods that are perceived to be gentrifying by practitioners.

Figure 9: Neighborhood Classifications Compared to Demographic Gentrification Indicators at the Census Tract Level



- Data sources: 2000 Census, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Shapefile sources: City of Providence Open Data; US Census Bureau; RIGIS Geospatial Data Catalogue
- In the map on the right, a census tract is considered to have experienced a gentrification-associated demographic change if it experienced this change to a greater extent than the city; significant at a 90% confidence level

Synthesis of Findings

Through an analysis of qualitative data gathered through interviews with community development, housing, and planning practitioners in Providence, I found that there is widespread agreement that neighborhood change processes in some Providence neighborhoods qualify as gentrification. However, practitioners also suggest that this gentrification has occurred relatively slowly and has been limited by the weak market and

by real estate boom and bust cycles. Comparisons made to other cities suggest that practitioners understand gentrification in Providence to be different from their perceptions of gentrification in hot market cities. They find gentrification in Providence to be slower, with less intense development pressure, and with real estate development that they perceive to be qualitatively different than in strong market cities. Some practitioners also suggested that, due to all of these factors, it has been comparatively easy to manage the negative impacts that are commonly associated with gentrification, namely displacement.

To complement these findings, I conducted an analysis of the demographic changes that have occurred in Providence neighborhood types between 2000 and 2011-2015, using Census and American Community Survey data, and compared these changes to those observed in New York City neighborhood types by the Furman Center. To reiterate, I find that Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type, which includes 12 of the city's 39 census tracts that are clustered around the city's Downtown and Federal Hill neighborhoods, sustained greater than citywide increases in young adult share, the share of adults with a college degree, the nonfamily household share, the white share, and in average household income, and below the citywide increase in the Hispanic/Latino share.¹⁷

When comparing demographic change in Providence to New York, Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type actually experienced greater percent and percentage point increases than New York's gentrifying neighborhood type on two measures: median gross rent and the young adult share. In other areas, gentrification-associated demographic changes occurred to a lesser extent in Providence's potentially gentrifying neighborhood type than they did in New York City's gentrifying neighborhood type. These include the share of adults with a college degree and average household income, which both increased most significantly in Providence's higher income neighborhood type.

Thus, my quantitative findings, affirm the overall finding from the qualitative analysis: that, as a type, the census tracts included in the potentially gentrifying

¹⁷ The increases in nonfamily household share and average household income are not statistically different than the citywide increases.

neighborhood type are experiencing gentrification but that the extent, here defined as the extent of demographic changes most commonly associated with gentrification, is more limited than in some other cities such as New York. Specifically, the comparison of my findings in Providence to the findings presented in *State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods in 2015*, suggest that the rent increases sustained in Providence, citywide and especially in the neighborhoods classified as potentially gentrifying, are substantial. However, the increases in share of adults with a college degree and the average household income, two variables that are strong indicators of socioeconomic status, fall short of New York City's gentrifying neighborhood type and of Providence's higher income neighborhood type, suggesting a more limited or incomplete form of gentrification.

At the geographic level of the individual census tract or neighborhood, my results are inconclusive but suggest that few census tracts or neighborhoods are experiencing full scale or late stage gentrification. As noted, there are significant limitations to my ability, with the methodology employed, to find conclusive evidence of gentrification at the individual census tract or neighborhood level. Thus, this brief analysis invites greater exploration of demographic indicators and gentrification at the individual neighborhood level in future research.

Next, in Chapter 4, I explore how the rationales that inform community development, housing, and planning work relate to concepts of revitalization, gentrification, and displacement.

Chapter 4: Revitalization Rationales, Gentrification, and Displacement

In Chapter 3, I used a mixed methods approach to assess the extent of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods and to compare what I observed to gentrification in strong market contexts, using an analysis of gentrification in New York City neighborhoods as a direct comparison. In this chapter, I use qualitative data gathered in interviews to explore how community development, housing, and planning practitioners in Providence relate their work to perceptions of revitalization, gentrification, and displacement in Providence neighborhoods. I refer to these as ‘revitalization rationales.’ The meaning of the word ‘rationale’ is the underlying reason or basis for a course of action or belief. By ‘revitalization rationale,’ I mean the underlying basis for a course of action taken by a community development practitioner or organization. I understand the revitalization rationale to be composed of two main elements:

1. An understanding of conditions impacting revitalization work, including:
 - a. Market conditions
 - b. System conditions such as the rationales and actions of other actors
2. Desired outcomes

A practitioner or actor’s perceptions of market and system conditions, combined with their desired revitalization outcomes, form the logical basis for choosing a particular course of action. Thus, in this chapter I address the following research questions:

1. According to practitioners, to what extent are revitalization rationales:
 - a. Defined in relation to gentrification and/or displacement?
 - b. Advancing gentrification?
 - c. Seeking to manage the consequences of revitalization/gentrification for low-income residents?
2. According to practitioners, to what extent *should* revitalization actors manage impacts of revitalization/gentrification on low-income residents?

I am pursuing this line of inquiry because, in addition to understanding the extent of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods, I want to understand the underlying rationales that influence efforts to encourage or manage gentrification. Additionally, while the literature suggests that displacement is hard to measure, practitioners’

perceptions of displacement inevitably influence the policy responses that are perceived as relevant, desirable, and feasible in Providence. Thus, the use of qualitative data also provides a unique advantage for assessing displacement risk and understanding potential policy levers. In this chapter, I first describe the methods used to analyze revitalization rationales. Next, I analyze revitalization rationales in four main areas of revitalization activity: blight reduction, historic preservation, housing production, and economic development.

Methods

To analyze the data gathered through semi-structured interviews, I sought to draw out qualitative data that speak to my research questions. Given the fact that the interviews were loosely structured and I formulated questions based on the evolution of the conversation, I did not code the interviews and I did not attempt undertake a quantitative analysis of the qualitative data (to enable me to say, for example, that 15 out of 17 participants responded ‘x’). Below, I define important terms, describe the types of qualitative data that I use to answer my research questions, and discuss the limitations of my methods.

Definitions

Revitalization practitioner, or practitioner, refers to any of the individual people I interviewed for this research.

Revitalization actor, or actor, refers to a community development, housing, or planning organization or agency whose work contributes to neighborhood revitalization efforts.

Revitalization rationale, or rationale, refers to the logical basis a practitioner or actor uses to decide on a particular course of action.

Analysis

To address Question 1, I explore revitalization rationales in the four main areas of revitalization work that surfaced during interviews: blight reduction, historic preservation, housing production, and economic development. For each topic area, I provide a brief introduction to the work occurring in Providence and then explore

interview participants’ discussion of their own and other actors’ rationales. Table 15, below describes the types of information that I use to answer each research question.

Table 15: Research Questions and Interview Data

Research question	Relevant interview data
1) According to practitioners, to what extent are revitalization rationales <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Defined in relation to gentrification or displacement? b. Advancing gentrification? c. Seeking to manage the consequences of gentrification for low-income residents? 	For each of the four topic areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptions of rationale components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Market and system conditions ○ Their own or other practitioners’ desired revitalization outcomes • Evaluations of if, and to what extent, revitalization work has contributed to gentrification • Evaluations of whether actors doing work in this area have sought to manage gentrification impacts
2) According to practitioners, to what extent <i>should</i> revitalization actors manage impacts of revitalization/ gentrification on low-income residents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluations of changing conditions • Evaluations of the desirability or feasibility of an anti-displacement agenda in Providence

Limitations

It is important to note that the analysis presented in this chapter is my interpretation of what the practitioners I interviewed said. The research questions that I seek to answer in this chapter are complicated and controversial, and I asked circuitous questions to arrive at these answers. Additionally, my concept of the revitalization rationale implies that community development and others actors according to a logic, wherein practitioners base a chosen course of revitalization action on their analysis of conditions and how those conditions relate to their desired outcomes. I recognize, however, that real-life community development work does not always follow this logic. For instance, actors are not always cognizant of all of the logic by which conditions and desired outcomes lead to a particular revitalization or community development program. Even more commonly, community development and revitalization activities may have their basis in other motivations, aside from this sort of logic, including political feasibility, funding, or, obligation to some other authority. In recognition of this limitation, I do my best to make my assumptions clear.

