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The Politics of Gentrification in Charlotte, NC:

A New South City Meets the Urban Realities of 21st Century Prosperity.

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Introduction

In the Fall of 2017, Amazon Inc. opened an unprecedented nationwide bidding competition.¹ The huge online retailer was seeking a home for its second headquarters, dubbed “HQ2,” which could potentially include 50,000 high-paying jobs and billions of dollars of investment into a local economy.² The company completed a request for proposal (RFP) that detailed the baseline amenities that cities applying for the headquarters must have. This included Interstate access, a metropolitan population of over 1 million, an international airport, and the presence of a research university.³

Cities across the United States scrambled to put together packages to market themselves for the company. This became a “battle royale” of economic development. Cities involved in the national competition were prepared to offer tax incentives, partially covered building construction, and in some cases, rename themselves after the company. Roughly 200 cities applied for HQ2, despite the potential stress to local infrastructure that 50,000 new jobs would cause. Based on this competition, it became apparent that this high-paying, high-tech company represents everything that America wants in its backyard, and in some ways, represents the future of urban prosperity. Many cities like Cleveland, Detroit, and Birmingham sought economic reinvention from attracting Amazon to fill a hole left from the days of manufacturing. Others, like New York and Los Angeles, sought to add to already diverse economic portfolios by attracting Amazon. What was key in this competition was not the explicit criteria expressed in the RFP, as all major cities in the U.S. matched up with them. The competition instead became a show of what type of city would best attract a large and forward-thinking company like Amazon.

¹ “Amazon HQ2,” *Amazon Inc.*, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.amazon.com/b?ie=UTF8&node=17044620011>.

² Amazon, Inc

³ Ibid.

What was not explicitly stated in the RFP could be ascertained from looking at the corporate and competition materials. Pictures of smiling young couples in flannel, large groups in brewpubs, sustainable-looking glass office towers, and background images of fixed gear bicycles, and streetcars featured in descriptions of the company's culture. Aspects of Amazon's work environment are also telling of what sort of city the company sought through this competition. Descriptions of innovative, young entrepreneurs supported by community outreach, sustainable office practices, diverse and inclusive worker policies, and generous parental leave compensations abound. This determines that Amazon is a company dedicated to progressive ideology and extreme youthful innovation, something that would factor heavily in the sort of city it would select for its second headquarters.

Charlotte NC fit the bill on paper, and worked to put together a strong application for HQ2 alongside local competitors like Raleigh, Atlanta, and Greenville. Charlotte, a mid-size metropolitan area on the Carolina piedmont, theoretically had a lot of factors going for it when considering the RFP that Amazon put out. Charlotte is home to one of the busiest International airport hubs in the nations, sits on the crossroads of I-77 and I-85, has a metro population of over 2 million, is home to a growing millennial population, and above all else, features a growing economy in technology and financial sectors. City leaders put together an excellent proposal, featuring statistics, a stunning video featuring skyline panoramas, and selected sites for a massive new complex along light rail easements. Even included was the creation of a citywide holiday called "Prime Day" on October 18, the day that responses to the RFP were due; this was

displayed on billboards and bus scrolls, and signed officially by mayor Jennifer Roberts at city hall.⁴

Despite all the fanfare, Charlotte was eliminated in the first round of competition, while neighbors (and regional competitors) Raleigh and Atlanta were selected as “top 20” finalists.⁵ This led many people in the city to wonder what went wrong. There certainly were aspects of the application that could have been written better way, but the large part of understanding the reason is to understand the culture of Charlotte itself, and the elements of it that are sorely lacking when held up to competitors for growth. But what is it that Charlotte lacks? The city certainly has had its fair share of growth, and in its present condition, is expanding rapidly as an important economy in the southeast. The 1970 census reports that 241,178 people lived within city limits; by 2010, that number had increased to 809,958, an increase of 568,780 people, an increase of over 175 percent.⁶ In those four short decades, industries like banking, distribution, healthcare, and technology have made the city a prosperous economic and transportation hub for the southeast. So, what does Charlotte lack to put it in the coveted “heavyweight” category in terms of attracting companies like Amazon?

Despite the high metropolitan population, the presence of multiple fortune 500 companies, and its valuable national connections, Charlotte’s lack of proportional cultural offerings, auto-dependent design, and high percentage of new transplant residents has caused many to disregard the city even today as “one big suburb.” In addition, many of the companies that built Charlotte (particularly banking) are traditionally known for cultivating a more

⁴ Billie Jean Shaw, Charlotte Mayor Declares Oct. 18 as ‘Prime Day,’” [wncn.com](http://www.wncn.com/article/money/business/charlotte-mayor-declares-oct-18-as-prime-day/484304388), October, 18, 2017, <http://www.wncn.com/article/money/business/charlotte-mayor-declares-oct-18-as-prime-day/484304388>.

⁵ Amazon, Inc.

⁶ “Historical Population – Population of Charlotte, NC,” [Population.us](http://population.us/nc/charlotte/), 2016, <http://population.us/nc/charlotte/>.

traditional white-collar, suit and tie atmosphere. By comparison, America's "heavyweight" cities like New York and Atlanta continue to attract a massive swathe of the country's economic growth in sectors beyond what Charlotte is currently capable. These are cities of innovation, home to top universities, medical research centers, and high-tech sectors like automation.

Beyond aggregate differences in population, heavyweight cities feature more urbane environments, centered around attracting members of the "creative class." The creative class, as defined by Richard Florida in his 2002 book "Rise of the Creative Class," is the next generation of economic leaders, the millennial innovators that are taking over white collar and research fields.⁷ This is a globally-minded, experience-obsessed, and culturally aware group of individuals who are often liable to pick the place that they live in before they pick the job they work at. These people have also been defined and explained by David Brooks, in his 2000 groundbreaking sociological analysis, "BOBOS in Paradise." This new upper class works hard, but enjoys the trappings of an intellectual and artistic life, a melting pot of both bourgeoisie and bohemian cultures of earlier generations.⁸ This new top notch labor market has expressed a preference for urbane living, featuring both the trappings of high culture and the grittiness of dense living; the presence of public transit, but also a parking garage available for luxury vehicles. In other words, the creative class is often responsible for gentrification, the effect of high-earners of a different background and lifestyle supplanting other demographics in urban neighborhoods. While Charlotte has indeed attracted its share of millennial transplants, it has catered to members of the creative class to a lesser degree than competitor cities of similar size, like Raleigh, Austin, Portland, or even Asheville and Greenville to the west. Charlotte grew as a

⁷ Richard Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 4.

⁸ David Brooks, "BOBOS in Paradise: The New Upper Class And How They Got There, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY: 2000), 9.

banking center, a crisp white collar town sunbelt town that was willing to do anything to attract economic development. Now, as the twenty-first century begins to carve out winners and losers in terms of influential cities, Charlotte must grow in a different way to continue its pace of growth that it has enjoyed throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Charlotte must continue to gentrify at a rapid pace, to build its portfolio of attractive urban districts that cater to this class. Only then, when Charlotte features a heavy portfolio of neighborhoods with artisan coffee shops, yoga classrooms, art studios, theaters, and modern apartments will it be a more serious contender for a large and liberal company like Amazon to open its doors within city limits. This is especially true considering the disadvantages of the city: A relatively short history of ethnic diversity, a lack of any major law, medical, or research university, and a host of recent issues that muddle the city's reputation of tolerance, most namely the Charlotte riots of 2016 and the HB2 "bathroom bill" controversy. These all may have been reasons Amazon knocked Charlotte off the short list, and may be reasons that the city lost out on other deals as well. The more Charlotte gentrifies, the better the city's prospects for future growth that offsets these disadvantages will be. Regardless of potential issues that gentrification may cause, it is the one constant of urban economic development that cannot be avoided; rather, it must be cultivated, so that it can be maintained and guided as a process.

While some neighborhoods in Charlotte are indeed experiencing gentrification, like in the South End and NoDa neighborhoods, the phenomenon thus far applies to less neighborhoods as compared to other cities in the northeast and west. The city has yet to experience a total transformation to the degree that the city's culture has shifted to a "creative class" city, and must continue to accept gentrification as the best way to get there. In this paper, I will first define gentrification, and present differing viewpoints on the process to promote a holistic

understanding of opinions. Then, I will present an overview of Charlotte's development history, to understand the way the city grew and how it got to where it is today. Next, I will explain why and where Charlotte is currently gentrifying, to present a snapshot of how far along the city is in gentrifying its core neighborhoods as of 2018, and where the next gentrifying districts will be. Then, I will explain the downsides of gentrification, the issues that it causes that Charlotte must learn how to manage as more and more neighborhoods. I will then explore the many positive attributes that gentrification brings to individual neighborhoods, like walkability, social capital, global perspective, and added tax value. Finally, I will present my "twelve point plan," designed to help Charlotte to manage gentrification as more and more neighborhoods become home to members of the creative class.

Introduction to Gentrification & Literature Review

In most circles, "gentrification" is considered a dirty word; ironically, it is mostly regarded as a concern for cities by the same people most responsible for it. The term was coined by economist Ruth Glass in 1960s London, to describe the supplanting of lower- and working-classes by middle and upper class residents. Neighborhoods in United States have been gentrifying in some way since the mid-Twentieth century, but has increased exponentially due to the flight back to the cities from the suburbs.⁹ urban America is in economic revival in which once languishing urban property is highly desirable. Increased competition for urban property is pushing up home costs and the cost of living.¹⁰ This desirability in many cities comes from a variety of sources; job opportunities and cultural amenities are the two primary draws to city life, especially among younger and wealthier demographics. These younger and wealthier urban

⁹ In the 1990s, urban cores began to recover from the dramatic effects of mid-century white flight.

¹⁰ Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City – How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011), 29.

professionals are considered members of a new upper class in America, commonly labelled the “creative class.” This group of people is comprised of young professionals who work in fields like technology, design, marketing, research, medicine, and academia. These are the drivers of the 21st Century economy, and are often drawn to urban centers, becoming the most common gentrifiers. When the creative class comes to town, neighborhood-level changes happen beyond just a statistical rise in affluence, or displacement of traditional residents. Gentrification is a shift in lifestyles, attitudes, and political orientations in specific neighborhoods brought upon by an influx of new residents. More specifically, it is a supplanting of traditional working-class or “bourgeoisie” values that translate to lifestyle. These new values that change can be high ideals like political orientation, down to the simplest of daily routines like a preference for artisanal lattes at the corner coffee shop. Neighborhoods that are gentrifying are easily recognizable from a street-level view; national retailers and high-brow standalone enterprises replace traditional local businesses. A special emphasis on public goods like street art is a sure sign of gentrification, as is the widespread marketing of “local” niche products. I report these nuanced observations to explain just how difficult gentrification can be to define numerically, but easy to spot on the street.

Defining Gentrification

Some researchers define gentrification as a race-based social displacement, while others lump it in with a mere increase in neighborhood affluence. In 2015, Bierbaum et al. described gentrification as a form of racial displacement in which predominantly white newcomers displace racial and ethnic minority residents in urban neighborhoods.¹¹ Displacement is attributed to the role of public investment in development and infrastructure (such as transit) and

¹¹ Ariel Bierbaum et al., “Displacement and the Role of Public Investment: A Literature Review” (2015), 11.

racially biased policies. Essentially, gentrification is sometimes used solely to describe how whites are displacing minorities in select urban neighborhoods.¹² These types of definitions tend to describe gentrification as a symptom of the revitalization of a community, which is overwhelmingly true nationwide. Richard Florida, prominent urbanist and author of both *Rise of the Creative Class* and later *The New Urban Crisis*, echoed sentiments similar to Bierbaum, but emphasized instead that neighborhoods gentrify when professionals and “creatives” move in, which can raise land value costs, stimulate investment, and displace both the middle class and minorities.¹³ Florida’s argument claims that gentrification is the side-effect of urban re-birth, is fueled more by employment opportunity than simple racial clustering, and is far more prevalent than previous studies have shown. Florida does examine the types of neighborhoods that gentrify more closely, and argues that most neighborhoods that gentrify were at least 35 percent white and no more than 40 percent black.¹⁴ This means that while displacement occurs, and there are exceptions, the argument that gentrification is completely whites displacing blacks is largely a myth.

Bierbaum argues that gentrification is an extremely small phenomenon, which happens only in select communities. Since both Bierbaum and Florida equate gentrification with displacement, both argue that it is a negative trend for America’s cities. However, others define gentrification more broadly, forgoing any racial or even displacement factors at all. *Governing*, an online local government magazine, conducted a study in 2013 using census data, and defined gentrification as merely an increase in property values and education levels in neighborhoods

¹² Bierbaum et al., 9.

¹³ Florida, 10.

¹⁴ Florida, 77.

that are in the bottom 40 percent of citywide income.¹⁵ Secondly, many local sources identify gentrification as a necessary evil, or a positive good for the urban economy (as I will do for Charlotte). Emily Livingstone, writing about the revival of the Fourth Ward neighborhood in Charlotte, considers gentrification as the process of middle class owner-occupants displacing renters, a shift to greater tax income and livability that helps propel the city to the status of headquarters town.¹⁶

Others, like Lisa Bornstein et al, define gentrification similarly, as the neighborhood-scale displacement of lower income residents by those of higher job title and affluence. Countering the conventional wisdom that gentrification destroys neighborhoods, they argue that gentrification increases community bonds (or, “social capital”) within each neighborhood.¹⁷ These bonds often come from the arrival of higher-earners with more leisure time, education, and pre-existing experience to fight for neighborhood concerns like schools and public works projects.

Since cities and studies operationalize and measure gentrification in different ways, it is difficult to pin down which locations are gentrifying, and what the impacts of that process is. For this study, I will be using *Governing’s* definition of gentrification, which is largely broad, and connected to affluence (education and income) as opposed to race. While race is often a factor in gentrification, it is not an accurate means by which gentrification can be observed. Oftentimes, racial definitions overlook the ways in which differing racial groups contribute to gentrification, as in Charlotte’s Fourth Ward. In fact, a third of the income gains that occurred in American

¹⁵ *Governing The States And Localities*.

¹⁶ Livingstone, 142.

¹⁷ Lisa Bornstein et al., “Is Gentrification All Bad? Positive Association Between Gentrification and Individual’s Perceived Neighborhood Collective Efficacy in Montreal, Canada,” *International Journal of Health Geographics* 16, no. 24 (2017).

urban neighborhoods between 1990 and 2000 occurred when wealthy black families displaced poorer ones.¹⁸ Race-based definitions also overlook how traditional white working class neighborhoods have been subject to gentrification, an issue unique to Charlotte and other new south cities to the periphery, like Gastonia and Rock Hill. Moreover, it is important to note that among urban dwellers the perception that a neighborhood is gentrifying matters just as much as hard demographic numbers. Gentrification at its observable core is a rise in neighborhood wealth, but I would once again like to stress that it is also a shift in neighborhood lifestyle along with added affluence. Gentrification happens when dry cleaners are replaced by yoga rooms; when greasy spoons are replaced by coffee shops; and more people are spotted on the streets walking well-bred dogs and jogging in expensive athletic gear.¹⁹ It is common for old and new cultures to clash, which often ignites the differences in backgrounds between traditional residents and gentrifiers.

