May 2006

Repopulation as Revitalization? Condominiums in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota

Fay L. Cleaveland

Macalester College, fcleaveland@macalester.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/geography_honors

Part of the Geography Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/geography_honors/6
Repopulation as Revitalization? Condominiums in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota

Senior Honors Thesis

Fay Cleaveland

Advisor: Dr. Laura Smith
Geography Department
Macalester College

May 1, 2006
Repopulation as Revitalization? Condominiums in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota

Abstract

Condominium development in downtown business districts has boomed in the last ten years, increasing the size and density of urban neighborhood populations. The design of condos and their immediate surroundings can affect how residents will use these spaces and the quality of life experienced by neighborhood inhabitants. This research applies the design principles of Jane Jacobs and the Congress for the New Urbanism to four condominium developments in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, to determine their impact on neighborhood livability in downtowns. I conclude with an analysis of their effectiveness as downtown revitalization tools and policy suggestions for future condominium projects.

Advisor: Laura Smith

Geography Department
Macalester College
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of those who provided their advice, time, and support for my honors thesis. Thanks to both Dr. Laura Smith and Dr. David Lanegran for encouraging my interest in geography and helping me develop a project that most suits my learning style. Additional thanks to Dr. Will Craig of the University of Minnesota for his critique and thoughtful discussion of this project. Thank you to my fellow majors for technical help with GIS and for input on my ideas. Finally, special thanks to my parents for enabling me to be here and for their strong encouragement throughout my studies.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>Introduction to Condominium Revitalization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Urban Design Theories: Jane Jacobs and the Congress for the New Urbanism</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Background to Condominium Development in the Twin Cities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>The Lowry: Bolstering St. Paul’s Entertainment District</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Grant Park: The Return of the Middle Class</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>Historic Preservation in Industrial Districts: the Great Northern Lofts and the Washburn Lofts</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
<td>Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction to Condominium Revitalization

Improving quality of life has been the goal of urban planning since the early days of American urbanization. Throughout city development, physical design has been altered in the attempt to better our experience in these places. While transportation networks remained limited, urban areas were tightly compact centers that formed the core districts Americans traditionally think of as “downtown.” Undeveloped urban land was scarce, and downtowns were the center of services, activity, and commerce for their region. At the same time, they were often crowded, poorly sanitized, and polluted by industrial facilities. Over time, cities were deemed unlivable by much of the American public, and planning was directed toward escape from the “dirty” city and development of the unpopulated urban edge.

New possibilities for urban living emerged after World War II. Automobiles and the growing highway network provided a means for people to live outside the city and still access all of its facilities. Federal housing programs provided mortgage assistance that enabled more families to purchase new homes. Land outside the central city became desirable real estate to urban residents. Employment centers soon followed the departure of the middle class population outside the central city to larger, cheaper lots in the suburbs. Office parks and shopping centers gradually replaced the hodgepodge of downtown skyscrapers and shopping districts as the centers of commerce. All of a person’s daily needs could be found outside of the central city, and strict separation of land-use functions became the preferred mode of development.
Critique of this development form soon emerged. In the *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, Jane Jacobs argues that high-density living is an essential part of urban areas and should be encouraged wherever possible. She disputes the strict zoning segregation found in suburbs, instead promoting mixed-use developments that share residential, commercial, recreational, and industrial functions. It is only through this mixture of major functions that the variety of specialized functions that make cities unique can give and receive economic support (14). Furthermore, Jacobs insists that urban design can promote the development of this functional diversity. According to Jacobs, city districts are interesting, exciting, and safe when their functions maintain an effervescence of people and activity throughout the day. The physical design of cities is a critical element in producing diversity and sustaining overall quality of life (35).

In 1996, the Congress for the New Urbanism defined a set of design guidelines based on Jacobs’ principles to ensure the health and sustainability of new communities. Critiquing the unabated growth of functionally-separated suburbs, New Urbanists argue that new development must consciously plan for mixed-use, walkable communities. This form of design enhances quality of life by creating distinctive spaces people can connect to and interact in. Today, these principles are applied to ensure the long-term viability of both new suburbs and in redeveloped urban districts (Fulton 10).

During the second half of the twentieth century, many downtowns lost the qualities that made them livable places in the eyes of Jane Jacobs and New Urbanists. While suburban growth claimed population and economic growth, central cities experienced a period of decline. Some neighborhoods like the Minneapolis milling
district became obsolete and were partially abandoned. In response to the decline in dominance over industrial, retail, and residential functions, central cities have had to seek new avenues of development. Large-scale entertainment facilities are a popular trend of the last two decades; Minneapolis and St. Paul have three sports/performance centers between them. Museums and theaters are also an important presence in downtowns that attract a wide base of visitors. In addition, central cities have added recreational functions, especially on previously industrial waterfronts. Both Minneapolis and St. Paul have implemented museums and running paths along their waterfronts in an effort to promote their continued use.

While these functions have created a new purpose for downtowns, most of these districts are yet to achieve the full mixture of activity that Jacobs claims necessary for true vitality. However, a new trend is transforming the urban landscape that might be able to establish the long-term revitalization of downtowns. High-density condominium developments in both new and renovated structures represent renewed mainstream interest in urban living. With this latest addition to their mixture of functions, it is now possible that downtowns will reverse previous trends of decline and become sustainable urban communities in their own right.

Given their newness, the long-term success of condo projects is still a question of debate. However, they are a major step toward changing cities in the direction promoted by Jane Jacobs and New Urbanists. Condominiums redefine former concepts of urban living and encourage greater use of downtowns. The infusion of condominium residents into urban neighborhoods has the ability to sustain their health into the distant future.
The successful implementation of condos is an important move toward achieving higher urban quality of life and the lasting revitalization of downtowns.
Chapter 2

Urban Design Theories: Jane Jacobs and the Congress for the New Urbanism

Introduction

First published in 1961, Jane Jacobs’ work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* redefined perceptions of urban living and cities’ roles in determining quality of life among their residents. The work remains one of the most influential pieces of literature on urban design, outlining land-use principles that promote the social and economic vitality of cities (4). At the time of publication, American cities were experiencing a physical, social, and economic transition. Previous to World War II, most big cities were typified by high-density cores of industrial, commercial, and residential functions. By the 1960s, cities had expanded to include suburban areas dominated by low-density residential developments that were strictly segregated from other types of functions. High-density living was associated with slums, urban renewal meant bulldozing older neighborhoods to construct freeways, and the newly implemented interstate system provided an escape route for the affluent from life in the unpopular city.

Jane Jacobs argued that contemporary planning aimed at revitalizing the decaying urban core was actually destroying it, because it ignored the central concepts that make cities unique from other kinds of places (16). She stood against the prevailing notion that certain land uses were incompatible, such as factories and busy commercial districts that detracted from the peace and quiet deemed necessary for healthy residential settings (19-20). Instead, Jacobs set forth that the most important and fundamental principle of city planning is “a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other
constant mutual support, both economically and socially” (14). Cities exist because of the diversity of social and economic functions they can perform in a comparatively small land area. Because of this concentrated diversity among people and their activities, the social and economic behavior of urban citizens is unique to cities. In a city, a large group of people live in close proximity to each other who may share nothing in common besides the spaces they inhabit. Quality of life in an urban setting is therefore defined by how people use their space and interact with each other in it. Jacobs argues that a city’s physical layout and spatial design play a direct role in encouraging the types of social and economic behaviors that promote quality of life in urban neighborhoods.

Today, Jacobs’ concepts are echoed by the Congress for the New Urbanism’s (CNU) principles of urban design aimed at promoting healthy urban lifestyles. While Jacobs’ design concepts stem primarily from personal observations and anecdotes of real city neighborhoods, New Urbanists follow design forms that can be implemented during the construction of new neighborhoods. By designing pedestrian-friendly settings that contain a mixture of commercial and residential uses, New Urbanist planners hope to increase the quality of life in communities through building and design codes. Though New Urbanists may differ from Jacobs on the exact details of how to create healthy and sustainable urban communities, both share the underlying principle that an area’s physical features and overall design can positively affect the quality of life of its citizens.

The Urban Environment: Sidewalks

In The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jacobs argues that cities form a unique type of environment that is conceptually different from towns or suburbs (16). Therefore, the physical components of a city: its sidewalks, parks, and neighborhoods,
are used differently in cities than they would be elsewhere. According to Jacobs, the interaction between urban residents and the pieces of the urban environment they inhabit must be understood in order to fully comprehend cities or make any plans to generate healthy urban neighborhoods.

The most elementary component to a city is its sidewalk system. While sidewalks all function as walkways, they serve most importantly as indicators of pedestrians’ personal safety. Sidewalks are a piece of the built environment where the entire scope of city residents must be expected to interact without danger. Given that “cities are, by definition, full of strangers […] the bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers” (Jacobs 30). This process is cyclical: if a person feels unsafe among the other people using a sidewalk, they are much less likely to walk on the particular sidewalks where they feel unsafe. Feelings of insecurity about a sidewalk can come as much from a street’s reputation as personal experience of crime. “It does not take many incidents of violence on a city street, or in a city district, to make people fear the streets. And as they fear them, they use them less, which makes the streets still more unsafe” (30). Sidewalks that are used frequently and consistently are more likely to be safe places to walk because potential criminals have a greater chance of being noticed by other sidewalk users, who are unconsciously serving as witnesses to crime. Without the ability to create a safe environment on its sidewalks, a city district has little hope of success.

Jacobs makes it clear that simply building sidewalks is not an incentive for people to use them. Sidewalks get used when they lead to places people want to go. Small businesses support public sidewalks in two ways. The first is obvious: to provide an
incentive for a diverse group of users to walk on the sidewalks. A mixture of businesses, restaurants, and bars maintain a street’s attraction for different reasons at different times of day. This ensures that there will always be a group of people coming and going along the street to use the different functions it offers (41). Not only do sidewalks become safer, they become interesting and exciting pieces of the cityscape that a large variety of users can enjoy as they travel to various businesses along the sidewalks. A district’s vitality rests on the success of sidewalks that encourage people to use its functions.

The second role of small businesses is a more subtle form of protection that Jacobs terms “eyes on the street.” Streets are under constant watch by their “natural proprietors,” the small business owners, shopkeepers, and residents who have a casual interest in the activity that happens outside their doors (Jacobs 35). Safe streets contain businesses that are oriented to the street, allowing people indoors easy visibility of what happens on the sidewalk. Without consciously acting as a police force, they form a constant watch over the street and could instantly perceive signs of criminal activity happening in front of them. The people who unconsciously guard the sidewalks are closely interrelated with the people outside using them. Unfrequented sidewalks are boring to watch, and cannot induce people in buildings along the street to watch them in sufficient numbers to keep them safe (37). On the other hand, busy sidewalks are both safe and pleasant features of urban living. They are attractive both to use and to watch, and contribute to the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

Safety is a particular issue on sidewalks because sidewalks are a place where all segments of an urban population expect to have unplanned interact among other people. While this interaction can result in crimes such as shoplifting, purse snatching, or assault,
Jacobs argues that most relationships formed on sidewalks have a unique quality of trust without personal obligation. Safety is the precondition for which people will walk on a sidewalk, but the positive relationships they form on sidewalks are unique and essential elements of city life. Within relationships formed in the publicity of the street,

“It is possible to be on excellent sidewalk terms with people who are very different from oneself, and even, as time passes, on familiar public terms with them. Such relationships can, and do, endure for many years, for decades; they could never have formed without that line, much less endured. They form precisely because they are by-the-way to people’s normal public sorties” (62).

A daily routine of stopping at the same shop or passing the same people ensures contact between human beings, developing a form of trust on public terms that are not entangled by the different codes of private relationships. These informal bonds tie people into their urban communities and create a sense of belonging that is unique to urban neighborhoods. The ultimate outcome of sidewalk interactions goes beyond personal safety: sidewalk interactions tie people into their communities and help them maintain a sense of commitment to their place. The more people are willing to use their sidewalks, the more opportunities they have for these interactions to occur.

The Urban Environment: Parks

City parks are another public space that define livability in an urban location. According to Jacobs, parks tend to fall into two categories, “delightful features of city districts,” or “dispirited city vacuums […] eaten around with decay, little used, unloved” (90). Like sidewalks, simply having a park in a city neighborhood is not a sign of high quality of life. Parks cannot automatically transform their neighborhoods into healthy communities, because “neighborhoods parks themselves are directly and drastically affected by the way the neighborhood acts upon them” (95). Parks are dependent on the
diversity of nearby destinations to attract a diversity of users who stop in the park or pass through it at different times of day (90). Jacobs observes “the worst problem parks are located precisely where people do not pass by and likely never will” (107). Like sidewalks, parks only become interesting friendly places to spend time when they are well used.

A park that is proximate to other important functions in the city attracts a variety of visitors who will stay in the park or pass through it. The buildings proximate to a park are equally important as the features of the park itself in generating reasons to use a park and integrating it into its surroundings. Besides attracting people to the park’s vicinity, buildings enclose the park and define its shape. Surrounded by buildings and activity, the park “appears as an important event in the city scene, a positive feature, rather than a no-account leftover” (Jacobs 106). Parks that are not surrounded by buildings are on the outskirts of any action and are therefore uninteresting to the people intended to use them.

Jacobs terms this feature of parks “enclosure,” and names this as one of the four design components incorporated in successful parks. In addition, Jacobs names intricacy, centering, and sun as critical elements for a well-used park (103). Intricacy refers to the eye-level attractiveness of a park that creates “subtle expressions of difference” across the landscape. Intricacy can be expressed by a difference in elevation, tree clusters, or openings to various focal points (104). A park that can create different types of space within it gives people different reasons to use it, helping it attract the necessary diversity of users of to maintain activity throughout the day.

Centering is an aspect of intricacy that calls for a defined focal point at a park’s center. The center defines the park’s space and draws people into it, providing a
crossroads or meeting ground for people to mingle with others (Jacobs 105). The sun also creates a particular setting that attracts people to a park. Jacobs cautions against surrounding parks with high buildings that can cut off sunlight. Well-used parks provide a mixture of sun and shade to fulfill their role as a pleasant outdoor space for city residents to use (105). Enclosure, intricacy, centering, and sun are features of design that can determine whether or not a park will be used and enjoyed. Like sidewalks, parks provide an opportunity for city residents to have casual interactions and enjoy the use of a shared space.

Together, a city’s various parks, sidewalk networks, and streets form its neighborhoods. Jacobs emphasizes that successful street neighborhoods are not discrete units, but “physical, social, and economic continuities” (121). Each street neighborhood forms part of the city whole. Quality of life in the city is tied to the health of its individual neighborhoods. In Jacobs’ view, the underlying objective of city planning should be to foster lively and interesting street neighborhoods, knit together continuously throughout the city. Parks and public space must be incorporated into the fabric of streets, rather than islanding off separate functions (129). While well-designed components of a city can help promote certain social behaviors, a city neighborhood cannot achieve success if it is not able to generate positive economic growth.

