

Portland State University

**PDXScholar**

---

School of Social Work Faculty Publications and  
Presentations

School of Social Work

---

11-3-2021

## Can Preference Policies Advance Racial Justice?

Amie Thurber

*Portland State University, athurber@pdx.edu*

Lisa Bates

*Portland State University, lkbates@pdx.edu*

Susan Halverson

*Portland State University, halverson@pdx.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/socwork\\_fac](https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/socwork_fac)



Part of the [Social Justice Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---



### Citation Details

Amie Thurber, Lisa K. Bates & Susan Halverson (2021) [Postprint] Can preference policies advance racial justice?, *Journal of Community Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/10705422.2021.1992557

This Post-Print is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Social Work Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).



## Q1 Can preference policies advance racial justice?

Q2 Amie Thurber <sup>a</sup>, Lisa K. Bates <sup>b</sup>, and Susan Halverson<sup>a</sup>

Q3 <sup>a</sup>School of Social Work, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA; <sup>b</sup>Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA

### ABSTRACT

Mitigating the harms of gentrification to communities of color is a pressing challenge. One promising approach is preference policies that enable long-term residents to remain in or return to gentrifying neighborhoods. This mixed-methods study evaluates the City of Portland's "Preference Policy," which provides targeted affordable rental housing to residents displaced from a historically Black neighborhood. This paper draws on survey, interview, and focus group data to explore resident motivations, changes to well-being, and recommendations for improving the policy. Findings suggest preference policies can enhance well-being, and underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to advance racial justice in gentrifying neighborhoods.

### KEYWORDS

Community well-being; gentrification; preference policy; racial justice

5

10

15

No longer just a problem for a few neighborhoods within the nation's population centers, gentrification is now reaching many small and mid-sized cities (Maciag, 2015; Yonto & Thill, 2020). As a process of neighborhood change, gentrification is generally characterized by a rapid increase in land values and the co-occurring transformation of an area's socioeconomic demographics (Lees et al., 2013). Neighborhoods that are home to communities of color have been particularly vulnerable to and disproportionately harmed by gentrification (as examples, see Gibson, 2007; Li et al., 2013). One of the greatest policy challenges is how to support residents to be able to stay in or return to the neighborhood after it has begun to gentrify.

20

25

In response, some cities are experimenting with "right to return" (or community preference) policies that link displaced residents with rental and homeownership opportunities in their former neighborhood (Iglesias, 2018). Racial reparation is at the heart of such policies: they simultaneously acknowledge the harms resulting from historic systemic racism – namely the disruption and displacement of communities of color – and seek to redress those harms through material investments in housing for those displaced, within their historical neighborhoods. If effective, right to return policies advance racial justice by creating housing affordability and stability in gentrifying areas; increase access to neighborhoods that are rich in amenities and resources, particularly for Black residents and other residents of color; and interrupt

30

35

economic and racial segregation. However, given the limited use and evaluation of these policies to date, there is little evidence regarding if and how right to return policies achieve these aspired goals. 40

Given that gentrification sits at the intersection of several key challenges identified by the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare – including reducing extreme economic inequality, ending homelessness, and eliminating racism – it is critical to innovate, implement and evaluate policy responses to gentrification. This study considers how one of the first community preference policies implemented in a gentrifying neighborhood has advanced racial justice and affected well-being. 45

### **Gentrification, community preference policies and community well-being**

Gentrification results from a combination of state policy and market response that historically created marginalized, under-resourced areas of communities of color in the urban core, while building exclusionary White neighborhoods for homebuyers in the suburbs (Alfieri, 2019; Massey & Denton, 1993). The disinvestment suppressed land values in many urban neighborhoods, making them vulnerable to gentrification – a sudden influx of capital and new residents taking advantage redevelopment opportunities. A key manifestation of gentrification is the displacement of poor and low-income residents who can no longer afford to remain in place as housing prices rise, accompanied by a changing commercial, institutional, and cultural landscape (Bates, 2013). This displacement has material consequences like housing instability that disrupts schooling and work, and also psycho-social health impacts that social psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove has termed *root shock*. Developed in the context of residents displaced by Urban Renewal, root shock is “the traumatic stress reaction to the loss of some or all of one’s emotional ecosystem” (Fullilove, 2016). Displacement due to gentrification threatens the well-being of people, families, and communities when they are involuntarily uprooted. 50  
55  
60  
65

The consideration of root shock and displacement due to an upward swing in urban neighborhoods is relatively new. For decades, housing policy advocates focused attention on the problems of neighborhood deterioration and concentrated poverty, promoting policies to support low-income people of color to “Move to Opportunity” and tearing down high-density public housing to build mixed-income developments in the HOPE VI program. These policies aimed to de-segregate housing and communities and provide access to place-based opportunity structures, but have had only mixed results for individuals and families (E. G. Goetz, 2010). Now, the dynamic of rapid urban redevelopment has shifted the focus of housing and community development policy. As concerns about displacement due to gentrification have arisen in cities across the U.S., advocates recommended a policy agenda to build and preserve affordable housing 70  
75

within these changing neighborhoods (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Levy et al., 2006). Recognizing that once-distressed neighborhoods are now becoming resource-rich with the influx of high-income and mostly White residents, the idea of supporting low-income, renting, and people of color households to stay in place has arisen as an anti-segregation policy. 80