Explaining Gentrification

There are two economic theories that, when placed together, objectively explain why gentrification takes place. Supply-side gentrification theory defines the process by which property values naturally decrease and increase over time in central city districts. Most American cities developed with an urban core, and a few rings of suburban development around it. Traditionally, property in the urban core was the most desirable and land value diminished with distance from that core. Increased crime, urban freeways, and white flight of the 1960s and 1970s upset the traditional order and property in the urban core began to diminish in quality and desirability. Much urban real estate value tumbled, but reached a point in which property value was low enough for speculators to begin reinvesting in center city property, which still offered

¹⁸ Florida, 63

¹⁹ Brooks, 55.

proximity to downtown jobs and amenities.²⁰ Reinvestment in urban centers has now turned into a high-cost real estate boom in which land and rent prices rise, bringing middle and upper classes back into the center city. Once pockets of revitalization become larger swathes of reinvestment and new construction, investors usually construct luxury apartments and professional centers that gentrify communities, because they are the most economically viable building type. This type of gentrification is especially apparent in the dense cities of the northeast in which the center city/suburban relationship is most distinct. Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburgh have all experienced this form of gentrification to a great degree.

Demand-side theory complements supply-side. It posits that an individual's motivation for moving to the center city is the primary driver behind gentrification. This theory is much more nuanced, because it includes region-specific motivations like universities, job opportunities, and cultural offerings. When housing stock is available and in good quality, living in the center city is a major draw for younger professionals, college students, members of the creative class, or even empty-nesters.²¹ Millennials, members of the generation born between 1980 and 2000, are the most common gentrifiers in northeastern and southern cities.²² This is the result of preferences. Millennials value experiences over possessions, and have been observed to be more globally minded at a younger age.²³ These aspects often translate into a desire to reside in urban areas, especially those perceived as rich in culture, unique experiences, film-worthy streetscapes, and most importantly, other like-minded peers. Elite teaching and research

²⁰ Steve Holland, "Gentrification: Causes and Consequences," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, January 1, 2016, <http://elca.org/jle/articles/1135>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Sharon Lurye, "The Real Reason Why Millennials, Gen Xers Are Flocking to Cities," *Philly Voice*, May 26, 2016, <http://www.phillyvoice.com/real-reason-why-millennials-are-flocking-cities/>.

²³ Joey Khuvutlu, "Millennials, Technology, and the Experience Economy," *Newsbank*, June 18, 2015.

universities contribute in drawing in gentrifiers, often millennial intellectuals and professionals.²⁴ Whatever the motivation, the demand consistently outpaces supply. “Superstar” Cities like San Francisco, Manhattan in New York, and Boston are contending with this form of gentrification, where demand raises the prices so high that only top earners can afford to live in formerly low-priced communities.²⁵

What About Charlotte?

While supply-side and demand-side explain how gentrification objectively occurs, what does this mean for Charlotte? Charlotte neighborhoods are undergoing a form of demand-side gentrification in which the combination of low land value and proximity to high-paying jobs and cultural amenities are driving a real estate boom.

To understand why certain Charlotte neighborhoods have low land value that is gentrifying, and why others do not, first requires a basic understanding of Charlotte’s development structure. Generally, Charlotte evolved as an amalgamation of mill villages and later auto-centric suburbs, ringing a core much smaller and less dense than in the northeastern cities. This means that while the objective model applies, it applies in a more lopsided fashion. Rapid sunbelt-style land speculation, the rise of the automobile, and the clustering of socioeconomic backgrounds caused the city to grow in population. The suburban sprawl (that over time was annexed into city limits) has expanded at such a rapid pace to cool the inner city real estate markets a bit. Compare this to cities like Portland, where strictly imposed urban growth boundaries have forced most growth to occur in denser core neighborhoods.²⁶ While

²⁴ Florida, 12.

²⁵ Nicole Gelinas, “Why America’s Great Cities Are Becoming More Economically Segregated,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/26/books/review/the-new-urban-crisis-richard-florida.html>.

²⁶ Livingstone, 144.

growth is happening in central Charlotte that is fueling gentrification, demand for potentially gentrified neighborhoods could be much more intense if it were not for the outsourcing of most new development to the periphery. This means that certain core neighborhoods can gentrify right next to others that have not. While a steadily rising number of neighborhoods in Charlotte are gentrifying, developers can afford to be choosier about where they locate new projects.

It is important to note that the gentrification process in Charlotte is relatively new and small-scale compared to larger cities like Atlanta and New York, and more isolated than denser cities like Charleston and San Francisco. It is the youth of the process that makes identifying, defining, and evaluating gentrification in Charlotte such an important task for the future health of the city. As I will explain in more detail, studies have indicated that of Charlotte's 57 gentrification-eligible neighborhoods, only 6 have fully gentrified based on income increase and education since the year 2000.²⁷ This number remains relatively low when looking at high-turnover neighborhoods in the Northeast.²⁸ For example, in the same period, New York City experienced gentrification in 128 of 429 eligible communities, roughly a whole quarter of low-income communities within city limits.²⁹ While this process is newer to Charlotte than to larger urban centers, as the city expands it will be a more essential task for those in power to effectively regulate new development, to minimize displacement and maximize economic diversity in every neighborhood. Therefore, studying gentrification and what city leaders can do to modify it is so relevant to the city's need for continued prosperity.

While gentrification correlates with displacement, it does not necessarily equate with it in every case, especially in predominantly industrial or undeveloped neighborhoods. Neighborhood

²⁷ *Governing the States and Localities.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

revitalization, as with any form of economic development, is an incredibly nuanced and complex concept that differs greatly from institution to institution, and city to city.

Charlotte's Historical Development Patterns

From its rise from the civil war to 2018, Charlotte's leaders have consistently displayed a thirst for growth and economic development that have led to the city "punching above its weight" both in business recruiting and planning innovation. This "anything goes" attitude toward business and development is what put Charlotte on the map, but is also liable for the city's worst planning mistakes.

Charlotte was established in the 1750s as a small trading village for local farmers, and as a courthouse town for Mecklenburg County. Despite the rich cotton-growing soil, the Charlotte region remained an economic backwater for most of its existence, because it was located far from any ports or navigable rivers. Even General George Washington, upon riding through the town, regarded it as little more than a "trifling place."³⁰ Cotton growers often had to take their crop far distances over treacherous roads to the port of Charleston to profit effectively.³¹ This geographical disadvantage retarded growth; Charlotte was roughly the same size as neighboring courthouse towns like Camden and Salisbury up until the end of the Civil War. The beginnings of Charlotte's rise were established in the 1850s, when town fathers promoted the extension of a rail line out of Columbia into Charlotte, which allowed cotton growers to bring their goods to the port of Charleston in a fraction of the time.³² This development suddenly made Charlotte a regional hub and an important trade town for cotton growers.

³⁰ Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City – Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 15.

³¹ Hanchett, 17.

³² Hanchett, 45.

Geographical disadvantage and subsequent shrewd planning is a testament to the miracle that is Charlotte's present-day success. Charlotte's leaders have consistently displayed an affinity for cutting-edge economic development practice. It is this spirit of improvement and growth that has propelled the city from geographic backwater to global city and continues to create the change that has led to gentrification in Charlotte's core neighborhoods.³³

The Great Sorting Out

The arrival of the railroad to Columbia made Charlotte the gateway between North Carolina and South Carolina rail systems. This line expansion solidified Charlotte as the region's premier transportation hub. After the Civil War, Charlotte's location along rail lines, along with its proximity to fast-flowing piedmont rivers and rich cotton country, made it the prime spot for textile manufacturing.

In the 1880s, the wealthy Oates family constructed the *Charlotte Cotton Mill* using parts purchased in the north.³⁴ This was an almost instantly profitable venture, attracting competitors to open their own mills and textile companies. By 1900, the textile boom helped Charlotte to blossom from railroad town to important small city. As the textile boom increased in intensity, financiers were attracted to Charlotte, drawn by the demand for loans for mill startups and expansions. Charlotte banks grew until they became wholly national in scope with the legalization of interstate banking in the 1980s.³⁵ The financial institutions that would later merge to become North Carolina National Bank (NCNB) and later Bank of America got their start with textiles. By the mid-twentieth century, banking would eclipse textiles as the dominant industry in

³³ Livingstone, 145.

³⁴ Hanchett, 51.

³⁵ Livingstone, 150.

Charlotte, fueling the rapid expansion that today is the reason for the real estate boom behind gentrification.

Through this short span of 100 years, Charlotte's shift from cotton to textiles to banking and distribution contributed to massive shifts in neighborhood dynamics. From the beginning of its development, Charlotte's elite and lower classes intermingled closely in the center of the city. From its founding to roughly the 1880s, Charlotte was comprised of a tight street grid within the geographical area of what is now considered "uptown," or, what is within the I-277 loop. Within the grid, individual landowners occupied spaces in which they lived and worked. This mix of uses was common in colonial America and was the dominant type of planning up until the beginning of industrialization.³⁶ Within this layout, the wealthy established homes along the two main thoroughfares, Trade and Tryon.³⁷ In early Charlotte, there were no physical neighborhood boundaries between rich or poor, or even white and black. Residents mixed and mingled among each other in a "salt and pepper" fashion, among each of the four sections of the city, or "wards."³⁸ This is not to say that Charlotte's social structure was entirely equitable; a southern city to an extreme degree, affairs were held tightly by an assortment of white-collar elites. This social structure lasted well into the twentieth century, a central factor that contributed to both the rise of the city's pro-business climate and the historical underrepresentation of ethnic minorities within city limits.

This "salt-and-pepper" layout persisted in the city well into the 1890s, far later than in most northern cities, which industrialized before the civil war.³⁹ Despite the advent of

³⁶ Hanchett, 32.

³⁷ Hanchett, 40.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

manufacturing, Charlotte's wealthiest still opted to live among the lower classes, as the number of blue-collar workers that early factories employed was relatively low. Even the Dilworth expansion, Charlotte's first streetcar suburb, was not an exclusive enclave for the rich and wealthy, as were many streetcar suburbs in the northeast. The plan even platted out sections for African-American residents, blue collar workers, and industrial complexes along rail lines. Part of the reason behind such equitable settlement situations was the docile nature of blue collar-white collar relations. Mill ventures in Charlotte were much smaller-scale than in the industrial north, which allowed for more direct and amiable relations between owners and mill-hands.⁴⁰

All of this changed with the establishment of Belmont Springs (today Belmont-Villa Heights) to the northeast of the city. As manufacturing ventures became more complex by the 1890s, the blue-collar population exploded, drawing formerly agricultural workers into the mill villages ringing the city center.⁴¹ This growth transformed the formerly docile group into a political force that mill owners had to handle with the utmost care. In the 1896 election, Charlotte's blue collar workers demonstrated overwhelming support for William Jennings Bryan and the Populist movement. Some more radical elements of this group began engaging in strikes and shutdowns to protest their working conditions.⁴² Such initiatives paralleled newspaper articles detailing riots and shootouts conducted by unruly members of the blue-collar class.⁴³ These events fostered mistrust between white collar and blue collar groups. This meant that wealthier families did not find it acceptable to live near the mills and mill villages that they

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hanchett, 90

⁴² Hanchett, 91

⁴³ Hanchett, 93

believed fostered such vices.⁴⁴ This shift in tastes sparked a great “sorting out” of Charlotte neighborhoods, a clustering of socioeconomic status that has lasted to this day. The northern streetcar suburb of Belmont Springs aspired to be a fashionable district for city residents like Dilworth to the south; however, proximity to planned mill complexes prevented many white-collar residents from purchasing lots. Belmont instead became a blue-collar neighborhood, housing mill hands and merchants employed in a variety of enterprises. In this type of neighborhood, corner stores and multi-family dwellings sprung up where in Dilworth, such a mix of land use was thought to be unacceptable.⁴⁵ This separation of blue-collar and white-collar compiled as new neighborhoods were added to the north and the south that followed this trend. Myers Park and Eastover, designed by famous landscape architects, were platted to become enclaves of the rich and influential, while Northeast Charlotte increasingly became home to lower classes. Eastern Charlotte, today Plaza Midwood, Eastland, and the Charlotte Country Club, became the neighborhood of choice for the middle class, while West Charlotte became home to African-American neighborhoods (as will be discussed below).

Political Consolidation

African-American communities existed in small clusters near the city center in the Brooklyn neighborhood (which today is Charlotte’s government complex in Second Ward), and in Biddleville, the neighborhood encompassing Johnson C. Smith University.⁴⁶ Race relations in Charlotte were much more subdued, and in some cases, more affable, than in other southern cities like Atlanta or Birmingham. Land developers gradually began to construct communities for African-Americans to the North and West, beyond Biddleville, in a manner that consolidated

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hanchett, 121

and grew those populations out to a similar scale as the white communities to the South and East. This type of suburban expansion for African-American populations was uncommon in southern cities. Additionally, services for the African-American community like schools and hospitals existed uptown, coexisting with white institutions, up until the 1940s when urban renewal began to erase this mixed heritage.

Despite these conditions, the political scene for African-Americans was far from equitable.⁴⁷ A policy enacted in 1917 allowed city council candidates to all be elected at-large, rather than divided from the various wards of the city.⁴⁸ This destructive policy only supplemented the tragic across-the-board disenfranchisement of blacks that had happened a few decades earlier. This electoral reform meant that the city council would be filled only with those who had the resources and means by which they could run for office (wealthier land-owning whites). This confined most political representation to the affluent southeast quadrant of the city, while housed the only people with the connections and resources necessary to run for positions. This reform completely neutered the political power of blacks and blue-collar whites.⁴⁹ This small policy change compounded in the 1930s when Federal New Deal funding was poured into the city. All community improvements were directed to either the center city or to the southeast, which was where representatives lived (and therefore aimed to funnel funds into their own neighborhoods). Highway projects, like Independence Boulevard in 1946, were routed through poorer and middle class neighborhoods like Cherry, Brooklyn, and Chantilly, while wealthier areas like Myers Park were left undisturbed.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hanchett, 211

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Unequal zoning and lending also contributed to sectionalization and unequal growth patterns in Charlotte in the twentieth century. Redlining, the practice of barring entire neighborhoods from obtaining loans based on their status as minority or mixed communities, isolated traditionally black neighborhoods in the west, as well as Brooklyn near uptown. Federal aid to homebuyers often went by rating systems notorious for redlining, like HOLC scoring, to give out aid to homebuyers.⁵¹ This meant that FHA mortgage insurance would only go to those who lived in homogenous suburbs. Aside from putting racism into practice, the FHA effectively encouraged a type of urban development that would further sort whites from blacks, and encourage suburbanization away from the center city. While redlining did more damage by stagnating African-American communities in northern cities like Chicago and Cleveland, it did its share in Charlotte as well.⁵²

Such unrepresentative policies only served to add to the neighborhood sectionalization. This political situation, which caused unequitable relations between socioeconomic classes, was the predominant factor in Charlotte's neighborhood landscape up until the late twentieth-century. One of the most devastating aspects of this consolidation of political power was the razing of Brooklyn, a thriving African-American community just east of Tryon Street in uptown. Brooklyn's residents and shops were relocated to the suburbs, to make way for an underutilized park and brutalist government complexes.⁵³ Not only were projects like these unjust, but they were severely destructive to the cultural offerings and relative walkability in the urban core.

