Reassembling the Politics of "Green" Urban Redevelopment in East Garfield Park: A Polanyian Approach

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Abstract

Spotlighting a "green building" project in Chicago (East Garfield Park), this paper explores the various cultural, geographical, and topological factors that serve to pluralize land commodification pathways. Building on the scholarship on rent capture, I re-assemble the politics of green gentrification in East Garfield Park in order to lay bare the dynamic interactions between structure (e.g., financialization of urban space), agency (e.g. expression of needs, purposes, interests), and spatial materiality (e.g. landscapes of built environment). My approach draws on Polanyian geographies, focusing in particular on plural social agencies, the impact of spatial infrastructural configurations on local politics, and the role of narrative/script-making in land development. The resulting conversation entails thicker criticism of municipal planning practices that fail to challenge the foundational assumptions of land market and property economy. Moreover, a number of implications arise from the performative political possibilities of spatial infrastructure: while broader economic structures may constrain the agency of diverse actants, spatial landscapes can nevertheless prove enabling for transformative value politics, with competing narratives on "what is the best use for the land" defying a singular ontology of land as "real-estate-land".

Introduction

> ***Resident A***: My concern … is I feel like I see a lot of development within the ward. And I feel like the development is pushing west and this all sounds fantastic, as it comes to the East Garfield Park community, but my concern is that when it comes, the people who are there now won't actually be the ones who get to enjoy it. So I guess what I'm concerned about is displacement. Frankly, is this something that the people who are here are going to have an opportunity to enjoy? Or will all these nice things come and I won't be able to afford live anymore?

> ***Alderman***: So what you're saying is very important, it's very valid. And these are housing units that are needed in our community to preserve affordability for those that want to stay here, those who are currently here, and those that may want to move in our community. It is my desire that those that are living in this community want to take advantage, or those especially that are renting to take advantage of the income-restricted homes, what has the rents that are stable, and they don't have to worry about the market factors that are existing across East Garfield Park.[1]

The concept of "green" or "ecological" gentrification—classically defined as private or public expenditure on "green" amenities driving displacement of low-income groups (Dale and Newman, 2009; Dooling, 2009; Safransky, 2014; Immergluck and Balan, 2018)—offers an apt summation of the concerns felt by many residents of East Garfield Park, a historically Black neighborhood in Chicago. One project at the heart of this process is "the Garfield Commons" (*GC*) (a given pseudonym), a land development project incorporating "green" affordable housing (43 units up to 80% area median income). While on paper the project satisfies the key elements of sustainable development, being both environmentally responsible (e.g., using energy-efficient "passive house" technologies) and socially conscious (e.g., provision of housing for lower-income households), its actualization reveals the contentious politics of spatial planning. Residents, as demonstrated in the exchange above, are concerned about how these changes will impact the neighborhood in terms of land market trends, rent/property tax increases, neighborhood culture and livelihood dynamics.

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[1] Alderman-East Garfield Park Community Meeting, December 21, 2020.

The *GC* sits alongside similar developments in the neighborhood, such as "The Hatchery" (a food and beverage incubator for "local entrepreneurs"), "The Eco-Orchard" (a flood-mitigation community garden funded by the city and the water reclamation district), and another newly proposed housing development, "Hub 32" (an affordable housing project with 63 units up to 60% area median income). Interest in "branding" East Garfield Park a "green neighborhood"—both on the part of the city and due to grassroots efforts—dates back in 2005, when the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance and LISC/Chicago's New Communities Program ("East Garfield Park: Growing a Healthy Community") was initiated. These efforts were bolstered by the fact that the west side of the neighborhood borders Garfield Park (184 acres of park space), Golden Dome Field House, and one of the largest conservatories in the US. Built in 1870, 1928, and 1907 respectively, these three neighborhood features were in place *well before* White flight commenced in the 1950s.

If the aim of this paper was simply to reiterate the basic green gentrification thesis—that is, the harnessing of a sustainability agenda as a land development tool, resulting in lower-income residents being displaced—there would, perhaps, be little more to say about the *GC*. Despite its resemblance to other cases emblematic of green gentrification, however, the present case of East Garfield Park points to the political paradox of "neighborhood improvement" in a historically disinvested urban area, with diverse actors each *making a case for* a value logic that aligns with their present needs, interests and beliefs. At the same time, such volition or "agency", to a certain extent, is inescapably in interaction with the structure of racialized uneven development (Wright, 2020), the financialization of subsidized housing (Rosenmann, 2018), and the municipal government's operative mechanisms for financing urban redevelopment (Weber, 2021).

The purpose of this paper is therefore to better understand the situation of East Garfield Park through unpacking how structure, agency, and spatial materiality interact. More precisely, beyond the constraints imposed on urban space by financialization ("structure"), I explore how the socio-cultural aspects of agent-centered value practices ("agency"), together with location-specific landscape concerns ("spatial materiality"), lie at the heart of land commodification processes. In doing so, I draw on what I broadly define as three existing interpretations of green gentrification. Going beyond this, I apply

what I consider to be a more useful perspective on the case of East Garfield Park—namely, a Polanyian approach to critiquing market economy and its moral failure.

Polanyi's non-deterministic approach to imagining transformative social futures has inspired many transdisciplinary scholars looking for pluralistic ways of interpreting the present capitalist crisis (Peck 2013a). A trenchant critic of Ricardo-derived liberal economism, Polanyi rejected the fictitious ideal of a "self-regulating market" not only because of its internal contradictions, but its impotence in explaining such variegated manifestations of social life as place-based solidarities, moral relationships in everyday habits, and "freedom" exercised as social performance within human associations (Rogan, 2017). Polanyi's anthropological tendencies led him to develop a "life-world" approach to critiquing the market economy, adding a more complex and "worldly" layer to existing anti-capitalist thought (Fraser, 2018). Further, in a departure from economic determinism, his signature concepts of "social embeddedness" and "countermovement" highlight everyday political possibilities and social agency (Peck, 2013b).

Even already strong perspectives can benefit from readjustment and reinvention, however, with contemporary theorists pointing out the limitations of Polanyian thought when applied to present circumstances. Their generative criticisms target Polanyi's reference to "progress" as a universalistic program, lacking a space–time dimension (Bärnthaler et al., 2020). In particular, an *a priori* political positioning is implicit in Polanyi's "economy vs. society" dichotomy—in practice, situated politics reveal more complex processes of how "countermovements" unfold (Fraser, 2014; Lake, 2021). The present paper incorporates these insights in illuminating the pluralistic politics of green gentrification.