One promising area of innovation is community preference policies that create affordable housing within the original/former neighborhood for long-term and displaced residents (E. Goetz, 2019; Iglesias, 2018). There have been long-standing resident preference policies in the context of subsidized housing renovation, in which residents have the first claim on redeveloped units. This new use of preference policies addresses the broader context in gentrifying neighborhoods that are changing enough to create re-segregation as people of color are displaced. 85 90

Given the degree to which historical and institutionalized racism has led to disparate consequences in housing and access to opportunity for people of color, housing policy leaders increasingly adopt a racial equity lens when considering how best to respond to gentrification (Bates, 2018). Preference policies must thread a careful legal argument to address housing access for people of color, as U.S. Fair Housing and civil rights policy forbid race-specific housing programs, but does allow for mitigation of disparate harms (Alfieri, 2019; Iglesias, 2018). Critics of preference policies express concern that such policies will deepen residential racial and economic segregation (Goodman, 2019). Proponents argue that residents are more likely to access place-based opportunity and resources in their “old” neighborhoods in desirable locations, as well as maintaining their community connections that support well-being (E. Goetz, 2019). There are a growing number of gentrifying cities that have adopted community preference policies (including Seattle, Austin, and San Francisco), combining affordable housing development and preservation with resident prioritization to maintain affordable housing and racial and economic diversity in gentrifying areas (E. Goetz, 2019). This new use of community preference in affordable housing programs offers a window for research about whether a “right to return” to a neighborhood supports access to opportunity and well-being for low-income people of color. 95 100 105 110

### ***The relationship of gentrification and preference policies to community well-being***

Preference policies are designed to be reparative in two ways, first through both the development and siting of affordable housing in gentrifying areas, and second, through the creation of priority access for households that already feel an affinity and have existing networks in the neighborhood. In this way, 115

preference policies are intended to not simply provide housing to but to ameliorate root shock. The individual, family, and community impacts of root shock can be understood through the construct of community well-being. 120

Wiseman and Brasher define community well-being as “the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfill their potential” (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008, p. 358). Although widely understood as a multidimensional construct, scholars differ on which domains constitute community well-being, and how these domains are operationalized. Measurement of community well-being often contains both objective factors such as housing affordability or amount of green space, and subjective factors such as perceptions of safety and feelings of inclusion (Lee & Kim, 2016; Sung & Phillips, 2016). This paper focuses on four dimensions of well-being: equity and inclusion, social connection, place attachment, and civic participation. The following examples illustrate the potential harms of gentrification to each of these domains, with attention to the disparate effects of gentrification on communities of color. As the effects of preference policies have yet to be studied, we hypothesize the potential effects to well-being for long-term residents who access preference policies to return to or remain in gentrifying neighborhoods. 125 130 135

### ***Equity and inclusion***

Black, Latino, and immigrant communities have consistently invested in their own neighborhoods, forming robust business, cultural, and residential districts (Lipsitz, 2011). However, in the face of shifting demographics and upscaling of residential and commercial areas, long-time residents may appear “out of place” in their own neighborhoods and face increased surveillance and policing (Stabrowski, 2014). Long-term residents living in gentrifying areas report increases in racism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Drew, 2012). This causes particular harm in historically Black communities and other ethnic enclaves that function as spaces of support and protection in the face of marginalization from the dominant culture (Drew, 2012). Preference policies have the potential to stem the racialized displacement of long-term residents from gentrifying neighborhoods, which may ensure the area’s continued function as a racially “safe space.” It is unclear if and how preference policies might reduce racism and other forms of oppression. 140 145 150

### ***Social connection***

As neighborhoods gentrify and some residents are priced out, residents may lose access to neighbors and friends they relied on for comradery, social support, and resource sharing (Hodkinson & Essen, 2015; Twigge-Molecey, 2014). This can be particularly damaging in communities of color, where social cohesion can buffer against experiences of racism and other 155

forms of oppression (Hudson, 2015). Preference policies might improve social well-being if returning/remaining residents have, or make, strong social ties in the neighborhood. In the absence of such relationships, returning residents might experience increased isolation and deteriorating social well-being. 160

### ***Place attachment***

Feelings of connection to place contribute to well-being (Plunkett et al., 2018). Gentrification threatens long-term residents' place attachment by erasing historical place names and rebranding neighborhoods to appeal to a wealthier demographic (Hodkinson & Essen, 2015). In such settings, long-term residents may no longer feel comfortable or that they belong (Drew, 2012; Huyser & Meerman, 2014). If residents have strong place-attachments, preference policies may improve their well-being by creating access to stable, affordable housing in the area. However, given spatial transformations within gentrifying neighborhoods, residents might also experience a diminished sense of place attachment. 165  
170  
175