*Conditions for Economic Diversity*

Healthy economic conditions are necessary to sustain the urban setting defined by sidewalks, parks, and neighborhoods. Again, Jacobs argues that the underlying principle for healthy economic life is diversity among the variety, size, and type of a district’s functions. In cities, diversity rests on the fact “so many people are so close together, and
among them contain so many different tastes, skills, needs, supplies, and bees in their bonnets” (147). Only an enormous variety of people can support the assortment of businesses, services, and professions that exist in cities. However, a large population center does not automatically generate successful centers of commerce and trade. Certain conditions must be present in a district that supports diversity and the growth of new enterprises. Based on her observations, Jacobs has found a combination of four elements that are necessary to create an “exuberant diversity” in city streets and districts (150).

The first condition for economic diversity is that the district must serve more than one primary function. Primary diversity functions “are those which, in themselves, bring people to a specific place because they are anchorages” (Jacobs 161). Offices, factories, and residences are examples of primary functions, because people use them reliably and consistently on a daily basis. In some cases, centers of entertainment and recreation have developed into primary diversity functions because they can be expected to regularly attract large crowds (161). Secondary diversity is made up by the various enterprises that crop up “in response to the presence of primary uses, to serve the people the primary uses draw” (162). Examples of secondary diversity functions are small businesses, shops, services, and restaurants. Diversity of primary functions and the secondary functions they encourage guarantees that people will use a district continuously throughout the day. Office districts may serve as primary functions, and even develop secondary function to support those businesses, but they become dead at night if there is nothing else in the area to draw people after business hours.

To stimulate economic diversity, primary functions must cause people to use them effectively. First, “the people using the streets at different times must actually use the
same streets” (Jacobs 163). If their paths do not crisscross, the reality is that these different groups of people will not actually mix, and the functions that they use will not mix. Therefore, some of the facilities used by the different people on the street must also be the same. Finally, effective economic diversity means that “the mixture of people on a street at one time of day must bear some reasonably proportionate relationship to people there at other times of day” (164). An office district may cause people to crisscross paths through its different functions, but it is ineffective if there is nothing to maintain this life after workers go home.

Jacobs’ second condition for economic diversity is that blocks must be short in length. Long blocks “automatically sort people into paths that meet too infrequently, so that different uses very near each other geographically are, in practical effect, literally blocked off from one another” (181). A person living on a long block is likely to walk from that street to the busiest cross street on either side, without ever having to use the streets adjacent and parallel. Short blocks provide walkers with options and commerce more nodes of intersection to develop. Businesses on short blocks can draw customers from a close range, because they are easily accessible to all of their customers. Businesses on long blocks must attract a larger customer base, because people within the same sized geographic area have a farther walking distance to the businesses (183). Short blocks encourage more businesses, and therefore the diversity of an area, because they increase the number of potential customers who can access them.

Variation in age and type of building structure is the third condition for economic diversity. In areas that only contain new buildings, “the enterprises that can exist there are automatically limited to those that can support the high costs of new construction”
(Jacobs 187). Chain stores, supermarkets, restaurants, and banks can afford to construct new buildings or pay the high rent that ultimately covers construction costs. However, new businesses, neighborhood bars, pawn shops, and family restaurants cannot afford these costs and must inhabit older buildings. Old buildings need to be present even in areas whose businesses can afford new construction. Otherwise, the area would be “economically too limited- and therefore functionally too limited to be lively, interesting, and convenient” (188). The reverse is true when an area only contains old buildings. This indicates that the area is a failure that cannot attract new businesses, new customers, or new construction from existing businesses (189). The mixture of building ages and conditions guarantees that a variety of enterprises can afford to operate in the same area.

The fourth condition for economic diversity in urban areas is a sufficiently dense concentration of people, including residents. Though the previous three conditions for economic diversity are essential, they can have very little influence if enough people are not present to receive their benefits (Jacobs 205). In contrast to the prevailing notion that high-density living was associated with low quality of life, Jacobs argued “people gathered in concentrations of city size and density can be considered a positive good.” People “are desirable because they are the source of immense vitality […] a great exuberant richness of differences and possibilities” (220). There is no formulaic answer for the desirable concentration of a city district; the primary concern is that residential land is dense enough “to do a good primary-diversity job of helping to generate flourishing secondary city diversity and liveliness” (212). Districts have different needs based on their locations and the other primary functions within them, but a concentration of people to support its services is essential to its economic prosperity.
Jacobs’ approach to urban planning identifies conditions for a city’s economic and social success. In her estimation, residents of neighborhoods that meet these conditions enjoy a higher quality of life due to the vibrancy and diversity of the urban spaces they inhabit. While Jacobs looked for qualities in existing urban neighborhoods that made them successful, the New Urbanist approach attempts to superimpose these elements for success on neighborhoods through comprehensive planning measures. The ideas that guide New Urbanist principles are meant to imitate the traditional urban neighborhoods first described by Jane Jacobs.

*New Urbanism*

The New Urbanist movement originated during a period of backlash against conventional suburban planning taking place after World War II (Fulton 4). Although New Urbanist neighborhoods may be used as in-fill in traditional urban neighborhoods, their design forms were first conceived as an alternative to suburban sprawl. The first Congress for the New Urbanism met in 1996, setting forth design principles that can be used to achieve a higher quality of life in planned communities. While these are principally intended as guidelines for entire new communities, some of them can be applied to new development occurring in built-up urban areas. The underlying concept: “economic health and harmonious evolution of neighborhoods, districts, and corridors can be improved through graphic urban design codes that serve as predictable guides for change” closely echoes the rhetoric of Jane Jacobs (Congress for the New Urbanism). New Urbanism uses deliberate planning techniques to achieve social and economic health in today’s modern neighborhoods.
One of the most basic elements of New Urbanist planning is that neighborhoods should be as pedestrian-friendly as possible. Commercial and residential areas are planned to be tightly compact and mixed-use. “Many activities of daily living should occur within walking distance, allowing independence to those who do not drive, especially the elderly and the young. Interconnected networks of streets should be designed to encourage walking, reduce the number and length of automobile trips, and conserve energy” (CNU). Most New Urbanist plans attempt to include all of a person’s daily functions within a ten minute walking distance from their residence (Steuteville). Encouraging walking also means minimizing the presence of automobiles on the landscape. Parking ramps that blend in with their surroundings are preferred over large expanses of parking lots. In residential areas, alleys remove the focus in front yards from large garages, making space for front porches with pedestrian access.

While the layout of functions can encourage walking, building design can make the experience more pleasant. Areas should have defined edges so that a sense of place is maintained in a setting. In addition, “Individual architectural projects should be seamlessly linked to their surroundings” (CNU). A streetscape becomes both visually attractive and more physically accessible when buildings are close together and set back a uniform distance from the street. When functions are grouped together and not separated from the pedestrian by large parking lots, the human eye is capable of taking in all of these sights, and the street and its businesses are perceivable as a connected whole.

New Urbanists also encourage building at the “human scale” of approximately three stories, a height that is low enough not to seem “cold aloof, and fortresslike […] designed for beings larger than ourselves.” Buildings are encouraged to develop texture
and a sense of depth that can “easily be perceived and comprehended” by people (Hall and Porterfield 271). This stands in contrast to the flat-walled, inward facing bigbox developments that dominate our commercial landscape.

Like Jacobs, New Urbanists emphasize the importance of public space in creating livable communities. “Streets and squares should be safe, comfortable, and interesting to the pedestrian. Properly configured, they encourage walking and enable neighbors to know each other and protect their communities” (CNU). This statement echoes Jacobs’ concept that contact between community members in public places encourages overall community health. Neighborhoods should have parks that encourage a variety of uses among different groups of people. “A range of parks, from tot-lots and village greens to ballfields and community gardens, should be distributed within neighborhoods.” (CNU). By creating a means of social contact between community members, parks elevate quality of life in their communities.

New Urbanists also encourage diversity in residential neighborhoods. “Within neighborhoods, a broad range of housing types and price levels can bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community” (CNU). Ideally, every neighborhood would contain a mixture of housing types so that people of varying income levels and backgrounds can share the same location. Lot sizes are kept small to encourage the use of public parks, not private yards, as a way of ensuring that the different segments within the community will incorporate the same space.

Conclusion

The concepts established by Jane Jacobs and the Congress for the New Urbanism depict how design can be used to sustain the social and economic health of real-life urban
areas. Neighborhoods must be interesting places for people and friendly to pedestrians. A mixture of different functions within a neighborhood guarantees its continual use and economic sustainability. If a project aimed at revitalizing an urban area is to work successfully, plans must incorporate these design principles and integrate the project with the neighborhood it occupies. Neither Jane Jacobs nor New Urbanism’s concepts are without limitations, and critiques of urban design theory will be introduced during discussion of case study revitalization projects. However, these theories are a starting point for determining the necessary elements of vital urban communities, and they can be used as standards to evaluate revitalization projects occurring in urban areas. This research paper will use the principles of Jane Jacobs and the Congress for the New Urbanism to evaluate whether condominium projects in the Twin Cities incorporate the design elements necessary to contribute successfully to revitalization efforts in the two downtowns.
Chapter 3

Background to Condominium Development in the Twin Cities

The recent growth in downtown homeownership comes after a long period of disinvestment and economic decline in U.S. urban areas that began after World War II. Mid-twentieth century federal government policies promoted investment in newly developed suburban areas at the expense of continuing reinvestment in existing downtowns. Policies set by the Interstate Highway Act, the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation, and the Federal Housing Administration ultimately resulted in the transition of the majority of the U.S.’s urban population from central cities to suburbs. The middle class in particular found incentives to move outside of downtowns, and employment and commercial functions soon followed to meet the needs of the growing suburban population. Unfortunately, the loss of the middle class population in many of America’s urban centers precipitated a decline in urban quality of life, and many cities lost the particular characteristics defined by Jacobs that make them vibrant livable communities.

The Interstate Highway Act

The growth of interstates and automobile transportation was a major factor in the decline of high-density urban centers. Previously, travel was limited to walking and public transportation lines, ensuring that the urban population remained highly concentrated within a defined land area. Industries, stores, offices and homes had to congregate close together or else average citizens could not access all of their daily needs. However, this phenomenon was short-lived, due to the fact that “interurban transportation-that between cities-was better than intraurban transportation- that within cities,” confining urban residents to a limited space in a central city (Jackson 188). The
Interstate Highway Act of 1956 initiated the federal interstate system and made transportation by private automobile the new norm for American cities. For the first time, a city’s residents could live, work, and shop across distances that were infeasible while transportation was limited to walking and streetcar networks. Without these transportation limitations, urban residents could take advantage of new real estate opportunities far from the urban core, knowing they could easily commute to a different part of the city to work or to shop.

*The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation*

While the interstate system facilitated transportation within urban areas, federal housing policy provided incentives for people to move away from central cities and live in suburbs. The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) simultaneously encouraged investment in suburban residences and discouraged reinvestment in older urban neighborhoods. HOLC was established during the Great Depression to enable more U.S. citizens to own a home by providing low-interest home mortgages. HOLC refinanced the existing mortgage system, changing the standard mortgage repayment period from seven years to approximately thirty years (Jackson 197). This policy spread out the length of payment on debt and reduced the risk of buying a home for middle and lower-class Americans. Because of HOLC, a greater percentage of Americans could stop renting homes and enter the housing market as potential home-buyers.

In order to grant home mortgage loans, HOLC developed an appraisal system for the homes it financed. Though mortgage refinancing in itself did not cause urban decline, HOLC’s home appraisal system favored suburban developments and undervalued homes in urban neighborhoods. The appraisal system was based as much on the group of people
in the home’s vicinity as on its structural characteristics. HOLC made maps that divided cities into neighborhoods, collecting information relating to local residents’ occupation, income and ethnicity, as well as the age, type of construction, price range, sales demand, and state of repair of the neighborhood homes (Jackson 197). HOLC then developed a rating system for the neighborhoods, assigning every block in a city a rating between one and four. New homogenous residential locations that were ‘in demand as residential locations in good times and bad’ received a rating of one. These were the type of neighborhoods typically found in newly developed middle-class suburbs. Fourth grade neighborhoods were areas that were ‘definitely declined.’ The kinds of neighborhoods that were most likely to be found in urban areas, with high densities, mixed racial or income groups, aging housing, or proximity to disamenities consistently received the lowest ratings of three and four (197). In a practice that came to be known as redlining, HOLC demarcated four-rated neighborhoods on city maps and cited them as poor investments. The same types of neighborhoods that Jacobs considered critical for sustaining livable cities were redlined and openly declared poor sites for investment by a federal agency. Meanwhile, HOLC’s rating system favored investment in suburban areas, with their homogenous populations, new housing, and separation of land-use functions through zoning codes.

Though HOLC itself granted loans to redlined neighborhoods, its maps were made available to private lending institutions that did refuse loans to redlined areas (Jackson 199). This contributed to the decline of urban neighborhoods, as private agents could systematically deny loans for improvements or new construction based on home location. HOLC’s ratings started a preference among home investors for growth in the
suburbs whose design New Urbanists today have rejected so forcefully. On grounds that were essentially classist and racist, HOLC helped prejudice the American public against investment in urban neighborhoods.

*The Federal Housing Administration*

Along with HOLC, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) also contributed to the population’s migration from central cities to suburbs. The goal of the FHA was to promote construction of new housing developments through private investment. The agency’s role was to insure long-term mortgage loans made by private lenders for home construction and sale (Jackson 204). This security served as an incentive for private lenders to give more home loans on new construction. In addition, the FHA decreased the necessary down payments on a home from approximately 30 percent to 10 percent, enabling more Americans to afford the cost of a home. Because of the FHA’s changes, it became cheaper for Americans to buy a home rather than rent one (205). Urban areas, with their high concentration of renter units and older homes, became less appealing places to live in comparison to suburbs. Suburban lots were typically larger than city lots, their homes were newer, and the overall cost to consumers who purchased a home here was lower because of FHA subsidies.

The impact of the FHA was tremendous. According to Jackson, “No agency of the United States government has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people over the past half-century than the Federal Housing Administration” (203). Most FHA insurance went to new residential neighborhoods in suburban areas, rather than in the existing core neighborhoods of downtowns. The agency favored construction of single-family projects, gave loans to new developments over loans to
improve existing ones, and again used an appraisal system that explicitly forbid loans to areas containing “inharmonious racial groups.” The result of FHA policy was that most white middle class Americans chose to live outside the urban center, thereby decreasing the overall wealth of the urban constituency and its racial diversity.

In regard to HOLC and the FHA, Jackson writes “the lasting damage done by the national government was that it put its seal of approval on ethnic and racial discrimination and developed policies which had the result of the practical abandonment of large sections of older, industrial cities” (217). By the 1960s and 1970s, many urban residential neighborhoods had declined into the disrepair and blight that were the logical outcomes of a lack of public investment and an increasingly impoverished group of constituents. As Jacobs points out “credit blacklisting maps are accurate prophecies because they are self-fulfilling prophecies” (qtd in Jackson 214). The Interstate Highway Act, HOLC, and the FHA explicitly promoted residential developments in suburbs that were contrary to the principles of healthy urban areas outlined by Jacobs and disadvantaged urban neighborhoods for future improvements and growth.