The resulting conversation, which situates the case of East Garfield Park (with the *GC* as its most recent agent of change) within both existing green gentrification debates and Polanyian geographies, entails thicker criticism of planning practices that fail to challenge the foundational assumptions of land as "real-estate-land". In the recent years, municipal governments are increasingly pressured by housing crisis and the need for affordable housing, in which they adopt "building more" and "densification" as an environmentally and socially progressive solution. However, this argument often neglects the socio-political processes of actualizing housing provisions especially in cities with

unequal spatial development patterns. Siting, financing, and actually constructing affordable housing involve a variety of political processes in which different rationalities and justifications should be made in contestation against one another. My rendering of Polanyian approach to understanding green gentrification, particularly focusing on such *ongoing* politics of land development processes, not only challenges the myths and narratives perpetuated by mainstream urban development projects but also illuminates the role of spatial milieu as a dynamic medium between structure and agency. Despite the financialization of urban space channels "green affordable housing" projects to become the legitimizing force behind gentrification, the vividly present social contestations across plural value logics evince the political possibility of spatial infrastructure becoming something other than the subservient product of land commodification.

Literature review: three existing interpretations of green gentrification

Five decades of gentrification scholarship have made one thing clear: under market-driven urban development, the "rent gap" offers entrepreneurs opportunities to extract value from land for the purposes of maximizing profit. It is unequal urban development fashioned by movements of capital that creates the conditions in which the rent gap—defined as the "disparity between the potential ground rent and actual ground rent under the present land use"—arises. Thus, "only when this gap emerges can redevelopment be expected, to cover the cost of redevelopment" (Smith, 1979: 545). The various "actors" of gentrification, no matter how divergent they may be, cannot help but operationalize these value regimes determined by the market logics of supply and demand. Even "cultural" gentrifiers, whose "desire" to live in particular location is not rooted in an economistic motif (e.g., the "lifestyle" choices of artists and younger homebuyers), are eventually enveloped by the logic of market expansion, with popularization of the "desirability" they bring leading to rises in property taxes and in turn lower, less stable, or stagnant incomed residents being displaced (Zukin, 1982).

Further, gentrification actors do not simply reiterate existing market logics as passive subjects. Rather, they are often *willing* participants in creating the particular conditions in which the market expansion materializes itself. For instance, gentrification cannot occur without the government's role in redlining (leading to unequal development

and thus a rent gap) and facilitating loan procedures for private developers (seen as "urban pioneers" igniting gentrification processes), or banking institutions deciding to supply private mortgage financing in certain locations (Schaffer and Smith, 1986). In Weber (2002)'s case study of tax incremental financing in Chicago, the municipalities, developers and financial-market actors worked together to expedite market expansion, contributing to "the public sector's loss of time sovereignty, as investors [due to their connection with the global financial market] have much shorter time horizons than states" (p. 536). Since then, gentrification has increasingly become a global, state-led strategy, with liberal urban policy actively pursuing capitalist production via a new urbanism that is "densely connected into the circuits of global spatial and cultural circulation" (Smith, 2002: 427).

While a political economist perspective often attributes gentrification's "root cause" to development pressures generated by the market, together with state–market growth coalitions, other scholars note it can also be culturally driven by residents seeking improvements in their built environment and infrastructure services. In Boerum Hill (Brooklyn), for instance, certain community activists concocted a neighborhood historical identity and narrative (accentuating the value of Brownstone characteristics) for the purposes of mobilizing new investment into the area (Kasinitz, 1988). Though other groups with competing community values fiercely opposed market expansion (e.g., Puerto Rican identity groups who supported public housing and anti-displacement campaigns; see Newman and Wyly, 2006), their efforts remained underrepresented compared to the more mainstreamed narratives fashioned by middle-class activists (who harnessed, rather than challenged, the market logic of land-rentability; see also Lees, 2003).

Green gentrification studies in general have followed similar storylines to previous gentrification studies (i.e., growth coalitions and global financiers exploit the rent gap for profit maximization), while adding "environmental landscapes" as a crucial land market variable. Broadly speaking, green gentrification as an observable urban phenomenon is currently interpreted along three lines of thoughts: "green" urbanism as a new excuse for the same old state–market growth coalition; green/ecological gentrification as the state's distributive failure of environmental goods; and green gentrification as cultural imperialism.

Green gentrification as continuation of state–market growth coalition

During the 2000s, in problematizing accelerating rates of climate change and ecological deformation, urban planning scholarship posited "sustainable urban design" as being at the forefront of environmentalist action (Berke, 2002). Recommended planning actions included transit-oriented development, incorporating buildings, urban form, and land use design that would minimize carbon emissions and respond to environmental challenges (e.g., flood or heat mitigation). Subsequent green gentrification studies have argued that, driven by market-driven urbanization, such ideas have been co-opted by the interests of capital (e.g., "green washing"), with growing middle-class enthusiasm for "sustainable lifestyles" deployed as justification for displacing the poor and marginalized (Dooling, 2009; Gould and Lewis, 2017). Further, city governments' promotion of "climate friendliness" is, in practice, often merely an excuse for pursuing "green growth coalitions" that prioritize capital reproduction over social reproduction (Rice et al., 2020). Given amenities incur value, and value is destined to be captured by capital, *any* kind of neighborhood "improvement"—insofar as we live under an economic system undergirded by principles of private property—is likely to have detrimental impacts on the livelihoods of the most marginalized. Thus, scholars following this vein of thought call for movements that explicitly prioritize social equity, highlighting the "green cover" cloaking the same old growth machines.

Green gentrification as a distributive failure of environmental goods

A less deterministic model of green gentrification, however, acknowledges the positive potential of local governments in addressing distributive justice problems caused by green gentrification. If "green gentrification" can be defined as using "green" amenities to justify displacing the poor, then the flipside of this problem lies in certain segments of the population being deprived of amenities deemed desirable by wider society—under capitalist urban development, the rich get to live in more pleasant environments, while the poor end up in the least desirable parts of town. Amenities such as parks, bike trails and transit-oriented urban designs are not inherently "negative". Rather, their negativity arises from the stabilization of existing spatial inequities (Dale and Newman, 2009). Thus, "the role of state" can potentially be decoupled from predetermined "growth machine" trajectories if local governments put in place appropriate policies *prior to* the land valuation process falling prey to market forces. Such policies include limiting property tax

growth for lower-income homeowners; incentivizing long-term affordable rents for lower-income tenants; and mandatory inclusionary housing policies committed to building affordable housing units (Immergluck and Balan, 2018: 560).