### ***Civic participation***

Gentrification may be accompanied by the political displacement of long-term residents by newer residents who gain control of groups such as neighborhood associations, tenant and homeowner associations, and parent organizations (Davidson, 2008; Freidus, 2019). Without institutional authority, long-term residents have less power to influence decisions that directly affect their neighborhood, or to address legacies of structural racism (Freidus, 2019). Though preference policies do not in and of themselves build power among long-term residents, it is possible that such policies can enhance civic well-being by helping to sustain a robust population of long-term residents who can engage in their communities. 180  
185

As explored above, gentrification has the potential for widespread adverse effects across multiple domains of well-being; it can disrupt social ties, diminish place attachments, weaken civic engagement, and escalate racism, classism, and other forms of oppression. Most policy responses to gentrification are only designed to address residents' housing needs. By leveraging residents' existing social, spatial, and civic ties, preference policies have the potential to address these other dimensions of well-being that are "essential for [individuals and their communities] to flourish and fulfill their potential" (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008, p. 358). However, the degree to which preference policies can fulfill this potential is unknown. Studying the effects of Portland, Oregon's Preference Policy provides a critical opportunity to understand the policy's impacts on returning residents' well-being, how such policies might be strengthened, and the ways that residents themselves may contribute to the well-being of their communities. 190  
195  
200

## Study context

The study context is in Portland, Oregon, in what the City identifies as the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area (ICURA), known to many residents as the *Albina district*. For more than 60 years, the Albina district in Northeast Portland has served as the residential, economic, spiritual and cultural heart of the city's Black community; over ninety percent of Black Oregonians lived in Albina (Gibson, 2007). The City's designation of multiple Urban Renewal Areas from the 1950s through 2000 in this area resulted in disruptions to the fabric of the neighborhood. In the midcentury, eminent domain was used to build sports stadia and highways; the 2000 ICURA designation extended light rail and spurred further investment. A wave of new boutiques, markets, and restaurants opened, and the resident demographics trended younger, wealthier, and whiter (Gibson, 2007). By 2010, the area lost two-thirds of its Black residents to gentrification and displacement (Bates, 2013). As of 2010, 15% of residents within the ICURA identified as Black, more than twice the city average, but there are no longer any majority-Black Census tracts in Albina (Portland Housing Bureau, 2019). Despite these rapid changes, the Albina district remains a Black cultural center, with multiple Black churches, institutions like the Urban League and the Black United Fund, Oregon's only majority-Black high school, and cultural, art, and entertainment activities focusing on Oregon's Black history.

Perhaps the strongest indicator of the neighborhood's continued significance has been anti-gentrification organizing by the Black community, including making the demand that the City stop displacement and create opportunities for Black families to return to Northeast Portland. In 2015, following the protest of a contentious urban renewal-funded commercial development, the City of Portland adopted a N/NE Housing Strategy with specific rental development, home repair loans and grants, and homeownership goals (Bates, 2018). A key aspect of the strategy is a Preference Policy that prioritizes applicants "who were displaced, are at risk of displacement, or are the descendants of families displaced due to urban renewal in N/NE Portland" (Portland Housing Bureau, 2019, p. 109). Households whose incomes are below 60% of area median income are eligible for priority placement in subsidized, regulated housing units by demonstrating that they, their parents, and/or their grandparents lived within the boundaries of City-drawn urban renewal areas from 1957 to 2000. The policy recognizes generational ties to the community through a point system, with the highest "preference" awarded to those whose residences were taken by eminent domain.

Despite strong community interest in accessing Preference Policy housing, given the degree of gentrification and the resulting loss of economic, social and cultural supports in the neighborhood, it is unclear how the policy will affect well-being. There are three specific aims of this study: (1) *To identify the range*

*of residents' motivations to seek housing through the Preference Policy.* Understanding resident motivation is key to centering the intended beneficiaries in evaluating the effects of the policy. We hypothesize that residents will be motivated by both a need for affordable housing and a desire to live in the N/NE area, and will have expectations regarding both the quality of their housing and their quality of life. (2) *To assess residents' self-reported well-being over time.* As explored above, the well-being literature suggests that the Preference Policy's effects may be mixed; we hypothesize that residents may experience benefits and risks to well-being. (3) *To identify opportunities to strengthen returning residents' well-being.* The Preference Policy was conceptualized as a housing policy. We hypothesize that residents will recommend complementary strategies to improve community well-being. Taken together, these three aims can assist scholars and practitioners in assessing the effectiveness of the policy, guiding ongoing implementation locally, and informing replication.