Analysis of Revitalization Rationales

I now turn to an analysis of revitalization rationales as described by community development, housing, and planning practitioners in Providence. I find the following:

1. Practitioners perceive that current weak market conditions have had a dampening effect on revitalization activities that could have otherwise catalyzed gentrification and displacement, and on revitalization, gentrification, and displacement, generally;
2. Many practitioners perceive the City of Providence's to be more concerned with generating tax revenue, through blight reduction and private development, than with the potential gentrification and displacement impacts of revitalization; and
3. Given current market conditions, even practitioners who are concerned about displacement have not had to do much to manage displacement impacts beyond building affordable housing into revitalization neighborhoods.

In what follows, I analyze revitalization rationales in the areas of blight reduction, historic preservation, housing production, and economic development before turning to the question of whether practitioners perceive a need for greater management of revitalization and gentrification impacts.

Blight Reduction

Blight is a general term, which includes vacant, abandoned, and nuisance properties. Like many post-industrial cities that have suffered from population decline, blight has been a defining issue in Providence's community development landscape. The city's population was over 250,000 people at its height in 1940 and declined by nearly 100,000 people between 1940 and 1980 (Nesi, 2011). While the population has since stabilized, deindustrialization and population decline both contributed to high rates of vacancy and blight in many of Providence's neighborhoods. More recently, blight has reemerged as a significant issue in Providence neighborhoods due to the severity of the foreclosure crisis. For fifteen consecutive quarters between 2007 and 2012, Rhode Island

ranked worst among New England states on both foreclosure initiations and seriously delinquent loans (HousingWorks RI, 2012). The foreclosure crisis was concentrated in Rhode Island's larger municipalities, including Providence, and the high rate of foreclosures contributed not only to blight but also to housing affordability issues, as both single-family homes and multi-family rental properties were taken out of the market (HousingWorks RI, 2012). In 2015, Mayor Jorge Elorza made blight remediation a cornerstone of his campaign platform. Elorza introduced the EveryHome program soon after he was elected, which aims to use a receivership program to rehabilitate 500+ vacant and abandoned homes (Elorza, 2015).

Blight and the EveryHome program, especially, are topics that were frequently raised by interview participants. Here, I discuss participants' take on the vulnerability of blighted neighborhoods, on blight reduction as a tool of gentrification, and on the EveryHome program. Many practitioners suggested that blighted neighborhoods are particularly vulnerable to gentrification. Fueled by periods of disinvestment, high concentration of blight and vacancy, such as exists in many of Providence's low-income neighborhoods, creates vulnerability to speculative reinvestment and, potentially, to gentrification and displacement (Rotondo, Marro, Shea). Xander Marro observes that, in these neighborhoods, disinvestment and gentrification are the flip sides of the same "neoliberal coin" in a unique boom and bust cycle where disinvestment fuels blight, creating vulnerability to investment (Marro). Christopher Rotondo articulated a similar point:

You know, capitalism works in these waves of 'how can we exploit people and make a bunch of money real quick?' Predatory loans were that way for the 4-5 years that they lasted, right? Collecting high interest rates, and then eventually disposing of them through foreclosure. And now there's a new wave of people saying, 'wow, look, foreclosure left this [vacant property] in its wake, now how can we exploit this situation?' Which is to buy up cheap property and land. (Rotondo)

Marro and Rotondo find that when, through disinvestment, foreclosure, or eviction, neighborhoods end up with a concentration of vacant property, they become susceptible to speculation and rapid reinvestment whenever the housing market makes a turn for the better. For example, between 2000 and 2008, a bulk of vacant and abandoned property in the Olneyville neighborhood was bought up rapidly and cheaply, only to become vacant again due to the prevalence of subprime lending (Shea). This, then, is the context

informing revitalization efforts in Providence neighborhoods with concentrations of nuisance and vacant properties.

In this context, participants suggest that revitalization work focused on blight reduction in Providence has historically contributed to gentrification or, at least, had the potential to do so. In addition to the impact of speculation on the part of small-scale investors, practitioners also perceive the City's actions to have contributed to fears about gentrification in Olneyville through an aggressive use of the state's historic tax credit program to restore historic mill buildings (Shea). Representative Anastasia Williams suggests that the City's approach to dealing with blight in the West End made gentrification, "almost inevitable, because of the fact that there's a lot of housing stock and buildings that have been made available" (Williams). Here, Williams recalls that the City gave away the Victorian homes around Armory Park for one dollar each in order to jumpstart revitalization and to regain property tax revenue: "You could get them for \$1, rehab them, and it was yours... They were given away, but you had to have a plan, and you had to have money to turn it over" (Williams). Those Victorian homes now form the heart of the gentrified Armory District.

Finally, practitioners spoke extensively about the EveryHome program, a current policy initiative of Mayor Jorge Elorza, which aims to revitalize 500+ abandoned and nuisance properties. Practitioners perceive the program to not be adequately concerned with the potential displacement impacts of revitalization and rising housing costs. For instance, practitioners believe that EveryHome's goal as to 'flip' abandoned homes to investors to put the properties back on the tax roll, which has been the city's historic prerogative in targeting blight (Palermo, Rotondo, Williams). Many practitioners criticized the program for not using the focused attention on abandoned property as an opportunity to address the needs low-income residents. For instance, some feel strongly that the program should be faulted for not including or prioritizing affordable housing production (Rotondo, Ordoñez, Palermo, Neirinckx). Finally, Fred Ordoñez criticized the program for failing to offer an opportunity to return to the neighborhood to the specific families that were displaced by foreclosure (Ordoñez).

Critics of EveryHome did not expressly indicate that EveryHome would, with certainty, contribute to gentrification. They do, however, perceive that EveryHome is not

making an effort to anticipate or manage the impacts the program could have on low-income residents if it were to catalyze revitalization/gentrification in the low-income neighborhoods in which most of the nuisance properties are located. According to Rotondo:

The city was legitimately like ‘well, this isn’t san Francisco, you know, there’s not going to be a bunch of white techy workers moving into these houses. It’s probably going to be, you know, up and coming Dominican families.’ And Elorza had a little group of Dominicans and some kids saying ‘we want these people to have housing,’ standing in front of a vacant building...it’s a great PR piece, but the will to create regulations that makes sure those things happen as opposed to just putting them in the press release doesn’t exist. (Rotondo)

The suggestion, here, is that while it is not certain that EveryHome will accelerate gentrification (by making the neighborhoods more attractive to higher income residents through blight reduction), it is trying to or at least not trying to manage the associated impacts for low-income people.

According to the City employees who I spoke to, although housing affordability is a general priority of the administration, the EveryHome program is more concerned with eliminating nuisance properties than with housing affordability. Speaking of the current administration’s approach to blight reduction, Asen says:

I think we’re at the point still, that in terms of the neighborhoods where there are a lot of blighted and vacant properties, that we just feel that improving those is not going to immediately lead to things getting so priced out that any negative impact would outweigh the benefit of improving them, you know? And [we feel] that you may not be able to, necessarily, address both problems – blight and affordability – simultaneously in the same program. (Asen)

I interpret this statement to mean that the rationale underlying EveryHome is based on one or both of the following assumptions: 1) given current housing market conditions, redeveloping abandoned properties as market rate housing units is not likely to jumpstart gentrification and displacement, and/or 2) based on the administration’s desired outcomes, blight reduction is a higher priority than preserving or creating housing affordability, regardless of the impact of blight reduction on a neighborhood’s property values and housing costs.

Taken in sum, practitioner commentary on blight reduction efforts suggests that neighborhoods with concentrations of blight are particularly vulnerable to gentrification and gentrification-related displacement; that, historically, the City’s blight reduction efforts have contributed to gentrification; that the revitalization rationale upon which

EveryHome is based is not concerned with gentrification or displacement impacts; and that some practitioners perceive EveryHome as providing inadequate benefit to or protections for low-income residents.