The political neutering of minority and blue-collar populations in Charlotte only consolidated the grip that the Chamber of Commerce held on the city's future. Most community

⁵¹ Hanchett, 232.

⁵² James Greer, "Historic Home Mortgage Redlining in Chicago," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 107, no. 2 (2014), 204.

⁵³ Livingstone, 156.

leaders at the start of the Twentieth century were businessmen who used their airtight political representation to craft the city of Charlotte into America's most business-friendly environment.⁵⁴



Image Credit: Congress for a New Urbanism

Throughout most of the mid-Twentieth century, city leaders leveraged their power to make Charlotte whatever anyone wanted it to be. This correlated with other common economic development practices of the era, which included the replacement of slums with highways, project developments, and auto-dependent civic complexes like Bojangles Coliseum and the

⁵⁴ Hanchett, 247.

Nine Pyramids Convention Center.⁵⁵ Despite this gap, the city has a lot of ground to gain when placed up against larger urban centers in terms of walkability and cultural diversity. The gentrification of formerly minority communities in Cherry, Elizabeth, and Biddleville brings echoes of the past to the forefront. The consolidation and eventual erasure of blacks from all four wards uptown in the mid-twentieth century was an unjust policy decision that reflected indifference towards those in most need of protection from the state. Gentrification will no doubt bring greater economic activity and land value to black neighborhoods, and revitalization should not be halted by any means. However, city policy must be directed into these areas in the future to ensure equitable treatment of displaced renters, and further to ensure the continued availability of affordable housing citywide; I will write about this in greater detail in the policy proposal section.

Auto Dependency and the Need for Correction

Despite differences in socioeconomic status between neighborhoods, one aspect of Charlotte's development has remained clear across the board: Auto-dependency. Even before the advent of the personal motorcar, Charlotte developed as a suburban city. The first expansion, Dilworth, was designed as a streetcar suburb; while sticking to the city grid, mixed uses were prohibited; only single family dwellings were permitted south of the city center, even along the streetcar lines themselves. Future expansions held to this common theme in varying degrees. While blue-collar suburbs like Belmont/Villa Heights had some form of commercial activity, density was still relatively low compared to the dense urban centers of the northeast, or even certain sections of rivals Atlanta or Richmond. As Charlotte expanded to the north and south, the sprawl trend continued. Myers Park and Eastover were designed as true suburbs, with secluded

⁵⁵ Ibid.

single-use lots, curving roads, and a forest-like atmosphere throughout. When the personal motorcar became commonplace, this design trend became the only way in which new expansions were constructed. Charlotte's arrival to the national economic scene was so late, that virtually all new construction after 1940 was auto-dependent; the construction of Independence Boulevard and later the Interstate system locked this design trend in.⁵⁶ Auto-dependent street design tends to sprawl development far into the countryside, far faster than the denser, mixed-use development that preceded it in the 1800s. New street layouts in auto-dependent design often conform to individual subdivisions, emptying out onto feeder roads that bend and twist in no particular pattern.⁵⁷ Charlotte's late growth compared to other American urban centers has resulted in a city that features neighborhoods in a suburban fashion extremely close to the urban core.

This design increases car capacity, but limits any mixed-use building types (i.e., apartments on top of shops or granny flats). This essentially destroys walkability by spreading individual structures far apart, with parking in front, along dangerously wide roads.⁵⁸ Zoning codes, heavily implemented in the Twentieth century, reinforced the separation of uses, and further locked in auto-dependent design. While this separation of uses was adopted in many other cities in the United States, Charlotte had a much smaller urban core built before these codes were passed. These factors (low density, high degree of auto-dependency, separate uses, building setbacks) prevented the city of Charlotte for much of its life from developing any semblance of an urban atmosphere. Without walkable streets, Charlotte, until recently, had been

⁵⁶ Hanchett, 240.

⁵⁸ Roger Scruton, "A Plea for Beauty: A Manifesto for a New Urbanism," in *Why Place Matters – Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America*, ed. Ted McAllister and Wilfred McClay (New York: Encounter Books, 2014), 149.

regarded as a “fake city;” some describe it as “urban, but not urbane.”⁵⁹ In Charlotte, even those dwelling in center city neighborhoods must climb into an automobile or onto a bus to reach the closest grocery store, coffee shop, or school. In a denser American city, one can merely leave one’s apartment stoop and take a casual stroll down the street to buy a latte, passing by friends and neighbors doing the same. This is the type of environment that economic development “heavyweights” tout to attract the best and brightest of America’s workforce.

These “heavyweights” of the North and West like New York, Boston, and San Francisco, have a much longer past and a different approach to planning. These cities feature more cohesive street layouts and dense construction with zero setback from the street, as they were largely built out in industrial eras that required large amounts of workers to live close to factories. In these older cities, the urban cores and inner ring neighborhoods were built before setbacks or zoning codes existed. This typical urban design format, reviled in the mid-twentieth century but popular today, has often been credited for cultivating street life and commerce.⁶⁰ It is this vibrant, urban atmosphere that many urbanists and economic developers expect will drive the economy of the Twenty-first century, and therefore Charlotte must emulate to remain competitive.⁶¹ It is true that walkability factors high among aspects that particularly millennials search for when looking to relocate.⁶² Increasingly, a trend among the drivers of the future economy is to search for a location, before searching for employment. Trendy, “culture-heavy” cities like Portland, Denver, and Austin have become masters at this form of economic

⁵⁹ Hanchett, 7.

⁶⁰ Jeff Speck, *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America One Step at a Time* (New York: North Point Press, 2012), 3.

⁶¹ Florida, 10.

⁶² Florida, 2.

development.⁶³ Urban culture can be defined in several ways. Entertainment venues, international restaurants, artisan shops selling local products, professional services, sports arenas, arts galleries, or any other unique defining characteristic in this manner can all be considered “cultural” in terms of American cities. Car-centric sunbelt cities, while experiencing massive growth as well, have realized that they must develop walkability around these types of cultural amenities that they have been criticized for lacking; Charlotte is no exception to this need.⁶⁴ In the Charlotte of the future, city dwellers should be able to walk down their street to buy their lattes, regardless of what section of the city they reside in.

Based off these observations, the city of Charlotte today faces two primary challenges. First, how to solve the massive economic inequality that has been built into the fabric of the city itself. Secondly, how to restore a sense of urbane vitality that will be critical in recruiting new business and young talent to the region.⁶⁵ This is a difficult balance for a city to resolve. The Charlotte neighborhoods currently gentrifying are attracting more internationally diverse residents and restaurants, while contributing to filling the cultural and walkability hole that the city has historically lacked; however, this is at the expense of preserving affordable housing and black neighborhoods.

Conversely, preserving affordable housing is politically difficult, as it deprives the city of potentially higher tax income through real estate development that could be reinvested back into infrastructure, economic development, and social programs. The city must strike a balance between the two. To understand how policy can address these concerns, the extent to which Charlotte has gentrified, what impact the process has brought to each individual neighborhood,

⁶³ Florida, 3.

⁶⁴ Galina Tachieva, *Sprawl Repair Manual* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010).

⁶⁵ Florida, 7.

and how the city can implement neighborhood-specific policy changes to promote mixed income (and use) development in the right places.

Gentrification in Charlotte

The first neighborhood in Charlotte to fully gentrify, following the era of destructive urban renewal, was the Fourth Ward.⁶⁶ This was the result of a corporate/public partnership, and yielded great results for the prosperity of the city.⁶⁷ In the early 1970s, NCNB was a corporation on the rise, and looking to attract top international talent to its corporate headquarters at the corner of Trade & Tryon Streets in Uptown.⁶⁸ Traditionally, it had been a challenge to entice corporate talent to move from the financial centers of New York, San Francisco, or even London to Charlotte. At this time in the city's history, the urban core had become a run-down shadow of its former self; most of the grand homes and commercial districts had been razed, replaced with brutalist public buildings, soaring office towers, and seas of surface parking.⁶⁹

Only one of the four quadrants of uptown retained a full complement of single-family homes: The Fourth Ward, or, the northwestern quadrant within the I-277 loop. Most these homes had been converted into low-rent duplexes, and the neighborhood had become rife with crime and blight by 1973.⁷⁰ Hugh McColl, then an executive with NCNB (now Bank of America), met with representatives from First Union Bank (which became Wachovia) and UNC Charlotte to determine what could be done to make the city more attractive for company recruitment. They

⁶⁶ While there is virtually no academic literature that discusses gentrification in Charlotte in detail, it can be examined through a combination of census data application and primary observation. In this section, I will use newspaper articles, personal observations of gentrification, along with a study conducted by *Governing.com* that compared neighborhood revitalization between the 1990, 2000, and 2010 census years.

⁶⁷ Livingstone, 142.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Page Leggett, "Fourth Ward Celebrates the 40th Anniversary of its Rebirth," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), July 1, 2016.

determined that the great cities of the world featured layouts where individuals could live within walking distance of work, and featured great public spaces like easily accessible parks and squares. They also determined that the city of Charlotte lacked any semblance of these characteristics.⁷¹ The group drafted a strategy to revitalize Fourth Ward to try to emulate the characteristics of great cities, to make Charlotte more attractive for top talent recruiting. The group worked closely with the city government, historic preservation non-profits, and other local banks to minimize risk for future revitalizers.⁷² The city coordinated with urban planners to revise the street design of the district, changing sidewalks to brick and limiting access by transforming certain street connections into pedestrian malls. Victorian homes were relocated from surrounding areas to supplement the stock of homes in the area already.⁷³ NCNB and First Union gave out below-market-rate mortgages to owner-occupants looking to move to the area.⁷⁴ Future Mayor Harvey Gantt, an African-American, moved his family into the district, as did many other prominent city leaders from the private sector.⁷⁵

These strong public-private partnerships formed what is today one of the most sought-after residential neighborhoods in the Charlotte region, and a huge advancement for both the urbanization and globalization of the Charlotte economy. This process can also be considered the first major gentrification of a neighborhood in Charlotte's history. This type of gentrification was purely income-based; lower-income residents were indeed replaced by those of higher income and education levels, though uniquely the gentrifiers were of varying ethnicities, lifestyles, and

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Livingstone, 143.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Leggett

⁷⁵ Ibid.

political orientation.⁷⁶ Care was also taken to cater to renters; the construction of apartment complexes has created a mixed-income neighborhood in Fourth Ward, a process that has not been reflected in more recent neighborhood gentrification. The gentrification of Fourth Ward represents the best form of revitalization that a city could hope to achieve. While there was displacement of lower-income residents, the community shares strong bonds due to a mixing of races and income levels within a larger walkable, well-planned environment. The Fourth ward experience above all else should show Charlotte of 2018 that, while not completely devoid of negative side-effects, neighborhood revitalization can be equitable and positive for all members of the community, specifically when the city government and neighborhood-based organizations take a more active role in guiding development.

Why Is Charlotte Gentrifying?

The continued growth and diversification of Charlotte's economy did nothing but speed up neighborhood gentrification since the completion of the Fourth Ward revitalization project in the 1980s. Today, the bulk of Charlotte's core neighborhoods ringing uptown, as well as all four wards within uptown itself, are experiencing gentrification to some degree.⁷⁷ Charlotte neighborhoods are gentrifying due to three characteristics: Job growth, a demand for urban living, and the direct involvement of government and nonprofit forces to cultivate the entrance of gentrifying forces.

As has been explained previously, Charlotte developed as a banking city through the 1800s and into the Twentieth century. The city remained a regional hub into the 1980s, when Interstate banking regulations were relaxed. Hugh McColl, the President of NationsBank,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Governing the States and Localities.*

engaged in a series of corporate takeovers that continuously grew the company's asset portfolio, until the company was the largest bank in terms of deposits in the United States by 1997.⁷⁸ Quite possibly the largest takeover occurred in 1998, when McColl acquired BankAmerica of San Francisco; this was recorded as the largest bank acquisition in history at the time.⁷⁹ This acquisition ran parallel to similar expansions conducted by First Union, which became Wachovia. The loss of Wachovia during the Great Recession did little to stem the flow of people to city center either; Wells Fargo located their east coast operations in former Wachovia facilities, and is now a larger employer in Charlotte than Bank of America or Duke Energy.⁸⁰ These developments made Charlotte the second largest banking center in the United States by assets. The designation of Charlotte-Douglas International Airport as a hub for US Airways also assisted in attracting a diverse portfolio of employers like IBM, Lowes, Sealed Air, and Nucor. Distribution is a burgeoning sector thanks to sprawling Interstate Highway connections; Amazon now operates a fulfillment center in Charlotte. Healthcare is also a prosperous and rapidly growing employer in the Charlotte area. Charlotte has also recently earned the title of fastest growing tech hub in the United States; between 2011 and 2016, the city added almost 22,000 tech jobs, predominantly in finance-related sectors like automated payment systems.⁸¹ The strong availability of high-paying employment has cultivated a strong labor market in the Charlotte metro region among all age groups, particularly millennials from across the United States.

It is the demand for urban living that directs this employment-driven population growth to center city neighborhoods that offer proximity to employment, transit, and cultural offerings

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "Charlotte Area Largest Employers," *Charlotte Chamber of Commerce*, 2013, http://charlottechamber.com/clientuploads/Economic_pdfs/LargestEmployers.pdf.