## Methods

This paper reports on the first phase of a longitudinal inquiry of the Preference Policy. The baseline, exploratory data collected in this phase reflects residents' experiences within the first year living in Preference Policy housing, and will serve as comparison data for subsequent rounds of data collection. The majority of the city's \$60 million investment has been in rental development, which is the focus of this paper. By the start of 2020, the Portland Housing Bureau had funded the construction of seven apartment buildings containing 531 Preference Policy units, for which there were several thousand applicants (Portland Housing Bureau, 2019).

The study population included all residents living in the first three Preference Policy apartment buildings to open ( $N = 137$ ). Using a convergent, mixed-method approach (Fetters et al., 2013), the research team sequentially collected surveys ( $N:98$ ), and conducted interviews ( $N = 29$ ), and focus groups in each building (28 participants across three groups). After distributing an informational letter to residents, researchers recruited adult participants through door knocking. Participants completed a survey that included questions regarding their motivations for applying to the Preference Policy and a point-in-time assessment of well-being along a number of domains (i.e. sense of community, experience of equity, civic engagement). During the survey, researchers recruited residents to participate in semi-structured interviews, which averaged 30 minutes, and explored residents' relationship to the neighborhood over time, the Preference Policy's impact on their quality of life, and their experiences within the broader neighborhood. After collecting surveys and interviews in each building, researchers hosted a focus group. We shared major findings from their building-level survey data and facilitated



a conversation about results and resident's ideas to improve well-being. The focus groups served as an additional source of data collection, a method of participatory analysis, and as a form of member checking. 285

The response rate for the survey was 69%. At the time of the survey, residents had been living in their new apartments between one and 15 months, averaging 7 months. Participants reported having lived in the Albina District on average for 32 years and 72% of their life. Eighty-four percent of respondents identified as Black or African American, and 68% identified as female. Participant ages ranged between 19–71, with an average age of 43. Most (54%) did not have children living in the home. The majority of apartments were studio or one-bedroom units). 290

As a *qualitatively-driven inquiry* (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015), this study's focus is to understand residents' motivations, experiences, and perspectives rather than make predictions or determine causation. Researchers analyzed quantitative survey data to identify patterns among respondents, including resident demographics, motivators for applying for the Preference Policy, and reported levels of well-being. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, then imported into MaxQDA for analysis. Initial research questions provided an entry point for thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). After Amie Thurber coded a portion of data from each of the three buildings, the coauthors reviewed the initial analysis to check for conceptual clarity, duplicative and missing codes. Thurber then coded the corpus of data. To increase the trustworthiness and credibility of our analysis, we engaged in investigator, methodological, and data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). 295 300 305

## Results

Analysis of data produced three major findings. First, *place matters* deeply to respondents; residents were motivated to apply for the Preference Policy by both the location and the cost of housing. Second, residents report experiencing overall *improved well-being* since moving into their units. And third, residents also report some *threats to well-being*, particularly related to economic vulnerability and the persistence of racism. 310 315

### *Place matters*

Understanding residents' motivations for applying to the Preference Policy is necessary to evaluate one of the policy's central assumptions: that the location, as well as the affordability, of housing matters to renters. This assumption proved largely correct: 80% of respondents indicated that both feeling a connection to the neighborhood *and* a need for housing were primary motivations for applying for housing through the Preference Policy. 320

Despite the demographic changes in the Albina district, 83% of residents reported having friends and family in the neighborhood, and nearly two-thirds of residents indicated that being closer to those existing social ties was a primary motivation for applying to the Preference Policy. In addition to wanting to be closer to friends and family, many communicated a desire to live in an area with a robust Black community, as reflected by another Black woman resident who concluded: “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be around my people.” Spatial aspects of the neighborhood – such as local organizations, businesses, parks, and schools – also mattered to many residents. More than 70% of those surveyed indicated that being “closer to the places I like to go” was a primary motivation for applying for Preference Policy housing. Many of the specific places named were culturally significant to residents, such as Dawson Park, a historic gathering spot for Black civic events. A sense of connection to the neighborhood over time also mattered to participants. Nine out of ten respondents agreed with the statement, “the history of this neighborhood matters to me.” In interviews, many residents traced their family history in the area, sometimes over generations. Several residents described their family’s migration from the south, seeking work in Portland’s shipyards, and settling in the Albina district. A resident in her 20s proudly shared that her great-grandmother has owned her home in the neighborhood since 1930. Participants broadly shared this feeling of comfort and belonging; 87% agreed with the statement, “I belong in this neighborhood.”

Importantly, residents were equally motivated by a need for affordable housing. Though the survey did not directly ask if residents had been previously homeless, 10% of respondents volunteered that they were unhoused prior to moving into their new apartment. Eighty percent believed that the Preference Policy was their best chance to move from a waitlist into housing, and nearly sixty percent indicated this was their only real housing option. As a formerly homeless Black resident put it, “I did want to stay in this area. But I had to find something that fit my budget.” The Preference Policy buildings made achieving these twin goals possible.