Green gentrification as cultural imperialism

On the other hand, a more genealogical thesis on "green gentrification as historical process" critiques claims regarding the "intrinsic goodness" of new urbanism, or "compact urban development" more broadly. Safransky (2014) discusses how elites have rarified urban land in Detroit via "greening", thereby increasing land values as supply diminishes, with one such effort being the city government's "right-sizing" initiative. This aimed to reduce city services and resources in outer-skirt areas, repurposing these "sprawls" into a green infrastructure network. Towards this end, the city offered "a special deal" to a white businessman (John Hanz), who proposed buying large swaths of land and putting it to more "productive" use, notably via building an urban farm complex. This met with resistance from local residents, who were already practicing care for their land and neighborhood, albeit lacking the capital to claim "official" ownership. Ultimately, "going green" in Detroit served as a mask for the city's grander ideological scheme to "emphasize the reorganization of space according to market typologies, so that municipalities can geographically target local assets and package them for investors, settlers, and private sector capital" (Safransky, 2014: 243). Such an interpretation of green gentrification goes beyond mere vilification of the market, framing it more as a human *political* problem, with a white settler colonial ideology lurking behind the various "green growth" coalitions, undergirded by a Lockean idealization of land privatization as the basis of political citizenship and social life. Thus, it is cultural domination—the continuation of colonial violence that sees black and brown lives as expendable—that lies at the heart of urban dispossession and displacement.

Value contestations over land and urban development are not merely historical, but spatially expansive and complex in terms of their interconnections and chance encounters with *the present* status of politics, which comprises competition between diverse interests as well as disparate understandings of what constitutes the "best use" of land in concern. Deciding, or legitimizing "the right manner" of handling land's materiality involves "not just contests between rich and poor, but contests among philosophers, scientists and

governmental authorities who debate what constitutes the public good in terms of many criteria: public health and hygiene, political stability, energy, pollution, species depletion, climate change, peace, development, prosperity, efficiency and more" (Li, 2014: 591).

Embracing this plurality in "making sense" of the land, and inspired by those writing on the pluralizing of land commodification storylines (Ghertner and Lake, 2021), I below discuss how Polanyian thinking can help in analyzing contemporary green gentrification processes.

A Polanyian approach to interpreting green gentrification

For Polanyi, "in all previous civilizations, the economy was embedded in non-economic social relations" (Polanyi-Levitt, 2018: 29). This is the basis of his signature concept, "social embeddedness": "the economy is determined not by given and unchanging natural laws but by social norms and conventions that are malleable over time" (Dale, 2010: 14). According to this line of thinking, "our dangerously disordered [neoliberal] world is best described as a continuous process of 'disembedding' the market economy from laws, customs, institutions and values essential for civilized life" (Polanyi-Levitt, 2018: 35). Polanyi's philosophy thus calls for a *moral* rejection of marketization and the perception that human relations can be distilled down to contractual barter and exchange (Rogan, 2017).

In making this argument, Polanyi insists that economic interests do not determine human experience, and consequently society's instinct to protect itself from the perilous impacts of commodification is common and natural. Contemporary Polanyian geography (Bärnthaler et al., 2020; Ghertner and Lake, 2021) thickens this discussion by pointing out that "the social" does not maintain a stagnantly monolithic existence, but is formed on an ongoing basis through spatially pluralistic contestations.

For instance, Ghertner and Lake (2021), building on the Polanyian thesis of nature being turned into a "fictitious" commodity under marketization (i.e., nature was "not meant for" furnishing its labor to capitalist production and accumulation), argue that the politics of land commodification can be understood in a more *performative* sense if one considers this "fictitiousness" to have been conjured, justified, and operated by living

social characters and their inter-relations. In doing so, Ghertner and Lake adopt a literary studies approach to analyzing the spatio-political landscapes of land development: through "narrative conventions, images and characters, and plot lines", land transformations—from ontological being to contested site of value projects—manifest. Land fictions are "social stories used to narrate the commodified reinventions of land and the implicit forms of land valuation such stories help secure", which are continually "imagined, enacted, justified, and contested" (p. 10). Through convincing storylines and vividly resonating characters, the narratives, rationalities, and justifications used to commodify land effectively *seduce* a new social audience.

Focusing on the agential power of narrative, Ghertner and Lake argue that "land" is not merely an empirical condition (with materiality determining its definitive or unshakable identity), but rather involves a transactional relationship with fictitious accounts of "a social relation, a toll of invention, an ideological project". Here, materiality (i.e., objective reality) and subjectivity (i.e., invented narratives) combine to form ongoing, plural trajectories, determining how land markets operate in a particular time and space.

Applying this insight to green gentrification, new urbanism's role in land commodification can be reinterpreted in a spatially performative sense. Popular demands for green urbanization (e.g., transit-oriented development), as Bärnthaler et al. (2020)'s and Tretter et al. (2022)'s studies attest, are often driven by both "cultural" as well as "market" concerns. In Bärnthaler et al. (2020)'s case, there has been a cultural shift in Vienna whereby younger demographics, especially in inner city neighborhoods, desire ways of living more oriented towards "sustainability". Resisting the post-war period's cultural homogenization (e.g., traditional family values, conservatism, White nationalism), this new generation of Vienna denizens are demanding their right to "postmodern ways of life", coupling cultural progressivism in the form of, for example, pro-migration and pro-climate politics with market-liberal practices.

In Tretter et al. (2022)'s case, environment activists genuinely believed their "new urbanism" advocacy was making a dent in Austin's otherwise sprawling urban patterns. Towards this end, the new urbanist pro-development coalition pursued land development code revisions that would help increase density in the city's more central neighborhoods, the underlying logic being that, on the basis of supply and demand, denser building

footprints are likely to result in both "abundant housing" (due to that is projected to dlower housing costs) and "sustainable growth" (by decreasing sprawling growth). In practice, however, not all the "central neighborhoods" were spatially equal when it came to the power dynamics of Austin's urban development processes. More affluent single-home neighborhoods had greater political resources to fend off high-density housing, resulting in less affluent neighborhoods bearing the brunt of rapid urban growth (the speed of which often determines the rate at which incumbent lower-income residents are pushed out).

In both Bärnthaler et al. (2020)'s and Tretter et al. (2022)'s scenarios, the complex politics of climate urbanism become evident. There are new urbanists who identify themselves as cultural minorities ("persons of color"); environmentalists whose primary motif is preventing urban sprawl (the overall effect of which is understood to be bad for the environment); and affordable housing builders whose main rationale is increasing the immediate availability of housing. Consequently, these empirically-grounded accounts extend the Polanyian emphasis on human agency, highlighting that actual processes of "double movement" are considerably more culturally pluralistic (e.g., postmodern lifestyle, multiculturalism, the rise of new urbanist creed), spatially context-specific (e.g., movement against suburban sprawl, spatial inequities in terms of urban form patterns), and therefore politically contingent than is acknowledged by foundational assumptions of the "social" being teleologically good or ideal (i.e., automatically working against the market).

Inspired by these works, the paper now turns to the case of green gentrification in East Garfield Park, following which I will return to how Polanyian thinking can help unpack the performative aspects of land commodification processes in green gentrification, especially with regard to the transactional dynamics between structure, agency, and spatial materiality.