Historic Preservation

Providence is well known for its historic housing stock. According to the 2014 Providence Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan, the architectural character of Providence's neighborhoods is one of the city's "most prized assets" (Taveras & Department of Planning and Development, 2014). There are thirty-five national historic districts within the city, as well as eight local historic districts which provide protection to historic properties through overlay zoning (Providence Preservation Society, 2017). There are numerous organizations that seek to preserve and enhance Providence's historic assets, including the Providence Historic District Commission, the Providence Preservation Society, the Providence Revolving Fund, and the for-profit Armory Revival Company. The Rhode Island Historic Tax Credit Program has been a significant source of development capital in Providence.

Practitioners suggested that historic preservation has been an influential piece of Providence's community development system. Among the practitioners who mentioned historic preservation, there is general agreement that historic preservation activity has contributed significantly to neighborhood revitalization and stability (Neirinckx, Schoettle, Wolf, Driver). For example, Clark Schoettle, Executive Director of the Providence Revolving Fund (PRF) since 1983, suggests that PRF's lending practices in conjunction with local historic district designations were a major force in the notable physical upgrading and revitalization of the historic district and asserts that the PRF has "been a stabilizing force as much as anything" in the Armory and Elmwood historic districts (Schoettle). Opinions diverge, however, as to whether historic preservation has contributed to gentrification or displacement.

According to Ray Neirinckx, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, historic preservation work served to advance gentrification. At the time, he says that historic preservation organizations seemed to be more concerned with physical housing stock than with quality of life and affordability for existing residents (Neirinckx). While he

believes that these organizations have become more conscientious of people, past housing preservation efforts, he says, have not only contributed to revitalization but also to displacement. In his words:

I used to call it ‘historic reservation work,’ because the feeling was that they wanted to put poor people, you know, or low-income people, into reservations of non-historic houses and neighborhoods. So that they [historic houses] could be preserved by, quote, ‘the right people’. (Neirinckx).

As an example, Neirinckx says that the creation of the West Broadway local historic district in the early 1990s spawned public debates about whether historic preservation was a revitalization tool that served existing residents or a tool of gentrification.

Some practitioners expressed more uncertainty about the orientation of historic preservation rationales, as well as the actual outcomes, in they relate to gentrification. For instance, Taino Palermo recognizes that the City has put a lot of resources into revitalizing historic properties, and questions the underlying intention: “Now I can’t speak to the intentionality behind that; is that in the hopes that you are going to revitalize, or start a domino effect of interest in the neighborhood?”

Scott Wolf, too, debates both the intention and impact of the Providence’s high profile historic mill redevelopments, which have been executed using the state’s lauded historic tax credit program. Although the tool has been criticized for catalyzing gentrification, Wolf suggests that these fears are not necessarily substantiated:

Whether they’ve caused displacement or not, I don’t know. Now you take Rising Sun Mill in Olneyville – I don’t think that’s displaced people. I think that’s brought some new people into the neighborhood but I don’t think it’s raised the rents dramatically around the area. So, I think that’s an example where new positive development in a neighborhood hasn’t necessarily led to displacement. Now, maybe its because it hasn’t lived up to it’s potential. Maybe the people behind it were hoping it would have a huge ripple effect in all of the adjacent buildings and neighborhoods. (Wolf)

Wolf’s analysis is nuanced: while historic preservation may be *intended* to spur gentrification, and might even have the potential to do so, displacement impacts have not played out because of the dampening effects of the market. Wolf also asserts that historic preservation resources can also contribute to the needs of low-income populations, because the historic tax credit program has been used to fund a significant amount of subsidized housing development.

In synthesis, the work of historic preservation organizations has been especially influential in the revitalization and increased stability of some of Providence’s most

historic neighborhoods. Multiple practitioners suggest that historic preservation has the potential to be used as a tool of gentrification, and to engender displacement, with some suggesting that this has happened in actuality and others suggesting that weak market conditions have limited the catalytic impact.

Housing Market and Housing Production

Providence, and Rhode Island generally, face significant housing challenges including low levels of housing production, affordability, and quality and safety issues due to the age of the housing stock (HousingWorks RI, 2016a). Providence has low levels of housing production, which, combined with housing units that were taken out of the market by foreclosure, contributes to a more constrained housing supply than moderate vacancy rates would suggest. Providence's housing stock is very old, with 56% of all housing units having been built before 1940 (City of Providence, 2015). The Department of Planning and Development characterizes Providence's housing market as "a fairly weak real estate market since the foreclosure crisis of 2007 with limited redevelopment or new construction," (City of Providence, 2015). At the state level, Rhode Island has the lowest per capita annual state spending on subsidized housing (Rhode Island Housing, 2016). Despite a weak housing market and low housing costs, relative to other cities in the Northeast region, Providence households suffer from housing affordability challenges due to notably low-incomes.

Practitioners perceive that the lackluster economy, in both Providence and Rhode Island, has constrained housing production. This is because building new construction market-rate housing is not profitable: while construction costs are the same as the Boston area, home values and rents are much lower (Penniman, Bennett, Schoettle, Driver). Developers also complain of costly permitting disincentives to housing development (Bennett, Schoettle). Unlike in a context with growing housing demand and competition, Schoettle pointed out that the lack of new housing does not necessarily contribute to gentrification and displacement as long as the resident population does not grow out of pace with housing production.

However, other practitioners suggest that such a low housing production level makes Providence's housing market vulnerable to gentrification and displacement

pressure through an onset of demand. Recently, the severity of the foreclosure crisis in Providence did introduce increased competition over affordable market rate units as foreclosed multifamily rental properties taken out of the market and foreclosed low-income homeowners entered the rental market (Wolf, Rotondo). Additionally, practitioners suggested that if housing supply does not increase in anticipation of economic improvement, Providence could quickly see a surge in rents, gentrification, and displacement (Wolf, Rotondo, Bennett, Penniman).

In this context, in which there is not much incentive for the production of market rate housing, the bulk of housing production activity has been the production of units by community development corporations. Practitioners expressed a range of opinions about the relationship between CDC housing and gentrification. While some expressed skepticism about CDC intentions in working on behalf of low-income communities, most suggested that affordable housing is an important intervention that can help manage neighborhood change. According to Frank Shea, the affordable housing activities central to CDC missions fundamentally serve to mitigate gentrification in low-income neighborhoods:

In terms of how we would view fighting gentrification, I grew up here [Boston] and I joke that we live in providence because we can't afford to live in the neighborhoods that we grew up in...So I'm personally very sensitive to how do you build a neighborhood, build in amenities, take advantage of the assets, but do it in a way that its accessible for the folks that have been there for generations...And so in Olneyville it was trying to build as much deed-restricted affordable rental housing as possible. (Shea)

Later in the interview, Shea reflected on his rationale as the executive director of a CDC, saying, "It was easy from a CDC point of view," to feel like they were doing what they could to mitigate displacement risks, "because if were doing as much as we could, all of that would be mitigating gentrification." Shea suggests that the ability of community development practitioners to intervene and control neighborhood change is limited by broader market force and that building deed-restricted housing is an intervention that is both feasible and that mitigates gentrification-related displacement risks for low-income residents of revitalizing neighborhoods.

Clark Schoettle expressed a similar view of the importance of affordable housing construction as, potentially, one of the only feasibly anti-displacement interventions in revitalizing neighborhoods, saying:

Nothing is perpetual in real estate. Everything goes through cycles. And a poor neighborhood might take – maybe it's a 70-year cycle to have it be gentrified, but eventually it's going to come back up again just by supply and demand. Eventually people will see opportunity in the poorer neighborhoods because of the lower prices and they will be attracted to that. ...There's an ebb and flow, and sometimes it's pretty hard to try to engineer how to prevent that from happening, or thinking you can make a real difference...I don't know how, other than providing publicly subsidized affordable housing as a component of this, but that requires a pro active public sector. (Schoettle)

I read this statement as expressing resignation about that fact displacement is an inevitable consequence of gentrification, which is an inevitable consequence of the “ebb and flow” of disinvestment and reinvestment in a neighborhood's real estate. But, Schoettle says, rent-restricted affordable housing can be a protection against displacement.

In sum, practitioner commentary suggests that the constraints of low housing production may allow increased displacement pressure if economic growth accelerates. In the current weak market conditions, CDC income-restricted housing serves as an intervention into the potential displacement risks of revitalization.