⁸¹ Laura Calugar, "The Projects That Will Reshape Charlotte," *Commercial Property Executive*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.cpexecutive.com/post/the-projects-that-will-reshape-charlotte/>.

like theaters and restaurants. Members of the millennial generation, and increasingly generation Z, have expressed preference for life experiences over possessions, land, or material wealth. As has previously been explained, this translates to a desire for authentic urban living, where newcomers do not mind paying high rent to live in a more urban setting. Young professionals and members of the creative class are increasingly interested in experiencing other cultures, making close friends, shopping for artisanal wares, eating unique food, and being able to walk to work or school.⁸² These are all activities difficult to enjoy in a purely suburban setting. While Charlotte's uptown and surrounding core neighborhoods are not as dense or urbane as other cities in the United States, they are still preferable to living in the suburbs for members of the newly transplanted creative class. Thus, many white-collar professionals opt to move into formerly subpar neighborhoods closer to the urban core. Charlotte has constructed its fair share of luxury apartments, cultural venues, and top-dollar restaurant space uptown. Dense urban living would not be such an attractive lifestyle if it were not for advancements in mobile technology, sanitation, and transportation. Issues like waste, overcrowding, and crime are no longer as large of an issue in Charlotte as they once were.⁸³

The city government, alongside nonprofit community associations, have contributed to revitalization projects that have made neighborhoods attractive to gentrifiers. This urbane environment has been cultivated in part by city leaders to appear and function as a "true city" as much as possible. Outside of the four wards of uptown, Charlotte's core neighborhoods do not conform to a grid thanks to their design as mill villages or suburbs. City zoning code attempted to change that starting in the 1990s. The addition of transit-oriented zones (TOD) along transit

⁸² David Brooks, "BOBOS in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY: 2000), 60.

⁸³ Article about Crime in Charlotte

corridors have helped in creating a dense urban environment that employs a mix of uses into its fabric, where previously only auto-oriented construction was allowed.⁸⁴ In fact, the construction of the Lynx Blue Line, the light rail that runs from I-485 along South Boulevard and into Uptown, was built to enhance new development and property values in those neighborhoods. City leaders understood that the properties along the proposed line would gentrify, expecting enhanced economic revitalization and tax revenue from those districts.⁸⁵ The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) has formulated the 2030 transit plan, to address the needs for a complete transit system in the Charlotte region. This plan includes heavy rail between Uptown and Mooresville, light rail between the airport and Uptown, light rail between Uptown and Matthews, and the extension of the streetcar line to the Rosa Parks transit center to the West, and the former Eastland Mall site to the East.⁸⁶ Along with these proposed routes, the extension of the Blue Line from Uptown to University City in the North was completed in March of 2018.⁸⁷ These new routes all have the intended consequence of boosting urban development first, and transit connectivity second, as has already been proven in South End. Already, land speculation in neighborhoods like NoDa, Optimist Park, and University City are pointing towards eventual gentrification in nearby tracts. Additionally, the city has sponsored beautification projects to the North and South that showcase public art like sculptures and murals, cultivating a sense of place while removing gritty streetscape elements. A branding effort in South End and NoDa has also

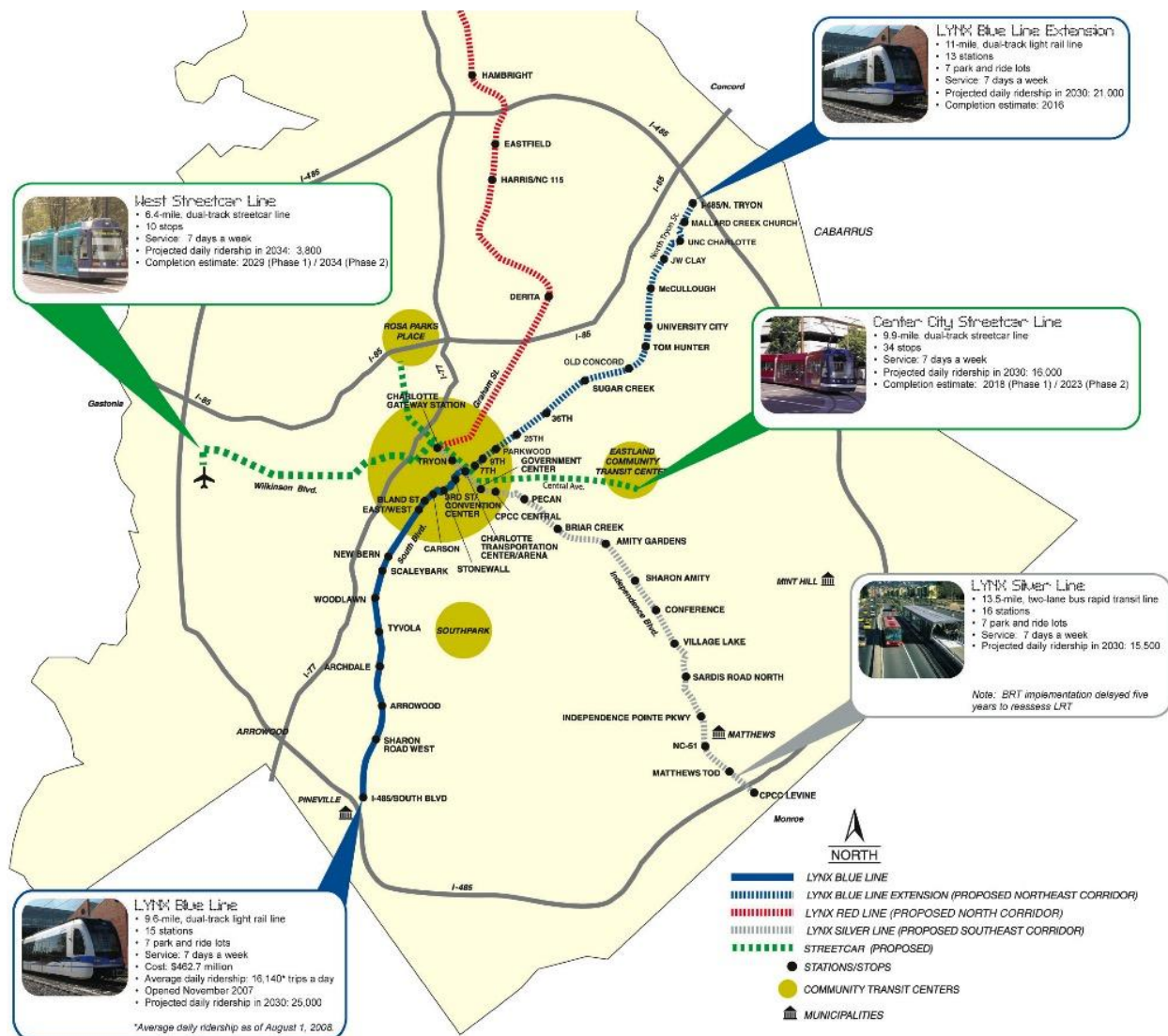
⁸⁴ “City of Charlotte Zoning Codes.”

⁸⁵ Cervero et al., “Transit-Oriented Development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review,” Transit Cooperative Research Program, *Research Results Digest* 6, no. 52 (2002), 7.

⁸⁶ “2030 Transit Corridor System Plan,” Charlottenc.gov, 2018, Accessed March 28, 2018, <http://charlottenc.gov/cats/transit-planning/2030-plan/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁸⁷ “Lynx Blue Line Extension,” Charlottenc.gov, 2018, Accessed March 28, 2018, <http://charlottenc.gov/cats/transit-planning/blue-line-extension/Pages/default.aspx>.

helped to cultivate a unique urbane environment within the two artistic enclaves. This type of public-nonprofit-private partnership has stimulated all sorts of investment.



The Charlotte 2030 Transit Plan; included are lines to Lake Norman, Charlotte-Douglas Airport, Matthews, Eastland, Rosa Parks Place, and University City. Light Rail land speculation that in turn gentrifies. As of 2018, the line to the airport has been adapted from Streetcar to Light Rail. Image: thesource.metro.net.

This dense, walkable environment, combined with easy access to transit, a multitude of cultural offerings, and proximity to high-paying employment have made previously poor neighborhoods exceptionally ripe for redevelopment. Luxury apartment complexes and hotels have served as the most profitable venture for real estate investors looking to build in TOD zones, due to economy of scale (this will be discussed further in the South End section).⁸⁸ Most construction in these districts has replaced vacant lots in these districts, minimizing direct displacement; however, rising land value and rents threaten to push out diverse residents of lower income in the South and West.⁸⁹

Where is Charlotte Gentrifying?

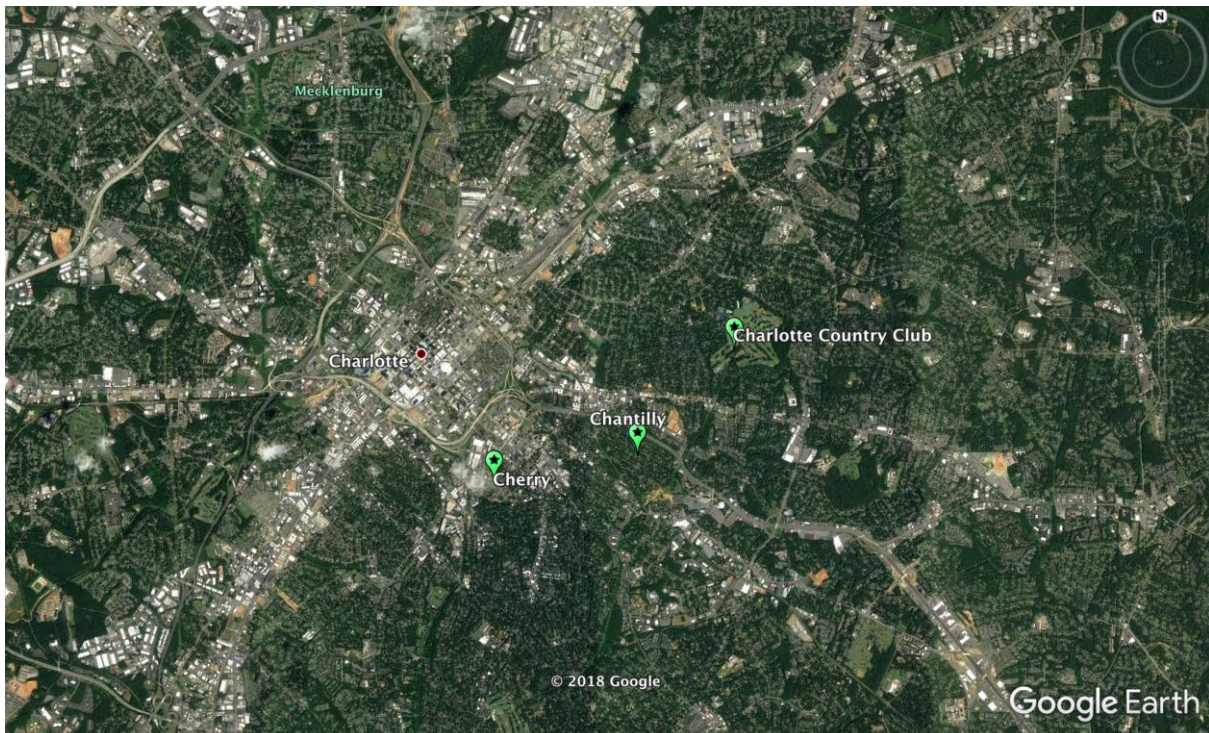
A large study conducted by *Governing* identified census tracts from 1990 to 2000, and 2000 to 2013, to find what gentrified within that span of 23 years. *Governing* conducted its studies based on U.S. Census data collected between 1990 and 2013, compiling data from different studies among individual “census tracts” (neighborhoods). Between 1990 and 2013, 28% of tracts/neighborhoods have gentrified in Charlotte, which is a hearty number considering that Fourth Ward was the only neighborhood in Charlotte that had gentrified prior to 1980. The key indicators used in the *Governing* study were census information on education level, average income, and home value increase. If the overall census tract displays a neighborhood in the bottom 40% of citywide stats in these areas, that tract is eligible to gentrify. Then, the study compiles those bottom-rated neighborhoods against census data ten years later; the neighborhoods that showed a heavy increase in average income, home value, and/or number of bachelor’s degrees held by residents is considered gentrified.

⁸⁸ Scruton, 150.

⁸⁹ Blaine Tolison, “Last Remaining Tenant Laments About Elizabeth Development,” Wsoctv.com, February 14, 2018, <http://www.wsoctv.com/news/local/last-remaining-tenant-laments-about-elizabeth-development/699222715>.

Especially in Charlotte, it is common to see African-Americans displaced from their communities by white gentrifiers; however, this is a measure that does not apply to all gentrifying tracts across the board.⁹⁰ Consider the example of Fourth Ward; many gentrifiers were also African-American, and in other neighborhoods, many young professionals coming into the city can be from a variety of international backgrounds. While a shift in neighborhood racial makeup is a common symptom of gentrification, it is not definitive enough to use as an indicator in this study. This omission as an indicator should not outright define gentrification as a driver for diversity; often, in neighborhoods like South End or NoDa, gentrification has definitively displaced ethnically diverse residents and replaced them with predominantly whites, showing that the city must work to address the equity issue in the future.

1990-2000 Census



⁹⁰ One primary indicator not used in this study that many correlate with gentrification is race.

Between the census years of 1990 and 2000, there were three tracts in central Charlotte that reflected both an increase in average education level and income, and have accordingly displayed a definitive shift in the built environment through new construction and building restoration. Census Tract 11 (Chantilly/Commonwealth), Census Tract 12 (Part of Plaza Midwood), and Census tract 26 (Cherry) gentrified in this period; two more tracts (Hunter Acres and Mallard Creek) also gentrified, but both are “greenfield” developments where the dynamics of displacement do not apply.⁹¹ Notably, all three of these tracts are to the east of uptown.

Chantilly was developed as a low density middle-class neighborhood along a grid street pattern. In the 1940s, city leaders leveraged their political authority to direct the construction of Independence Boulevard, Charlotte’s first urban expressway, through the heart of the neighborhood and then around uptown. The construction of the expressway razed seven blocks of the neighborhood, splitting it in two; the section to the north of Independence henceforth evolved as “Commonwealth,” the name coming from central street this portion was built around. Though separate, the two are still considered in the same census tract. Most gentrification (both new construction and renovated homes) reflected in this tract occurred in the Commonwealth portion, though there is some new apartment development along the southern boundary of Chantilly on Monroe Road. According to census data, median home value in this tract was \$140,900 in 2000, a 73% increase from 1990.⁹² In 2000, average household income in this tract was \$33,463, relatively unchanged from 1990; however, there was a sharp increase in the number of bachelor’s degrees held in this tract. In 1990, 26.6% of adults held bachelor’s degrees, but by 2000, 40.8% of adults had them. The combination of increased home value and an

⁹¹ Greenfield developments are where new homes are constructed on vacant land, often converted from agricultural use. Gentrification by these dynamics occurred, but involuntary displacement did not occur.

⁹² *Governing the States and Localities*.

increase in education level is a signifier of Gentrification in Chantilly/Commonwealth. However, this district was traditionally a middle-class white neighborhood; there was little shift in the racial makeup of this tract, while as home values and rents went up, it is safe to assume that rising rents could have displaced lower income occupiers.