It is noteworthy that a small number of respondents were *not* motivated by feelings of connection to the neighborhood; this was most frequently described by people who had lived in the area only briefly. For the vast majority of respondents, residents’ deep social and spatial attachments to the Albina district – combined with a need for affordable housing – motivated them to apply to the Preference Policy, and they carried the expectation that the policy would not only address their housing needs, but help them achieve other dimensions of well-being.

**Improved well-being**

Overwhelmingly, residents reported improvements to community well-being since accessing housing through the Preference Policy, particularly related to equity and inclusion, social connection, place attachment, and civic engagement. Although the following sections explore these themes independently, in practice, they were often interrelated. 365

**Equity and inclusion**

Many expressed appreciation for living in a neighborhood where they experience lower levels of prejudice than elsewhere in the city. Seventy percent of those surveyed agreed that people of different backgrounds get along in the neighborhood. A number of those interviewed contrasted living in the Albina district to other areas of Portland that are less racially diverse, particularly suburbs that had been destinations for “white flight” in previous decades. Regarding her move, a Black mother living with her school-aged child reflected: 370 375

... it’s improved my quality of life because I’m not as stressed out. My neighborhood in Gresham [a Portland suburb] was way worse. It was very White out there, and ... There was a lot of racism out there, and I didn’t feel accepted out there, and being back in the neighborhood, I’m glad this building is predominantly Black. I can feel comfortable around Black people, and if anything, it’s improved my quality of life. 380

As evidenced above, the experiences of equity and area demographics were intimately tied: many residents reported experiencing less racism living in areas with a larger Black population.

**Social connection**

Most of those interviewed noted the social benefits of living where they have existing social connections and also feel a broader sense of community. When asked what it felt like to return to the neighborhood, a Black mother who grew up in the neighborhood explained, “Kind of a relief, like a sigh in a way. It just felt comforting to move back to somewhere that- where I’ve- I know. It’s just so close to my family and my friends I grew up with. It’s just a really big deal.” This theme was echoed in most interviews and focus groups. As a Black grandmother who lived her entire life in N/NE explained, “It’s a lot of people that still stay in this neighborhood that I grew up with ... A lot of people still here on the same block.” In addition to the benefits of living closer to existing social networks, many residents spoke to the broader social value of living in a robust Black community. One mother explained the importance she placed in moving her daughter out of a predominantly White school: “I wanted her to be able to see the representation. To be around people that look like her, and to not feel like she was so different. It was so important for me to get back on this side of town, for her.” 385 390 395 400

Strikingly, some residents noted that the Preference Policy was helping to stabilize and rebuild the Black community in the area. As one Black mother explained,

The people that grew up in the area, they got moved out and the houses were bought out and all of that. They tore them down, redid them, but I guess they're doing these new developments to try to get people back and it's working. I feel like it's working. 405

Another resident who lived most of her life in the neighborhood reflected that since the two Preference Policy buildings have opened in her area, "I've actually seen a lot more colored faces, more urban people come back, which is nice. It is really nice." Overwhelmingly, residents expressed improvements in social wellbeing as a result of the Preference Policy. 410

### **Place attachment**

Respondents voiced nearly universal appreciation for the convenience of living in the neighborhood. Several respondents specifically noted the Black-owned stores in the area, as well as the value of living closer to their church, children's school, Black civic and youth-serving programs, and preferred beauty supply stores and salons. A number of people shared that though they had previously moved out of the Albina district to access more affordable housing, they were still commuting to the neighborhood regularly for community activities. One father of five explained he had moved his family to a suburb, "and we was never there because all of our kids' activities was in Portland . . . I'm not paying \$110.00 in gas a week now. It's barely \$20.00 a week now for gas." Living closer to the culturally-specific resources and amenities within the Albina district has economic, cultural, and community benefits for Black residents, and has strengthened many resident's place attachments. 415  
420  
425

### **Civic participation**

Also noteworthy were residents' self-reported increases in civic engagement. Fifty-six percent of residents reported they spend time volunteering regularly – which is significantly higher than the U.S. average of 25% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016) – and a quarter of residents reported that their civic engagement has *increased* since moving into the building. Similarly, 80% of residents reported regularly participating in arts and cultural events, and more than 50% indicated their participation had *increased* since moving into housing. In interviews, many residents credited this increase in civic and cultural engagement to proximity, particularly to Black churches, schools, and civic organizations. 430  
435

In summary, most respondents identified positive changes in their life as a result of moving into Preference Policy housing: they report greater feelings of equity and inclusion in the Albina district than in other areas of Portland, feel a stronger sense of community and belonging, are closer to the 440

places they want to go, and are more involved in their community. However, as described below, many residents also described threats to their well-being, and the Preference Policy seems to be serving some residents better than others.

445

### ***Threats to well-being***

Though the majority of residents felt their lives improved since moving into Preference Policy housing, many still identified vulnerabilities to their well-being. The two most prevalent areas of risk relate to equity and inclusion: inequitable access to resources and services, and the persistence of racism and other forms of oppression. These were also the two areas where residents had the greatest number of recommendations for neighborhood improvements.