Reassembling the politics of green urban redevelopment in East Garfield Park

The story begins thus: a non-profit property developer entered an internationally recognized green urbanism competition, with the support of Chicago's then-mayor Rahm Emanuel. The submitted proposal ended up winning the competition, and subsequently, the city promised to fund it, citing "affordable housing" in a "traditionally underinvested neighborhood", utilizing "the leading edge of energy efficiency". The building site,

according to the plan passed in a November 2021 planning commission meeting, comprises two parcels: a South parcel building containing 43 units (all rentals owned and managed by the non-profit developer, consisting of 14 one-bedroom units, 17 two-bedroom units, and 11 three-bedroom units[2]); and a North parcel building intended for co-op ownership, with 32 units (2 one-bedroom units, 17 two-bedroom units, and 13 three-bedroom units). In addition to the housing units, the South parcel building will feature 4,500 square feet of retail (equating to three or four commercial sites).

From this point on, I will reorganize East Garfield Park's story of green gentrification, spotlighting the contingent politics at play when it comes to materializing this spatial infrastructure "with good intentions". Structural constraints, including systemic racism and the financialization of urban space, have conditioned the grounds for East Garfield Park's impending gentrification. The question of agency is entangled with these structural conditions, as willful participation in land commodification by certain actants, along with contestation against it by others, are relationally constituted in the context of discourses legitimizing the development. Spatial materiality then acts a medium between structure and agency, with its physical performativity providing a stage for physical enactment of land fictions that inscribe future relations between the land and its social surrounds.

Methodological considerations

The following analysis, drawing on Koopman (2017), adopts what I term a "transitionalist approach" to social inquiry (Jon, 2023). This involves delineating the present conditions of possibility through a genealogical analysis tracing why such conditions had to surface amidst diverse vectors of practice over time. This in turn points to the contingent materialities of the *ongoing* problematic situation, revealing how they shape new possibilities in conversation with current power configurations.

The paper draws on two main data sources: transcripts from *GC* community engagement meetings and oral histories of East Garfield Park authored by residents; the

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[2] This was the break-down of the bedrooms reported during the November 2021 planning commission meeting; but the total does not add up (14 + 17 + 11 = 42 units).

author's site visit which entailed interviews with residents and developers, as well consulting local archives.

The *GC* project's three-year community engagement process (2020–2022) was conducted virtually or in hybrid form due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The author attended the meetings online (six meetings in total, each on average 70 minutes) and transcribed proceedings. In addition, 27 resident interview recordings on East Garfield Park's neighborhood history and gentrification (conducted by The East Garfield Park Oral History Project, 2016) were listened to and transcribed by the author. These transcripts were analyzed using inductively drawn codes based on iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis (Charmaz, 2006), assisted by *Atlas TI*'s thematical coding function. The umbrella code list included (but was not limited to): empty buildings and lots; importance of intergenerational values and youth education; gentrification and displacement; stories of churches, organizations, and women's role in the community; and diversity and cultural change in the neighborhood. These initial analyses were further substantiated by the author's stay in the neighborhood and walking interviews conducted with 11 residents encountered on-site, as well as semi-structured interviews with 7 informants working in roles related to the *GC* development.

The paper is also informed by the author's engagement with archival materials housed in the Harold Washington Library Center (on the neighborhood history of East Garfield Park) and the University of Illinois Daley Library (Chicago Urban League Records). For instance, Chicago Urban League records provide material proof of the institutional racism that has systematically hindered the development and revitalization of previously redlined areas in Chicago. This includes not only the practice of redlining by banks/lenders, but the city's mishandling of federal funding (e.g., the Community Development Block Grant in 1974) that could have been used to rehabilitate existing low-income housing stocks (Chicago Urban League, 1976, Redlining: Clippings, Series III, 31-380; 1978, Housing Block Grant Section 8, 32-400). The author also observed, through the yearbooks of John Marshall High School, the demographic shift that occurred in the 1950s when veterans returned from World War II. This new dynamic played out in conjunction with discriminatory practices—known as "blockbusting"—employed by real estate agents (Seligman, 2005).

Structure

One of East Garfield Park's most distinctive historical storylines is that it was the epicenter of Martin Luther King's civil rights movement in Chicago, and subsequently, how his assassination and the events that followed shaped the neighborhood's development over subsequent decades. Several oral history narrators (The East Garfield Park Oral History Project, 2016) mentioned how the neighborhood turned from a busy, family-oriented space with small "mom and pop" stores into an area associated with boarded-up houses and gang violence—a shift that coincided with the assassination of Dr King:

> BL (chm_oh_179): What I wanted to talk about, talk more about the West Side, and say that after, especially after the riots,[3] and then Dr King was assassinated in 1968. Especially after that, although the attitude was still there in City Hall, but really after 1968, they wrote off the West Side. There really was the attitude, well, if that's how they want to treat their neighborhoods, they want to burn them down, let them. Of course, the poor "they" was always the African American population. Austin [the adjacent neighborhood] had gone from ninety-eight percent white to ninety-eight percent black in two years, so that was in 1968 and 1969, from 1968 to 1970. … and the businesses and the churches and the banks and the people, most importantly, the people, went with them.

> CP (chm_oh_203): [Discussing how the neighborhood changed in the years following Dr King's assassination] The last time all these fifty schools or so got shut down, schools in our community were gone. When you don't have decent schools and banks and libraries, those things, and churches, things that hold a community together and a lot of those things have gone. … when you see your banks move out and you have no hospitals and those kind of things that hold a community together then your community's going to fall apart.

As to *why* the neighborhood recovery process since then has been slow—which is one reason a "rent gap" has emerged—several diverging accounts were put forward. Several

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[3] Referring to the 1966 Chicago uprising (July 12), also known as the "West Side Riot".

interviewees mentioned "Reaganomics" and lack of public funding leading to the disintegration of social infrastructures. Other interviewees noted institutional racism, such as redlining, white families moving out, and real estate practices that economically isolated the neighborhood. In such a context, local Black businesses were regarded as having insufficient social, political or financial resources to sustain themselves.

All this is in line with Smith (1979)'s explication of the decline of American inner-city neighborhoods, with "large structural forces of capital and state power" such as racial redlining and federally funded, highway-driven suburbanization driving down "the capitalized ground rent of urban poor and working-class residential land uses in twentieth-century American cities, creating opportunities for local real estate elites and individual investors to gain profits by closing the rent gap through displacement and redevelopment" (Wyly, 2023: 66). Wright (2020), drawing on Robinson (1983), refers to this as *racialized uneven development*.