Suburban Growth in the Twin Cities

The outcome of the Interstate Highway Act and the policies of FHA and HOLC can be seen in the pattern of the Twin Cities’ development. Residential construction accounted for 80% of the value of building permits in Twin Cities suburbs in 1955, three fourths of which were single-family units (Abler Adams and Borchert 51). Abler Adams and Borchert attribute this growth directly to the low interest rates guaranteed by federal housing programs and property tax reductions granted to owner-occupied housing units through the FHA and HOLC. By 1956, the Twin Cities had added 185 square miles of
new subdivisions to its pre-WWII land area (53). Despite growth in the metro’s size, the population of Minneapolis and St. Paul began to decline after 1950 and is yet to regain the population at that peak.

Though they lost residential growth to the suburbs during the 1950s, Minneapolis and St. Paul did not lose their economic dominance over the suburbs until the 1960s with the completion of Interstates 694 and 494. These roads created a circumference around both cities and enabled travelers to bypass central cities altogether when they moved between suburbs. Previous transportation lines had radiated out from each city’s downtown, ensuring that the city centers remained the focus of transportation and economic activity. For the first time, suburban areas became easily accessible to commuters, and the downtowns lost their situational advantage over the suburbs (Adams and Van Drasek 188).

During the period from 1960 to 1990, employment centers followed residential development away from the central cities to suburbs accessible by freeway. As middle and upper class residents relocated to suburban locations, these areas became more appealing to large employers. Fueled by the easy transportation and large tracts of land available outside the cities, they too left the central cities for suburban locations in the metropolitan area. Places like Lowertown, St. Paul and St. Anthony Falls, Minneapolis, once vibrant warehouse districts, were slowly abandoned in favor of cheaper and larger lots in the suburbs. In a 1990 list of the 10 largest public, private, and cooperative corporations headquartered in the Twin Cities, only 10 of these 30 companies’ headquarters were located in St. Paul or Minneapolis proper (Adams and Van Drasek 51).
This fact indicates that the location of the metro’s wealth and investment is no longer focused in its two downtowns.

**Accommodating Automobiles**

While the automobile era sparked population growth in suburbs, it also necessitated a land use conversion in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul to accommodate vehicular traffic. First, parking space had to be provided to ensure that people traveling by car could come to the downtowns. In 1967, Minneapolis developed a zoning code that imposed parking requirements on downtown buildings (Sether). The downtown core was zoned for high density, and no parking requirement was made for buildings constructed here. However, the area just outside downtown was zoned for “medium density.” Any building larger than 400,000 square feet was required to provide one parking space for each 300 square feet of building construction. Because parking space generates little profit to a development and decreases the space on lot that can be built upon and leased out, the zoning code discouraged major real estate development outside of the downtown core (Adams and Van Drasek 120). Today, downtown Minneapolis remains tightly compact while the immediate periphery is left largely unbuilt due to its undesirability to developers.

Zoning code was revised in 1999 so that parking requirements reflect a building’s use as well as size, but the impact of the 1967 code is still highly visible in the Minneapolis landscape (Sether). The former “medium density” zone just outside downtown is predominantly made up of flat surface parking lots. In the short term, this form of land use is much more profitable than maintaining and marketing the older warehouse, hotel, apartment, and retail buildings that once existed in that space, and has
therefore become the norm for lots outside of the downtown core (Adams and Van Drasek 121). While the high-density zone of Minneapolis is pedestrian-friendly, compact, and functionally diverse, its immediate periphery is dedicated to parking cars. On the following map, created by the Minneapolis City council, surface parking lots are depicted in dark grey. At a glance, it is easy to see the extent to which parking space dominates the Minneapolis landscape immediately out of the downtown core. The pedestrian feels out of place in a bleak and uninviting landscape that caters to vehicles.

![Figure 1: Minneapolis Landuse (courtesy City of Minneapolis)](image)

In addition to the creation of parking space, the conversion of the Twin Cities’ roads to accommodate automobile transportation devastated many urban neighborhoods. Unlike in the suburbs, the interstate system within the two cities had to be constructed on land that was already being used by city residents. One of the major controversies
surrounding the construction of I-94 in St. Paul was the destruction of the Rondo neighborhood, the residential and commercial center of the city’s Black population. The Rondo neighborhood contained five sixths of St. Paul’s Black population and a supporting network of churches, schools, and small businesses. Highway department planners proposed the route for the freeway on St. Anthony Avenue, a street that ran straight through the center of the neighborhood (Young and Lanegran 60). The story of the Rondo neighborhood illustrates the disregard that public officials showed toward sustaining the kind of urban neighborhood described by Jacobs. Instead, the heart of an urban community was displaced in favor of highway development.

The consequences of building a freeway through the Rondo neighborhood were multiple. The community was physically divided in half by the freeway and stripped of its commercial district, both an economic and psychological blow to its residents. Approximately 1,500 families were displaced from their homes because the interstate’s route was planned on top of them. No money was provided by local, state, or federal agencies to help these families relocate their homes, and the government did not pay property owners a value high enough to replace their homes in different areas of the city. On top of this, city council members refused to pass an open occupancy ordinance, a law that would expressly prohibit discrimination in housing rentals and sales (Young and Lanegran 62). This exacerbated the difficulties of Black community members to find housing in new locations because no law explicitly stated that denial of housing on grounds of race was illegal. While federal agencies undervalued urban working-class neighborhoods, the policies surrounding freeway construction through the Rondo
neighborhood showed that federal state and local governments could consider a neighborhood to be a dispensable piece of the city fabric.

The culmination of government policies regarding suburbanization and freeway construction might be evidenced by the riots that became prevalent in U.S. cities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The 1969 riots on St. Paul’s Selby Avenue can be linked back to policies that ignored the needs of urban communities. When the Rondo neighborhood was destroyed, the city’s Black population migrated south to the neighborhood around Selby Avenue, the next major commercial street south of the former St. Anthony Avenue. Though the government had provided housing here, there were not enough jobs for the new population. The neighborhood was considered too risky for most investors, who preferred growing new suburbs (Young and Lanegran 68). Many lots were left vacant, while established white businesses were perceived negatively by militant members of the Black community. Tensions came to a head in January 1969, when four businesses’ windows were smashed by youth shouting “Black Power.” Twenty-three other local businesses, the majority of which were owned by whites, experienced vandalism and violence during that time (69). Unable to receive protection from city council or insurance on their properties, most of these businesses closed or moved elsewhere. The area came to be known as a place of prostitution, drug sales, assaults, and shootings, and was avoided by the outside community (68).

_Urban Decline_

Rioting and crime contributed to popular perceptions that cities were dangerous and unfriendly places to live, providing yet another incentive for those with means to live in the suburbs. Both Minneapolis and St. Paul steadily lost population between 1950 and
1980. The following graph depicts that loss, showing that the total population in both cities reached its lowest point in the year 1980. Although population in both cities has been increasing since that time, neither has regained its population in 1950.

Figure 2: Population Change in the Twin Cities (data source: Campbell Gibson, U.S. Census Bureau)

This departure from the central cities suggests that a majority of residents in the metropolitan area did not consider St. Paul and Minneapolis “livable.” Media labels such as “Hell’s Kitchen” and “Murderapolis” have suggested that the Cities are dangerous places to be. A decline in the tax base caused by the lack of new investment in the Cities meant that they were less able to provide public services to their citizens. In 1971, the Minnesota State Legislature passed the Fiscal Disparities Act in an attempt to redistribute tax revenues from the metro area’s commercial and industrial properties, the majority of which were located in suburbs (Adams and Van Drasek 166). The goal of the legislation was to ensure that all communities profited from new growth, aiding the central cities that were losing their industrial and commercial tax revenues to suburbs. During the 1980s and 90s, continued decline of the metro’s two downtowns sparked several revitalization efforts that would attract outsiders to the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.
**Revitalization Efforts**

In St. Paul, downtown redevelopment was pioneered by two projects, the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Landmark Center. The Science Museum, built in 1978, was intended to attract families to St. Paul from all over the surrounding region (Adams and Van Drasek 132). It currently sits on St. Paul’s riverfront, where it was moved in 1999. The Landmark Center, a historic building renovated in 1978, anchors Rice Park and serves as a focal point for the city. Rice Park is also bordered by the St. Paul Hotel, the St. Paul Public Library, and the Ordway Center for Performing Arts, home to the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. After the 1980s, the largest entertainment function to come to St. Paul was the Xcel Center, completed in 2000. Owned by the City of St. Paul, this sports arena and performance venue is expected to generate profits both from use of the facility and from supporting venues such as hotels and restaurants (Xcel Energy Center). All of these buildings serve to attract city residents and outsiders alike, providing a setting that is urbane, well-lit, and visitor-friendly. Signs guide unfamiliar drivers through the district, and brick-lined crosswalks welcome pedestrians to the streets.

In Minneapolis, the Target Center and the Metrodome, opened in 1990 and 1982 respectively, draw on the region’s widespread baseball and basketball fans for downtown visitors (Adams and Van Drasek 125). Both are located on the fringes of the downtown core where ample parking space is available. The Nicollet Mall is a three-city block long strip of high-end retail stores. Converted in 1967 to a pedestrian mall, this shopping district competes with suburban malls as a place where shoppers can walk outside, window shop, and experience the feeling of life downtown. Finally, the Guthrie Theatre,
originally built in 1963 adjacent to the Walker Arts Center, is being moved to anchor Minneapolis’s newly revitalized riverfront district east of downtown.

Though efforts to attract people to come downtown have met with measured success, until recently, little progress had been made convincing people to stay downtown. According to Adams and Van Drasek, “a key element in creating a lively, twenty-four-hour downtown is to have people live there as well as work and shop there” (138). This statement echoes Jane Jacob’s insistence of primary function diversity.

Galtier Plaza was constructed in St. Paul’s Lowertown district in 1985 at a price of $140 million (134). For several years the building was unable to fill its retail and residential leasing space, and has been sold multiple times due to its low profitability. The problems in Galtier Plaza were mirrored throughout downtown St. Paul. In 1990, 3,756 housing units were recorded in St. Paul’s central business district, but 1,078 of them were reported as vacant (135).

Until recently, residential development has been the missing link in creating sustainable urban communities in downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis. However, the recent boom in the condominium industry shows that a new trend is emerging. Areas of the cities that have already received heavy reinvestment in entertainment and service industries are becoming new sites for urban residential communities. For the first time since the 1950s, a significant portion of residential construction is occurring downtown, and urban neighborhoods are evolving to accommodate this growth. The following case studies of four condominium buildings will explore how these residential developments affect quality of life in these settings. Perhaps condominiums can add the final piece of primary diversity to downtowns that have already received heavy investment in
entertainment diversity. This study explores how the present trend of repopulation can contribute toward the revitalization of downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis into livable urban communities.
Chapter 4
Methodology

High-density condominium construction is a visible aspect of the population growth that has been taking place in the Twin Cities since 1990. Though it is not the goal of this research to determine what factors have caused this resurgence in urban living, it is safe to say that new growth in the urban population will affect quality of life in Minneapolis and St. Paul. According to Jane Jacobs’ theory, the introduction and expansion of primary diversity functions—new condominium residences—can be expected to support new secondary diversity functions such as shops, restaurants, and services in their neighborhoods. The introduction of new functions to urban neighborhoods means that change in neighborhoods’ existing functions is inevitable. Some functions will prosper due to the influx of clientele, while others might go out of business in neighborhoods that now cater to a new economic group.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between new condominium projects and their immediate neighborhoods. Using the principles of urban design laid out by Jane Jacobs and New Urbanist planning theory, I will analyze the ways Twin Cities condominium projects are incorporated into their neighborhoods and whether they are likely to promote a higher quality of life there. Condos can impact their communities directly simply by increasing population density, or indirectly through their ability to encourage (or discourage) other types of neighborhood functions. Condominium buildings introduce a comparatively large number of people to a neighborhood while using very little of its land area. However, condo projects are inseparable from their neighborhoods, and I include analysis of the neighborhoods
themselves to determine whether projects are in areas conducive to the development of the type of sustainable communities described by Jacobs. Condominiums can reinforce patterns of vitality or of disuse that already exist in their neighborhoods based on the design of these settings. I hypothesize that the addition of condominium housing to the Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns has the potential to support a long-term revitalization of the Twin Cites’ urban neighborhoods in the style outlined by Jane Jacobs and New Urbanist planning theory.

Definition of Terms

Three terms will be used to describe multi-family condominium residences. All definitions are based on the author’s interpretation of promotional material produced by developers and real estate agents to describe different units. Each of these terms is most commonly attached to a different style of building, and it is important to understand their differences in order to hypothesize the impact these buildings might have on their neighborhoods.

- Condominium, or condo, is the general term for any owner-occupied housing unit within a larger building. Condominium building or condominium tower are terms used to describe structures that contain multiple condominium units. Both a duplex that is owned by its two occupants and a multi-story tower can be termed condo. In most cases, residents must first pass through the main entrance of the condominium building to enter a condominium unit. Typically, condominium dwellers are required to pay monthly or annual fees toward building management, upkeep of common areas, general maintenance, landscaping, and the like.
Lofts are also owner-occupied units within multi-unit structures. Because of their design features, some renter-occupied units can also be called lofts. In most cases, a unit is termed a loft when all of the different functions within the loft, such as kitchen, living area, and bedroom, are actually one large room. The room may be divided by partitioning walls. Lofts are most likely to be found in renovated historic buildings with features like high ceilings and large windows. New buildings trying to capitalize on the popularity of historic architecture might also be called lofts. Like condos, residents must enter a loft via a main building entrance.

Townhomes are multi-unit structures that contain owner-occupied units. Unlike condos and lofts, townhomes can be entered individually from the sidewalk. Townhome structures spread horizontally down a block, with self-contained units between two and four stories high. Townhomes differ from single-family homes because there is no space between one home and the next, and they are usually not separated from the street by a yard.

Project Overview

This project includes case studies of four recently constructed condominium buildings in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. In Minneapolis, the case study condominiums are Grant Park Condominiums and the Washburn Lofts. In St. Paul, they are The Lowry Building and the Great Northern Lofts. These were selected by the author in order to include the greatest physical and demographic variety among the case study neighborhoods and condos.

The first criteria for condominium selection was the location and type of neighborhood the condo inhabits. The Lowry Building and the Washburn Lofts are both
relatively isolated from other residential populations. The Lowry sits among St. Paul’s office skyscrapers, and there are few other residential structures in its immediate vicinity. The Washburn Lofts form part of a new urban neighborhood based on the renovation of Minneapolis’ historic milling district into private residences. Here, several condominium buildings form an urban community that is not contiguous to any established residential neighborhood.