450

### ***Insufficient access to needed resources and services***

Although all Preference Policy units are designated “affordable,” a few residents remain very precariously housed. For example, one man in his 60s whose only income is a monthly SSI check of less than \$800 reported paying more than \$700 each month for rent. Three interviewees shared serious concerns about how they will be able to stay housed. While only a few respondents reported extreme precarity, many reported persistent economic vulnerability that was exacerbated by insufficient affordable stores and shops in the neighborhood, as well as the scarcity of employment opportunities.

455

460

When surveyed, residents confirmed that there were many restaurants and stores in the area. Yet, it became evident in interviews and focus groups that many residents did not frequent area businesses. One woman who lived in the neighborhood for about ten years explained, “[I wish there were] more, different stores. Because the stores are so expensive that they put in this area.” A third of those interviewed recommended collocating a low-cost grocery close by their apartment building. The need for jobs was also a concern. Less than half of those surveyed believed that people who want to find a good job in the neighborhood can do so, and several people identified the need for job training programs for young people. Others, like a Black father who grew up in the neighborhood, spoke about the need to invest in more Black-owned businesses: “That will need to come back, and [the city] will have to give the opportunities for Blacks and help Blacks.” As demonstrated in this quote, some residents expect the Preference Policy to be accompanied by targeted economic development. In addition, nearly half of those interviewed expressed concern for more affordable rental and homeownership opportunities.

465

470

475

480

### *Persistence of racism*

Although many residents reported feeling more racially comfortable in the Albina District than in other neighborhoods, residents also reported uneven experiences in this domain. For example, while most agreed that people of different backgrounds get along, 37% also agreed that there's "a lot" of prejudice in the neighborhood, and 30% of those surveyed indicated that they had experienced discrimination in area businesses. The interviews surfaced many examples of marginalization, surveillance, and presumed criminality of Black residents by White neighbors. One gentleman in his 60s shared this example:

I was carrying a ladder, and I borrowed it from a friend, and this guy came out of his house and had his phone, and he's recording me walking down the street. He walked with me about five blocks, came in front of my house, and filmed me. I said, "Man, what is up with this? I'm not stealing the ladder; it's my friend's ladder. I've got to work on the house, I'm painting . . .

Several recounted experiences of discrimination at area parks that have been long-standing gathering places for Black residents. Residents described White families pulling their children away from playing with residents' children and younger relatives, and being looked at by White people as if they were, in the words of one previously unhoused woman, "an eyesore." As another woman explained, "You walk around, and there's just all White people and they look at you like you ain't supposed to be here. No, *you're* not supposed to be here. I grew up over here . . ." For many, these experiences of racism were particularly hurtful *because* they occurred in an area where residents have deep personal ties and expect to feel racially comfortable more of the time.

The most frequent hope for the neighborhood – shared by nearly 40% of those interviewed – was for greater community cohesion, both within the Black community and across group lines. Many people mentioned events that draw out the Black community each year, such as "Good in the Hood," a day-long street festival, and expressed a desire for more frequent events such as these to nurture Portland's Black community. Several expressed a desire to see more Black families return to the area. As one Black mother with multi-generational history in N/NE explained, she hopes the neighborhood will:

. . . get back to normal, like how it used to be like. More Blacks in the area, coming back to where they are from and where they grew up. And everybody being able to intertwine. It don't have to be just Black people, but I want people who are not minorities to be able to interact with minorities.

A number of interviewees echoed this desire for non-Black residents to have the ability to interact respectfully across group lines.

Others spoke to the need for intercultural gatherings to build relationships and comfort in the neighborhood. One Black woman in her 30s reflected that her experiences with racism have made her cautious with White people,

offering, “I think there needs to be more opportunity to get together and really get together . . . personally, I would like to see more opportunities for more intentional gatherings of people.” Residents expressed interest in fostering greater community cohesion at various scales, from Sunday potlucks in their building, to block parties designed to build relationships with immediate neighbors, to broader social, cultural, and civic activities. 525

In summary, though most residents feel that their lives are improving due to having stable, affordable housing through the Preference Policy, insufficient access to needed resources and services, as well as experiences of racism and other forms of oppression, are threats to well-being. As noted above, residents identified a number of complementary economic development and community building strategies to address these areas of concern. 530

## Discussion 535

The City of Portland is among the first to adopt a place-based preference policy to redress the harms caused to a historically Black neighborhood by past land-use policies and present-day gentrification, and this study is among the first to examine the impacts of such policies on well-being. Results from this first phase of study offer several promising findings. The N/NE Preference Policy has contributed to housing affordability and stability in a gentrifying area, particularly for Black residents with intergenerational ties to the Albina district. Findings also confirmed what the Black community organizers who advocated for the policy knew to be true – that place matters deeply to many of the Albina district’s longtime residents. The levels of place attachment reflected in this sample far exceed the national averages. Whereas less than 20% of adults in the U.S. report a strong emotional connection to their community (Carman et al., 2019), the vast majority of respondents in this study expressed particularly strong social connections, place attachments, and above-average levels of civic engagement. By facilitating these residents’ ability to live in an area where they already feel connected and are engaged, the Preference Policy contributes to their well-being. Findings imply a secondary benefit as well: the policy may contribute to the broader community’s well-being through these returning residents’ connection and engagement. In this way, the Preference Policy leverages two important resources to improve community well-being: affordable housing and the residents themselves. 540 545 550 555

