

To: DMNA and Land Use Committee Members
From: Tom Schmid

As homeownership has emerged as the fundamental neighborhood issue in the 205 Park conversation, I thought it would be useful to take a look at the social science literature on the social benefits of ownership. I would like to call your attention to a recent meta-analysis and updating of this literature by William Rohe and Mark Lindblad, prepared through the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard. The article can be found in full at:

<http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/hbtl-04.pdf>

My purpose in sending this is twofold. First, this analysis offers ample justification for why the DMNA should take a specific stand on the 205 proposals. Second, this analysis and the specific studies reviewed in it offers a wealth of information that can be cited in DMNA and individual letters about the development.

The analysis reviews theories and research on numerous benefits—economic, educational, psychological, parenting & children, etc.—but the most important studies here are those that address neighborhood/community benefits. These include clear evidence:

- that home owners are more likely than renters to be politically engaged, especially by voting in local elections;
- that home owners are more likely to participate in neighborhood and block organizations;
- of “a strong correlation with the number of non-professional organizations to which [homeowners] belonged and to involvement in activities designed to solve local problems”;

I particularly recommend the section on neighborhood perceptions and social capital (pages 36-42), which provides support for the proposition that “policies that foster positive homeownership experiences...have the potential to impact not only individual households, but also social capital within communities.” After reviewing studies that establish that a positive perception of neighbors leads to reduced violent crime rates and increased “safety, walkability, physical exercise, and mental and physical health of residents”, the authors report on studies that demonstrate:

- “homeowners were more likely to engage in instrumental civic engagement...[and] in so doing, homeowners may build more neighborhood cohesion and social capital than comparable renters”;

- homeowners tend to report a higher level of neighborhood satisfaction, to be more vigilant, to trust their neighbors more, and to be more willing to engage in informal social control (i.e., “willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good.”) Rohe and Lindbland summarize this part of their analysis [41] by noting that “the reviewed studies largely uphold the link between homeownership and social capital as measured by positive perceptions of neighbors that include greater neighborhood satisfaction, trust, cohesion, connections, and beliefs that neighbors will act in the common good. These perceptions also mediate homeownership’s influence on more distal outcomes such as crime and safety in neighborhoods.”

Finally, in their overall conclusion [45—this is a bit redundant but also refers to individual benefits], the authors state: “The updated literature review presented above does provide support for several social benefits of homeownership. Even after taking self-selection and other confounding factors into account there is considerable evidence that positive homeownership experiences result in greater participation in social and political activities, improved psychological health, positive assessments of neighborhood, and high school and post-secondary school completion.”