The core neighborhood of Cherry, meanwhile, was historically one of Charlotte's premier African-American neighborhoods up until the 1990s.⁹³ A smaller census tract overall, the neighborhood sits directly to the southeast of the 277-inner beltway around uptown; the superhighway had been directed through this tract in part because of the limited amount of political clout the groups living here possessed at the local level. Wedged between the more affluent districts of Elizabeth to the North and Myers Park/Dilworth to the south, investment occurred here earlier than in more outlying districts to the north and east. In Cherry between 1990 and 2000, median home value increased to \$138,900, a 58% increase from the median home value in 1990. Education level is a factor here as well; similar to in Chantilly/Commonwealth, 40.6% of adults held bachelor's degrees in 2000, as compared to

25.9% in 1990. Visually, the



Cherry neighborhood changed little between 1990 and 2000, despite the relatively early gentrification of occupants. However, less than ten years later, new construction

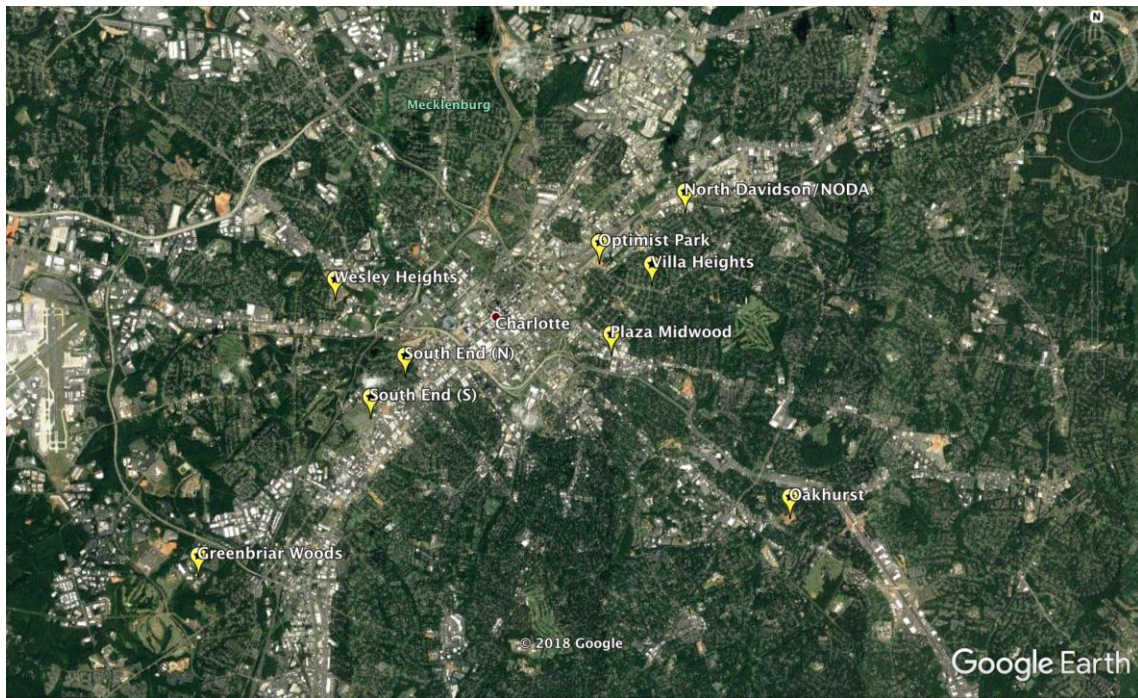
⁹³ Sherrell Dorsey, "Charlotte's Oldest Black Neighborhood Grapples With Gentrification," *Next City*, January 21, 2016, <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/charlotte-cherry-gentrification-oldest-black-neighborhood>.

drastically altered the face of the neighborhood. *The Metropolitan at Midtown*, a luxury retail, condominium, and office development was constructed on the site of a former manufacturing facility in 2009. The development, a multi-story behemoth, was designed to bring big box and boutique retail to uptown; Staples, Best Buy, Trader Joe's, and Target are all present here, alongside restaurants like the upscale restaurant *Vivace* and aptly-named yogurt bar *Cherry Berry*. *Metropolitan* brought useful retail near Uptown Charlotte, something that city leaders had been pining for; it also was built to form a cohesive, walking environment with the rest of the neighborhood. The subsequent completion of the Sugar Creek Greenway to the west and the Gold Line Streetcar to the northeast only enhanced speculation here; by 2018, new home and apartment construction has supplanted income-adjusted housing throughout most of the tract. Of the tracts studied in this paper, Cherry remains the most distinct example of gentrification in Charlotte, and features the most visible shift in the built urban environment.

The third core tract that gentrified between 1990 and 2000 was Tract 12, the section of Plaza Midwood known as "Country Club Heights." Average household income here was higher in 2000, at \$46,141; median home value increased by 25%, up to \$116,799.⁹⁴ 34.6% of adults in this tract held bachelor's degrees, in 2000, as compared to 23.3% in 1990. A historically white community, Country Club Heights consists of a set of neighborhoods arranged around the Charlotte Country Club. It was developed as a streetcar suburb in the late 1800s, and has traditionally been an enclave of wealth among more blue collar neighborhoods. Lower income residents in this tract are predominantly clustered around Central Avenue and Eastway Drive; though no concrete data exists on this subject, these areas are where gentrifiers most likely displaced traditional residents.

⁹⁴ *Governing the States and Localities.*

2000 – 2010 Census



Most tracts in Charlotte gentrified between 2000 and 2010, during the expansion of Bank of America, Wachovia, and the housing markets up until 2009. It was during this period that the city experienced explosive growth; in 2000, 571,382 people lived in Charlotte, while in 2010, 731,424 people called the city home. This growth rate increase of 160,042 people is larger than the population of Columbia, the largest city in South Carolina. With such an influx of people,

The following neighborhoods experienced a combination of median home value and education increase, and in some cases, an income level increase: Optimist Park, Villa Heights, Plaza Midwood, North Davidson / NODA Arts District, Oakhurst, South End, Greenbriar

Woods, and Wesley Heights. Included in this list are predominantly African-American communities, formerly industrial areas, and former blue-collar neighborhoods. It is worth noting that of these tracts, none are in the southeastern “wedge” of affluence, that consists of the Dilworth/Myers Park/Eastover neighborhoods; these communities were never in the bottom 40%, and have historically retained wealthy white residents.⁹⁵ I will provide extended analyses of only the most significant of these neighborhoods, as many share traits and characteristics in terms of income, home value, and education increases.⁹⁶

The U.S. Census showed gentrification in two tracts that make up the bulk of the South End Neighborhood, tracts 36 and 37. South End is built along *South Boulevard*, and extends from Uptown to the southwest, terminating near *Clanton Road*. South End became incorporated as part of the Dilworth neighborhood in the late 1800s, and due to proximity to the Main Line to Columbia, was home to mostly industrial-zoned lots and low-income housing.⁹⁷ Through most of Charlotte’s history, few people lived in South End; most residents resided to the western and eastern edges of the tracts, in low-income or duplex housing. Most of South End’s core remained devoted to industrial or commercial use up until the 1990s. The first signs of gentrification occurred in the 1980s, when the historic neighborhoods of Dilworth and Myers Park (directly to the east) became fashionable again, attracting higher-wealth residents keen on renovating and restoring the old homes there. South End’s brick warehouses became home to designer-level home décor shops, and later, restaurants.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Hanchett, 146.

⁹⁶ *Governing the States and Localities*.

⁹⁷ Hanchett, 148.

⁹⁸ Livingstone, 150.

South End was by far the most heavily-impacted neighborhood in Charlotte by the construction of the Blue Line Light Rail, opened in 2007. Between 2000 and 2010, Leading up to and immediately after the introduction of this groundbreaking transit alternative, real estate speculation ran wild in this section of the city. Developers made quick use of the vacant lots and underutilized industrial facilities to construct townhomes, offices, and apartment complexes up to four blocks within the light rail corridor.⁹⁹ The gentrification of South End was perhaps one of the best examples of planning-guided development in the entire southeast; Charlotte passed zoning code amendments that restricted development within walking distance of transit stations to largely mixed use and high density.¹⁰⁰ This zoning change applied to South End and other sections of South Boulevard before any other district in the city, since the Blue Line debuted here.¹⁰¹ By 2018, South End has been transformed into a dense and transit-oriented neighborhood with easy access to Uptown and beyond, thanks to Charlotte's ever-expanding light rail portfolio. Atherton Mill, a sprawling textile mill complex, has served as the core of the neighborhood's revitalization; now, it is home to boutique office space, restaurants, and designer home décor shops.¹⁰² Investors particularly favored luxury apartments and restaurants in this district, raising density and walkability but largely eliminating affordable housing and retail geared toward low and middle income clientele. When a housing market is assessed to support many different price points, developers commonly invest in higher density but also higher priced units; this had the phenomenon of driving away socioeconomic diversity in South End, and

⁹⁹ "The Historic South End Vision Plan," *Historic South End Association*, 2017, <https://historicsouthend.com/live/south-end-vision-plan/>.

¹⁰⁰ "Establishment of Transit Oriented Development Districts," City of Charlotte Zoning Code Section 9.1202, <http://www.charmeck.org/Planning/Rezoning/TOD/TOD.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Atherton Mill and Market," *Atherton – The Soul of Southend*, <http://athertonmillandmarket.com/>

threatens to do the same in other locations.¹⁰³ The most egregious of changes is the planned demolition of the Brookhill Village townhomes, an income-adjusted community near I-77 that will be phased out and replaced with more luxury apartments and office space.¹⁰⁴

The Plaza Midwood neighborhood is located directly to the east of Uptown, oriented along two major boulevards. The denser commercial portion of Plaza Midwood is located on *Central Avenue*, running East/West from Uptown and paralleling Independence Boulevard. *The Plaza*, a predominantly residential street, bisects Central Avenue and runs North towards North Davidson. While portions along *The Plaza* have always been a more affluent historic neighborhood, much of Plaza Midwood was home to Hispanic populations and blue collar workers until roughly 2005.¹⁰⁵ Commercial districts along Central Avenue have begun to lease to more art- oriented business types, while apartment complexes have begun to spring up to the eastern and southern edges of the tract, once again catering to clientele of a higher socioeconomic class than traditional residents; this retail conversion reached its peak when Harris Teeter constructed a retro-styled pedestrian-oriented store at the corner of Central and Plaza. Median home value in this tract increased by 15%, while the number of bachelor's degrees held by residents of this tract increased from 3.1% in 2000 to 14.1% in 2010.¹⁰⁶

Adjoining Plaza Midwood to the north, the neighborhoods of Belmont and Villa Heights all reported a rise in education level, median home value, and average income along similar margins; these formerly blue-collar communities, located to the north of Uptown and aligned

¹⁰³ James Kimmons, "Economy of Scale in Multi-Family Real Estate Investment," Thebalance.com, September 9, 2016, <https://www.thebalance.com/economy-of-scale-in-multi-family-real-estate-investment-2867042>.

¹⁰⁴ Matt Kaminer and Ely Portillo, "Run-down South End Housing at Center of High-stakes Lawsuit From Billionaire's Firm," The Charlotte Observer (Charlotte, NC), June 5, 2017, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/article154398799.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Hanchett, 107.

¹⁰⁶ *Governing the States and Localities*.

along the CATS Blue Line Extension, consist of mostly single-family homes, small apartment buildings, and duplexes.¹⁰⁷ That have changed hands organically due to their proximity to Uptown jobs, in a similar format to Plaza Midwood. These communities will likely see more transformation when the Blue Line Extension opens in the Spring of 2018; the land speculation may see a boom in apartment construction in Optimist Park particularly, and must be carefully evaluated by a city used to handing out approvals for construction liberally.

The North Davidson neighborhood (Census Tract 14) is right behind South End in terms of the most heavily impacted by gentrification. North Davidson formed as an independent mill village in 1903, along with the construction of the Highland Park No. 3 mill to the district's west side.¹⁰⁸ A blue-collar community for most of its existence, the neighborhood slid into decline by the 1970s, when the city's last textile mill, the Johnston Mill, closed here in 1975. By the end of the decade, drug houses and adult theaters were commonplace. In 1986, The Historic North Charlotte Neighborhood

Association was established, and began a campaign to revive the neighborhood; by the 1990s, this revival was in full swing.¹⁰⁹ The neighborhood was re-designated as "NoDa," to emphasize the artistic nature of the community; art galleries, pubs, and theaters have transformed today's NoDa into one of Charlotte's premier entertainment districts.¹¹⁰

By the 2010 census, NoDa had gentrified dramatically as a part of this economic revitalization. Median home value had increased to 193,000, up 84% from 2000. Median household income had risen to \$62,261, while 47.8% of adults held bachelor's degrees, up from

¹⁰⁷ Hanchett, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ "History of NoDa," *Noda.org*, 2016, <http://www.noda.org/about/history.html>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

a mere 8.4% in 2000. This transformation is easily apparent in NoDa today. New apartment complexes have transformed the neighborhood to the west and southern edges, while mill complexes (including Highland No. 3) have been transformed into mixed-use developments. The Blue Line Extension slices through NoDa, further increasing real estate speculation and expected gentrification here. NoDa serves as the most “typical” style of gentrified community in Charlotte; public murals, sidewalks crowded with young millennials, yoga studios, artisan desert hubs, and public signs covered in political stickers are all features of the NoDa built environment.