Economic Development

According to the grey literature, Providence suffers from high poverty rates and poor performance on economic indicators including employment, income, and output, and an inadequately competitive business climate (City of Providence Task Force on Economic Development, 2014; City of Providence & Taveras, 2013; The Providence Poverty Work and Opportunity Task Force, 2010). Economic development task forces recommend a strategy that creates opportunities for low-wage workers and builds skills among the city's youth, in addition to cultivating a more attractive business climate, and using tax stabilization agreements to incentive economic development. Recently, Providence has focused on high profile development opportunities such as the redevelopment of the downtown Superman Building and the Providence Innovation and Design District on land that became available for redevelopment after the rerouting of Route 195.

In the realm of revitalization and economic development, I find the following about practitioner perceptions: macro economic conditions are hindering revitalization/gentrification; the city's is acting in an unnecessarily subordinate position

in relation to private developers; and, finally, the city's approach to economic development is contributing to gentrification-related displacement by trying to attract higher earners rather than raising the incomes of existing residents.

According to practitioners, weak economic conditions have a dampening effect on the current extent of revitalization and gentrification in Providence neighborhoods. The relatively stagnant economy in Providence, and Rhode Island, both limits revitalization and enabling a certain amount of revitalization without displacement. This position is well articulated by Clark Schoettle of the Providence Revolving Fund:

We don't have the population growth, that's really what's missing. If we had population growth in the state, I'd be really much more worried. But if you're just kind of reshuffling the same population around, without a huge growth in our job industry with really high paying jobs – that's what's kept it the same, basically...And that's the only reason we haven't gentrified them, I think, is that everything's been a little bit stagnant in terms of the economy. (Schoettle)

According to Schoettle, the lackluster job market limits population growth, which, in turn, keeps housing competition and gentrification pressure low. Wolf, too, suggests that the economy has kept development low and enabled revitalization without too much displacement: "I think we've been able to kind of, in Rhode Island or in Providence, manage this issue [gentrification] in part because our development scene has not been that robust" and raises the southern part of Elmwood as an example of revitalization without displacement.

In this economic context, practitioners are ambivalent about the City's relation to and leverage with private developers and employers. Practitioners understand the City's economic development strategies as driven by a need to expand both the residential and commercial property tax base (Kolawole, Marro, Ordoñez, Rotondo, Williams, Deller, Driver, Lang). Many perceive the City of Providence to be acting from a subordinate position in which it doesn't have the leverage to make demands. Former Planning and Development Director, Thomas Deller, says that this attitude is not new: "I think that the tradition in Providence was, and maybe we've gotten back there, that we don't have leverage." Acknowledging the challenging development climate, however, some expressed ongoing uncertainty about whether the city's position is a realistic response to market conditions, a holdover from the past, or unnecessarily beholden to private interests (Wolf, Shea, Penniman). Some practitioners suggested that the city could have a

clearer vision and take more of an authoritative stance in setting parameters for private development (Deller, Bennett, Crenca). Finally, others believe that the city ought to give fewer subsidies to private developers and employers, to exact more community benefits from those receiving subsidies, and enforce these agreements (Rotondo, Ordoñez, Shea).

Practitioners expressed a variety of opinions regarding the impact of current economic development efforts on low-income residents and communities. Allen Penniman, Principle Planner, mentioned that the City is formulating an economic development strategy focused on design manufacturing which can provide well-paying jobs to Providence residents with low educational attainment. Other practitioners perceive that the city and state primarily engage in “trickle down” economic development focused on attracting employment opportunities through tax breaks and other concessions that will, in turn, attract higher-income individuals (Rotondo, Ordoñez, Marro, Kolawole). Rotondo, for example, observes that the city and state only engage in this form of economic development and with poor results for low-income communities:

They are totally beholden to this as the only economic development tool – despite the statistics, despite the numbers, despite no evidence of actual growth or progress for people in terms of jobs...They’re still totally sold on, you know, let’s get the 195 land to build another hotel, let’s get a corporation to move here, without any analysis of who GE is going to hire, and where they’re from, and definitely no political or regulatory force for making them do that. (Rotondo)

Practitioners have noticed that in cases where the city has demanded hiring, community benefits, or other exactions from developers or employers, they remain largely unenforced (Rotondo, Shea, Kolawole). Palermo suggests that economic development is not adequately being addressed as an essential part of revitalization without displacement:

There’s a disconnect between the need for economic development and community revitalization as it pertains to blighted properties and abandoned homes...Industry is just the beast that nobody wants to touch. And you just can’t do one without another. Even if you got all the HUD money in the world to revitalize every blighted property, or you sold off every blighted property to some body who could afford it and revitalize it and fix it up, you are doing one of two things: you’re either gentrifying and intentionally displacing people because they’re just going to be priced out or moved out of neighborhoods, and you’re not considering the fact that if you wanted to support them in an authentic way while revitalizing, you need to give them a source of income. (Palermo)

According to Palermo, displacement is inevitable when revitalization efforts focus on blight reduction and other physical upgrading without providing a means for low-income residents to afford to live in a revitalized neighborhood. Other practitioners voiced

similar convictions that efforts to continue revitalizing Providence neighborhoods without causing displacement of low-income residents must include economic development to raise the incomes and improve the livelihoods of low-income residents (Bennett, Lang, Rotondo, Ordoñez, Kolawole).

Taken together, practitioners' comments about revitalization and economic development suggest that the weak economic conditions are currently impeding revitalization/gentrification as well as the associated consequences for low-income people. Practitioners perceive that the city's economic development rationale is heavily influenced by a need to expand the tax base and by a perception that the city does not have enough leverage to make demands without deterring developers. Finally, practitioners suggest that the pursuit of revitalization/gentrification without displacement will require more in-depth economic development for Providence's low-income populations than is currently taking place.

Managing the Impacts of Revitalization and Gentrification

Thus far, I have used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the extent of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods (Chapter 3) and, in this chapter, to understand the extent to which revitalization rationales are defined in relation to gentrification and displacement; contributing to gentrification; and/or seeking to manage the impacts of revitalization/gentrification for low-income residents. I find, according to both quantitative and qualitative data, that gentrification processes have occurred in a limited way in some Providence neighborhoods. In my analysis of revitalization rationales, I find that practitioners perceive that current weak market conditions have had a dampening effect on revitalization activities; that many practitioners perceive the City of Providence's to be more concerned with encouraging revitalization to generate tax revenue than with the potential displacement impacts; and, that given current market conditions, efforts to consider or manage displacement impacts have been limited.

This brings me to the final piece of the research questions pursued in this chapter: According to practitioners, to what extent *should* revitalization actors manage impacts of revitalization/gentrification on low-income residents? The goal of this line of inquiry is to

analyze whether, according to practitioners, the extent of gentrification in Providence merits more explicit anti-displacement work.

Many practitioners offered predictions of how anticipated change in conditions could alter the answer to this question, and I assess practitioner commentary in the context of both current conditions and projected conditions. I find, firstly, that given the extent of gentrification in current conditions, additional measures to prevent displacement are not considered to be especially urgent, by some, or politically feasible, by others. Second, however, practitioners anticipate impending economic growth, which will catalyze gentrification and lead to an acceleration of the displacement pressures faced by low-income residents of gentrifying neighborhoods.

Displacement Risks in Current Conditions

As I have already described, practitioners generally perceive current weak economic and real estate market conditions to be limiting both the extent of revitalization or gentrification and the potential for displacement. These conditions inform revitalization rationales in a variety of ways. As discussed, practitioners find that a number of the City's revitalization programs have suggested that its rationales are not especially concerned with gentrification or displacement risks to low-income populations, including: a history of blight reduction efforts without the inclusion of affordable units as with the EveryHome program, a history of historic tax credits given without demanding the inclusion of affordable units or local hiring, and unenforced community benefits and hiring agreements. The lack of regard for gentrification and displacement risks could be based in one or both of the following logics as related to current conditions: 1) Providence needs to increase its residential and commercial property tax base and, given current conditions, does not have the leverage to make demands that might scare away developers, 2) addressing blight is essential and, in current conditions, not likely to result in displacement. The latter is the position suggested by Peter Asen's account of the rationale behind EveryHome: "we just feel that improving those is not going to immediately lead to things getting so priced out that any negative impact would outweigh the benefit of improving them, you know?"