While this systematic racism and disinvestment created a rent gap to be captured by the next flow of capital, the financialization of subsidized ("affordable") housing also played a key role in the *GC*'s initiation.[4] These financing mechanisms foregrounded future conditions for development in the area. The project is financed through a bricolage of resources, comprising: "4%" Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC, 43%); City of Chicago TIF and/or HOME funds (50%);[5] land donation credits (3%); energy and solar grants (2%); and deferred developer fees (2%).

In a sense, this is a typical case of urban space financialization. On the one hand, as an LIHTC-funded project, the developer must ensure rents do not exceed 30% of either 50% or 60% of area median income (AMI). Here, the "social" goal of providing assisted rental housing is funded through selling federally-endowed credits to private corporations

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[4] By "financialization", I follow Lake (2015: 52)'s definition: "Financialization refers to the process through which the financial sector commands an increasing share of the economy, ultimately leading to the organization of the economy and society according to the logic and rationality of finance—'penetration of finance into the fabric of daily life'".

[5] HOME funds are federal block grants that require end beneficiaries to be low or very low-income households, in addition to other "partnership" reqauirements such as state-matching funds.

in exchange for tax liability relief.[6] In the case of the *GC*, LITHC credits involve the upfront sale of ten years' worth of tax credits based on the project's cost (approximately $37 million). The developer must pay back one of the city loans from 75% of surplus cash over the building's lifetime; the TIF funding was made as an immediately available fund while being loaned to the project.

Financing LIHTC projects often entails additional "soft debt" funding such as TIF (as in the case of the *GC*). This requires fiscal prolongability, which in turn dictates the reorganization of social life according to particular logics and worldviews (Lake, 2015; Field, 2017; Rosenman, 2018; Weber, 2021). Given that the private investors who are willing to buy these credits generally are wealthy enough to benefit from tax deductions, with their funds now going directly to expediting the process of filling the rent gap found in urban communities, this is a typical story of financialization of urban space that often ends up transforming impoverished neighborhoods into investable parcels of land, process of which only prioritizes generating particular forms/kinds of value that are tradable in financial markets (Tapp and Kay, 2019).

Despite the "good intentions" recited by planners and the alderman, the mandate of securing long-term revenue streams goes a long way to dictating the planning and operation of a development even before its "community consultation phase". Below, I zero in on how political agency and spatial materiality in a specific time and place interact with these broader structural constraints.

Agency

In terms of the *GC*'s planning process, what is noticeable is how the different actants' agency—including both those who enact land commodification schemes and those who strongly object—exists in relation to the structural conditions outlined above. In the narratives given by the planners and alderman justifying the project, the project's "net

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[6] In essence, LIHTC is allocated annually to each state's Housing Finance Agency (HFA) by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), with the amount based on total population (equal to $2.60 per person). Each state (such as the State of Illinois)'s HFA has its own Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) for local governments (such as the City of Chicago) to apply when selecting an affordable housing project (such as the *GC*) through a competitive tendering process. The winning project is awarded tax credits (4% or 9% of the project cost), which its operating parties can sell to private investors.

benefit" involves alleviating social ills arising from historical patterns of disinvestment and unequal development, while furnishing an effective policy response to the increasing unaffordability of housing in the area:

> ***Planner A***: So real high performance building, you'll hear more about that, you know, it's the kind of building maybe you'd see in the West Loop. But you know, we believe buildings like that belong in Garfield Park, and people's energy bills will be really low because it's a very efficient building. And then there will be a Community Room, public art, landscaping, and really important emphasis on construction jobs priority for Black-owned contractors and priority for neighborhoods serving retail and Black-owned businesses. We wanted to do some of the work we've done in Woodlawn [i.e. Woodlawn Station affordable housing owned by the same developer], you know, believing you could have a sit down restaurant and a yoga studio and a Black-owned pet salon and UPS franchise.[7]

> **Alderman**: I do want us to understand that if we do nothing, that these housing costs will continue to rise around us. And the sites that we look at that are owned by the city, but a lot of lots are owned by private hands. And so we have a responsibility I believe, to work to preserve the affordability in East Garfield Park and use the tool that the government has at its disposal, including low-income tax housing credits, which will give affordable units of housing for not only legacy residents, but also young families that want to move into our community as well.[8]

Here, the *GC* is presented as a proactive solution to land parcel vacancies characterized as in "decline", and justified on the basis of its potential to generate economic opportunities for Black-owned businesses and provide subsidized rental housing in the face of land development pressures.

Several residents willingly subscribed to this narrative of the project as neighborhood "solution", viewing similar land development trajectories as representing the ideal:

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[7] *GC* Community Engagement Meeting, February 25, 2021.
[8] Alderman-East Garfield Park Community Meeting, December 21, 2020.

Resident B: I was born and raised in Garfield Park and I recently purchased my home in Garfield Park last week for Black History Month. … I do not want to hear that we don't want cafés because as a young person, we want something that's Instagrammable, we want to be able to take our friends to our neighborhood. Cafés can create jobs and appreciate their surroundings. And one thing we're trying to connect is the youth to those small businesses. They don't have to look downtown and say "I want to work there"; they can look at the entrepreneurs [based in our neighborhood] and the small business owners, mom and dad shops and end up interning or volunteering or potentially working part time. … the developments will increase the property tax and we need our people to purchase those buildings and also understand what there is to save. We know redlining still exists so coming up with programs to help them maintain their business and their home is key.[9]

According to this perspective, historically unequal patterns of development and economic marginalization by institutional racism (e.g., redlining) are backdrops against which individuals such as Resident B willingly formulate narratives supportive of the *GC* project. For them, fighting for political empowerment (or "agency") entails embracing the current workings of the land market—thus, retaining the freedom to decide their neighborhood's future landscape means having sufficient financial resources *now* to participate in private property ownership and market exchange. The *GC* project scenario offers a scripted justification of land commodification that someone such as Resident B can utilize, with several other individuals also claiming this opportunity.

Other residents, however, refused the predetermined "benefits" offered by the *GC* project's developmentalist mandate:

Resident C: We've talked to hundreds of people in the surrounding area and you know, the general consensus is that this is not the kind of development that most of the residents want to see come. Most of us understand that it's really geared more towards gentrification, really, ultimately, displacement and replacement of our community so we really would hope for a better kind of resident-driven design and

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[9] *GC* Community Engagement Meeting, March 11, 2021.

process. It does kind of feel like we are being placated by, you know, by the cosmetic kinds of things that we're hearing here, and while I do appreciate alderman, I am looking forward to a better kind of community meeting where there could really be more substantial community input into what should actually go in there at the corner of Fifth Avenue and in Kedzie.[10]

The dissenting residents problematized the fact that the "engagement phase" appeared little more than an accessory to the already idealized outcomes justified by the planners. The project's key operating mechanisms had already been determined and were not up for dispute: the basic building structure and architectural design ("won" in the global green urbanism competition) had to be maintained (to comply with agreements made with the city government and other "green building" grants procured by the developer); the means of financing the project (a significant chunk of which was TIF) had already been worked out by the city; and the planned use of the building was constrained since planners were mainly concerned with revenue stream consistency and operating cost (i.e., building space use had to be funded by occupier income).