The final neighborhood cluster that recorded gentrification was a portion of Wesley Heights, situated directly west of Charlotte along Wilkinson Boulevard. Wesley Heights was home to affluent populations of African-Americans at its founding, due to proximity to Johnson C. Smith University and a black business corridor.¹¹¹ Like most inner-Charlotte neighborhoods, Wesley Heights slipped into decline in the 1970s and suffered heavy crime rates up until the 2000s. New residential infill construction has begun to shape the socioeconomic of Wesley Heights; single-family homes, and even a few “tiny homes,” have sparked controversy among locals who are not happy with the changes that this new construction may bring.¹¹² Revitalization has already led the neighborhood to be classified as “gentrified” by the 2010 census; data indicates a median home value of \$171,900, up 84% from 2000. 41.8% of adults held bachelor’s degrees here in 2010, up from only 6.8% in 2000. Median household income remains lower here than in other areas, at only \$42,708.¹¹³ Of the various “wedges” that Charlotte consists of, the

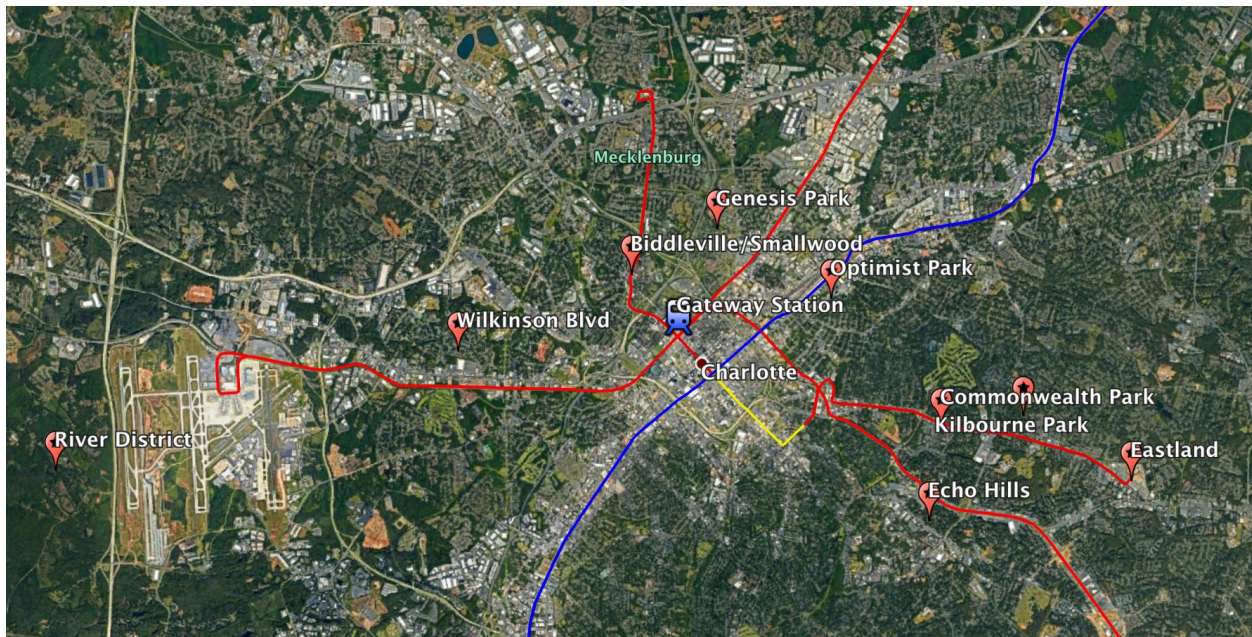
¹¹¹ Hanchett, 135.

¹¹² Fred Clasen-Kelly, “‘We Can’t be Bought.’ Can This Charlotte Neighborhood Stop Investors from Moving In?” *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), June 30, 2017, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article159093699.html>.

¹¹³ *Governing the States and Localities*.

western neighborhoods surrounding Wesley Heights – Biddleville, Smallwood, and Wilkinson – stand to gentrify to the highest degree as the city continues to grow at a fast speed.

Where Will Charlotte Gentrify Next?



Anticipated Gentrification in Charlotte, based on proximity to Uptown and future transit lines. The completed Lynx Blue Line (Blue) and Gold Line (Yellow) are reflected, as well as future light rail and streetcar lines (Red). Image: Google Earth 2018.

Based on proximity to Uptown, proposed transit lines, and other gentrifying neighborhoods, I have developed a prediction of which census tracts are the “next in line” to be gentrified. The following neighborhoods are expected to gentrify in the next decade or so, should the 2030 transit plan take effect as planned. To the East, Eastland, Echo Hills, Commonwealth Park, and Kilbourne Park are expected to gentrify, following land speculation anticipating the construction of both the Gold Line Streetcar, and the Silver Line Light Rail to Matthews. These

neighborhoods today consist of low-rent apartment complexes, single family homes, and standalone commercial enterprises that may have a difficult time fighting an influx of investment from big-name developers. To the West, the neighborhoods of Optimist Park, Genesis Park, Biddleville/Smallwood, Wilkinson Boulevard, and a swathe of undeveloped land dubbed “River District” are all anticipating some form of gentrification, coinciding with the construction of a light rail line to the airport.

In these neighborhoods, and others in the city that have been experiencing gentrification or expect to in the future, gentrifiers bring with them forms of economic revitalization that would be relatively impossible without this level of change. At the big picture level, gentrification in Charlotte’s core neighborhoods is something to embrace, to a certain degree; however, this embrace should not be without provisions for the retention of neighborhood character and income diversity. Before explaining the many aggregate benefits that gentrification brings to the city, I will develop a picture of the disadvantages to the economic and social structure of Charlotte that gentrification may bring to these places.

The Disadvantages of Gentrification for Charlotte

While economic revitalization promises many goods, there are always drawbacks that must be addressed by citywide policy (discussed below) and finding solutions that suit Charlotte's unique character. The challenges that gentrification brings to Charlotte include a lack of affordable housing, a decrease in economic mobility for lower-income residents, the cultural and physical “homogenization” of neighborhoods, and a potential drop in mass transit ridership as a result of more affluent residents in otherwise transit-rich environments.

Quite possibly the largest concern that gentrification brings along into communities is the lack of affordability in central locations. As communities become more “in-demand” for both

residents and developers, landlords can charge more for their units, and sellers can fetch more for their properties than they ever were able to in the past. This situation is excellent for homeowners who bought in low, and plan to resell at as high a price that their properties can fetch; this is called a “seller’s market.” Even during the Great Recession of 2008, Charlotte’s diverse economy meant that the housing market was not impacted as heavily as in other areas, and rebounded faster.¹¹⁴ The strong housing market in Charlotte, fueled by an overall good economy and white collar job growth, has led to heavy Demand-side gentrification factors in Charlotte’s less desirable but cheaper East and West side neighborhoods.

Larger investors have begun to buy large amounts of property to build on, or flip and sell at a higher price; this has driven up cost and kept many small-time buyers, particularly buyers who would serve as owner-occupants, out.¹¹⁵ Rents have also steadily increased in Charlotte, as expanding housing supply has continued to outpace demand in all neighborhoods, gentrifying or no. The influx of newcomers able to pay high rent to the region especially threatens to reduce available housing in low-income neighborhoods. Many neighborhoods to the East and West have more renters than homeowners; since rents are lower in these neighborhoods, these are the primary targets for developers to either purchase property and evict tenants, or for renters to be displaced when their leases expire and new rents are higher than they can afford. A study conducted during 2017 concluded that 44% of all renters in Charlotte considered themselves “cost-burdened,” or, their rents take up a much larger amount of their income than is financially

¹¹⁴ Joshua Zumbrun, “In Depth: America’s Recession-Proof Cities,” *Forbes*, April 29, 2008, https://www.forbes.com/2008/04/29/cities-recession-places-forbeslife-cx_jz_0429realestate_slide_3.html?thisSpeed=20000#581bfbc4166a.

¹¹⁵ Gavin Off, Ely Portillo, “Here’s Why Big-Money Wall Street Players Have Bought Thousands Of Charlotte Homes,” *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), August 31, 2017, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/biz-columns-blogs/development/article170431257.html>.

comfortable.¹¹⁶ This comes as no surprise, as Charlotte's rent cost reflected the tenth largest increase between 2006 and 2014, at 28.8%.¹¹⁷ These numbers reflect the difficulties that middle and lower income families are having not only in buying into Charlotte, but staying in the communities they may have lived for most of their lives. High rent means high demand; high demand leads to investment in property where it can be the most profitable, often in the same communities that are home to the largest amount of low-income and often, minority, residents.

A lack of affordability heavily affects traditional residents, and can lead to displacement if gentrification explodes outwards quickly. The long-term effect of diminished affordability, however, is the decline of economic mobility. In a 2016 study, Charlotte was ranked dead last in metros across the United States in terms of economic mobility; that is, the ability of people living here to escape poverty within their lifetimes.¹¹⁸ The results of this study fell particularly heavily on city and business leaders in Charlotte, who work hard to portray Charlotte as an economic development leader in the Southeast. Unfortunately, widespread gentrification will only increase inequality, and make it harder for impoverished residents to get a leg up. As center city neighborhoods become further out of reach for traditional residents to remain, socioeconomic homogenization occurs, where residents of a similar economic class occupy nearly every residential unit in each neighborhood. As homes in the more walkable urban core and around transit stations become more expensive, those who depend on things like busses, trains, and walkability to get around are pushed further from those services; this in turn reduces the

¹¹⁶ Ely Portillo, "More Than Four in 10 Charlotte Renters Are Cost-Burdened – But It's Worse Elsewhere," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), December 15, 2017, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/article189851584.html>.

¹¹⁷ Richard Florida, "The Steady Rise of Renting," Citylab.com, February 16, 2018, Accessed March 6, 2018, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/02/the-rise-of-renting-in-the-us/462948/>.

¹¹⁸ Alana Semuels, "Why It's So Hard To Get Ahead in the South," *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/04/south-mobility-charlotte/521763/>.

employability of those who need jobs the most. This is an element of gentrification that the city of Charlotte must grapple with if the city wants to sustain holistic economic growth for all levels of the socioeconomic totem pole.

Another issue that gentrification has brought, and threatens to bring more of, is the homogenization of Charlotte's neighborhood culture and built environment. This is an aspect of the changes afoot that concern all of Charlotte's residents, regardless of whether they are the gentrifiers or long-term residents. Most construction in South End, for example, has taken the form of what certain critics call a "Beige Box" – The Mid-rise apartment complex that often occupies an entire city block, built of timber and cheap facades like stick-on brick and stucco. These types of buildings, in some cases, replace smaller historic structures that were once part of the community fabric.¹¹⁹ This construction phenomenon occurs exclusively in gentrifying neighborhoods, as they require a massive undertaking and a luxury apartment market to pay off. While "Beige Boxes" adhere to Charlotte's TOD zoning requirements, they often fail to contribute the historic character of the neighborhoods they are placed in. If Charlotte is to develop a culture reflecting diverse nature of new millennial gentrifiers, construction quality must be brought up to par.

The final issue that gentrification brings to Charlotte is the lack of transit ridership, which threatens the very systems established to bring reinvestment in the first place. The advent of ride sharing programs like Lyft and Uber have particularly drawn gentrifiers away from riding busses and the Lynx Blue Line; often, wealthier residents in South End and Uptown have stated that they located in dense transit-heavy neighborhoods for that reason, but rarely actually use those

¹¹⁹ Ely Portillo, "Crews Tearing Down the Former Common Market Building In South End To Make Way For Offices," The Charlotte Observer (Charlotte, NC), November 7, 2016, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/biz-columns-blogs/development/article112631313.html>.

transit services.¹²⁰ This is partially a zoning issue – new developments in transit-served neighborhoods that gentrify also include ample parking – but still resonates as a result of gentrification itself. It does logically make sense that wealthier residents in denser neighborhoods that still have ample access to parking spaces will choose their personal vehicles over mass transit. To solve this economic sustainability issue, the city of Charlotte must aggressively reform its parking codes, to better work with new development along transit lines; this and other policy change recommendations will be discussed in the next section.

As gentrification continues to mold the face of Charlotte's oldest neighborhoods, changes will provoke the age-old tensions surrounding community culture, affordability, and transit access. However, for every difficulty that gentrification brings for the city to resolve, there is a benefit that will help to sustain Charlotte's economic future. While the above stated issues are crucial for the city's future to resolve, they alone do not call for the entire negation of growth and reinvestment to prevent gentrification altogether. Next, I will discuss the benefits that gentrification brings to the city of Charlotte, and why it should still be cultivated in some areas.

Why Gentrification is Good for Charlotte

Revitalization can only happen in cities like Charlotte with a partial degree of income, education, or property value increase, as investment must come from someplace to begin with. There are many benefits that the city of Charlotte can reap from the gentrification of certain neighborhoods within it, benefits that can apply to the environmental and physical health of the city, as well as the fiscal and economic outlook of Charlotte's future. To continue to grow and become a truly global economy, Charlotte must continue to gentrify.

¹²⁰ Steve Harrison, "Where Are the Bus Riders? CATS Struggles to Understand Why Ridership Keeps Falling," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), February 22, 2017, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/article134279674.html>.

Gentrification benefits the environmental health of the Charlotte region. A sprawling sunbelt city, the vast majority of new construction takes place in suburban enclaves at the fringes of Mecklenburg County, in places like Steele Creek, Ballantyne, Matthews, and Huntersville. Land is typically subdivided into housing developments, shopping centers, industrial parks, and office complexes that cover the landscape with driveways and surface parking. This type of development is typically auto-oriented and wholly unwalkable, increasing emissions from vehicles while replacing forest and farmland with pavement.¹²¹ The massive demand for new housing that has taken Charlotte by storm following the great recession continuously threatens the last tracts of green in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Gentrifiers, on the other hand, are groups of people who prefer to locate in more dense locations close to jobs and amenities; this cultivates demand for new construction in core neighborhoods, on vacant lots or formerly blighted properties.¹²² This type of construction makes good use of underutilized urban land, growth that would otherwise be offset into the suburbs. Dense core neighborhoods are also more walkable, and often have close access to alternative transit options like busses and trains; these modes of transit per traveler are much less emissions-heavy.¹²³ In neighborhoods like Cherry, South End, and Biddleville, gentrifiers are almost exclusively the market for new homes and apartments constructed on infill sites; without newcomers willing to live in the city center, all new development would have to take place further out. The neighborhoods where gentrification is currently underway or expected to take place are overwhelmingly dominated by large lots, single family homes, and strip malls, far from

¹²¹ Jo Kwong, "Suburban Sprawl and Human Ecology," *Action Institute*, July 20, 2010, <https://acton.org/pub/religion-liberty/volume-9-number-2/suburban-sprawl-and-human-ecology>.

¹²² Florida, 20.

¹²³ Brauer, et al., "Healthy Neighborhoods: Walkability and Air Pollution," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 117, no. 11: 1752, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2801167/>.

a cohesive urban environment. New apartment buildings fueled by strong market demand have increased the density of the neighborhoods they are constructed in. Most new complexes are placed on the street with zero setbacks and, in some cases as in Uptown and NoDa, ground floor retail. This development type tends to enliven sidewalk life and cultivate a more urbane environment.¹²⁴ Previous studies have concluded that there is a direct correlation between walkability and the physical, social, and financial health of a neighborhood's inhabitants.¹²⁵ This walkability, in turn, is becoming enhanced as gentrifiers continue to drive new construction in these areas; to block new construction in Charlotte's core neighborhoods for fear of gentrification would only stagnate them in their current car-dependent state. This is an advantage that gentrification brings uniquely to Charlotte, or other similarly sprawled-out cities; in Northeastern cities like New York, walkability is already there, and cannot be further cultivated by new construction as in Charlotte. By driving the market for new construction that will enhance walkability, gentrifiers are increasing the social equity of neighborhoods across the board. Walkable neighborhoods are places that needs can be met on foot; when a neighborhood is walkable, suddenly everybody, regardless of age or income can enjoy easy access to their own communities.¹²⁶ While luxury apartments and high-end retail is driving the new construction, they are fueling a more long-term infrastructure of connected roads, sidewalks, and storefronts that will likely be here to stay.