As discussed, within the four topic areas explored in this chapter, efforts to mitigate revitalization/gentrification-associated displacement risks have been largely limited to the creation of affordable housing. Practitioners perceive that sometimes revitalization efforts such as historic mill redevelopment, which may have been intended to have a revitalization/gentrification domino effect, did not result in displacement because of the dulling effects of the market. Thus, practitioners suggested that for much of Providence's recent history, these limited displacement management efforts have been adequate due to the dampening effects of market conditions.

Others suggested that revitalization efforts do not currently require additional management to avoid displacement but would merit more consideration if conditions were to change. According to Frank Shea, for example:

So I think it's [gentrification-associated displacement] probably always a risk, but maybe not the prime risk in Providence now. But if it is [a greater risk] in five years, you're going to wish that you had as much affordable housing with restrictions, and that you had legislative and policy remedies that could mitigate. So that's a problem – when it's a problem that you're in the middle of, there's very little you can do. (Shea)

Here, Shea intimates that, while gentrification-related displacement is not currently a “prime risk” that requires management, Providence also does not have adequate legislative and policy measures in place to manage impacts if conditions were to change. Allen Penniman echoed this sentiment, saying that Providence is succeeding in managing neighborhood revitalization without too many negative impacts on low-income populations, but that additional housing pressure would require judicial and legislative policy infrastructure which he perceives to be politically infeasible in this moment (Penniman). Finally, Christopher Rotondo, an anti-capitalist community organizer, suggests that gentrification in Providence is not so blatant as to enable a full-scale campaign:

Gentrification here is more – very piecemeal. I mean you don't have a Google that's trying to say ‘the whole Mission should be for our workers and they should have all the soccer fields and all the apartments and all the swanky parks for themselves’...You know, we don't have Google bros going around stealing the soccer fields. If we [community organizers in Providence] did, we could call it that and then probably get some traction, but we can't. (Rotondo)

Projecting Future Conditions

Many of the practitioners I interviewed suggested that they see signs that economic and real estate market conditions are beginning to shift. Here, I present the evidence of changing market conditions that they presented to me, and explore their varied assessments of the feasibility and urgency of implementing anti-displacement measures.

First, Clark Schoettle and Kari Lang both suggest that the Armory District within the West End has reached a new level of gentrification for Providence. Both practitioners commented that prices in the Armory are at an all-time high:

I mean right now, the Armory District seems like it's overpriced. Some houses are listed at \$420,000, – we're in new record territory in the Armory District...So that means it's getting a little super-heated over here and it's because there's a demand...if it's the same cycle that we've been having, there's still another 5 or 6 years left in this cycle, so you kind of go 'where's the Armory District headed?'...At the end of the cycle, are houses going to be \$550,000? And they could easily be. And that'll be different. (Schoettle)

While real estate in the Armory District, like other neighborhoods in Providence, has undergone boom and bust cycles, Schoettle's seems to suggest that what he is observing in the Armory District is new. Not only are the prices in "new record territory," but also, during the last recession, property values in the Armory District dropped less and recovered more quickly than in past cycles and than other neighborhoods, which he says, "probably means that there are fewer and fewer lower income homeowners that are on the margin" (Schoettle).

Both Schoettle and Lang seem to be incorporating these observations into revitalization rationales, acknowledging that the degree of revitalization/gentrification in the Armory District indicates that there may, now, be a greater risk of displacement associated with revitalization than there has been in the past in Providence. According to Schoettle:

I think the Armory District is going to spread down the hill. It's going to go down into Olneyville, and it's going to help Olneyville, I think ultimately it will probably be good for Olneyville because Olneyville has a lot of problems. And Manton. I think for all of those areas, it's going to be good to see reinvestment. But it will come at a price – lower income families will find it harder and harder to find places to live unless the public sector safeguards their welfare, but I guess that's been true in Brooklyn, Harlem, everywhere that has experienced revitalization. (Schoettle)

Schoettle anticipates that the stable and relatively advanced level of gentrification of the Armory District is likely to have a radiating effect into nearby neighborhoods. He foresees that it will become increasingly difficult for lower-income families to afford housing in these neighborhoods. Lang, too, has noticed that although revitalization efforts in the Armory District have been slow and have suffered setbacks in the boom and bust cycle, revitalization has now succeeded to the extent that housing costs are higher than ever in the past:

There is concern about prices going up and rents going up, even though when you look at the cyclical nature of those crashes, you wonder how much of those increases are permanent. But, it is expensive...and booms and busts are not an excuse to not be aware of the overall impact of these changes. At this point these issues are becoming more and more on the minds of the WBNA. Almost 35 years ago when this neighborhood association was established, I don't think most people imagined that this would be a problem we would be having. Is that not something that should have been thought of long ago, who knows? (Lang)

According to Lang, the WBNA is starting to question whether they should incorporate affordability into their revitalization rationale. This suggests a change in the conditions they are responding to.

In addition to the super-heated prices of the West End's Armory District, practitioners spoke about anticipated market changes that could enable greater development, gentrification and displacement pressures. Of all of those I interviewed, Scott Wolf of Grow Smart Rhode Island was most convinced that Providence is poised for economic growth. For evidence, Wolf cited the following: five national companies have recently announcement that they are moving to Providence or expanding; universities located are becoming more entrepreneurial in real estate development; an improving city and state reputation due to a decrease in corruption; fresh leadership in politics, government and the civic sector; and a state unemployment rate that is lower than the national rate for the first time in over a decade. Beyond these changes, Wolf says that Providence and Rhode Island have been underperforming given their assets – including talent, high quality of life, strategic location and proximity to Boston – and that, given the other signs of economic growth, Providence is poised to take advantage of these strategic assets and become a much more attractive location. Other practitioners also referenced Providence's proximity to Boston as a factor that has increased housing competition and displacement pressure during economic booms and that could, therefore,

contribute significantly to accelerating gentrification in Providence neighborhoods if there were more job opportunities available (Marro, Shea, Deller, Wolf).

Thus, while Providence has been able to manage gentrification and displacement due to the stagnant economy, Wolf sees this changing:

Our development scene has not been that robust, but I think that's about to change, and so we could be in for a shock... We've been under-achieving for decades, big time, when it comes to economics. Now, if we become higher achievers that means that there's more potential for displacement...so we're going to have a lot to manage. And, as you pointed out before, because we haven't had big growth spurts for decades, people may not have that potential high enough on their radar screen. But it should be, I'm really convinced it should be. (Wolf)

Providence and Rhode Island are poised for economic growth and this means an acceleration of gentrification and a call to action to practitioners to prepare to manage displacement. Thus, Wolf says, “this is the time to be thinking seriously about this and trying to preempt some of the negative consequences of gentrification.” Rotondo also suggested that he sees economic growth and increased displacement pressures on the horizon due to the recent announcement that General Electric (GE) is opening a new facility in Providence. Although Providence has never had an employer like Google, which engenders a “very villainous form of gentrification,” he predicts that this could be the impact of GE:

Although, when Gina Raimondo pays GE I don't know how much state money to come here, that will happen. I mean, when GE has 100 workers who for some reason want to live in Providence...they're going to try to absorb resources just like Google employees do. And we'll have the same fights, and you can easily see that coming. (Rotondo)

Returning, then, to Shea's warning that if gentrification-related displacement becomes a greater risk “you're going to wish that you had as much affordable housing with restrictions, and that you had legislative and policy remedies that could mitigate,” the predictions of economic growth described, here, suggest that it may be time to pursue those restrictions and remedies.

A Shifting Landscape

In conclusion, practitioners suggest that in current market conditions, the impact of revitalization activities intended to catalyze revitalization and gentrification has been limited by weak market conditions that limit population growth and housing competition.

While not all practitioners are concerned about displacement risks, and some believe that there is a limit to the extent that gentrification and displacement can be managed, even practitioners who are concerned about displacement have not had to do much to manage impacts. Critically, practitioners suggest that impending economic growth could rapidly increase gentrification and gentrification-related displacement pressures.