In the Lowertown district of St. Paul, the Great Northern Lofts are also part of a large-scale renovation of the warehouse district into an upscale residential neighborhood. Unlike the Washburn Lofts, many of the buildings here were previously occupied by artists attracted to spacious rooms with low rent. The size of the community is expanding as it accommodates a new population who represent a different set of interests than the
former artist community. Finally, Grant Park condominiums sit just outside of Minneapolis’ urban core in a residential neighborhood. While the size and architecture of the historic buildings that surround Grant Park suggest that this was once the home of Minneapolis’ upper-middle class, current statistics show that the condominium tower, which sold penthouses for $4 million, sits in one of Minneapolis’ most impoverished neighborhoods. The low-income population of the neighborhood is in great contrast to the population inhabiting the condos.

Condominium towers were also selected based on the price of their units, an indicator of the economic group that is expected to purchase them and move into each neighborhood. While not all of the condos being constructed in St. Paul and Minneapolis are high-end, the majority of condos constructed in or immediately next to the downtowns are designed and priced for members of the upper-middle class. The condos used in this case study reflect this preference. While condos have been developed as a new form of affordable housing for single parents, young couples, and low-income earners, these are not easily found near the downtown core. Therefore, the four case study condominiums can all be expected to attract a similar group of middle and upper class residents to their neighborhoods. However, their impact on their neighborhoods will differ depending on the conditions that already exist there.

The third characteristic to determine the case study condominiums was their date of completion. All of the condominiums chosen were completed between 2001 and 2005. Not all of the condominiums have yet reached their full occupancy: the Lowry and the Great Northern Lofts were still selling new units at the time of this study. Because these condos are so new, this research focuses strictly on the physical features of the
condos, which are well-established and unlikely to change in the near future. The non-physical features of the condominiums, such as their real-estate value, the demographics of their inhabitants, and city policies on their implementation will be mentioned here. However, a true analysis of these issues is impossible due to the unavailability of recent data.

Field Methods

To analyze the impact of condominiums on their urban neighborhoods, I completed four field studies on each of the condominiums and their neighborhoods. The first task was to determine the extent of each neighborhood that would be used in the study. Politically, neighborhood is a term used by state and local governments to subdivide cities into planning units. However, people’s daily activities and the use they get out of their cities are not determined by these political boundaries. New Urbanist planning theory maintains that a distance of about a quarter of a mile, or about five to ten minutes of walking, is the farthest possible separation between daily functions that enables Americans to walk between them instead of taking a car or public transportation (Steuteville). Therefore, the design of the space within that walking distance of a new condo is critical if condominium owners are expected to become pedestrian users of their neighborhoods. For this reason, the field studies include all places within a quarter mile radius of each condominium.

To accurately depict the study area for each of the condominiums, I created GIS maps to define an area of exactly one quarter-mile radius focused around each condominium. City streets that fell into this radius were used in this study, those that fell beyond the circle were not. Observations were taken by walking down each of the streets
in the study area. The majority of fieldwork is based on qualitative observations in the style of Jane Jacobs. The goal of the fieldwork was to assess the diversity of functions in the study area, its accessibility to pedestrians, and the unique qualities of that place that would encourage a sustainable community. Condominium projects themselves were analyzed to see how their implementation, design features, and demographics might affect how each neighborhood functions. The following analyses of the four case studies are the result of this fieldwork.
Chapter 5

The Lowry: Bolstering St. Paul’s Entertainment District

Among the four condominium projects discussed in this study, unique to the Lowry Building of St. Paul is its location in the heart of a downtown. The blocks north and east of the building are dominated by St. Paul’s office skyscrapers and government buildings, while the southern half of the condo’s radius is home to St. Paul’s major entertainment venues, including the Minnesota Science Museum, the Ordway Center for Performing Arts, and the Xcel Center. Because of its location in St. Paul’s central business district, the Lowry is relatively isolated from other residential structures. In fact, only two other residential buildings exist in the study area radius, one of which has been recently vacated due to its impending renovation.

One of the tenets of Jacobs’ design theory is that a district should have mixed primary diversity functions, and the introduction of a residential community might serve as the perfect complement to the neighborhood’s existing office and entertainment districts. The residents of the Lowry’s 139 units have a unique role as the only twenty-four hour users of their

Figure 4
immediate neighborhood, and they will use it differently than the current population of
office workers or audiences at the entertainment centers. However, even with full
occupancy, the residential population brought by the Lowry is small, and it is
questionable whether the downtown is yet to reach the population threshold that will
generate Jacobs-style exuberant diversity. The Lowry Building provides an excellent
case study of how downtown St. Paul can appeal to and accommodate a residential
population in an area new to full-time occupancy.

The Lowry Building

The original Lowry Medical Arts Building was constructed in 1911 by St. Paul
streetcar magnate Thomas Lowry. Its yellow brick and white terra cotta trim complement
its closest neighbor, the St. Paul Hotel, a St. Paul landmark
constructed in 1878 with similar architectural features (The
Lowry). This building is 12 stories high, neither dominated nor
dominating the buildings in its immediate vicinity. In 2003, PAK
Properties purchased the largely vacant Lowry Medical Arts
building with the intention of redeveloping it to condo units.
Currently renamed The Lowry, the structure houses nine floors of
residential lofts with two stories of commercial and retail space
on the lower levels. Condo units are priced between $140,000
and $410,000 and contain one to three bedrooms (PAK Properties). This price range
ensures only middle and upper class households can afford them. In 2004, the median
home price in Ramsey County was $159,900, a cost that is considered unaffordable to
families making less than $52,000 per year (Housing Minnesota).
PAK Properties, the real estate developer currently selling the Lowry’s commercial and residential units, is sensitive to its unique setting in downtown St. Paul. Marketing information emphasizes the Lowry’s pedestrian accessibility to St. Paul’s amenities just as much as the actual features of condo units. The building is linked to St. Paul’s skyway system, and marketing brochures claim residents can attend events at the Xcel Center without once stepping out of doors. Real estate agents held open house tours of condo models at 10:30pm after operas at the Ordway Center, hoping to captivate the same crowd that already uses nearby entertainment venues. Advertisements inform buyers that they are not merely purchasing homes, they are purchasing the chance to have a unique lifestyle that comes with a downtown setting. PAK Properties bills the Lowry’s location as “one of St. Paul’s most sought-after places to live and have fun,” while the building itself is “the hub of lifestyle and living trends.”

Unlike similar condos in its price range, the Lowry offers no internal amenities, such as a swimming pool, party room, or health club. Instead, it offers concierge service through the St. Paul Hotel to obtain event tickets at nearby entertainment venues. During an open house for the Lowry’s models, I asked the real estate agent whether the building came with any internal amenities. She succinctly summed up the Lowry’s marketing stance, responding that “the city really is the amenity.” Though it is clear that the Lowry is
marketing condos based on their proximity to downtown amenities, questions remain about the way downtown St. Paul incorporates these different functions and its ability to service a residential population.

**Rice Park: A Landscape of Entertainment**

It is true that most of St. Paul’s major entertainment venues exist within the Lowry’s quarter mile radius. Rice Park, less than a block away, serves as a focal point for most of these venues and creates an informal centerpiece for the entertainment district. The park embodies several of the qualities that make it a “delightful feature of the urban landscape” according to Jacobs’ four principles of successful park design. In size, the park is less than a block large and bordered by four non-parallel streets. Rice Park has a clear focal point, a statue surrounded by a large circular pool that people can sit down next to or stop to admire. The buildings surrounding the park are large in width, but low enough in height to allow in sunlight and provide visual variation from the backdrop of skyscrapers immediately north. Intricacy is perhaps the one feature of Rice Park that it most lacks according to Jacobs’ principles. The park is flat and paved with bricks and concrete, leaving trees and benches to line its edges. Though this design creates a sense of difference between the borders and the central space around the pool and statue, the overall look to the park is flat and featureless.

Most importantly to its existence, Rice Park is enclosed on all sides by five large buildings: the Landmark Center, the Ordway Center for Performing Arts, the St. Paul
Public Library, the St. Paul Hotel and the Minnesota Wild Clubhouse. These anchor the small park, and guarantee that visitors will pass through it on their way to or from any of these venues. Other venues, though not directly bordering the park, are still connected to it and serve as a sort of outer ring of enclosure. Market Street, which forms the park’s southern border, opens up to the entrance of the Science Museum one block east on Kellogg Boulevard. The Xcel Center is in walking distance of the park, and many of its visitors pass through it after they park their cars or stop for dinner before events. The 7th Street Mall, a bricked pedestrian mall of theaters, restaurants, and small shops is less than a block away from Rice Park. A strip of small businesses on St. Peter Street lead pedestrians down the sidewalk away from the larger structures to this pedestrian node, maintaining the park’s connectivity to other places nearby.

The Lowry’s neighborhood is defined by the places that are connected to Rice Park and those that are not. The places connected to Rice Park are pedestrian-friendly and oriented to street life. Historic buildings like the St. Paul Public Library and the Landmark Center provide the visual intricacy touted by New Urbanists, while windows to the small retail businesses on St. Peter Street and the 7th Street Mall appeal to pedestrians in a way that the closed skyscrapers to the north do not. In addition, much of the area connected to Rice Park appears to have been renovated recently to encourage pedestrian use of the space. Crosswalks are wide and demarcated from the street by brickwork. Sidewalks are lined with trees and antique lampposts. These components of the urban design invite pedestrians to walk here and send a message that they are welcome in this setting.
While there is ample evidence of investment in improving or preserving the streetscape around Rice Park, other clues suggest that the public is still not as willing to use these streets as Jane Jacobs and New Urbanists would require. The Lowry offers twenty-four hour valet service for its residents between its front entrance and an exclusive parking garage, explaining this benefit both as a luxury and a safety precaution. The Lowry’s parking garage sits on the same block as the building—hardly a far enough walking distance away to warrant such safety precautions. As mentioned earlier, the Lowry also advertises its connectivity to downtown via the skyway system. Skyways, which are public domains entered through private buildings, allow walkers to bypass the realities of the sidewalk by crossing above streets and passing through buildings. Though implemented as innovative solutions to cold weather walking, they have been criticized for emptying the streets of pedestrians, especially the more affluent population with access to buildings in the skyway system (Adams and Van Drasek 120 and 160).

Meanwhile, the study area contains relatively few secondary diversity functions to interest people in walking down the streets. What functions there are largely serve the population of office workers centered just north of Rice Park. For example, Chipotle, a high-end fast food chain across the street from the Lowry’s entrance, closes at 4:30 pm on weekdays and does not open at all on weekends. Walking by these businesses on a Sunday afternoon proved that most of them are not opened for weekend customers. Entirely missing from the study area radius is a grocery store, while low-order functions like dry cleaners, flower shops, or coffee shops are few and far between. These types of businesses cater to the most basic needs of a residential population, but most are hard to find within walking distance of the Lowry. Instead, an optometry business, a pet store,
jewelry stores, and a few fast food restaurants compete for the type of business that could be generated during an office worker’s lunch break.

While Lowry sales material emphasizes the fun and excitement of life in a downtown setting, advertisements also betray a tacit understanding that the district is somewhat lacking in the kinds of functions that create interesting secondary diversity. PAK Properties states explicitly that it is engaged in “aggressive marketing” for new venues, including up-scale restaurants, a dinner theatre, and a night-club, to occupy the lower parts of the Lowry building and surrounding blocks. Though Lowry residents may patronize these venues, these are a form of secondary diversity better suited to support the nearby entertainment centers than the daily needs of a resident population. This suggests that the Lowry’s greatest impact on its neighborhood will be to provide a dependable body of users for the entertainment facilities and the restaurants and bars that support them, rather than as a residential community who can support secondary diversity based on their unique needs.

North of the Lowry: St. Paul’s Office District

Rice Park and its surroundings play a large role in street life for the Lowry, but this is not the only district that creates downtown St. Paul. The blocks north and northeast of the condos are dominated by St. Paul’s office skyscrapers. From the pedestrian-oriented perspective of Jane Jacobs and New Urbanists, much of the public space in the core of the office district should be described as lifeless. The skyscrapers are inward facing, and their outer walls present little to the street. Their blank, textureless surfaces are of no visual interest to pedestrians. The height of the buildings blocks sunlight from reaching the streets, while skyways over the street also cast shadows and
block one’s line of vision. The majority of buildings here are entirely enclosed, without any smaller businesses on their lower levels to entice pedestrians. Though the office district does support other functions, they are not necessarily visible from the street. The Wells Fargo tower contains a Starbucks and a convenience store, but they are only accessible from the main lobby and close during non-business hours. No signs or individual entrances advertise them to outside pedestrians. Other small businesses have cropped up near the entrances of skyways, including sandwich shops and dry cleaning services. All of these are oriented toward office workers, and do little to promote street life. Walking the sidewalks of Cedar Street and Minnesota Street on a Sunday afternoon, little human activity was present to break the monotony of building sides.

The dullness and uniformity of the office district serves as a barrier to pedestrian movement northeast of the Lowry Building. Just north of the offices, the Lowertown District, including the Great Northern Lofts, is attracting new residential development around another downtown park, Mears Park. However, the Lowry is likely to remain isolated from its neighboring residential district due to the office barrier that stands between them. The space between the two is highly built up preventing either area from expanding into the other. While the Lowertown District is home to several residential structures, the Lowry’s separation prevents it from combining with these to form an anchor primary diversity residential function. Without the density brought by the
development in Lowertown, the population density of the Lowry building is much too small to support secondary diversity functions on its nearest streets. This situation is likely to remain, as the Lowry is surrounded by large entertainment facilities or established office towers that prevent the expansion of residential developments close to the Lowry. Without a sufficient increase in the population density of its neighborhood, Lowry residents should not expect to see more secondary diversity functions develop beyond those that are already being supported by the current downtown population.

East of the Lowry: the Mississippi River

The walkable area of the Lowry’s neighborhood is tightly bounded to the north by the office district and to the south by the large Xcel Center. East of the Lowry, the Mississippi River cuts off the study area radius, creating another pedestrian boundary in the Lowry’s neighborhood. Kellogg Boulevard, which borders the river, is home to several county and municipal government buildings. While these functions are strong anchors that guarantee Kellogg’s use, the street cannot boast a vibrant sidewalk scene. Four traffic lanes across, Kellogg is too wide to enclose pedestrians in the streetscape and minimize the effects of busy traffic. Where Kellogg intersects the study area between 4th Street and Wabasha, the majority of the buildings that line the street are on its west wide. The east side is at the edge of a bluff looking down into the river valley, and the narrow strip has been developed into a park. Contrary to Jacobs’ principles of park design, the Kellogg Boulevard park is separated from pedestrians by the busy road to its west and the bluffs to its east. What is meant to be a scenic overlook is effectively one of Jacobs’ no-account leftovers to the city scene (Jacobs 106). Though the park looks out over the river, the valley below is dominated by parking spaces, garages, railroad lines, and
remnants of the river’s former industrial uses. The park is entirely unenclosed on one side, and its verticality along the river border prevents it from having a discernable center. No one can pass haphazardly through the park, because they must first choose to cross Kellogg Boulevard to get to it. In addition, no secondary diversity exists on Kellogg Boulevard to entice pedestrians down its sidewalks in the first place, and the park has few visitors.

West Seventh Street: Room for Change?