These preliminary findings also suggest limitations of the Preference Policy. Although the policy successfully increases affordable housing in an increasingly desirable neighborhood, residents also need affordable stores and family-supporting jobs. Results underscore that simply *residing* in a neighborhood with abundant amenities does not produce a universal benefit. Furthermore, although the policy approaches reparation for the harms of past policies on residents of a historically Black neighborhood, the policy does not account for 560

persistent racism that shapes residents' experiences living in the neighborhood, or address their desire to strengthen social ties and address intergroup bias. Informed by resident recommendations for economic development and community building, we wonder what it would look like for this policy to be reimagined from a housing strategy to a comprehensive community development strategy that includes attention to housing, jobs, and the civic/social/cultural life of the neighborhood. A holistic strategy imagined and implemented in partnership with government, nonprofit, and civic organizations, can more effectively support the longtime Albina district residents returning to the neighborhood, as well as those who never left. 565 570

Thoroughly assessing changes to community well-being requires a longitudinal analysis. In the next phase of this study, the research team will gather data from residents up to three years into their residence in Preference Policy housing, and compare that to the well-being of similar residents residing in other types of neighborhoods. While this study focuses on the policy's effects on those served, a more comprehensive evaluation of the policy is needed to fully consider its effectiveness, particularly toward meeting racial justice goals. Given the policy's reparative aspirations, it is important to ask whether the scale of investment from the City is commensurate to the losses incurred by the Black community, and to consider perspectives of those who have not been served by the policy (such as those who remain on the waitlist and those who did not meet renter eligibility requirements), as well as existing Albina residents. 575 580 585

## Conclusion

This study suggests that preference policies can be a critical tool for advancing racial justice and well-being in gentrifying neighborhoods by (1) recognizing the disparate harms of urban development on communities of color; (2) siting affordable housing in areas with existing social, cultural and civic networks; and (3) leveraging the power of returning residents to help rebuild community well-being. In providing insight into how returning residents' well-being is affected positively and negatively by accessing housing in a gentrifying neighborhood to which they have strong ties, the results of this study can inform policies in other contexts where changing neighborhoods have disrupted housing stability. As similar policies are adopted, additional research will be critical to understanding the conditions in which preference policies are more and less effective, and the long-term effects on area demographics and well-being. 590 595 600

Community preference policies are not intended to address all of the harms caused by gentrification. That said, this study suggests preference policies can be an important tool for addressing the disproportionate effects of gentrification on Black communities and other communities of color that have



longstanding ties to now-revitalized neighborhoods. However, given the wide-spread harms of gentrification across multiple domains of well-being, simply increasing affordable housing in gentrifying neighborhoods is insufficient. Advancing racial justice and well-being in gentrifying neighborhoods will require comprehensive community development, including community-engaged assessment of needs and policies and programs that respond to residents' desires for their community. In the context of historic and ongoing systemic racism that continues to shape neighborhood well-being, it will take a holistic approach to rebuild what has been lost and restore a sense of community that will last.

615

### Disclosure statement

Q6 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Funding

Q5 This work was supported by the Portland State University [2019 Faculty Development Grant, Vision 2025 Seed Data].

620

### ORCID

Amie Thurber  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0753-5895>

Lisa K. Bates  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3887-8754>

### References

- Q7 Alfieri, A. V. (2019). Black, poor, and gone: Civil rights law's inner-city crisis. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 54, 629–702. 625
- Q8 Bates, L. K. (2013). Gentrification and displacement study: Implementing an equitable inclusive development strategy in the context of gentrification. *City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability*. <https://doi.org/10.15760/report-01>
- Q10 Bates, L. K. (2018). Growth without displacement: A test for equity planning in Portland. In N. Krumholz & K. Wertheim Hexter (Eds.), *Advancing equity planning now* (pp. 21–43). Cornell University Press. 630
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). *Volunteering in the United States — 2015* [press release]. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/volun.pdf>
- Carman, K. G., Chandra, A., Weiland, S., Miller, C., & Tait, M. (2019). *2018 national survey of health attitudes: Description and top-line summary data*. RAND. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2876.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2876.html) 635
- Davidson, M. (2008). Spoiled mixture: Where does state-led 'positive' gentrification end? *Urban Studies*, 45(12), 2385–2405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098008097105>
- Drew, E. M. (2012). "Listening through white ears": Cross-racial dialogues as a strategy to address the racial effects of gentrification. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 34(1), 99–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.2011.00572.x> 640

- Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs—principles and practices. *Health Services Research*, 48(6pt2), 2134–2156. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12117> 645
- Freidus, A. (2019). “A great school benefits us all”: Advantaged parents and the gentrification of an urban public school. *Urban Education*, 54(8), 1121–1148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916636656>
- Fullilove, M. (2016). *Root shock: How tearing up city neighborhoods hurts America, and what we can do about it*. New Village Press. 650
- Gibson, K. J. (2007). Bleeding Albina: A history of community disinvestment, 1940–2000. *Transforming Anthropology*, 15(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1525/tran.2007.15.1.03>
- Goetz, E. (2019). *Criticism about community preference policies are misguided*. Shelterforce. <https://shelterforce.org/2019/11/14/criticisms-about-community-preference-policies-are-misguided/> 655
- Goetz, E. G. (2010). Desegregation in 3D: Displacement, dispersal and development in American public housing. *Housing Studies*, 25(2), 137–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030903561800>
- Goodman, J. D. (2019, July 16). *What the city didn't want the public to know: Its policy deepens segregation*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/nyregion/segregation-nyc-affordable-housing.html> 660
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., Bailey-Rodriguez, D., & Frost, N. (2015). A qualitatively driven approach to multimethod and mixed methods research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & R. B. Johnson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of multimethod and mixed methods research inquiry* (pp. 3–20). Oxford University Press. 665
- Hodkinson, S., & Essen, C. (2015). Grounding accumulation by dispossession in everyday life: The unjust geographies of urban regeneration under the private finance initiative. *International Journal of Law in the Built Environment*, 7(1), 72–91. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLBE-01-2014-0007>
- Hudson, K. D. (2015). Toward a conceptual framework for understanding community belonging and well-being: Insights from a queer-mixed perspective. *Journal of Community Practice*, 23(1), 27–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2014.986595> 670
- Huysen, M., & Meerman, J. R. (2014). Resident perceptions of redevelopment and gentrification in the heartside neighborhood: Lessons for social work profession. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 41, 3–22. 675
- Q11 Iglesias, T. (2018). Threading the needle of fair housing law in a gentrifying city with a legacy of
- Q12 discrimination. *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development*, 27(1), 51–65.
- Q13 Kennedy, M., & Leonard, P. (2001). *Dealing with neighborhood change: A primer on gentrification and policy choices*. Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-neighborhood-change-a-primer-on-gentrification-and-policy-choices/> 680
- Lee, S. J., & Kim, Y. (2016). Structure of well-being: An exploratory study of the distinction between individual well-being and community well-being and the importance of intersubjective community well-being. In Y. Kee, S. Lee, & R. Phillips (Eds.), *Social factors and community well-being* (pp. 13–37). Springer. 685
- Lees, L., Slater, T., & Wylie, E. (2013). *Gentrification*. Routledge.
- Levy, D. K., Comey, J., & Padilla, S. (2006). *In the face of gentrification: Case studies of local efforts to mitigate displacement*. The Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/50791/411294-In-the-Face-of-Gentrification.PDF>
- Li, B. Y., Vitiello, D., & Acoca, A. (2013). *Chinatown then and now: Gentrification in Boston, New York and Philadelphia*. Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. <http://aaldef.org/Chinatown%20Then%20and%20Now%20AALDEF.pdf> 690

- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lipsitz, G. (2011). *How racism takes place*. Temple University Press.
- Maciag, M. (2015). *Gentrification in America report*. Governing. [http://www.governing.com/](http://www.governing.com/gov-data/census/gentrification-in-cities-governing-report.html) 695
- Massey, D., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Harvard University Press.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1609406917733847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847> 700
- Plunkett, D., Phillips, R., & Ucar Kocaoglu, B. (2018). Place attachment and community development. *Journal of Community Practice*, 26(4), 471–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2018.1521352>
- Portland Housing Bureau. (2019). *State of housing in Portland*. <https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/phb-soh-2019-web.pdf> 705
- Stabrowski, F. (2014). New-build gentrification and the everyday displacement of Polish immigrant tenants in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. *Antipode*, 46(3), 794–815. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12074>
- Sung, H., & Phillips, R. (2016). Conceptualizing a community well-being and theory construct. In Y. Kee, S. J. Lee, & R. Phillips (Eds.), *Social factors and community well-being* (pp. 1–12). Springer. 710
- Q14 Twigge-Molecey, A. (2014). Exploring resident experiences of indirect displacement in a neighbourhood undergoing gentrification: The case of Saint-Henri in Montreal. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 23(1), 1–22. 715
- Wiseman, J., & Brasher, K. (2008). Community wellbeing in an unwell world: Trends, challenges, and possibilities. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 29(3), 353–366. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jphp.2008.16>
- Q15 Yonto, D., & Thill, J. C. (2020). Gentrification in the US New South: Evidence from two types of African American communities in Charlotte. *Cities*, 97, 102475. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102475> 720