Exactly how much population growth can Providence's neighborhoods take? Given the weak housing market and relatively high vacant rate, but also given the constrained housing supply due to low levels of housing production and the very low-incomes of a large share of the city's households, is the anticipated economic growth enough to send Providence's revitalizing/gentrifying neighborhoods over the edge toward a more complete form of gentrification in which low-income residents are inevitably displaced? While opinions vary on the urgency and feasibility of anti-displacement measures, but there is broad agreement among the practitioners I interviewed that now is an appropriate moment to initiate more explicit anti-displacement, if not a critical moment.

I believe that it is a necessary moment to plan to manage gentrification and displacement risks. Population projections for Providence, conducted by HousingWorks Rhode Island (2016), with technical assistance from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), find that Providence will see a 29-32% population increase by 2025 (HousingWorks RI, 2016b). The population increase is projected to come from a small (4% increase) increase of the school age population and a large increase in the population ages 20-44 (35-39% increase), who will be retained and attracted due to economic growth. The projected population growth will result in a 43-46% increase in households by 2025. New heads of households will largely be seniors, younger professionals ages 25-44, and people of color, thus growing the lower-income population and greatly increasing the demand for housing, with particular pressure on the supply of affordable and multifamily units (HousingWorks RI, 2016b). These projections suggest that population trends and projected economic growth are certainly enough to create new housing demand and competition in Providence's revitalizing and gentrifying neighborhoods. Thus, I argue that we are about to cross the line suggested by the title of this paper, the line between when "you don't have a problem" with displacement

pressures and when “you do.” In the next chapter, I recommend a path forward for responding to this reality.

Chapter 5: Recommendation: A Development Without Displacement Strategy for Providence

In this chapter, I use my findings from the previous two chapters – which are, most simply, that some Providence neighborhoods are undergoing a slow and comparatively limited form of gentrification and that, while weak market conditions have made gentrification impacts relatively easy to manage, anticipated economic growth may require more active effort to manage these risks – to recommend that Providence’s community development system pursue a pro-active, comprehensive, context-specific “development without displacement” strategy. First, I review the findings from the previous two chapters and make a case for this recommendation.

Making the Case for a Development without Displacement Strategy

In Chapter 3, I found, both from interviews with community development practitioners and from a quantitative analysis of rent increases and demographic change, that some gentrification has taken place in select Providence neighborhoods, though it is of a more limited form than has taken place in strong market cities. I conclude that some of Providence’s neighborhoods are gentrifying but did not fully gentrify during the 2000 to 2011-2015 period. In Chapter 4, through an analysis of revitalization rationales, I find the following: 1) that practitioners perceive that current weak market conditions have had a dampening effect on revitalization, gentrification, and displacement; 2) that many practitioners perceive the City of Providence’s to be more concerned with generating tax revenue than with the potential gentrification and displacement impacts of revitalization; and that 3) given current market conditions, even practitioners who are concerned about displacement have not had to do much to manage displacement impacts beyond building affordable housing into revitalization neighborhoods. Importantly, practitioners anticipate economic growth which, unmanaged, could accelerate and intensify housing competition, gentrification, and displacement pressures. This last point leads Scott Wolf to assert that “this is the time to be thinking seriously about this and trying to preempt

some of the negative consequences of gentrification,” and my recommendations, in this chapter, outline a path forward to do just that (Wolf).

In addition to the research findings described above, my recommendation of a development without displacement strategy is based on a value proposition that low-income people – the people most impacted by the consequences of gentrification – have a right to be able to afford to live in the city and in the neighborhood in which they have made their homes, work, schools, services, and communities. When taken together, my findings and this value proposition mean that Providence practitioners should manage the current and anticipated impacts of revitalization and gentrification to maintain housing opportunity for the city’s low-income residents and, beyond housing affordability, to ensure that low-income residents of revitalizing neighborhoods share in the benefits of revitalization. Throughout the interviews, practitioners expressed a desire for development without displacement (Wolf, Lang, Palermo). For example, Scott Wolf eloquently describes the goal of revitalization advocates as being to ‘thread the needle’ between revitalization/gentrification and displacement:

And I think one of the tricky things for the city and for us as smart growth advocates, as revitalization advocates, is how do you thread the needle between promoting, incenting revitalization, and of causing displacement. But I think we have to avoid the trap of assuming that all so-called gentrification automatically leads to massive displacement. We shouldn't accept that...but it is a needle to thread. I don't think the answer to avoiding displacement is to let neighborhoods totally flounder and not change them at all. Because that's – there's got to be a third way. There's got to be a way other than just sort of keeping people in squalor and displacing them all. (Wolf)

The ‘third way’ that Wolf talks about is the alternative to, on the one hand, letting low-income neighborhoods remain disinvested and, simultaneously, vulnerable to speculative investment and, on the other hand, promoting unmanaged revitalization such that the existing lower income residents are displaced. This ‘third way’ is exactly the goal of proponents of development without displacement policy agendas.

In the rest of this chapter, I explain the concept of development without displacement, explore development without displacement agendas, recommend the approach that Providence should take, and review specific policy recommendations that surfaced from my practitioner interviews.

Development Without Displacement Literature

The concept of development without displacement has been varyingly articulated in grey literature as development without displacement, equitable development, equitable revitalization, and anti-displacement development strategies. For example, Allan Mallach describes the challenging task of *equitable revitalization* as building “both a stronger housing market and a healthier neighborhood while ensuring that the community’s lower-income residents benefit from the neighborhood’s revitalization” (Mallach, 2008). The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) defines *equitable development* as “an approach to ensure that low-income residents and communities of color participate in and benefit from regional growth and development” and suggests that equitable development should aim “beyond efforts to limit displacement to look at positive steps to build regional social equity, moving from development without displacement to development with diversity” (Cravens et al., 2009, 5, 7). According to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), *anti-displacement development strategies*, can mitigate impacts and help “distribute the benefits of new investment among all members of a community” (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2015a). Finally, the mission of *development without displacement*, as articulated by the organization Causa Justa in the Bay Area, is based in the premise that gentrification and displacement are “not the inevitable result of economic development,” and as such, development without displacement strategies aim not only to maintain affordability and avoid displacement, but also to “empower local residents and communities with rights, protections, and a voice in determining the development of their own neighborhoods” (Phillips, Flores Jr., & Henderson, 2014, 9). All of these formulations share the intention of promoting revitalization and development (in weaker market contexts) and/or managing development (in stronger market contexts) such that development processes benefit, rather than displace, low-income residents.

There are many examples of policy toolkits based in development without displacement, equitable development, equitable revitalization, and anti-displacement frameworks. Policy reports and toolkits are both general and place-specific. Among the general ones, policy reports and toolkits are sometimes focused exclusively on housing policy (Albee, Johnson, & Lubell, 2015; Levy et al., 2006a, 2006b; Lubell, 2016;

Mallach, 2008) or encompass multiple policy areas (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, 2015; PolicyLink, n.d.; Pollack, Bluestone, & Billingham, 2010; Weinstein, 2015). There has also been a more recent surge in place-specific studies that evaluate displacement risk and make context-specific anti-displacement recommendations. Such policy studies and agendas have been written for the Bay Area (Cravens et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2014; Rose & Lin, 2015), the Boston Metro area (MACDC Gentrification Learning Community, 2016; Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2011; Reardon, Partridge, & Martin, 2014), Philadelphia (Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations, 2015; Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities, 2015), and Portland, Oregon, (Bates, 2013) among other cities.

Development Without Displacement Agenda for Providence

Given the examples set by these city-specific policy agendas, I recommend that Providence practitioners undertake to create a pro-active, comprehensive, context-specific “development without displacement” strategy that:

1. Develops context-specific indicators of gentrification and displacement in order to conduct ongoing monitoring of neighborhood change
2. Creates a policy agenda with gentrification-stage specific interventions for early, middle, and late stage implementation

First, practitioners in Providence should create context-specific housing market and demographic indicators of gentrification in order to monitor neighborhood change processes as they evolve. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council recommends that revitalizing or gentrifying neighborhoods prepare to manage change “by identifying the appropriate indicators and measuring them over time to determine which strategies or interventions are needed to manage change that has an adverse impact on lower-income populations or neighborhoods” (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2015b). The goal of monitoring housing market and demographic change is to better understand the stages of gentrification in Providence’s unique context and to be able to implement context-relevant policy measures at the appropriate moments. Practitioners should consider tracking house prices, vacancy rates, renter/owner tenure, public and private investment,

housing burden, population living in poverty, and more in depth study of racial change, in addition to the demographic variables studied in Chapter 3 of this paper.