The western edge of the study area has the least permanent borders, and is therefore the most interesting in terms of its future development. Here at the edge of the downtown core, the height and the density of built structures decline. West Seventh Street, which forms the westernmost border of the study region, is the width of four traffic lanes and a median. It is much wider than any of the streets in St. Paul’s office district or around Rice Park. The business district turns away from this street, which is left with shorter smaller buildings and flat parking lots. Buildings here are spread further apart, and there is an incongruity to the landscape that is not present elsewhere in the study area. Like Kellogg, West Seventh’s width makes it more conducive to automobile traffic than to pedestrians. Unlike the areas north, south, and east of the Lowry that are for the most part controlled by a single group of functions, the area of West Seventh Street between St. Joseph Lane and Cedar Street is notable because it lacks a dominant function. This could be caused in part by pressure from the Xcel Center immediately south, which breaks up the landscape with its large irregular shape and the flat parking lots emanating out from it.
Another notable feature along West Seventh is the Dorothy Day Center, a homeless shelter whose doors and front entrance host a steady stream of people waiting to enter the facility. Visitors to the Dorothy Day Center could be termed the only other residential population to occupy the Lowry’s quarter-mile radius. Here, we see a stark juxtaposition to the “downtown lifestyle” promoted by Lowry developers and the homeless population less than a quarter of a mile away. Where the blocks surrounding the Lowry are receiving heavy investment in new venues, the city has still turned its back on West Seventh Street. There is little cohesion among the functions along this street, and few of its businesses appear to be very prosperous.

Analysis and Conclusion

As Jacobs and New Urbanists would tell us, the Lowry’s neighborhood stands to benefit from the implementation of a residential community. Its three primary diversity functions: the office district, the entertainment district, and new residences, complement each other and should ensure that St. Paul’s downtown receives 24 hour use, seven days a week. However, the field observations indicate that the Lowry might not serve as a primary diversity function. The Lowry’s 139 loft-style units and their location in the heart of a city are inconvenient for families with children. Assuming that most units are purchased by childless couples, the total population of the area when all units are sold will be about 300 people, hardly enough to anchor a residential community. Few businesses in the condo’s vicinity cater to local residents, a sign that the condo has not actually generated any secondary diversity of its own. In fact, the Lowry’s marketing suggests that it might actually serve as a form of secondary diversity to the entertainment venues. People who already enjoy coming to the neighborhood for the purposes of
entertainment might enjoy it better if they could live there and save themselves the hassle of driving to downtown. “Living” in this neighborhood is equated to entertainment, and daytime activities at stores and small businesses are limited. Because of the small population size and lack of variety in nearby functions, it is difficult to say that the Lowry is part of an urban community. Instead, it remains isolated and disconnected from the more mundane features of daily urban living and services the entertainment venues.

The businesses that have opened recently near the Lowry cater to a high-end group of customers with disposable incomes to capture. Sushi restaurants and dinner theaters may improve the quality of “downtown living,” but their high prices ensure that they will only do this for a small group of people. Residents of the Dorothy Day Center, the nearest population group to the Lowry, will enjoy few benefits from expensive new restaurants. A lower-order function, such as a grocery store, could service both populations and potentially provide employment to those at the homeless shelter. However, it is unlikely that real-estate developers will turn away from high-end restaurants that promote condo sales in favor of these less-glamorous necessities in the downtown landscape.

Unless significantly more residences are constructed or renovated close to the Lowry, this neighborhood will not support its own secondary diversity functions or create a noticeable change in the use of its public space and sidewalks. The permanence of the land-uses north, south, and east of the Lowry prevent any major expansion in these directions. West of the Lowry on West Seventh Street is the only place in the study area that might sustain transition in the near future. However, the fact that this space is currently undefined is not necessarily an indication that it will one day be defined by any
new development. It sits on the outskirts of the downtown between the downtown and interstate, and has few existing amenities that would attract growth. Should high-end condominiums expand into this area, there will surely be some clash between the needs of new residents and the existing population that is serviced by the Dorothy Day Center.

The most obvious contribution of the Lowry’s population to downtown St. Paul is their ability, through economic means and close proximity, to support St. Paul’s entertainment facilities. Growth in secondary diversity functions, most notably restaurants, can be attributed to the Lowry’s presence. However, as a primary diversity function, the Lowry’s isolation prevents it from anchoring a downtown residential community with secondary diversity functions that support those needs. Lowry residents are not enough to produce a sufficient density of people to maintain life on the sidewalks and public spaces. Although it is exciting to see this resurgence in the popularity of “downtown living,” in St. Paul, the status quo along this neighborhood’s streets and public spaces is likely to remain unchanged as a result of its new population.
Chapter 6

Grant Park Condominiums: The Return of the Middle Class

The Grant Park Condominiums are the only condo development of this study in a historically residential neighborhood. Although they share the same function as surrounding homes, the high-priced grandeur of Grant Park is incongruent with the affordable housing developments and low-rent apartments that characterize much of the study area. The Grant Park Condominiums are situated in the Elliot Park neighborhood just southeast of downtown Minneapolis’ core. Historic brownstones and large single-family homes sprinkled throughout the area suggest that one hundred years ago this was the home of Minneapolis’ upper and middle class. Before automobiles and streetcars improved accessibility to other locations, this neighborhood was prime real estate for downtown commuters. However, the character of Elliot Park has shifted dramatically since that time. Most of the brownstones have been subdivided into apartments, and homes are in need of major repairs. The neighborhood is lacking in small businesses or services, and there are few signs of recent development in the study area radius aside from Grant Park. The infusion of a new middle and upper class population is the first step toward change in this study area. Should this process continue beyond the Grant Park Condominiums, the neighborhood could complete a full-circle transition back to its original status as a middle class community with pedestrian accessibility to downtown Minneapolis. This case study analyzes the transition taking place in the study area radius in the two years after the opening of Grant Park Condominiums.
Grant Park Condominiums

The Grant Park Condominium development covers the entire Minneapolis block bordered by Grant Street, Portland Avenue, 5th Avenue, and 10th Street. Obvious design elements show that developers Apex Asset Management Corporation and Opus Northwest have made a conscious effort to integrate the condo into its setting in an older urban neighborhood. The development consists of a 27 floor, 284 unit tower surrounded by 43 three-story townhomes (Grant Park Condominiums).

Aesthetically, the Grant Park townhomes match the older brownstones that line nearby streets, even including features like faux bricked-in windows to match the historic character of nearby architecture. While the condo tower is set back from Grant Street by a curved drive, the townhomes line Portland and 10th Streets for the entirety of the block. They feature walk-up entrances set back only about three yards from the sidewalk. The townhomes also hide a 500-car underground parking garage for Grant Park residents, effectively removing cars from street life. Both the parking garage and the placement of the townhomes follow New Urbanist design principles by minimizing the visibility of cars in this setting and unifying the streetscape with an even, pedestrian-focused façade.

In addition, a brick and metal “Elliot Park” banner has been constructed across 10th Street at the northwest corner of the Grant Park block, the corner closest to downtown Minneapolis. The banner connects one side of the street, which is lined by historic brownstones, to the opposite side lined by the newer townhomes of Grant Park.
This manifests another New Urbanist principle: a defined edge to the residential community that creates a sense of internal coherence and distinction from the commercial streets at the edge of downtown. The condo tower is the highest structure in its immediate vicinity, but the surrounding townhomes help it blend into the residential street. At the same time, the tower is still considerably shorter than the Minneapolis skyscrapers in its background. This differentiates the condos from the downtown core and helps bridge the gap between its high density and the lower buildings and densities immediately outside in Elliot Park.

Completed in stages between 2003 and 2005, the homes of Grant Park sold at prices between $150,000 for a one-bedroom unit and $1.2 million for a three-bedroom unit (Minneapolis Urban Homes). Amenity features help sell units, including an indoor health club and pool, in-house massage services, a business conference center, and a heated indoor garage with carwash. Though developers can be credited for using urban design to integrate the condo with its setting, the exclusivity of its internal features might prohibit integration of Grant Park residents with their neighbors who live in surrounding blocks. No unplanned interactions can take place between condo residents and the other members of their community if Grant Park members have no reason to leave their complex and patronize shared public facilities.

*Grant Park: Development and Implementation*

All of Grant Park’s 327 units are owner-occupied, an anomaly in Elliot Park. At the time of the 2000 Census, 95 percent of homes in this neighborhood were renter-
occupied. Even though the median rent in Elliot Park is lower than that of Minneapolis, residents typically spend a greater percentage of their income on housing than do residents in Minneapolis as a whole. In 1999, 33 percent of Elliot Park families were considered below the poverty level, well above the Minneapolis average of 12 percent. This indicates the importance of affordable housing and poverty issues in this neighborhood (City of Minneapolis).

The change in development pattern brought by Grant Park is intentional. A 2003 Minneapolis Star Tribune article attributes Grant Park’s presence in Elliot Park to the work of City Council member Lisa Goodman and Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. planners, who struggled three years to find a residential developer for the former industrial site (Gendler). While they saw this site as an opportunity to promote homeownership in Elliot Park, developers were put off by the nearby treatment centers and homeless shelters that contribute to the neighborhood’s negative reputation. Prior to Grant Park, the most serious proposal for its site was a parking garage, in spite of the skyline view and proximity to downtown nightlife Goodman emphasized (Gendler).

According to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. had two main goals for the Grant Park project: stability brought by homeownership and affording renters the opportunity to own. Part of the reason the Grant Park plan was successful was a $300,000 contribution by Elliot Park Neighborhood Inc. and a $7.3 million investment by the City of Minneapolis in tax-increment financing for the project. Despite the work and investment by neighborhood planners to bring in the condos, Grant Park developers never formally pledged any units to be at an affordable rate (Gendler).
Even the lowest priced condos are out of reach for the majority of Elliot Park’s present residents.

One year after the completion of the Grant Park Condominiums in 2005, industry newsletter “Multi-Housing News” declared “Grant Park has revitalized the surrounding neighborhood” (Weeks). Though it is true that the Grant Park Condominiums have created change in a struggling community, it is questionable whether a single development can completely “revitalize” any area. In addition, whether this revitalization has positively impacted a majority of Elliot Park residents is also a question to explore. The condos’ high prices make it unlikely that any of Elliot Park’s existing residents could afford to move into them, so any positive effects of homeownership in the community must impact citizens indirectly. The following section uses the theories of Jacobs and New Urbanist to analyze the claim of revitalization generated by Grant Park based on field observations in its study area radius.

**Grant Park and its Neighborhood**

Grant Park Condominiums sit at the southeast corner of downtown Minneapolis. Their position close to two interstates guarantees auto accessibility to and from anywhere else in the metropolitan area. However, the interstates also serve as a boundary to pedestrians and limit growth of the walkable neighborhood. The southern border of the study area radius touches Interstates 94 and 35, which deter neighborhood
development to the south. Highway 65 separates the Minneapolis Convention Center at the westernmost sector of the study area radius. Because of this separation, any secondary diversity generated by this venue will have minimal effect on the smaller residential blocks of Elliot Park east of the highway. The only major destination with comfortable pedestrian accessibility to this study area is downtown Minneapolis, a connection that caused the neighborhood’s initial growth in the late 1800s. Given that fifty percent of Elliot Park residents today cannot afford a car, it is easy to see why the neighborhood has maintained a strong connection to downtown (McKenzie). Grant Park residents may move here for easy accessibility to downtown nightlife, but many of their neighbors depend on downtown for accessible employment.

The northwestern corner of the study area radius forms a transition zone between the high-density, business-oriented Minneapolis downtown and the lower structures of residential Elliot Park. Though there is a diversity of functions here, the mixture is haphazard and jumbled. Flat parking lots break up the landscape. Turn of the century brick buildings and churches intermingle with tall new glass office towers and parking garages. A Goodyear Tire center, a drive-up Wells Fargo bank, and convenience stores fill in the lots between skyscrapers but do not provide a sense of functional or visual unity. Older cheaper buildings are occupied by functions that serve the low-income population, including the former Francis Drake Hotel, converted into a homeless shelter, and House of Charity. Other functions, such as the Best Western Hotel and Kraus Anderson Construction Headquarters have taken advantage of lower-priced real estate by constructing low-storied buildings and flat parking lots over the entirety of a block. Short city blocks make this area easily navigable for the pedestrian, but there is little in the way
of shops, restaurants, or even bars to entice them to spend time along the streets. Residents of Elliot Park might pass through this zone on their way downtown, but this sector of the study area does not support a vibrant pedestrian street life of its own.

South and east of Grant Park, residences dominate the study area radius. Several historic brownstones line these streets, evidence of the former middle-class population who constructed them. Grandiose single-family homes of ornate Victorian architecture also indicate the neighborhood’s former status. Today, most of these buildings have been converted into smaller apartments and show signs of disrepair. Old windows and doors suggest that no renovations have been done in the recent past to upkeep neighborhood homes. These older residences usually exist in isolated structures separated by flat parking lots and vacant lots. These are another indication of investors’ disinterest in this study area and the low value of its real estate. The former Madison School building on 15th Avenue, now an apartment building, is another sign that the middle class who constructed the school is no longer present to ensure its continued functionality as a public building.

Institutional facilities like the Eden House drug treatment center are also a part of this landscape. Though they provide a service to the local population, it is also possible that they deter new development. Aside from Grant Park, little of the neighborhood’s construction looks newer than thirty years old and it is doubtful any of the older buildings have seen major renovations. According to the U.S. Census, Elliot Park added only 62
new housing units between 1980 and 2000, a sign that little construction has taken place to fill the neighborhood’s vacant lots (City of Minneapolis). Goodman claimed that one challenge of promoting the Grant Park site to developers was the sight of “people hanging around, some selling drugs” along the streets nearby (Gendler). With the completion of Grant Park, the neighborhood population now represents two extremes: the very rich and the very poor. Each group has a different set of interests and requires the service of different secondary diversity functions from their neighborhood.

*Secondary Diversity in the Study Area*

Aside from the transition zone close to downtown, the study area radius boasts little secondary diversity. A small commercial strip sits on 10Th Street between Park Avenue and Chicago Avenue, but it has lost its ability to sustain retail functions. Again, the attractive one-story brick buildings testify former prosperity. Design elements of this node fit perfectly with Jacobs’ and New Urbanists’ criteria for a walkable commercial strip. It is on a short block, buildings present a uniform front to the street, and it is surrounded by a residential community. Open glass windows ensure that owners can maintain “eyes on the street.” At present, all of the units in the commercial buildings are occupied by only two enterprises: departments of the North Central Bible College and a community thrift store. These do not sustain a diversity of functions or encourage diversity among users. The complete lack of any small businesses in this space suggests that the poverty of the
surrounding neighborhood is too great to interest entrepreneurs or professionals in taking advantage of commercial real estate.