Cultivating a walkable, urbane environment in core neighborhoods goes beyond simple neighborhood health. Walkability is a key component of urban living that attracts millennials and

¹²⁴ Andrew Price, "The Problem With Setbacks," *Strongtowns.org*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/10/23/the-problem-with-setbacks>.

¹²⁵ De Bourdeaudhuij et al., "Neighborhood Walkability and Health Outcomes Among Older Adults: The Mediating Role of Physical Activity," in *Health and Place* 37: 17, DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.11.003.

¹²⁶ Douglas Farr, "Sustainable Urbanism: Urban Design With Nature, John Wiley & Sons (Hoboken, NJ: 2008), 45.

young professionals to a city; most economic development “heavyweights” like Boston, New York, San Francisco, and Portland all feature dense walkable districts.¹²⁷ As the creative classes become even more essential components of the American economy, so will the importance of attracting these types of people.¹²⁸ Charlotte especially must contend with this need; unlike nearby competitors Raleigh and Atlanta, the city is only home to one research university, and is the largest city in the United States without either a law or medical school. Talent must be attracted by selling a combination of job opportunities and a high quality of life, making walkability something of a necessity for Charlotte’s future planning.

Gentrification also directly combats urban blight. In the planned gentrification of Fourth Ward in the 1970s, most homes that were repurposed were either abandoned, or home to unseemly uses like drug dens and adult shops.¹²⁹ Gentrification directly increases property value in the surrounding area, which in many cases can benefit long-term property owners in the area even more than it benefits newcomers; gentrification, in other words, creates a “seller’s market” in certain Charlotte neighborhoods. Increasing property values also allows greater tax revenue when property tax values are reassessed following the gentrification of a neighborhood. On top of this direct revenue increase, infill development typically provides more tax revenue to city coffers than does new construction in the suburbs. Suburban (or, “greenfield”) development requires the extension of city services like water, roads, and sewers into those areas. This added network, in some cases, costs the city more in the long run than benefits the city in terms of added tax revenue. Infill development, on the other hand, makes use of existing systems, allowing the city to make more from tax revenue in those neighborhoods. If managed properly,

¹²⁷ “Walkability Index,” Data.gov, January 3, 2018, <https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/walkability-index>.

¹²⁸ Florida, 21.

¹²⁹ Livingstone, 150.

increased tax revenue from gentrifying districts can be put towards new transit lines or improvements in lower-income neighborhoods, to foster a more equitable situation citywide.

Gentrification replaces blight in ways that can also preserve the historic character of Charlotte. Three historic mills in Charlotte have been adapted into other uses thanks to increased demand for commerce and housing in the neighborhoods around them. Highland Park No. 3 in NoDa has been repurposed into apartments, offices, and shops; Atherton in South End is undergoing a renovation process to house condominiums and high-class shops; finally, the John B. Ross Mill in Uptown now houses a sprawling entertainment venue known as the NC Music Factory.¹³⁰ Mill houses in some neighborhoods, like NoDa and Plaza Midwood, have been repainted with vibrant colors and thanks to gentrification house owner-occupants who can properly care for them. These are all elements of Charlotte's manufacturing history that, rather than lost to gradual urban decay, have been gentrified in ways that preserve the essence of what was. While Charlotte is often criticized for razing historical buildings, the wave of gentrifiers seeking new and different places to live have driven the market towards this form of adaptive reuse in Charlotte neighborhoods.

The final, and perhaps the most important benefit that gentrification brings to Charlotte is enhanced diversity of perspective, talent, and neighborhood resources. While gentrification is often criticized as being the simple influx of whites into diverse neighborhoods, the situation in Charlotte is much more nuanced. Top talent (particularly millennials) is attracted to Charlotte, particularly from the financial sector, from national and international labor markets. In fact, 69 percent of adults living in Charlotte are not from North Carolina, while 6,000 of the 37,000

¹³⁰ Andy McMillan and David Moore, "Old Masters: A Look at Charlotte's Historic Buildings," *Charlotte Magazine* (Charlotte, NC), February 20, 2012, <http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/February-2012/Old-Masters-A-Look-at-Charlottes-Historic-Buildings/>.

people that Charlotte added in in 2017 were not from the United States.¹³¹ Many international newcomers hail from places like the United Kingdom, Germany, and India; these are a far cry from the social landscape of twentieth century Charlotte, where populations were overwhelmingly black and white, with little global connectivity.¹³² With these newcomers come a diversity of experience, from other parts of the country and the world, that can only enhance the culture of an urban place. A true sign of urban prosperity is not only global connectivity, but also the acceptance and knowledge of other cultures; gentrifying communities have the potential to plant these perspectives right in the center of the city. Connectivity to international markets, with a culture of inclusiveness and diversity, will be extremely important for cities to cultivate in the 21st century economy; as Charlotte gentrifies, this form of diversity will only increase as well. Social efficacy, or, neighborhood connectivity has been observed to increase in gentrifying neighborhoods of other cities.¹³³ This type of relationship often grows when residents of a community have more free time to engage in neighborhood events, social gatherings, and volunteer work, often a result of increased wages and education levels. Charlotte neighborhoods that are gentrifying are suddenly mixing people of higher income levels with those of lower income; this type of connectivity increases the social capital of these locations, which in some cases helps to provide increased opportunity to those looking to better their economic situations.

Charlotte certainly stands to benefit a great deal from gentrification, but this gentrification must be properly observed and managed by the city. While increased property values, international perspective, and new infrastructure will empower Charlotte, gentrification's

¹³¹ Calugar.

¹³² Jen Wilson, "Charlotte Ranks No. 1 For Influx of Millennials; Chemical Firm Shutting Local Office, Moving 140 Jobs," *Charlotte Business Journal*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/news/2017/08/31/cbj-morning-buzz-charlotte-ranks-no-1-for-influx.html>.

¹³³ Bornstein et al.

negative aspects like reduced affordability will dampen these benefits if left unchecked. Moving forward, I will propose that the city take specific action to lessen the blow that gentrification may deliver to core neighborhoods.

Policy Proposals: The 12-Point Equity Plan

Gentrification threatens the city of Charlotte's affordability, economic mobility, and in some cases, architectural variety. As the city continues to grow, gentrification should still be allowed to continue in a way that maximizes the benefits expressed in the previous section; however, certain policy decisions must be made to ensure that gentrification does not spread to all parts of the city, which would further hamper affordability and economic mobility. I propose several small policies that the city of Charlotte can utilize to fight the drawbacks of gentrification, while reaping the benefits of walkability, density, and international perspective that this type of growth brings to the city. This plan has three overarching goals: First, to prevent homogeneity; second, to ensure affordability; and thirdly, to improve economic mobility.

Prevent Homogeneity

This wave of new home and apartment construction that has fueled gentrification has contributed to several negative architectural trends in Charlotte. These are trends that threaten the soul of Charlotte's oldest neighborhoods. Most city zoning codes regulate elements of new construction, like use (residential, commercial, etc.), minimum parking requirements, setback from the street, and density of occupants. Few codes are in place that regulate architectural elements like paint scheme, exterior materials, or massing. This has led to, as has been described

previously, the “beige box” phenomenon, where developers use shoddy and unattractive materials to clad new buildings, regardless of their high-profile nature. On top of this, due to zoning density requirements and the relative economy of scale, most new buildings constructed in gentrifying neighborhoods are multi-million dollar projects built by huge companies. To make matters worse, some of these new projects have replaced properties of historic value. While gentrification aids in repurposing larger cultural structures like old mills and churches, smaller, older buildings meet a less fortunate fate when in geographically advantageous locations. Charlotte has a poor track record of preserving historic structures, consistently trading them for newer and bigger developments (in line with the deference city leaders have historically showed toward aggressive economic development).

The city should encourage the creation of more local-level historic districts as gentrification continues to spread through the center city, to protect architectural heritage and variety. The combined loss of historic structures, lack of uniform building design codes, and construction of poorly clad and scaled apartment complexes are all symptoms of gentrification, but will only hurt the city’s appearance if not contained. The first two elements of the Twelve-point policy plan attempt to address this issue. Historic districts can be designated on the local, state, and national level, but only at the local level exist substantive design restrictions, and only at the local regulatory level can a structure be prevented from demolition. Local historic districts have the benefit of implementing neighborhood-specific restrictions on architectural appearance, ensuring that no structure in the district past a certain age is lost or changed beyond recognition; these codes can vary according to what each district association finds pertinent to restrict, making them the best means through which history can be preserved. Historic districts function as “overlay” districts under city zoning code, meaning that the regular Charlotte zoning

rules, as well as special historic district rules, apply to property construction and appearance within them.¹³⁴ As of 2018, the city of Charlotte had six historic districts: Fourth Ward, Dilworth, Plaza Midwood, Hermitage Court (part of Myers Park), Wilmore, and part of Wesley Heights.¹³⁵ While these districts are home to a large portion of Charlotte's historic housing stock, most historic structures lie along corridors far from these enclaves of preservation. The city of Charlotte should seek local participation, and make the process of designating a district as historic as streamlined as possible; also, campaigns advertising the historic heritage of existing districts would be an excellent step in the right direction. The more that Charlotteans know and appreciate their architectural heritage, the more properties will come under protection over time. Preserving architecture from different time periods of Charlotte's history can break the monotony of new construction, and inject much-needed local flavor into what is otherwise a business-oriented city.

Step two calls for *an overhaul of city zoning code, to allot more language restricting the appearance, height, massing, and quality of materials used in new construction citywide*. While encouraging historic district creation is an excellent first step that city leaders can use to maximize preservation and property protection, the second step gives the city more regulatory teeth to ensure that new construction remains tasteful and of good quality. Charlotte zoning codes, as of 2018, are meticulous in regulating the use of property in all forms, weaving together a confusing patchwork of 39 different zoning district types.¹³⁶ The codes are exceedingly strict in regulating what types of uses a property can have, based on what that property is zoned as; they

¹³⁴ "Overlay Districts Part 1: Purpose," Charlotte City Zoning Codes Section 10.101.

¹³⁵ "Charlotte Historic District Review Cases," [Charlottenc.gov](http://charlottenc.gov), 2018, [http://charlottenc.gov/planning/HistoricDistricts/Pages/Home_copy\(1\).aspx](http://charlottenc.gov/planning/HistoricDistricts/Pages/Home_copy(1).aspx).

¹³⁶ "General Districts Part 1: Table of Uses and Hierarchy of Districts," Charlotte City Zoning Codes Section 9.102.

also heavily regulate the density of properties; for example, only single family homes can exist in R-3 districts, while duplexes are permitted in lots zoned R-8. The most common form of zoning in Charlotte is R-3, prescribing most of the city's land to single family housing, a preference established in the mid-twentieth century and thus far unchanged.¹³⁷ This type of zoning serves to sectionalize the city and ensure that certain uses, like loud and dirty factories, do not impede upon peaceful residential districts. Despite these stringent rules, few of these codes restrict the appearance of new construction on zoned property beyond restrictions on density and proximity to the street.¹³⁸ Municipalities like Portland and Charleston have these types of restrictions in their code, and have employed them to great success.¹³⁹ Elements of overlay zoning commonly used in these cities can be put in practice here, like mandated zero setbacks along streets, maximum (or minimum) building height, and use of accurate eclectic architectural styles. This code overhaul would particularly useful in the four wards of Uptown, where preference to high rises has failed to provide adequate street-level density; the strong housing market here (fueled by gentrifiers) can be funneled by these new codes to fill that gap through height restrictions.

Parts of this overhaul are already in the works as of 2018; however, the city must be particularly mindful of the types of regulations that would be beneficial for preserving the appearance of neighborhoods as gentrification continues to prompt new infill construction and renovation.¹⁴⁰ Preference for traditional quality materials like brick should be given over cheaper materials like stucco; at the same time, large buildings should be massed in a way that breaks up monotonous and cheap-looking facades. This type of regulation will ensure that only quality

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Zoning Code City of Charleston, South Carolina," December 27, 2017, <https://library.municode.com/sc/charleston/codes/zoning>.

¹⁴⁰ Ely Portillo, "After More Than 3 Years, Charlotte Finds a New Planning Director," The Charlotte Observer (Charlotte, NC), December 18, 2017.

buildings are built, improving upon the development that gentrification is already bringing to central neighborhoods.

Ensure Affordability

The next five points in the twelve-point policy proposal function to ensure that Charlotte neighborhoods preserve a level of affordability, even as the neighborhood culture within it gentrifies. Access to entry-level housing, goods, and services are key to any city's future, regardless of neighborhood median income, education, or assets.¹⁴¹ Gentrification and housing price increases have traditionally been viewed as synonymous, but if the city of Charlotte engages in policies similar to the ones I will propose in this section, the blow of gentrification to affordability can be dramatically lessened for the benefit of all.

Charlotte should adopt mandatory housing affordability ordinances as overlay zones in core neighborhoods. The city of Seattle, WA has successfully implemented a Mandatory Housing Affordability Ordinance (MHA) in many zoning districts. This code requires developers to either include affordable housing in new projects, or contribute to a city fund for affordable housing to be subsidized elsewhere at government discretion.¹⁴² This type of code can be controversial for voters, particularly those with a pro-development or anti-regulatory stance; however, in cities with strong markets for new construction, as in both Seattle and Charlotte, these codes can both empower quality mixed-income construction and the future of affordability. This would especially help to balance the construction of luxury apartments with that of other income types, and particularly lessen the blow to affordability that gentrification threatens to bring as it spreads to the East and the West.

¹⁴¹ Florida, 18.

¹⁴² "Developer Contributions – Mandatory Housing Affordability," *Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections*, December 8, 2017.

City zoning codes must be reformed to allow for truly mixed-use properties; i.e., complete elimination of regulation on the number of occupants in a building, the type of uses on properties (excluding industrial), and the number of dwellings on a single piece of land. This fourth policy proposal once again attempts to reform Charlotte's zoning codes. While policy proposal number two proposed an increase in regulation around building appearance and height, proposal four calls for the relaxation of these same codes. Zoning came into existence as a concept in the late nineteenth century, when the dirty and overcrowded cities of the Northeast were notorious for their lack of services or proper planning. Zoning attempted to organize city districts based on their use, to keep dirty industrial and loud commercial properties separate from quieter and cleaner residential spaces.¹⁴³ As a city that evolved later than others, Charlotte was constructed almost exclusively according to these codes, in a way that strips malls and single family homes reign supreme. Advancements in modern sanitation, manufacturing methods, and technology have rendered this type of planning archaic; in the twenty-first century, people can live comfortable lives in close quarters with each other, allowed walkable, transit-oriented, mixed-use neighborhoods to once again be desirable places to live.¹⁴⁴ Charlotte has begun to develop its fair share of dense neighborhoods thanks to transit improvements, but new construction is often held back from creating a seamlessly urban environment by use restrictions. The gentrified South End neighborhood, while full of dense apartments, lacks ground floor retail due to zoning codes that restrict most new construction to residential use only.¹⁴⁵ Relaxing these codes would function in tandem with proposal two, in that the codes will be shifted to regulating the appearance and construction of buildings, and away from the internal use of them. Deregulating use would

¹⁴³ Jane Jacobs, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (New York, NY: Random House, 1961), 65.