According to Karen Chapple and Miriam Zuk (2016), community stakeholders around the country adopted such “early warning systems” for monitoring neighborhood change starting as early as the 1980s, but city governments have not yet formally adopted these systems as a means to inform policy (Chapple & Zuk, 2016). Portland, OR and Somerville, MA are two examples of cities that commissioned or partnered on studies that recommend the implementation of such systems, although the extent to which they have been adopted as policy is unclear (Bates, 2013; Reardon et al., 2014). Boston recently became the first city in the nation to create an Office of Housing Stability and to initiate a government-initiated anti-displacement agenda. Notably, I did not find any examples of comprehensive development without displacement agendas – either in practice *or* in the form of recommendations – for mid-sized weak market cities like Providence. Thus, Providence policy makers have an opportunity to be a leader, in particular among the country’s mid-sized weak market cities, in putting gentrification and displacement on the policy agenda.

Second, Providence practitioners should craft a development without displacement policy agenda. The policy toolkits referenced above provide an excellent starting point for developing a policy agenda for Providence. Among these, those that take market context into consideration (Levy et al., 2006a, 2006b; Lubell, 2016; Mallach, 2005, 2008; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001) will be especially useful for Providence policy makers. Providence practitioners should develop a set of principles or overarching policy goals to guide policy selection and include policies that are relevant and feasible for implementation at early, middle, and late stages of gentrification.

For example, Phillips et al (2014) outline six complementary principles, which form the basis of the recommended development without displacement agenda for the Bay Area. These are: “baseline protections for vulnerable residents; production and preservation of affordable housing; stabilization of existing communities; non-market based approaches to housing and community development; displacement prevention as a regional priority; planning as a participatory process” (Phillips et al., 2014, 59). The authors designate the individual policies, which are organized within this six-principle

framework, as being relevant for early, middle, or late stage gentrification, or as being relevant “early and always.” The feasibility of policies that are considered to be relevant “early and always” are not dependent on city or neighborhood conditions, “and may be critical to establishing an environment in which other anti-displacement efforts will be successful” (Phillips et al., 2014, 60). Because I find this report to be a particularly comprehensive example of a stage-conscious development without displacement agenda, I provide an outline of the six policy principles, and the specific policies that fall within each policy goal, in Table 16 at the end of this chapter. The principles and policies advanced by Phillips et al. are not reproduced here as a roadmap for Providence practitioners to follow but, rather, as example of how to organize policies within a policy goal framework and with reference to the appropriate stage of implementation.

Specific Policy Recommendations for Providence

My recommendation, outlined above, is that community development practitioners commit to a process of understanding and monitoring the context-specific gentrification and displacement indicators in Providence’s low-income neighborhoods, and to managing neighborhood change through a comprehensive policy agenda. Providence already has a number of existing policies that fit within a development without displacement agenda. These include the Community Housing Land Trust of Rhode Island; the 10% affordable housing mandate for Rhode Island cities and towns; state legislation that enables inclusionary zoning; the Just Cause eviction ordinance; and recent Providence zoning changes which enable higher density development.

Policy makers in Providence have an exciting opportunity to implement policies which are uniquely feasible in weak market contexts and in neighborhoods where gentrification is not yet too advanced. For instance, the comparatively affordable price of land enables particular development without displacement policies that rely on land acquisition. In this section, I recommend a few specific policies which fit within a development without displacement agenda and which are appropriate in the context of both Providence’s relatively weak housing market and the relatively early and limited stage of gentrification that is ongoing in Providence’s gentrifying neighborhoods. Many

of these recommendations came up during the practitioner interviews I conducted for this paper. I recommend that Providence practitioners and policymakers do the following as part of a comprehensive development without displacement policy agenda:

1. Harness the city's current focus on abandoned property
2. Ramp up housing production
3. Take better advantage of the existing statewide community land trust
4. Implement a rent control policy
5. Implement policies which use private development to contribute to affordable housing development and funding
6. Pursue an anchor institution community development strategy

While an in depth exploration of the feasibility and specifics of each recommendation is beyond the scope of this paper, below I explain my rationale for making each recommendation as part of a broader development without displacement agenda.

First, the city's current focus on blight reduction, and the recent passage of a \$50 million housing bond with \$10 million designated for blight, presents an incredible opportunity to reconfigure the EveryHome initiative in a way that aligns with a development without displacement agenda. This point of view was articulated by many of the practitioners I interviewed. Such a reconfiguration would mean, firstly, conceiving of the program as a holistic neighborhood revitalization initiative rather than a parcel-by-parcel program to eliminate nuisance properties. As Neirinckx suggested, "for the most part you can see neighborhood concentration with those [nuisance] houses, so why not bring together a consortium of the housing development groups in the city and say 'how do we look at this as an opportunity?'" This opportunity means including affordable housing requirements within the initiative and also considering non-residential possibilities on land made available by nuisance homes, such as economic development focused on income generation for low-income residents or open space uses. Thus, through approaching blight reduction as part of a more comprehensive strategy to develop and revitalize low-income neighborhoods in ways that increase housing and other opportunities for the existing residents, practitioners can adapt the focus on abandoned properties to fit within a development without displacement agenda.

Secondly, Providence practitioners must prioritize ramping up housing production. Kyle Bennett is part of a statewide coalition working to address the state's chronic housing shortage which is advocating for 35,000 additional units of housing to be

developed statewide by 2025 – a level of production that he says has not been achieved since the early 1990s (Bennett). Addressing the many barriers and disincentives to housing production, including reducing the expense of permitting processes and standardizing permitting across Rhode Island municipalities, will be necessary to avoid displacement pressures in the case of economic and population growth. Specifically, targeting housing development to the middle income population, those households making 80%-120% of area median income which includes many of the young adult households with higher future earning potential, could help take pressure off of the market rate housing at the lower end of the price spectrum, which is currently commanding inflated prices due to a housing supply constrained by very low levels of housing production.

Third, Providence practitioners should further develop the capacity of the statewide Community Housing Land Trust of Rhode Island to provide long-term affordable housing opportunities. The Community Housing Land Trust was the first statewide housing land trust in the country. By separating the ownership of the land from the housing units themselves, the land trust provides a mechanism for long-term housing affordability for both renters and owners (Housing Network of Rhode Island, 2017). The trust, however, does not have the capacity to engage in housing development, and so the impact of the mechanism has been limited to collaboration with willing CDCs and municipalities (A. Bourne, personal communication, March 17, 2017). Rhode Island's Community Housing Land Trust is a unique and important asset not possessed by most cities. Providence practitioners should, while the housing market is still relatively weak, acquire land in low-income neighborhoods and especially in neighborhoods that are currently gentrifying, to incorporate in the land trust, thus locking in affordable housing opportunities that will be lost as the market improves.

Fourth, practitioners should consider policy measures that place limits on future rent growth, including a rent control policy and/or a cap on annual rent growth. Although Providence's low-income, potentially gentrifying neighborhoods did not experience gentrification-associated demographic changes to the same levels as is typically associated with full-on gentrification, as for example in New York's gentrifying neighborhoods, I have shown that rent growth between 2000 and 2011-2015 was very

substantial and argued that this poses a considerable risk to Providence's large low and very low-income population. As noted above, it is likely that rents are being driven up because housing supply is constrained by low levels of new housing production. Thus, policy makers should seriously consider limiting rent growth in order to maintain affordable rental housing. Placing limits on rent growth could also incentivize housing production. Providence's Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) is currently pursuing a rent control campaign to this end.