A few small businesses have opened up recently in the study area radius, and it is likely that the Grant Park Condominiums influenced their development. A block away from the condos on 10th Street between Portland and Park Avenues, three small businesses operate next door to each other. These include a coffee shop, a bookstore and an art gallery. All are non-franchised. One of them, Atelier Coffee, was opened by Sharon Kanan in 2004 with the mission of providing an evening hangout spot for members of the community. The only other place to buy food in this radius, the Band Box Diner, closes at 4pm every day (McKenzie). While these new businesses are providing much-needed secondary diversity in this neighborhood, it is questionable whether these types of functions, which require discretionary income, will serve neighborhood residents other than those who live in Grant Park.

Neighbors in Conflict?

One benefit of these new small businesses is that they can encourage Grant Park residents to walk to them along the sidewalks of their neighborhood. As Jacobs would tell us, this increases eyes on the street and increases the safety and vitality of sidewalks. However, evidence in the neighborhood suggests that Grant Park residents do not feel confident about using the streets. All of the development’s townhomes are separated from the street by decorative wrought-iron fencing that matches the historic feel of
nearby brownstones. At the time of the field study, a sign was posted on these fences notifying the public of an upcoming city council meeting to decide whether or not a variance to zoning code would be granted that would allow Grant Park residents to reconstruct a higher fence. Tall fencing is one of the most obvious and explicit messages of distrust between neighbors and indicates that a vibrant street life in this community might be a long way off.

Meanwhile, not all Elliot Park residents have expressed favorable opinions about Grant Park. A 2005 Star Tribune article cites Luella Gruchalla, a resident of the low-income Balmoral Apartments across the street from Grant Park. The height of the condo prevents her apartment from receiving more than one hour of sunlight a day, a change she does not appreciate (Peterson). Even more distressing for low-income residents, property taxes surrounding Grant Park have already increased. In the last two years, taxes on the Balmoral building have gone from $16,000 to $35,000 per year (Peterson). Peterson speculates that continued pressure on low-income housing will force up prices and cause many Elliot Park residents to have to move elsewhere. The fifty percent of residents who do not own cars would be hard pressed to find another affordable neighborhood in such close walking distance of their downtown employment. Proximity to downtown is now a contested issue between the affluent seeking nightlife and the poor seeking affordable housing close to an employment center.

Analysis and Conclusion

Grant Park is the first sign of a dramatic change in the character of its study area. Another high-rise condo is under construction on an adjacent block, continuing redevelopment as a middle class neighborhood. The first obvious signs of new retail in
the study area radius have opened up just outside of Grant Park’s doors. Many of these transformations brought by the condo support Jacobs and New Urbanist’s planning principles toward creating a livable community. Though limited, secondary diversity now exists within easy walking distance of residential functions. The neighborhood’s short blocks and proximity to downtown Minneapolis ensure that the residents of Grant Park are likely to walk at least some of the time to their different activities downtown, adding a new body of sidewalk users to the neighborhood. The density and design of the development minimize the impact of cars while townhomes highlight life on the sidewalk. In short, the neighborhood appears to be in the first step towards transition back to its initial status as a vibrant residential community.

Although it is exciting to see the reinvention of the Elliot Park neighborhood, it is important to question which population will most benefit from the changes taking place in this study area. Although the condos increase rates of home-ownership, they did not help any of the neighborhood’s existing residents achieve that goal. New condos might spur further economic development in the neighborhood, but an art gallery is of little service to a population that cannot afford cars. It is unlikely that the type of services influenced by Grant Park will address concerns for the majority of the neighborhood’s citizens. Meanwhile, the internalization of so many services within Grant Park Condominiums discourages its residents from seeking them elsewhere in their community. Any entrepreneur who wishes to start a massage service, tanning salon, car wash, or health club in this neighborhood would be discouraged to learn that Grant Park residents can already access these services without once stepping out of doors. Both the potential for employment and the increased diversity of sidewalk users are taken away
from the neighborhood by the privatization of so many functions within Grant Park.

Besides potential change from new condos, the neighborhood contains several older commercial and residential structures with aesthetic appeal to middle-class buyers who can afford the price of renovations. As the neighborhood’s reputation changes, it is possible that more middle class members will take an interest in purchasing these buildings, and fewer will remain on the market at affordable rates. Meanwhile, a widespread spike in property taxes like the one occurring outside of Grant Park would price out many low-income residents and force their replacement by new residents with higher incomes. New Urbanist planning theory calls for a mixture of income groups to reside in the same neighborhood, but if present trends in this study area continue unchecked, diversity of income groups here is unlikely. Only the middle class will be able to afford the high prices and property taxes of homes in this neighborhood.

Even as the exterior changes in this study area conform to Jacobs and New Urbanism’s design principles, it is important to remember the limitations of these principles. The case of Grant Park exemplifies one critique of New Urbanist theory, that planned design does little to serve low-income populations in practice. Though Grant Park developers do not promote the condo for its New Urbanist design, the fact that the development employs several of these elements makes it subject to the same critique.

According to Winstanley, Thorns, and Perkins, “the costs of housing, the visual ‘sameness’ of design […] mean that the resultant community is likely to be socio-economically homogeneous” where New Urbanist building techniques are involved (184). The exclusivity of Grant Park to local residents, due in part to the added cost of its aesthetic appeal, is testimony to this statement. Bitar et al. also support the claim that
New Urbanism can only benefit a select group of residents. “It is true that new urbanism developed and used certain patterns-building scale, spacing and proportions-that makes neighbourhoods very comfortable and liveable. But it fails, however, to be accessible to people of different incomes and backgrounds” (qtd in Winstanley Thorns and Perkins 184). Though Grant Park is geographically and architecturally integrated with its neighborhood, the changes it brings do not truly incorporate the rest of the community. The condo itself excludes the majority of Elliot Park’s residents based on price alone. The neighborhood’s newest functions- the coffee shop, bookstore, and art gallery, may provide services and even a sense of community to new residents but do little to address the needs of the low-income population living nearby.

Grant Park Condominiums have been touted as revitalization for the Elliot Park neighborhood. It is true that the condos have instigated changes that support the sustainable living theories of Jacobs and New Urbanists. Every attempt has been made by developers to encourage Grant Park’s walkability, and new secondary diversity functions have generated spontaneously nearby. Despite the fact that these promote a more pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, not all neighborhood residents are likely to benefit from this change. If more middle-class residential and commercial functions continue to develop, many lower-income residents of Minneapolis could lose a source of affordable housing and be forced to leave their community. Grant Park may promote streetlife to its residents, but design principles alone cannot ensure that quality of life for residents of surrounding Elliot Park will be improved by the current changes in their neighborhood.
Chapter 7

Historic Preservation in Industrial Districts: Great Northern Lofts and Washburn Lofts

Unlike most condominium projects in the Twin Cities, the Great Northern Lofts of St. Paul and the Washburn Lofts of Minneapolis are not individual new developments whose impact on diversity functions can be discussed in isolation across a study area. Instead, these condos are part of distinct urban districts that have recently changed their function from abandoned industrial centers into high-density residential neighborhoods. The Washburn Lofts are part of the former Washburn-Crosby Mill complex in the heart of Minneapolis’ former milling district. Today, this area boasts over 2,200 residential units spanning both sides of the Mississippi, many of which are in converted factory and warehouse buildings. St. Paul’s Lowertown district, once the major distribution center for the Mississippi port, now contains over 1,500 homes in former warehouse buildings and new developments (Metropolitan Council). Where the Lowry and the Grant Park Condominiums represent some change in the development pattern of their study area, the Washburn Lofts and the Great Northern Lofts each represent a universal trend of development within their neighborhoods that is currently transforming them from industrial districts into residential communities.

In both these condominium buildings and their surrounding districts, historic preservation has played an important role in the revitalization process, as well as large-scale investment from both the public and private sectors. In addition to housing development, recreational functions also add diversity to these neighborhoods. Although the Washburn Lofts and the Great Northern Lofts are the platform for discussion, the
focus of this chapter will be on how condominium development in general is transforming Lowertown and the Mill City neighborhood into high-density residential districts. Because of the similar timing and political approach toward revitalization in these areas, comparisons can be drawn between the evolution of their residential primary diversity function and the secondary services that result from each neighborhood’s changing use.

*Great Northern Lofts*

The Great Northern Lofts sit at the edge of the Lowertown district in St. Paul, an area of about eighteen blocks just north of the central business district. St. Paul railroad magnate James J. Hill originally constructed the Great Northern Lofts in 1888 as an office building for the Great Northern Railroad Company. Originally named the J.J. Hill Office Building, the structure faces Kellogg Boulevard, a former commercial street that runs parallel to the Mississippi River (Cornerstone Group). The building stands eight stories high, on par in both age and style with other buildings in its vicinity. Like most of the buildings in Lowertown, the Hill Office Building is box-like in style, constructed of red brick, and features ornate terra cotta molding and large windows with aesthetic appeal to today’s condominium buyers.

While the building appears square from the outside, it was actually constructed in a U-shape, allegedly to allow James J. Hill to ride his horse straight into its courtyard from the arched front entranceway. Today, this courtyard has been remade into a private outdoor setting for condominium owners (Cornerstone Group).
The commercial importance of Hill Office Building was short-lived. In 1916, James J. Hill constructed a larger headquarters on Fifth and Jackson, converting the Lowertown building to a storage unit for company records (Emporis). The building was abandoned in the 1970s and fell into structural disrepair. The Cornerstone Group and Sherman Rutzick and Associates purchased the building in 2002 with the intention of renovating it into condominiums. Completed in 2004, the 53 lofts of the renamed Great Northern Lofts building are some of the most expensive units in Lowertown, with 2,400 square foot units selling between $600,000 and $750,000 (NRT Incorporated). Similar to most other condos in this price range, the ground floor of the building contains a party room and health club, and a private garage has been constructed across the street for residents.

Though its external appearance has changed little during its 118-year existence, the Great Northern building’s present function is dramatically different from the original administrative building. Decades after St. Paul’s industrial functions left Lowertown, new uses are being created for warehouse and factory buildings to redefine their functionality in today’s economy. Condominiums like the Great Northern Lofts are an important aspect of revitalization efforts in Lowertown because they bring a new primary diversity function to downtown St. Paul. With sufficient density, this district could once again sustain its own sidewalk life and secondary diversity services despite the loss of its original economic purpose.

The Lowertown District

The history of the Lowertown district closely follows that of the Great Northern building. Lowertown is a densely filled-in neighborhood of eight-story brick warehouses
constructed during the railroad era of the late 1800s. The district originated as a Mississippi port, and products from the industrial mills of Minneapolis and beyond were shipped here via rail to be transferred onto barges for shipment downriver. Shipping warehouses were supplemented by manufacturing venues throughout the early 1900s, and the district remained the focus of St. Paul’s industrial activity throughout WWII. By the late 1950s, the departure of industry to cheaper land-rich suburbs deprived it of its primary function, and several of the neighborhood’s buildings were abandoned. Much of the neighborhood fell into blight, and remained so until revitalization efforts first began in the 1970s.

The first step towards Lowertown’s revitalization took place in 1967, when an eighteen-block area was designated as the Lowertown Heritage Preservation District. This political district, which includes the Great Northern Lofts, is bounded by Kellogg Blvd., Broadway Street, 7th Street Place, and Jackson Street. Official designation by the federal government as a historic district mandates preservation of an area’s historic buildings and creates financial incentives for developers interested in restoring them (National Park Service). About one quarter of the study area radius falls in the boundaries of the preservation district, while much of the remaining land in the study area radius is connected to

Figure 16
major highways or to the Mississippi River.

After the creation of the preservation district, the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation (LRC) was formed in 1978 to initiate development projects and solicit growth for the improvement of the community (Bruner Foundation). The LRC, which is still active, intends to create an “urban village” in Lowertown, “a dynamic mix of housing, offices, retail stores, services, restaurants, theaters, parks and public spaces.” This mix is “supported by a marketing strategy that would attract people, business and investment to the area, creating a new and vital community in the heart of the city” (LRC). Lowertown’s physical features lend themselves to the creation of a Jacobs-style mixed-use community. Buildings are dense, relatively modest in height, and have textured facades. All of the blocks in this district are short and square, creating several crossroads that allow for the growth of commercial businesses.

Since the 1970s, over 1,500 housing units have been added to Lowertown either from the construction of new structures, like the Galtier Towers, or from the conversion of old warehouses (Metropolitan Council). Although revitalization efforts began thirty years ago, major residential growth did not take off until the last five years when upscale warehouse conversions created new housing units like the Great Northern Lofts. In addition to renovated buildings, new high-density complexes like the Sibley Court apartments on 7th and Sibley are being constructed just outside of the study area. Architecturally designed to match the existing structures of Lowertown, these expand the size of the neighborhood and add population density while adhering to New Urbanist design principles of building height, density, and setback from the sidewalk.
In addition to new housing, several other functions increase the livability of Lowertown, many of which are present in the Great Northern Lofts’ study area radius. The centerpiece of the neighborhood is Mears Park, a one-block park bordered by Wacouta, Sibley, 6th and 5th Streets. Although the bordering Mississippi River and its port caused this neighborhood’s existence, Lowertown’s form is defined by Mears Park. This park creates the centerpiece and focus of Lowertown. Occupancy rates in residential and office buildings appear to be highest closer to Mears Park, while the buildings at the neighborhood’s periphery tend to be oriented outward to the downtown and occupied by low-order businesses.

Mears Park has been remodeled several times during its history; it was first redeveloped during the 1970s revitalization and again remodeled in 1992 (Bruner Foundation). Its present design perfectly suits Jane Jacobs’ criteria for successful park design. The park is bordered on all four sides by residential and office buildings, including Galtier Tower. All of the streets bordering the park are narrow and generate only moderate traffic, allowing pedestrians to cross into the park without disruption from automobiles. The park’s center is a small amphitheater that can be used both as a place to sit and a stage for warm-weather entertainment. A small brook runs through the park, adding intricacy, and the trees scattered throughout provide ample shade. In addition to offices and condos, a few small restaurants and cafes line the park to provide secondary diversity. Mears Park is well-used by residents and remains one of Lowertown’s most important assets.
With the departure of heavy industry from the riverfront in Lowertown, efforts have been made to convert this space into another park and recreation area for the neighborhood. However, Kellogg Boulevard, which runs parallel to the river, is no longer a busy commercial strip with vibrant secondary diversity. Redevelopment efforts along the Mississippi River appear to be less successful than in Mears Park. “River-themed” cement-work on sidewalks leads residents out of Lowertown to the newly developed river walk, but there is little sidewalk life either en route or at the river to interest people in walking there. To reach the river from the Great Northern Lofts, pedestrians must pass under a parking garage above 5th Street, a dark space that could never support any type of vibrant sidewalk life. Meanwhile, painted railings and new paving clean up the riverfront’s image but do not create the visual interest of people and activity that secondary diversity functions can produce. Only one jogger was sighted on this path during the field study, despite the fact that it took place on a pleasant fall afternoon.