From the perspective of the mission-oriented, non-profit developer, the project poses an impossible dilemma. Despite taking pride in building "quality affordable housing projects in traditionally underinvested neighborhoods where the residents still live with the historical consequences of unequal development" (e.g., grocery stores and retails pulling out from these neighborhoods, leaving the residents devoid of everyday services), the developer is cognizant of how "good intentions" are often occluded by larger structural forces, including lack of government investment in public infrastructure. In particular, the developer expressed concerns about the falling registration rates of legacy public schools such as Marshall Metro Highschool (featured in renowned 1994 Chicago documentary *Hoop Dreams*), which risk being shut down when the Chicago school closures moratorium ends in January 2025. Public schools in the neighborhoods like East Garfield Park tend to be underfunded, with the city preferring to "bus" kids to other neighborhoods.

Indeed, the financial arrangements of TIF *itself* deprives school districts and other public district organizations (parks, water management, public health centers, library

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[10] *GC* Community Engagement Meeting, March 11, 2021.

systems) of the resources needed for citywide equitable service provision—all in return for locking-in an often decades-long landscape stabilization ("aesthetic improvement") subsidy. Given the city's tax revenue is heavily reliant on property tax, this is a common dilemma of "neighborhood improvement", with the economic structure imposing severe constraints not only on the agency of residents, but that of the developer and even the city's "good intentions". Residents, faced with an unquestioned idealization of "affordable housing" as a "good thing" for their neighborhood, are deprived of the right to independently develop "a sense for the better kind of life to be led" (Lake, 2017: 1215), which may depart from the foundational precepts implicit within dominant land market exchange practices. Thus, the non-profit developer finds itself in a situation whereby its finances—in a broader sense—are provided at the expense of funds that could spent on more substantive neighborhood improvements. As for the city, dependent for its revenues on the real estate economy, public "investments" must be designed in ways that bank on potential (or speculative) property development bubbles (Weber, 2021).

Stepping beyond the categorical separation of "agency" and "structure" (or the dichotomy of "society" versus "market"), however, we arrive at the idea that the physical performativity of spatial infrastructure in a specific time and place provides a stage for contestation. Here, the characters involved are relational and co-constitutive, unexpectedly evolving without one definitively dominating the others.

Spatial materiality

Key points of resident opposition during the *GC* development's "design meeting" were the building's physical scale ("a block-long building") and the climate control functions ("passive house" technologies) that would allow the project to be "better for the planet" (which is why the developer won the international green urbanism competition, facilitating the city's financial support):

> **Resident D**: I think that you know in my mind's eye I don't know and I'm just giving my opinion. I don't like the fact that I'm in a space and someone is saying how they're going to control my air. … I still think that separate buildings would put people under less pressure to have so many people being controlled by one entity that you know controls that whole building. So my just you know, like I said,

I thought it was a smaller building. I would not like to have such a building that is a block long. Now, one thing that I would like to see in this community, if it ever happens if you come back with some other ideas is to create tiny houses. That's a small, structured house with different kinds of configured space that might be conducive for people controlling their own destiny. So I would like to see something like that because I don't quite know what the cost of this structure is. But I do know that tiny houses are being you know, successful around the country. And it is more conducive for this community as well.[11]

Responding to the planner's justification that its "energy-efficient building" design (referred to as "passive house" features) not only addresses climate change but will be beneficial for residents in terms of saving on their energy bills, Resident D's concerns lie with their perception that the "block-long" building's scale runs counter to residents' ideal mode of livelihood-making, which should be "conducive for people controlling their own destiny". "Tiny houses", however, do not correspond with the typical pathways of capitalist development and land commodification, where "financing" processes are formularized on the basis of speculative economic growth and the resultant land value capture.

Here, it becomes clear that a building's spatial structure contributes to how financing for a housing development project is justified, with solvency reliant on an aggregate structure of "homes" and mixed-use development program that increases the potential for city-backed loans or TIF. If material land is to be subsumed into the value logic of financialization, physical parcels of land must be *extracted* from the existing webs of other value logics and then appended onto the objectified order of "generating a stream of revenue" (Lake, 2023). The imaginations of the *other* spatial logics that constitute the social meaning of these parcels of land are, though, potentially limitless (see Wright, 2020; Gandy, 2022; Wolf-Powers, 2022): they may be, among other things, a monument to the aforementioned history of Garfield Park and the land that staged the civic uprisings of the 1960s; a witnessing site of intergenerational endurance where a child becomes a parent aspiring to provide the things they missed out on when they were young (Taylor, 2016); an

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[11] *GC* Community Engagement Meeting, February 25, 2021.

open space of gathering for nearby high school students; or the habitat of ants, butterflies, and other insects among the existing trees and long grass.

When it comes to spatial materiality, the issue at stake is not just the two parcels of the land on which the *GC* will be built, but the surrounding vacant lots along Madison Street, North Kedzie, and 5th Avenue that are already under development pressure.[12] While the alderman argues this affordable housing project is being undertaken precisely because it provides rent-controlled apartments under such market conditions, it seems more likely that government assistance is aimed at providing a license of rentability for the vacant lots clustered in close proximity.

In response, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Garfield Park Community Council, and the Institute of Housing Studies at DePaul University have mobilized community leaders and residents to develop "Preserving Affordability Together (East Garfield Park, Chicago): A Blueprint for Community Action". The document lays out strategies for preventing "unintended yet forced displacement of low-income families as investment and speculation raise property values followed by higher rents and higher property taxes" (p. 1). One key proposal is preserving the *existing* two-to-four-flat housing stocks available to low-income residents, where "affordability" is defined according to what households below an annual income of $25,000 can afford.

These instances demonstrate how spatial materiality can become a performative platform where interactions between structural constraints and agent-centered meaning-making constitute the political. More specifically, different interpretations of "affordability" result in different landscapes: if "affordability" is centered around what low-income residents can actually afford, any short-term boost in the property bubble represents a hindrance to the long-term social goal of preventing displacement. As such, public "investment" should prioritize rehabilitation of existing housing stocks and legal protection for current renters. On the other hand, for those actors and institutions that rely on *constructing* affordable housing, new builds are instrumental to their financial model.