Fifth, policy makers should encourage the city to develop policies through which private developers contribute to affordable housing production or funding for affordable housing production. Although, in the past, the city has feared that such exactions would deter developers from an already unattractive development context, the practitioners I interviewed feel that these parameters are changing and that it is time for the City of Providence to stop giving as many development subsidies without demanding something in return. Such policies could include inclusionary zoning, for which Rhode Island already has enabling legislation, or a linkage fee policy in which developers pay into an affordable housing fund. While linkage fees have to be proportional to a demonstrated development impact and, thus, are typically implemented in stronger market contexts, linkage fee policies can be implemented incrementally so as to respond to changing contexts (K. Seidman, personal communication, March 22, 2017). Thus, it is reasonable, even in the current market context, to suggest that Providence adopt a modest linkage fee policy with provisions to increase the fee as conditions change. Additionally, linkage fee policies can be designed to include non-profit institutional development, which would allow Providence to benefit from the high level of institutional real estate development in the higher education and medical sectors ('eds and meds'), which is likely to increase into the near future.

Finally, given the concentration of non-profit anchor institutions which do not contribute regular tax revenue to the city, Providence practitioners should pursue a strategy which uses anchor institutions as a conduit for place-based economic development for low-income populations in revitalizing and gentrifying neighborhoods, for which there are a number of nationally recognized best practices. Firstly, the City of Providence should review its current payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements, in

comparison to those held by other cities, to ensure that it is not forgoing potential revenue. Even more importantly, Providence practitioners should prioritize more in-depth collaboration with the city's anchor institutions to initiative a culture of mutual obligation and mutual benefit in *place*. In such a strategy, anchor institutions recognize their impact on the cities and neighborhoods in which they are located and dedicate resources toward stabilizing low-income neighborhoods and toward economic development through local supply chain development. Examples such as the Evergreen Cooperatives and Greater University Circle Initiative in Cleveland, and the supply chain development and engaged scholarship commitments of the University of Pennsylvania, demonstrate best practices for such a strategy.

Conclusion

I have argued that that, given the evidence of limited gentrification in Providence and forecasted economic and population growth, community development practitioners in Providence should adopt of a pro-active, comprehensive, context-specific “development without displacement” strategy. This strategy should include ongoing monitoring of neighborhood, based in place-specific indicators that measure both housing market conditions and demographic change. While a full review and analysis of the feasibility of development without displacement policies in Providence is beyond the scope of this paper, I have recommended that Providence practitioners include six specific policy goals in a broader, comprehensive agenda.

With place-specific indicators, neighborhood change and displacement risk monitoring, and a comprehensive ‘development without displacement’ policy agenda, Providence practitioners will be prepared to respond to the somewhat limited form of gentrification that is ongoing in Providence as well as to the increased pressures and displacement risks of future economic growth.

Table 16: Development Without Displacement Policy Goals and Policies from Causa Justa (2014)

Policy	Stage
Policy Goal 1: Baseline protections for vulnerable residents	
○ Just Cause eviction ordinances	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Anti-harassment policies to prevent landlords from coercing tenants into leaving homes due to negligence, intimidation, or buy-out offers	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Comprehensive right of first refusal policy	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Strengthen relocation policies to ensure just compensation and relocation assistance	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Reparations and right to return policy	<i>Early and Always</i>
Policy Goal 2: Production and preservation of affordable housing	
○ “No net loss” policy: requires no net loss of affordable housing units citywide or in specific gentrifying neighborhoods	<i>Middle to Late</i>
○ Comprehensive affordable housing preservation strategy	<i>Early, Middle, Late</i>
○ Rent control policy and maximum annual rent increases, as well as legal avenues for tenants to dispute rent increases	<i>Middle to Late</i>
○ Condominium conversion regulations	<i>Middle to Late</i>
○ Inclusionary zoning	<i>Middle to Late</i>
Policy Goal 3: Stabilization of existing communities	
○ Proactive approach to code enforcement	<i>Early to Middle</i>
○ Track public investment at neighborhood level to improve equity in budgeting	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Homeowner and renter protection programs including tax relief, grants, loans, especially for repairs	<i>Middle to Late</i>
○ Homebuyer-assistance programs, with a focus on helping tenants in susceptible and gentrifying neighborhood purchase homes in the neighborhood	<i>Early to Middle</i>
Policy Goal 4: Nonmarket approaches to housing and community development	
○ Supporting community land trusts, limited equity co-ops and other cooperative arrangements	<i>Early to Middle</i>
○ Penalize speculative investment through a real estate transfer tax, directed to housing trust or relocation fund	<i>Middle to Late</i>
Policy Goal 5: Making displacement prevention a regional priority	
○ Regional funding streams to incentivize displacement prevention efforts (Stage: early and always)	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ State and federal policy changes to support local anti-displacement efforts (ex: enabling legislative for inclusive zoning or rent control)	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Methods for assessing development project’s displacement impacts and associated mitigation fees	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Publicly accessible regional database of neighborhood change	<i>Early and Always</i>
Policy Goal 6: Planning as a participatory process	
○ Best practices for community and public engagement	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Community-based training for residents to participate in planning and development processes	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Neighborhood-level planning councils	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Community organizing and outreach about housing rights	<i>Early and Always</i>
○ Include displacement impacts in community health impact analysis	<i>Early and Always</i>

Source: Causa Justa (2014), *Development Without Displacement: Resisting Gentrification in the Bay Area*

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Motivated by the productive tension between my personal observations of gentrification as a resident of Providence and widespread popular discussion of gentrification in cities nationwide, I have sought to investigate the extent of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods, the extent to which revitalization rationales are defined in relation to gentrification and displacement, and to evaluate the perception of feasibility and urgency around anti-displacement efforts in Providence's unique context. Through this research, I put forward the following findings:

1. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis suggest that some neighborhood gentrification change has occurred in Providence, but its extent is not as great as in strong market cities
2. Current weak market conditions have had a dampening effect on revitalization activities that could have otherwise catalyzed gentrification and displacement, and on revitalization, gentrification, and displacement, generally
3. Given current market conditions, current revitalization activities have not needed to and have not been adequately seeking to manage displacement risks
4. Practitioners anticipate impending economic growth and, given that current revitalization rationales are calibrated to more stagnant economic conditions, they warn that economic growth could rapidly increase gentrification and gentrification-related displacement pressures.

In light of these findings, I recommended that Providence community development practitioners and other stakeholders of low-income neighborhood undertake to create a pro-active context-specific “development without displacement” strategy for Providence. I suggested six specific policies that I believe are relevant and feasible given Providence's market context and the limited, or *early* stage, of gentrification in Providence neighborhoods. These include harnessing the opportunity afforded by the EveryHome initiative; prioritizing a ramp up in housing production levels; implementing rent control or other policies to limit rent growth; policies to exact more from private developers; and, finally, an anchor institution strategy. Practitioners should further assess

housing market context, citywide and at the neighborhood level, in order to put together a context-relevant policy agenda. Policy makers in Providence have a critical opportunity to put forward and implement a ‘development without displacement’ policy agenda in a more forgiving and affordable housing market context, before it is too late.

Providence has many advantages and opportunities that can help in this undertaking. First and foremost, Providence has a strong community development system made up of CDCs and service organizations that are accountable to their consistencies. Among them, Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) has a history of successful policy campaigns such as the hard-won just cause eviction ordinance. They are, now, in the beginning stages of a rent control campaign, which is certainly in keeping with the development without displacement agenda proposed in this paper.

Additionally, Providence faces new conditions that, in turn, enable new approaches. Providence is changing its reputation and seeking to implement innovative, evidence-based approaches to government, in contrast to the widely acknowledged corruption of days past. According to Scott Wolf, Providence and Rhode Island, both, have improving self-esteem and, with it, a growing ability to imagine new solutions. The practitioners who I interviewed believe that Providence has a lot of assets that make it attractive and that it has recovered enough, financially, require private developers to act in its vision. Development without displacement could be that vision.

The title of this thesis, “You don’t have a problem until you do,” is not meant to downplay the gentrification that is happening in Providence’s low-income neighborhoods, or to undermine the actual lived experiences of gentrification and displacement endured by Providence residents. The title, words spoken by one of the practitioners I interviewed, is meant to serve as a call action in this critical moment. My claims, presented in this paper, are that while gentrification-related displacement risks faced by residents of Providence’s revitalizing neighborhoods are not as acute as in gentrifying neighborhoods in other cities, such as New York, we must anticipate these risks growing more acute in the near future given projected economic growth.

You don’t have a problem, until you do. This is the moment for Providence practitioners – those who believe that all Providence residents have a right to remain and thrive in their homes and neighborhoods – to act.

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