Besides parks, other functions have gradually replaced the industry that once dominated Lowertown and contribute to its present diversity. Architecture firms, law firms, travel agencies, and other professional services have offices throughout the district. Due to efforts by the LRC, a downtown YMCA was
established in 1984 at the western edge of Galtier Plaza. This is an excellent secondary diversity function for this neighborhood, because it can provide both employment and services to downtown residents and workers alike. The St. Paul Farmer’s Market on 5th and Wall Street was established in 1977. While it can currently attract as many as 25,000 visitors in one day, the facility also provides a service that can be regularly enjoyed by local residents (Gehrz).

Despite these well-planned secondary diversity functions, the pedestrian-friendly design of the built environment, and the mixture of housing and office buildings in Lowertown, signs in the study area radius suggest that its revitalization is still a matter of debate. Galtier Plaza, the largest development in the study area, has been plagued by low-occupancy throughout its twenty-year existence. After extensive renovations in 2001, the building still only reached 85 percent of its total occupancy (MN Real Estate Journal). In 1999, the building’s movie theater shut down, despite the fact that it was downtown St. Paul’s only movie theater (Reilly). Few other businesses in the study area radius generate any evening activity that could encourage people to use the sidewalks after business hours. Most secondary diversity functions that exist sit in isolated blocs of three to five businesses, a hint that commercial viability on these streets is still tenuous. Coffee shops and restaurants fill in the lower stories of several buildings in the radius, but the area is still relatively quiet without weekday business professionals. However, with all of Jacob’s design components in place, the neighborhood’s recent boom in high-density condos suggests that it might be able to sustain new secondary functions in the near future and reverse the current pattern of under-use.

_Changing Residential Dynamics_
While new condos have visibly established Lowertown’s shift from an industrial
district to a residential district, it should be noted that condo residents were not the first
group of people to reinvent this space. Attracted to the large space and natural lighting
provided by old warehouses, a sizable population of artists established themselves in the
neighborhood prior to condo redevelopment, some in low-rent apartments and some
living illegally in abandoned buildings (Bruner Foundation). The conversion of
apartment buildings into condos is controversial, because it typically does not add
housing to the real estate market and can raise the cost of units as much as three times
higher than they were as apartments (Anderson 18). Many of a building’s original
residents cannot afford to stay in a unit after it has been renovated into a condo. The
Rossmor Building, which sits just outside of the study area radius, was formerly an
apartment complex occupied entirely by artists. PAK Properties purchased the building
in 2003 for condo conversion. Despite a stated wish to retain its current residents after
the conversion, the following graffiti photographed on the building’s elevator portrays
skepticism on the part of residents:

“Gen-tri-PAK-fation\1, gen-tri-pak-fashun \v.
1. Obliteration of an entire sacred arts community rooted in the history of
St. Paul, MN. through the "cleansing" of buildings perceived to be money-
makers by developers from a non-marginalized social class” (Maquah
Publications).

Although the condo boom has displaced some of Lowertown’s, the LRC has found
some ways to maintain this population in the community. The organization helped
convert the Lowertown Lofts and the Tilsner Building into artist-run co-operatives,
allowing artists to live, work, and sell their art in these spaces. Several galleries can be
found inside the Great Northern’s study area radius. The St. Paul Art Crawl capitalizes
on the artist’s presence in the community to bring in visitors to enjoy their work. In addition, several large public murals and statues dot the landscape of the study area, contributing visual interest to the sidewalks.

Besides artists’ cooperatives, the Lowertown community has made some effort to maintain economic diversity among its housing units. According to the Bruner Foundation, 25% of the 1,500 units established in Lowertown are at an affordable rate. The community’s most recent project is the conversion of the Crane-Ordway factory building at 5th and Wall Street. The building is being renovated to seventy affordable apartment units, including twelve set aside especially for the homeless (Helms). These efforts ensure that people of all income levels can enjoy Lowertown and support a diversity of neighborhood functions.

Condominiums are some of the most obvious signs of change in Lowertown, but it is important to remember that this growth comes after a thirty-year redevelopment process. Functions like Mears Park, the YMCA, and the Farmer’s Market are important establishments that support the new residential community, encouraging pedestrian street life and contributing to vibrant diversity. Housing density continues to grow, and efforts have been made to ensure that a diverse population can live in this neighborhood. With such a variety of residents and functions already established in this community, it is likely that streetlife and secondary diversity will continue to expand as new housing units are added.

*The Washburn Lofts*

The Washburn Lofts in Minneapolis are located in the city’s historic milling district at the St. Anthony Falls of the Mississippi. The unique history of the multi-
building Washburn Crosby complex was an important factor in its eventual transformation into condominiums. Once the largest flour mill in the early twentieth century’s largest flour-producing district, the complex was abandoned in 1965 when its company, now General Mills, moved headquarters to suburban Golden Valley (Martin 21 and Emporis). Other industries moved out, and the milling district fell into disuse and decay. The site’s original advantage, the Mississippi, had become too polluted and smelly to attract new users to the space. From 1960 until 1990, Minneapolis’ most prosperous industrial neighborhood was most commonly perceived as a space of blight.

In 1991, fire destroyed part of the Washburn Mill complex, leaving the eastern half of the building in ruins (Explore Minnesota). In honor of the mill’s importance to Minneapolis’ early growth, the Minnesota Historical Society announced plans in the late 1990s to renovate the mill’s burned segment into the Mill City Museum. Other segments of the mill complex were sold off in pieces by the city, and in 2001 Brighton Development, Paul Madson and Associates, and Kraus-Anderson Construction Company bought the building that is now the Washburn Lofts. Ten stories in height, the building was originally the central packaging plant for the Washburn-Crosby Mills. As a condominium, the building contains a mere 22 units, ranging in size from 1,010 square feet to 7,845 square feet (Brighton Corporation). At the time of this writing, a 2,800 square foot unit was on the resale
market for $1.7 million, signifying that the abandoned mill is once again among the most expensive properties of its kind in Minneapolis (Great Homes in Minneapolis).

Unlike other condominiums in this study, little information is available regarding the internal amenities of the Washburn Lofts, such as a party rooms, a swimming pool, or car services. The lack of information might be a marketing technique to connote their exclusivity, or it could simply mean that the condo does not include any of these features. In the cases of Grant Park and the Lowry, knowledge of each condo’s internal amenities was useful in analyzing how readily tenants might take advantage of secondary diversity functions in their neighborhood. The following analysis of diversity in the Washburn Loft’s study area will assume that such internal features are not available within the condominiums, and could therefore be considered “missing” from the study area when they are not in plain sight of pedestrians.

*Residential Growth at St. Anthony Falls*

Like the Great Northern Lofts in Lowertown, the Washburn Lofts are in one of the Twin Cities’ oldest industrial sites, designated today as the St. Anthony Historic Preservation District. Named for the Mississippi waterfalls that powered early mills, this district “served as the economic core of the Twin Cities region from the 1870s to the 1930s [...] a heavily industrial world of flour milling and trains” (Martin 121). The waterfalls provided hydropower for industry, while the complex railroad network shipped products out of the neighborhood to places like Lowertown for distribution. The buildings and transportation lines of this study area are oriented to the river, ranging linearly along the Mississippi without expanding greater than two blocks deep. Although narrow, blocks are long and rectangular to allow large buildings to spread along the river.
Industrial growth dominated the district’s function, and the Minneapolis train depots, grand hotels, rail infrastructure and warehouses all conglomerated around the district’s mills and factories. The Mississippi River makes an obvious eastern boundary to the district, while Washington Avenue, a wide commercial corridor only two blocks west of the river, is a western border to this district. Unlike in Lowertown, whose streets are platted in the same grid as St. Paul, blocks along the Mississippi are disconnected from downtown Minneapolis. West of Washington, blocks are small and square in the same grid as downtown. However, only two of these blocks cross Washington into the milling district in this study area. This street pattern effectively separates the milling district from the modern business district, an important aspect to consider when discussing the district’s transition to a pedestrian-oriented residential neighborhood.

Just as in Lowertown, the reuse of the Minneapolis milling corridor former as a high-income residential neighborhood has come after considerable effort and expense on the part of government and private developers. In 1971, the milling district received status as a Historic Preservation District, officially titled the St. Anthony Historic Preservation District. The Minneapolis/Mississippi plan was published in 1972 and adopted as the major vision of
how the riverfront district as a whole should be reused (Martin 126). In addition to condominium developments in the district’s former industrial buildings, recreational uses have been added to capitalize on the neighborhood’s historic character and proximity to the Mississippi. Directly across the street from the Washburn Lofts, the Mill Ruins Park displays old architectural pieces of the mills. West River Parkway, with its well-established bike trails and pedestrian paths, has been extended from southern Minneapolis to draw recreationalists further up the Mississippi and into this neighborhood. Most strikingly, the Stone Arch Bridge, a disused rail bridge across the Mississippi River, has been converted to a pedestrian/bike path connecting both banks. These functions are intended to provide residents with an as well as encourage public enjoyment by the entire city of the formerly polluted riverfront.

In addition to outdoor recreation, the Mill City Museum attracts visitors from the entire state and educates them about the district’s history. Next door, the Guthrie Theater is constructing a new building overlooking the river, symbolizing the riverfront’s transformation from polluted industrial corridor to a place for high-end living. Other evidence of this transformation is the former Milwaukee Road Depot. The station building itself is now a hotel and
waterpark, while the platform area has been adapted to a public indoor/outdoor skating rink. Meanwhile, prolific signage throughout the district proclaims its historic significance, although their various titles make it difficult to determine which aspect of the neighborhood should be considered most important. “River City Trolley,” “Mill Quarter,” “Mill Ruins Park,” “Heritage Trail,” “Grand Rounds Scenic Byway,” “Great River Road,” and “St. Anthony Historic Preservation District” all compete for passerby’s interest in an effort to establish this place as a significant historic and recreation area.

The transformation of this study area has come with considerable cost and effort. Seventy years of heavy industrial use had left its mark on the landscape. Approximately $200 million of public money was used to acquire park space along the river and clean up litter and pollution. Unused rail lines were removed from the district or repaved into roads. Second Street is a former rail route that has been converted into a road.

![Figure 24: Second Street before and after redevelopment (photo courtesy Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)](image)

This explains why so few streets cross Minneapolis onto 2nd, because rail-lines were originally the most important mode of connection to the mills. In addition to public money, private investors had to be found to renovate buildings and add economic functions to the site. Often, private firms were encouraged to purchase buildings with financial incentives from the public sector. The City of Minneapolis estimated that the
redevelopment of the Washburn Crosby complex would cost a total of $60 million, including $1.5 million in financing from public funds. All told, over a billion dollars have already been invested in the redevelopment of the milling district (Martin 131).

Despite such large-scale efforts to create primary residential and recreational functions in this study area, little secondary growth has occurred as a result. Washington Avenue, once a commercial corridor, is bordered on the east almost entirely by flat lots or newly constructed parking garages for the condos and the Guthrie. While land remains taken up by parking functions, there is little hope that the Guthrie could spawn any type of entertainment “district” of studios, actor’s workshops, or even bars and restaurants. The lack of cross streets in the study area and the width and busyness of Washington make it uninviting for pedestrians to cross between the mill district and downtown Minneapolis. This hampers integration between the two areas and limits nodes for potential commerce to develop. Development on the western side of Washington is almost as sparse. Only one commercial strip exists on Washington in the study area radius, which includes a coffee shop, tanning salon, gay bar, and a fast food restaurant. Other blocks are filled in by surface parking.

Figure 26: Flat lots surrounding the Guthrie Theater (photo by the author)

Figure 25: Scenes on Washington Ave (photo by the author)
lots, construction headquarters, new garages, and parking lots—nothing that is of visual interest to pedestrians. As long as the mill district remains islanded away from downtown Minneapolis by parking lots, it is unlikely that any significant sidewalk life will take hold in this neighborhood.

Comparisons of Residential Districts

The development of Lowertown and the St. Anthony district has been closely paralleled throughout their history. Both districts were formed by railroad-era industries and enjoyed a high status in their city’s economy until post-WWII deindustrialization. Both spent nearly forty years in a state of blight until they were revived under the auspices of historic preservation. Heavy spending from both the public and private spenders have shaped these districts into the residential neighborhoods they are today.

On a broad level, Lowertown and St. Anthony appear very similar. However, certain characteristics distinguish one from the other to determine their overall livability. First, neighborhood layout has encouraged certain forms of secondary diversity. Lowertown’s blocks are short and continuous with downtown St. Paul. This allows seamless passage between the two districts and creates various nodes for commercial development that encourage pedestrians to travel the streets. Mears Park is in the center of the district, a magnet that can draw neighbors inward as they pass along the city blocks. In contrast, the Washburn Lofts sit in a section of long blocks that are blocked from downtown Minneapolis by Washington Avenue and its surrounding parking facilities. Although the Stone Arch Bridge and the river parkway are pleasant attractions, they encourage linear travel at the edge of the community rather than meandering through the district’s streets. As these neighborhoods expand their population, the physical layout
of Lowertown will promote secondary diversity and pedestrian life to flourish in a way that cannot along the streets of St. Anthony.

High housing values are also characteristic of both neighborhoods. This could be attributed in part to the enormous cost of renovating abandoned buildings. The Great Northern building was originally constructed on timber piles that had begun to settle and deteriorate from proximity to the Mississippi River. Part of the $23.5 million dollar cost of restoring the building involved restructuring its foundation to correct a twenty one inch difference between the height of the front of the building and the back (Madsen). Developers have a much higher incentive to invest in such a project if they know that the return on the units they sell will be at the highest possible rate. This trend has sparked controversy among affordable housing advocates who argue that the public funds spent on neighborhood redevelopment in both these study areas mainly benefits the very rich.

Although it is beyond the scope of this work to untangle the sources of funding and the taxable values for all of the residences in these two districts, the secondary diversity they support gives some indication of the population the neighborhood can serve. In the Great Northern’s study area radius, the two major secondary diversity functions are the YMCA and the St. Paul Farmer’s Market. Both of these functions provide a service that people from all income levels can enjoy- the Farmer’s Market even accepts food stamps. In the St. Anthony District, the Guthrie Theater, the Mill City Museum, and the Depot skating rink are for discretionary spending only. Even if low-income housing was available here, these residents might have to look elsewhere for the kinds of services they need. Without secondary diversity that is accessible to all income
levels, the role of the district’s excluded groups as potential sidewalk users is lost to the neighborhood.

The nature of secondary diversity functions is the study areas is one of the main distinctions in their potential developing sidewalk life. The YMCA and the Farmer’s Market in Lowertown are functions that residents, workers, and visitors might frequent on a regular basis. They can attract a diverse population throughout much of an entire day. The street layout encourages growth of smaller businesses that people might pass on their way to and from one of these places. In short, this diversity meets all of Jacobs’ conditions for the creation of casual street relationships and sidewalk interactions.

In St. Anthony, secondary diversity if focused on large-scale entertainment. Although the skating rink may attract visitors, residents are unlikely to want to go there on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis. The same can be said for the Mill City Museum. While some theater patrons might see every new show of a season, the majority of them probably only see shows occasionally. Therefore, smaller secondary diversity is unlikely to develop close to these entertainment functions because it is unlikely that any resident will purposely travel to or from them on a regular basis. Without this anchor group of passers-by, sidewalk life will be difficult to attain.