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[12] As of April 2023, there are at least ten vacant lots publicly on sale (with a real estate manager name and phone number) between the West Washington and the Jackson Boulevard. On top of this, at least twenty vacant lots have been acquired by Cook County Land Bank and are being sold on the basis of minimum offer requirements ranging from $5,500 to $24,000 depending on lot size.

This requires an influx of residents who can contribute to higher rentability and revenue streams, doing so in ways that reinvigorate the surrounding land market.

At the same time, several environmental activists in Chicago—such as "Black in Green" and "Elevated Chicago"—have married "new urbanism" principles (e.g., transit-oriented development, walkability) with "environmental justice" ideals. Their logic involves asking why, following decades of discriminatory planning practices, Black neighborhoods still suffer from lack of investment. This, they argue, has led to "unwalkable" neighborhoods, with concerns over mismanaged vacant lot and health issues linked with the general environmental degradation found in west and south Chicago. Spatial materiality (e.g., "quality of living environment") therefore acts as motivation for pro-developmentalist sentiments, despite also providing a rationale for anti-development arguments (e.g., "we do not want a block-long building"). Here, we see that community agency is not only constrained by "public investment" funding mechanisms, but by decades of government neglect and disinvestments. These have materially affected the lives of residents to the point where their visual/somatic experience of daily landscapes can be utilized in the service of arguments favoring a marginal gain.

Green gentrification as sites of Polanyian geographies

One distinctive aspect of Polanyian thinking is its holistic critique of capitalism, whereby anthropology and cultural studies are brought into conversation with political economy. Polanyian geographies therefore highlight the plural justifications and claims made in our relationship with land and environment. While these situated value logics and socially-driven motivations are not always subservient to marketization, this does not mean Polanyi romanticized "the social" as a way of thinking that would necessarily result in communities opposing the unrolling of market expansion altogether. In fact, the process of marketization is in a transactional relationship with more-than-market value logics, with the latter acting as useful buffers to the market's otherwise destructive effects. In other words, Polanyi's "double movement" is neither about glooming about a market conquering society nor about cheering on the triumph of the social (or its "countermovements") over the market, but rather understanding how two counterbalancing tendencies work together in dialectic ways, sometimes in the same

direction: in this case, society's slowing of market expansion allows market expansion to continue without destroying society and nature on which the market depends (Block, 2001, p. xxviii; Polanyi, 2005, pp. 151-153; Lake, 2021, p. 227; Balakrishnan, 2021, p. 105).

This is not so much of a "cynical view" in the sense of seeing market expansion as inevitable, but more of a realistic view that discerns the conditions of possibility in the present moment in relation to, not in spite of, the market logics that currently exercise a dominating force. Colin Koopman (2013)'s re-reading of Foucault can assist us in understanding this transactional relationship between domination and subversion, power and freedom, or what this paper has framed as "structure" and "agency". As Koopman clarifies, modernity presents an enmeshed future of power and freedom as each entangled with one another in a reciprocal and incompatible relationship—crystallizing "a double movement of liberation and enslavement" (p. 163). Foucault's claim was not that we are always trapped in power, nor that "agency" has no meaning under governmentality, but that the present conditions of modernity mandate a continual negotiation between disciplinary power and emancipatory freedom "as two reciprocal but incompatible aspects of our existence" (p. 170). This understanding moves beyond a causal explanation to a transactional argument between two opposing tendencies, which is similar to what Block (2001) argues to be the point of Polanyi's "double movement".

My contribution to this dialogue is to propose that "spatial materiality" constitutes a third element in a transactional triad. The case of the *GC* accords with the Polanyian thesis that double movement proceeds through a politically mediated negotiation between structure and agency, at times speeding up market expansion and at other times slowing it down. However, the very contingency that spatial materiality harbors in a specific time and place provides an active medium capable of influencing the structure–agency relationship in new and unpredictable ways (Jon et al., 2023).

Some residents have expressed opposition to the project due to the proposed building's physically overwhelming character, confounding the planners' rationale that "green" features (energy efficiency, passive house technologies) work better in aggregated form—a rational that is, in fact, bounded by funding conditions. The idea of land development and "building from scratch" are equally contested given the alternatives available, such as historical preservation and the rehabilitation of existing housing stocks.

Again, the economic logic driving new construction is tied to the building's financing mechanism (i.e., TIF), which relies on an influx of "the right kind" of population contributing to the real estate economy. Meanwhile, "bottom-up" green urbanism, such as community gardening (supported by Elevated Chicago) and eco-orchards (led by the Garfield Park Community Council), have arisen in response to the spatial legacies of racialized uneven development—these, however, are in line with, rather than opposed to, the operations of land commodification (i.e., "the area becoming nicer" feeds into the monetarily tradable value of land).

In short, the case of the *GC* showcases the relevancy of the Polanyian approach in reassembling "green" gentrification dynamics as physical sites of political contestation. Here, material landscapes constitute a dynamic spatial milieu that animates the transactional relationship between structure and agency, prompting consideration of how the empirical concreteness of spatial relations can be harnessed to rebuke the dominant narratives sustaining present conditions of injustice.

On the argument that LITHC/TIF-financed affordable housing projects provide long-term landscape stabilization in disinvested areas, it should be highlighted that regardless of these purported intentions, such projects are still real estate housing developments that transform *surrounding* vacant lots into an ample stock of real-estate-lands subject to speculative land markets. Given property tax is a major source of city revenue, government-sponsored "affordable housing" projects often find themselves at the vanguard of subsidized gentrification, with their financing arrangements downplaying the role of public schools, libraries and water districts—which are potentially better placed to condition the pace of neighborhood change—in land stabilization.

On the argument that the city (as a whole) needs affordable housing and vacant lots should be "better utilized" for such purposes, it is questionable why historically disinvested neighborhoods should be made "responsible" for providing affordable housing to a broader income spectrum (i.e., those who can afford to live elsewhere). The "vacant lots" are, in effect, not "vacant": under the contextual conditions of East Garfield Park's speculative land market, their *unruly* spatial presence has fed into neighborhood resistance against land commodification (see also Wright, 2020). There therefore exists contestation between, on the one hand, a quick over-injection of capital (via new builds), and, on the

other, facilitating the preservation and rehabilitation of existing buildings and housing stocks. Such material matters are especially contentious in historically African American neighborhoods such as East Garfield Park, as landscape stabilization efforts are often used as justification for destroying spaces that embody a "Black habitus" (Wright and Herman, 2018).