¹⁴⁴ Price.

¹⁴⁵ "City of Charlotte Zoning Maps," Charlottenc.gov.

instantly increase housing stock across the city, dropping prices and keeping them down for the foreseeable future. While the immediate market for new construction could be affected by this code change, the long-term benefits of this policy change would overwhelm this drawback; it could also help prevent artificially raised housing prices, fueled by speculation in Charlotte's neighborhoods. This would also allow households extra income, allowing them to rent out rooms or construct "granny flats" (add-on apartment units to homes or above garages), keeping the cost of living down for property owners as well as renters.¹⁴⁶

The city of Charlotte should directly subsidize a mixed-income/affordable development on the current site of Marshall Park in the Second Ward. This is a proposed development, labelled by the historical name "Brooklyn," that as of 2018 is undergoing approval.¹⁴⁷ Developments like these often drop the affordable housing segment as developers double down on getting the "most bang for their buck." Considering this trend, the city must ensure that these units get built along with the rest of the mixed residential/commercial project. Aside from providing more units of affordable housing Uptown, this development, if completed, brings the added benefit of righting the wrongs of midcentury urban renewal. Brooklyn was a prosperous African-American community before it was levelled to construct a new government complex and Marshall Park, an underutilized green space at the corner of Third and McDowell.¹⁴⁸

Charlotte should cancel plans to extend the Gold Line Streetcar beyond phase 2, to prevent the intense land speculation that will fuel gentrification and threaten the displacement of low-income renters in these districts. The sixth policy proposal directly confronts the progress of

¹⁴⁶ Scruton.

¹⁴⁷ Ely Portillo, "Redeveloping Second Ward's Brooklyn Neighborhood Will Be a Balancing Act With History," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), August 5, 2016, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/biz-columns-blogs/development/article93912382.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Hanchett, PAGE NUMBER.

Charlotte's 2030 Transit plan, and seeks to ensure affordability to the Eastern and Western ends of the city in an unconventional way. In this plan, the city has announced it plans to construct light rail lines to the East from Uptown to Matthews, to the West from Uptown to the airport, a light rail or commuter rail line to Lake Norman, and an extension of the Center City Streetcar (Gold Line) to Wilson Heights in the West and to the former Eastland Mall site to the East.¹⁴⁹

The expansion of transit lines, particularly rail, fuels land speculation, that in turn leads to gentrification. This allows neighborhoods with improved rail transit access to both reap the enhanced property value and access to services, but also suffer the increased housing prices that come along with gentrification. The proposed Gold Line Phase Three, which extends West from Johnson C. Smith University and East from Plaza Midwood runs through some of the lowest-income neighborhoods in Charlotte, all of which are eligible to gentrify if construction is completed along this designated corridor.¹⁵⁰ This way, gentrification can be consolidated to the neighborhoods along other proposed lines, while enclaves of affordability can be preserved to the East and West. While the city is selling this proposed line as a boon for residents in terms of increased transit accessibility, the same level of accessibility can be achieved by reforming bus service to these areas (something I will discuss as a separate proposal).

the city of Charlotte should approve as many developments as possible along designated transit corridors, so long as they conform to the regulations expressed above. This seventh proposal is a broader recommendation that builds upon the ideas previously proposed. The regulations are meant to adjust new construction, but should never be meant to block what is otherwise free market behavior. Gentrification happens because there is a market in lower-priced

¹⁴⁹ Charlotte 2030 Transit Plan.

¹⁵⁰ Governing the States and Localities.

neighborhood for more residents with more money; because this is a boon for city coffers and existing property owners, this type of construction should not be avoided. At the end of the day, nothing can prevent the pitfalls of the market, and the more housing supply exists, the more affordability there will be in the long term for both renters and potential homebuyers. This city policy will help to counteract the kind of intense supply-side gentrification that happens in places like San Francisco, the result of extreme NIMBYism and the reason the middle class has been driven far from city limits.¹⁵¹ Preserving Affordability is the cornerstone for long-term urban prosperity, and though a difficult task, must be preserved at all costs if Charlotte seeks to retain the same kind of growth rates among millennials and members of the creative class.

Improve Economic Mobility

Where preserving affordability serves as a cornerstone to long-term urban prosperity, economic mobility serves as the rest of the structure. In 2017, *The Atlantic* conducted a study of the economic mobility of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, and Charlotte ranked dead last among competitors.¹⁵² While a bad public relations incident, this study proves that the city has a lot of issues, both past and present, to overcome. Unfortunately, gentrification threatens to merely widen the gap between prosperity and poverty, if left as an unchecked process. The policies proposed in this section, though similar to those in the ensuring affordability section, are especially geared towards the provision of opportunity to those who need in most, even in gentrifying neighborhoods.

¹⁵¹ Sarah Carnochan and Chester Hartman, “City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2002), 8.

¹⁵² Janie Boschma and Emily Deruy, “Where Children Rarely Escape Poverty,” *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2016.

*Charlotte should implement a bus system laid out in a grid, where simpler routes and less transfers can make transit use faster, easier, and cheaper.*¹⁵³ This eighth policy proposal once again attempts to adapt Charlotte's transit system. The Charlotte bus system currently operates as a "hub and spoke" system, where bus lines originate in the center city, and radiate out to all sections of the city. This system once again reflects a mid-twentieth century mindset, when all commerce and major activity centered around Uptown. As Uptown and the neighborhoods around it are revitalizing thanks to gentrifiers, residents who most need bussing live too far for the hub and spoke system to reach them.¹⁵⁴ This system reflects an archaic form of planning that no longer applies to the Charlotte of today. This proposal looks to the city of Omaha, Nebraska for this innovative idea, which has seen both increased ridership and decreased cost thanks to the overhaul of bus routes.¹⁵⁵ This proposal can have the dual benefit of better serving populations to the East and West, where I proposed the Gold Line be cancelled. Thankfully, transportation leaders are in the beginning stages of creating more cross-town routes.¹⁵⁶

Parking minimums should be replaced with parking maximums. Proposal number nine is a popular policy adjustment in the world of urban planning, as they attempt to correct a past of encroachment by expressways and surface parking. While Charlotte has improved walkability drastically by opening the Lynx Blue Line, much more must be changed via zoning before the city can truly reap the benefits of transit-oriented development. Due to archaic parking minimum laws in the Charlotte zoning code, most new developments near transit lines still feature enough

¹⁵³ As of 2018, elements of this proposal are in the process of being implemented.

¹⁵⁴ Steve Harrison, "Bus Ridership is Tumbling in Charlotte. Can a New CATS Plan Bring People Back?" *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), December 26, 2017, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/article191612039.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Eric Jaffe, "Omaha Just Designed a Way Better Transit System for Zero Cost," Citylab.com, May 20, 2015, <https://www.citylab.com/solutions/2015/05/omaha-just-designed-a-way-better-transit-system-for-zero-cost/393620/>.

¹⁵⁶ Harrison, "Bus Ridership is Tumbling in Charlotte. Can a New CATS Plan Bring People Back?."

parking for all residents to own personal vehicles. This policy flaw has led to lower ridership on the transit lines the new developments were intended for, preventing transit from doing its job getting cars off of streets and people on sidewalks. Parking minimums also continue to require new development to place parking around each new building in many parts of the city, destroying walkability and preventing the truly dense, mixed use neighborhoods that the city needs to cultivate. Gentrification has indeed increased walkability, but the developments in gentrifying neighborhoods manage to still bring enough parking spots for everybody, through rear lots and hidden parking decks. By shifting zoning policy to parking maximums, developers will suddenly be required to limit the number of spaces in new development across the board; since this policy would affect everyone, the impact to the market for new construction would be limited. The city of Buffalo, New York has implemented this policy and enjoyed great success from it in its downtown district.¹⁵⁷

At all costs, prevent a citywide minimum wage hike. This tenth proposal may seem counter-intuitive, but the economics behind this proposal are sound and meant to preserve entry-level jobs citywide. In 2017, Mayor Vi Lyles won a bid to become Charlotte's next mayor. In her campaign platform, Lyles proposed a hike in the Charlotte minimum wage to \$15/hour, designed to enhance equity across the board for all income brackets.¹⁵⁸ This massive increase has been implemented in other cities like Seattle and Washington, with very mixed results; in some cases, a minimum wage hike leads to reduced hours for minimum wage workers or increased

¹⁵⁷ Linda Poon, "Buffalo Become First City to Bid Minimum Parking Goodbye," *Citylab.com*, January 9, 2017, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2017/01/buffalo-is-first-to-remove-minimum-parking-requirements-citywide/512177/>.

¹⁵⁸ Vi Lyles, "Vi's 7-Point Plan for a More Equitable Charlotte," *Vi Lyles For Mayor*, 2018, <https://vilyles.com/vis-7-point-plan-equitable-charlotte/>.

automation.¹⁵⁹ Should the minimum wage be raised incrementally, as Lyles has proposed, minimum wage jobs may come under fire as companies rely on automation in service jobs like fast food and retail, a modern technology that would save corporations lots of money in places with high minimum wages. This proposed solution to equity will only damage the livelihoods of the people it is designed to help, especially in neighborhoods that are gentrifying.

Ensure that the next light rail line constructed extends from the Uptown Gateway Station to Charlotte-Douglas Airport and River District beyond it. Proposal eleven ensures equity by ensuring a successful transit system in Charlotte. The Charlotte Area Transportation System (CATS) has been reporting lower and lower ridership levels, as gas becomes cheaper and ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft become more widespread; this has been a nationwide phenomenon. A large portion of Charlotte's low income population rely on the bus and train system to get around the city; to some degree, economic mobility in Charlotte relies on a successful transit network. To ensure the CATS system continues to flourish, the city must devote time and resources to aggressively expand the light rail system alongside the bus system reforms, to make a more complete system that is convenient and easy to use. The surest path towards a complete transit system is momentum towards expanding the light rail line to the airport, and to the massive River District proposed development beyond it. This line is one of the three proposed, but is significantly shorter than the other two (to Lake Norman and Matthews); considering the growth of the Charlotte airport as a hub, the neighborhoods around it, and the existing gentrification along Wilkinson Boulevard, this easement will allow CATS to get its best "bang for its buck," while establishing light rail as the preferred means of getting from the

¹⁵⁹ Jardim et al., "Minimum Wage Increases, Wages, and Low-Wage Employment: Evidence From Seattle," *National Bureau of Economic Research*, June, 2017, <https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/NBER%20Working%20Paper.pdf>.

airport to uptown. By emphasizing an expanded light rail system in the most cost-effective way, CATS will solidify its place in the Charlotte area as the preferred transit option, counterbalancing decreasing bus ridership in gentrifying districts and complementing bus system reform.

The Charlotte Transit system should develop partnerships with ride-sharing programs like Uber and Lyft, to build a seamless network that empowers options. This twelfth and final policy should work closely in tandem with other transit reform proposals, and should be designed to ensure that ride-sharing programs augment, rather than destroy, the CATS system that low-income residents desperately need. Ride-sharing programs depend on mobile technology, and are extremely convenient for people in urban settings looking to get from one specified place to the other. CATS must develop seamless mobile applications that users can utilize to understand routes and transit times, and provide riders with intuitive interfaces on busses and trains to understand the wider network. These improvements have the potential to connect millennial gentrifiers to Charlotte's transit system, and help to balance ridership with ride-sharing, another boon to the trains and busses that ensure economic mobility for Charlotte residents in lower income communities.

Conclusion

Gentrification is a complicated and controversial issue nationwide. America's largest cities are learning to cope with the new economy, and gentrification will change their social, economic, and political makeup for generations to come. As this happens, sunbelt cities like Charlotte will have the advantage of insight into the process before it reaches the critical point that it has in larger areas like New York and San Francisco. Charlotte's core neighborhoods can truly benefit from the economic revitalization that gentrification brings, and if city leaders make

the right decisions over time, these economic advantages can be translated into economic mobility for all. As Charlotte's age-old growth strategy holds, growth and economic development is good, so long as the right decisions at the neighborhood level continue to be made regarding transit, infrastructure development, and affordable housing policy. Charlotte is truly becoming a global city, and as the city begins to wrestle with what those things mean for it, Charlotteans should also take a step back and appreciate just how far their city has come in the past century. Gentrification will become another issue of the past, just like economic reconstruction, segregation, and urban renewal were at one time. Charlotte is a city of innovative solutions to unique problems, and gentrification is merely the newest unique problem to contend with.

The Twelve-Point Equity Plan (2018)

| Prevent Homogeneity |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage specific neighborhoods to enact more historic districts. 2. Reform outdated and confusing zoning codes to better control the size, appearance, and density of construction, and less the use inside buildings. Enforce design guidelines that promote certain materials and prevent homogenous massing in large projects. |
| Ensure Affordability |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Place new affordable housing codes into effect to force developers at a certain scale to either include affordable housing in their new residential projects, or to contribute to a fund that serves this purpose. 4. Relax zoning code that applies to use, to allow for things like multi-occupancy units, boarding houses, and granny flats to allow for lower rent options. 5. Overhaul the Brooklyn development with mixed-use, mixed income housing. This should be a city-supported endeavor to ensure affordable housing units are included here. 6. Skip the third phase of the Gold Line Streetcar to ensure East and West Charlotte neighborhoods avoid aggressive property speculation. 7. Along transit lines, approve as much housing development as possible in conjunction with affordable housing codes & density-based zoning codes. |
| Improve Economic Mobility |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Reform bus system from a hub-and-spoke system to a grid system, to increase bus routes into low income. 9. Reverse parking minimums, turn them into parking maximums to allow for more versatile architecture, greater reliance on transit, and improved walkability. |

10. Do not implement a citywide minimum wage hike; this will increase costs across the board for things like housing, food, and services as well as provoke the loss of service jobs that low-income people rely on.
11. Ensure that the next light rail line constructed extends from the Uptown Gateway station, out past Wilkinson and the Airport to River District.
12. Ensure that the CATS system develops ways to work in tandem with ride-sharing programs like Uber and Lyft, to ensure that these new services augment, rather than destroy, Charlotte's transit system.

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