Lowertown and St. Anthony have both proven themselves able to attract growth in their residential populations. The reuse of abandoned buildings has given each district a new function and reversed a long trend of blight after the decline of their industrial production. However, long-term revitalization in these neighborhoods goes beyond adding more housing units and ultimately depends on the sidewalk life they can support. While St. Anthony has invested heavily in new recreation and entertainment facilities,
Lowertown has had the most success with less flashy redevelopment efforts that support a local community. Unless St. Anthony alters its pattern of growth and adds more pedestrian-oriented functions to its mixture, it is unlikely to achieve any degree of exuberant streetlife even with the addition of more condos. Meanwhile, Lowertown, with its meaningful secondary diversity, well-designed streets and parks, and diverse socioeconomic population is likely to continue to grow into a vibrant, sidewalk-oriented urban community as its residential population expands.
Chapter 8
Discussion of Findings

Each of the four case study condominiums has made a unique contribution toward quality of life in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul. While the condo buildings themselves all follow New Urbanist design guidelines, the success of condominium developments varies widely across these four neighborhoods. In the case of the Lowry and the Great Northern Lofts, condominiums bolster neighborhood density and help stabilize its existing diversity. The Washburn Lofts are part of a new kind of development in their neighborhood where there is little established secondary diversity to support condo residents. Finally, the Grant Park Condominiums sit in a zone of transition between the downtown core and an existing residential neighborhood that is in need of residential secondary diversity. The affluence brought to the neighborhood by condo residents makes change in this direction foreseeable, albeit that the added functions almost exclusively serve a high-income population. How effectively condominiums can impact diversity functions in their neighborhood is critical to their success as revitalization tools. The following paragraphs will discuss the ability of condo projects to produce vibrant pedestrian-oriented communities in downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis and offer opinions on how walkability of the case study neighborhoods could be further improved. This section will conclude by exploring the universal viability of downtown condo projects and the potential for their long-term success as revitalization tools.

The four condominiums in this study closely follow New Urbanist design principles in their building exteriors. This can be attributed to the fact that three out of four projects: the Lowry, the Washburn Lofts, and the Great Northern Lofts are in
historic buildings that were constructed during an era when this kind of building technique was the norm. The Grant Park Condominiums, the only new construction in this study, consciously incorporate several New Urbanist design techniques by incorporating the development’s tower with the three story brick townhomes that line the streets. All of the condominiums have intricately textured facades that enhance the look of the streetscape. They sit close to the sidewalk, maintaining a sense of connection between residents and activity outside, and none are too large to appear overwhelming. In addition, all four condos minimize the impact of cars by hiding them underground or in discreet parking garages that blend in with neighborhood architecture.

Given that all of these condo structures are built in accordance with New Urbanist principles, the variation in their contribution to sidewalk life must be explained by other factors. Neighborhood design, both its physical layout and its functional diversity, can limit or promote a condo’s effectiveness at encouraging vibrant streetlife. How frequently condominium residents use their neighborhood and contribute to its sidewalk life is dependent on the functions they find there and the design that allows them to develop.

*Lowertown as a Pedestrian Community*

The Great Northern Lofts’ study area in Lowertown has generated residential secondary diversity to a greater degree than any of the other study areas. The neighborhood’s physical elements support the growth of a vibrant pedestrian neighborhood. Blocks are short, Mears Park conforms perfectly to Jacobs’ criteria for successful parks, and most of the neighborhood’s buildings are oriented to the street. It is important to note that the introduction of residents to this neighborhood has been a
twenty-year process, and the boom in loft condominiums is merely the latest manifestation of a gradual change that has been slowly adding diversity to the study area. Anyone moving to this neighborhood today can expect that this neighborhood will retain its present character even as it adds more functions.

Even with the benefits of design and continued investment, secondary diversity around the Great Northern Lofts is still not quite up to the level of exuberance Jacobs would require. The neighborhood has several live-work spaces for artists, but has not yet evolved into a reputed arts district with artists’ work centers or art supply stores. Most lacking in the neighborhood is any kind of entertainment venue, a function that is critical to the area’s twenty-four-hour use. Currently, the only opportunities for after-hours socializing are a few low-end bars. The closing of the neighborhood’s movie theater inside Galtier Plaza seven years ago is a great loss to residents. It is possible that the neighborhood’s population growth since 1999 could now support a small theater. If such a building were accessible from the street, it might also attract crowds from outside of the neighborhood. Movie-going can be enhanced by a certain amount of ambience, and Lowertown, with historic buildings and tree-lined Mears Park has the ability to attract outsiders for this experience.

In the case of Lowertown, new condominiums strengthen the mixture of primary diversity that already exists in the neighborhood. In 1995, the community already contained 1,500 housing units and 2,000,000 square feet of leasable office and studio space (Bruner Foundation). This helps explain its ability to support a YMCA, the Farmer’s Market, and a few coffee shops. New condominiums like the Great Northern Lofts continue the previous trend. Their addition to the neighborhood is most likely to
stabilize the tenure of existing functions, and it is possible that a few more secondary
diversity functions could develop with the increase in neighborhood population density.

*Secondary Diversity for Residential Populations
The Lowry*

Although Lowertown can boast a YMCA and Farmer’s Market, one of the trends
observed universally across the four study areas was their inability to sustain a sizable
portion of secondary diversity functions that support local residents. All are lacking in
modest services like grocery stores, hardware stores, pharmacies, bakeries, dry cleaning
services, and day care facilities. Residential neighborhoods need functions like these if
residents are expected to use their neighborhood on a daily basis. This lack of secondary
diversity functions is the major inhibitor of walkability in all four neighborhoods.

Particularly in the cases of the Lowry and the Washburn Lofts, the emphasis of
neighborhood development has been on large-scale entertainment structures. While these
add a primary diversity function to their neighborhood, they should not be confused with
the kind of secondary development that supports a residential population. In the case of
the Lowry, it is unlikely that the neighborhood will ever achieve sufficient population
density to sustain much residential secondary diversity. This condominium is most
successful as secondary diversity for the entertainment facilities, providing a regular base
of patrons who would have little reason to live there without the attraction of St. Paul’s
nightlife. New restaurants and clubs on the Lowry’s lower floors are a welcome
contribution to neighborhood diversity, but their use depends more on nearby
entertainment venues than on the patronage of Lowry residents.

As with the Great Northern Lofts, the Lowry best serves as a means to promote
the further success of existing neighborhood functions, not as a generator of new kinds of
diversity. Given the strong presence of two primary diversity functions in this study area and the current growth in its secondary diversity functions, this neighborhood has a good chance of maintaining twenty-four hour street life and sizable secondary diversity even if it never achieves a sizable residential population.

The Washburn Lofts

The Washburn Lofts are also constructed near major entertainment venues. However, they are part of a much larger residential area than the Lowry and should support a greater variety of secondary diversity functions. While the Lowry’s neighborhood is seamlessly connected to downtown St. Paul, the Minneapolis milling district is separated from downtown by a strip of parking lots and a lack of cross-streets. This inhibits pedestrian connections into and out of the neighborhood, limiting the customer base of any potential new businesses. While these design elements and the neighborhood’s historic separation from downtown Minneapolis are difficult to correct, they only underscore the importance of secondary diversity to this neighborhood’s long-term success. Even if the former milling district’s residential population never reaches the quantity necessary to sustain its own secondary diversity, new functions might develop in this neighborhood if its connection with downtown were improved.

Currently, the Washburn’s study area contains a mixture of residential and recreational primary diversity functions with very few secondary diversity functions to support either. Washington Avenue, the commercial corridor that presently serves as a barrier between the two districts, needs to be transformed by functions that encourage pedestrian travel between the two. For example, the Mill City Museum contains an upscale deli that can provide both a service to residents and lunch to both guests and
downtown workers. If this sort of venue were visible from the street, it would be more attractive to pedestrians and provide a new set of eyes on the street to encourage sidewalk life. The continued development of parking garages between 2nd Street and Washington Avenue hinders the improvement of pedestrian connections between the milling district and downtown and limits the potential for sidewalk use among the neighborhood’s new residents.

The milling district’s change from abandoned industrial zone to condo and theater district is still relatively recent, and it is possible that the neighborhood will develop secondary diversity as these changes become more established. Meanwhile, the addition of historic light-posts and well-paved sidewalks may give the illusion that the neighborhood is walkable, but it is unlikely that the sidewalks will ever attract many users until they filled with destinations. City planners, who were main actors in the implementation of the Guthrie, the Mill City Museum, and the river parks, need to continue to work actively toward the development of secondary diversity functions in this neighborhood. Without these, it is unlikely that the former milling district will ever fully evolve into distinctive place that residents or theater guests will adopt and sustain into the future.

Grant Park Condominiums

The Grant Park Condominiums are the only development of this study in an area that originated as a residential neighborhood. Like the Washburn Lofts, major transportation networks disconnect parts of its neighborhood from other districts, in this case the Minneapolis Convention Center in the study area’s southwest corner. With this exception, the neighborhood’s blocks are short and easy to navigate and it still maintains
a strong connection to the Minneapolis central business district. The condos themselves sit in a transition zone between downtown and residential Elliot Park. While the street layout is conducive to pedestrians, the functions in this zone are neither a part of the downtown core nor integrated with the residential neighborhood. People may pass through this zone out of necessity, but large low structures like hotels and auto-care facilities are unlikely to encourage much sidewalk life.

Southwest of the transition zone, the residential primary diversity function in Grant Park’s study area is well-established. The Grant Park condos do not add any primary diversity to their neighborhood; they simply introduce a new income group to the neighborhood’s residential mix. In this case, lack of secondary diversity functions is most likely due to the neighborhood’s impoverishment and undesirability to investors, not to any major design impediments. The effects of this change are not inconsiderable: Grant Park condos are the only development in this study that correlate with the growth of new residential secondary diversity in their neighborhood. In this case, a coffee shop, bookstore, and art gallery have been added less than a block away from the condos. Although the suitability of these functions with the poverty issues that concern a majority of the neighborhood’s residents can be debated, it is undeniable that the Grant Park condos have increased the overall level of residential secondary diversity in Elliot Park. Objectively, the Grant Park Condominiums have contributed to the walkability of their neighborhood. However, the problematic consequences on neighborhood affordability must be considered before these condos could be declared a successful revitalization effort. Future policy-makers looking to introduce condominiums in other neighborhoods like Elliot Park must be aware of their neighborhood’s existing character and find
development tools that meet the needs of established residents while they generate new
growth.

Outlook on Condominium Revitalization Efforts in the Twin Cities

In all four study areas, condo development is still too recent to conclusively
determine how they will contribute to quality of life and pedestrian access in downtown
St. Paul and Minneapolis. New condo units are still under construction in all four case
study neighborhoods, and the potential for secondary diversity functions continues to
grow. Based on their current design features, the neighborhoods that are most likely to
sustain Jacobs-style growth are the study areas of the Great Northern Lofts and the Grant
Park Condominiums. They have solid pedestrian connections to other districts and well-
established residential populations. Both neighborhoods’ existing buildings are
conducive to the growth of additional secondary diversity functions because they are
close to residences, oriented toward the streets, and have attractive aesthetics. In short,
most of the design elements that encourage vibrant diversity are in place in both these
neighborhoods.

The Washburn Lofts are isolated from Minneapolis by design, and the growth of
secondary diversity will take a major shift in its current pattern of development pattern of
large structures and parking garages. In addition, the speed with which the entire
neighborhood has been recreated makes it difficult for secondary diversity to keep up
with the influx of users. Whether condos will retain their value in a functionally uniform
neighborhood without street activity remains to be seen. Finally, the Lowry building is
likely to support diversity in downtown St. Paul but only in its capacity to enhance its
entertainment district. The implementation of these condominiums will not have a major impact on the overall mixture in the variety of downtown St. Paul’s functions.

Discussion of Walkability

Even if condominiums continue to increase population density and spur economic growth in the two downtowns, it is still possible that walkability will never regain a prominent status in today’s auto-oriented society. Especially in the Twin Cities, climate can be an important factor in peoples’ decision to avoid spending time outdoors. As Larry Ford points out, “few urbane flaneurs want to be outside long in Minneapolis […] in January.” The valet parking services offered by the Lowry and the skyway connections that define Minneapolis’ core reflect this aversion to the natural elements. Ford argues that the American conception of a “good downtown” often derives from models of European cities that are located in relatively benign climates (77). Idealized sidewalk cafes are unfeasible most of the year in Minnesota. It is possible that no amount of added population density will bring the Twin Cities’ sidewalks to maximum capacity, even if it can ensure a district’s regular use.

While the public’s willingness to readopt pedestrian lifestyles is still untested, so too is its acceptance of high-density living. The Twin Cities are not the only metropolis to gamble on the success of downtown condos, which are emerging in cities across the country. At this time, little is known about the long-term stability of this new real-estate market. Kemba Dunham and Ray Smith hypothesize that the apparent boom in condo growth is the result of developers over-flooding the market, rather than forces of consumer demand. Speculators frequently make the initial purchase of condos in the hopes of turning them over for a large profit. While this implies that condos are selling
quickly, it does not necessarily mean that buildings are becoming occupied at the same rates. Empty units do not add people to the mixture of the city who can create sidewalk life, and present rates of sale are not accurate predictors of the desirability condos will sustain throughout their lifespan.

Furthermore, some sources have argued that signs already point to a cool-down of the condo market. In January of 2006, only four condominium units sold in the Minneapolis market, compared to twenty-seven a year earlier (Efrati). The use of condominiums as a successful revitalization tool depends on whether consumers continue to want homes in this market. Urban condos represent a dramatic shift in mind-set over the ever-larger suburban homes and yards that have been popular since World War II. At present, it is too soon to tell whether this real-estate market can be sustained over a long period of time in downtowns across the country.

Even given the unpredictability of their future growth, condos are an exciting development in the Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns. They are one of the first widely marketed alternatives to urban sprawl, and they assert the desirability of inner-city neighborhoods that have gone decades without major economic growth. Although pioneered as luxury items, condominiums are currently being developed at affordable rates across the Twin Cities, and it is imperative that they continue to be used to create new housing options for people of all income levels. Beyond their ability to create housing options, all four of these case study condominiums have demonstrated their potential to transform their neighborhoods and generate a new mixture of functions in downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis. If any condo is to become a meaningful addition to its neighborhood, planners must work for the development of smaller-scale secondary
diversity long after condominium projects are finished. The addition of condominiums to urban neighborhoods is an important first step toward improving quality of life and generating vibrant streetlife in our urban centers.
Works Cited
(alphabetical by chapter)

Chapter 2: Urban Design Theories


Chapter 3: Background to Condominium Development in the Twin Cities


**Chapter 4: Methodology**


**Chapter 5: The Lowry**


PAK Properties. Lowry sales materials and brochures. Received Oct 2005.


**Chapter 6: Grant Park Condominiums**


Chapter 7: The Washburn Lofts and the Great Northern Lofts


NRT Incorporated. “Great Northern Lofts.” 


Chapter 8: Discussion of Findings