Figure 1. A historical building at the intersection of Madison and Kedzie in East Garfield Park, near Kedzie Green Line CTA station. In the 1930s, when streetcars were still present, this intersection was one of Chicago's busiest commercial centers. The brown storefront (center) was Edna's Soul Food restaurant (closed in 2011), a historical institution that survived the uprising following Dr King's assassination in 1968. ©Author
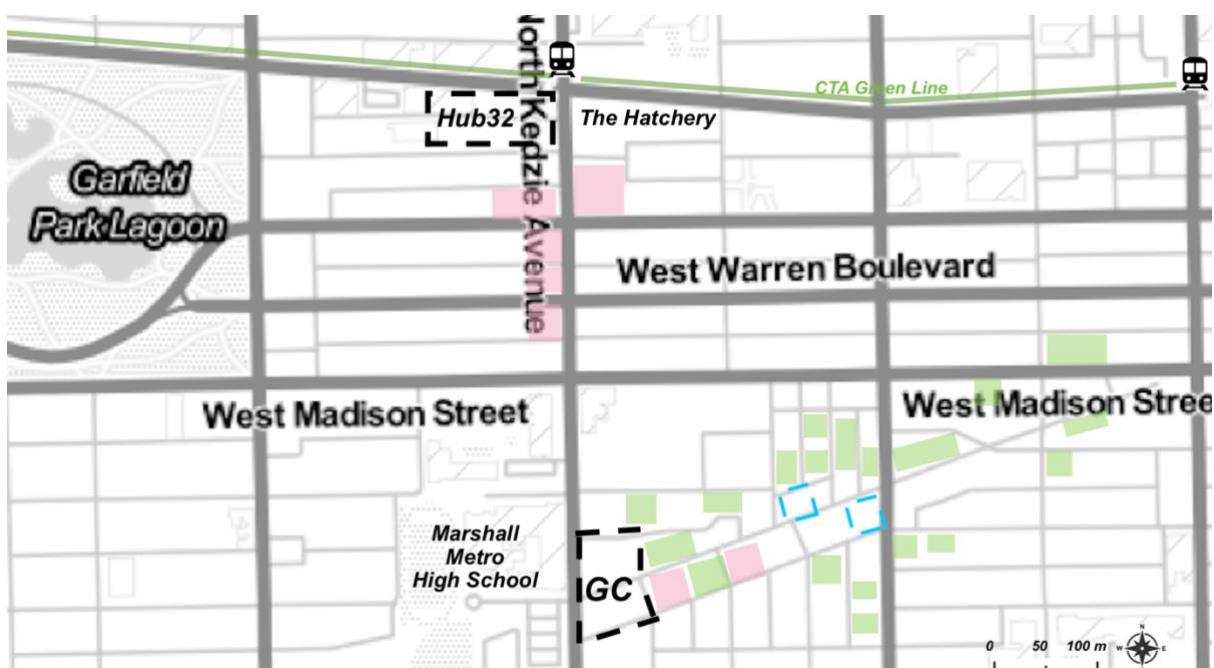
Figure 2. Green squares represent the land acquired by Cook County Land Bank and now being auctioned off. An "Eco-Orchard", initiated by Garfield Park Community Council and funded by the City of Chicago and the Water Reclamation District, will be built on two city-owned lots around the green squares (highlighted in blue squares). Red squares are private lands publicly on sale. (©Author; basemap: Stamen).

Conclusion

The persistence and perniciousness of the housing crisis in cities around the world are now met with a popular policy discourse that posits "building more" affordable housing as a moral imperative. Reducing housing crisis into the market logic of supply-and-demand, such discourse prioritizes construction of new buildings "faster and more", seeing any social or regulatory barriers against them as hindrance to societal progress (Lake, 2022). Green gentrification debate, in this context, often finds itself entrapped between the discourses of "densification" versus "urban sprawl", or "building more" versus "lack of affordable housing".

What gets occluded in this generalized, globalist narrative however is the context-specific processes of where these projects locate themselves and why, how they are financed, and to what extent they influence the development trajectory of their surrounding neighborhood going forward. In the absence of geographically and historically nuanced considerations, the clamor for "building more" risks dismissing the social costs of an imposed neighborhood change—e.g., the loss of community, the trauma of displacement, and exclusion of "benefits" from marginalized residents. This is especially so in historically Black neighborhoods in American metropolises, where decades of institutional racism such as redlining have actively created a development gap (or "rent gap") to be filled, only to be left in the hands of real estate developers or the dynamics of land market exchange.

A Polanyian approach to reframing green gentrification moves beyond the foundational assumptions underpinning such abstract discourses. By paying attention to the ongoing interaction between the social and market expansion, whereby spatial materiality positing as a situated medium between structure and agency, what we get to observe is not only the ramifications of "building more" in the neighborhoods of which

material landscapes physically embody the histories of various social and institutional discrimination, but also the viability of actualizing other competing value logics beyond the narratives perpetuated by mainstream urban development projects. It is almost certain that the targeted audiences of *GC* are not the people living in encampments in the West Side; the rationale justifying "building from scratch" is perfectly enveloped in the formula of "development" equaling the influx of the "right kind" of populations and the projected increase in property values. At the same time, it is hard to expect more from the actors involved in the process of negotiating diverse individual and social needs, especially under the current economic structure and policy programs that naturalize "housing" as a secure financial asset. The residents of East Garfield Park have already come up with a variety of solutions that demand local, regional, and national attention: preservation of already-existing housing stocks in historical buildings and houses, moratoriums on capping property tax and rent hikes, securing public investments in schools and landscape stabilization independent from local property tax revenues, and "affordability" defined by a situated social consensus (and not by area median income). Actualizing this would not only require individual actors harnessing performativity of spatial materialities, but also a fundamental shift in our culture questioning the axiomatic presuppositions behind "development", "housing", and "land" as real-estate-land.

As much as gentrification in East Garfield Park is about "local" dilemmas of neighborhood improvement and land commodification, structural issues—including legacies of institutional racism; the financing mechanisms used for low-income housing; a tax system that relies on property economy; and the perniciousness of America's "gun rights" debate—continue to constrain the contours of the residents' spatial agency. In the midst of it all, life in East Garfield Park continues: children walk with flowers in the afternoon; different crowds sit around the Fifth City's Ironman statue; school workers guard students embarking on their morning commute; and elders refuse to leave Kedzie station area despite The Hatchery's effort to "clean up" neighborhood landscapes. After all, what makes a community a "community", as Hartman (1997: 59) soberly observes, is "figured as the desired negation of the very set of constraints that create commonality"—a shared yearning for change capable of ameliorating the physical conditions of subjection.

The case of green urban development in East Garfield Park highlights the centrality of contingency and specificity as against undifferentiated generalizations about market

processes. While the laws of supply and demand are presumed to work everywhere equally, this paper is a renewed call for foregrounding the specificity of situated material contexts. Future geographical research on ecological gentrification must attend to how phenomenological "publicness" of physical landscapes and material surrounds remains at the center of ongoing contestations across different rationalities and value logics, the geographical expansiveness of which effectively defies the aspatial assumptions behind capitalist urbanization processes.

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