

OREGON HILL



Neighborhoods in Bloom Retrospective

NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

Oregon Hill, while not as economically challenged as other Neighborhoods in Bloom (NiB) target neighborhoods, has a moderate-income population and a need for historic preservation and revitalization. This working class neighborhood dates back as early as 1817, when business partners attempted to develop the town of Sydney west of the City of Richmond. An economic downturn in 1819 impeded development of the hopeful new town. However, in the mid-to-late 19th century, the expansion of various industries in the area, such as Tredegar Iron Works, Albemarle Paper Company

and the Virginia State Penitentiary, grew the neighborhood organically.

Oregon Hill boasts an understated, yet notable tradition of social involvement. Throughout its history, institutions and individuals promoted social programs for the betterment of the community. Grace Evelyn Arents, the niece of Richmond Tobacco mogul Lewis Ginter, commissioned housing for low-income renters, in addition to churches, schools and libraries in Oregon Hill. A nurse's settlement was constructed in Oregon Hill, which attempted to address the disparity between the health and lives of the rich and poor.

Map 1: Neighborhoods in Bloom Impact and Target Area - Oregon Hill



From 1950 to 1960, Oregon Hill faced the challenge of a migrating population as many individuals moved out of the city to the western suburbs. Richmond’s expansion and urban renewal offered its own set of challenges in the latter half of the 20th century. The 1968 construction of the Richmond Metropolitan Expressway (today Virginia State Route 195 or the Downtown Expressway) cut through the northern portion of Oregon Hill and destroyed nearly 100 homes and businesses. In the same year, two existing academic institutions, the Richmond Professional Institute and the Medical College of Virginia joined to form Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). More recently, university development has moved into Oregon Hill’s neighborhood boundary, demolishing more than 100 of its buildings.

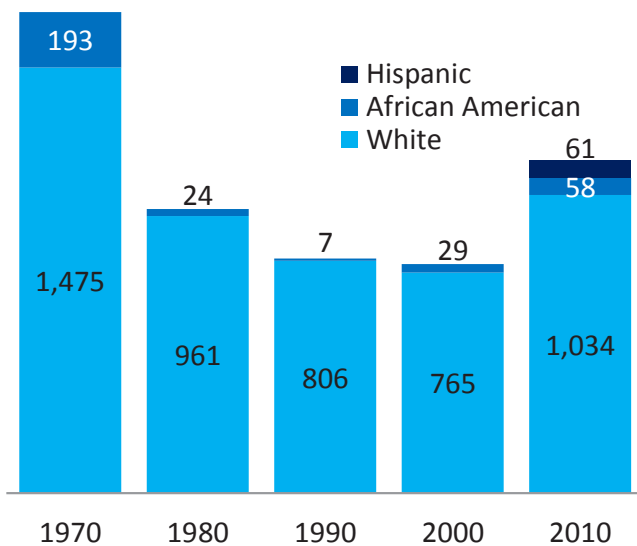
As Oregon Hill did not share the economic challenges of other NiB neighborhoods, the City did not define a target or impact area in the neighborhood. Instead, the

City directed resources to the neighborhood as a whole (see Map 1).

NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

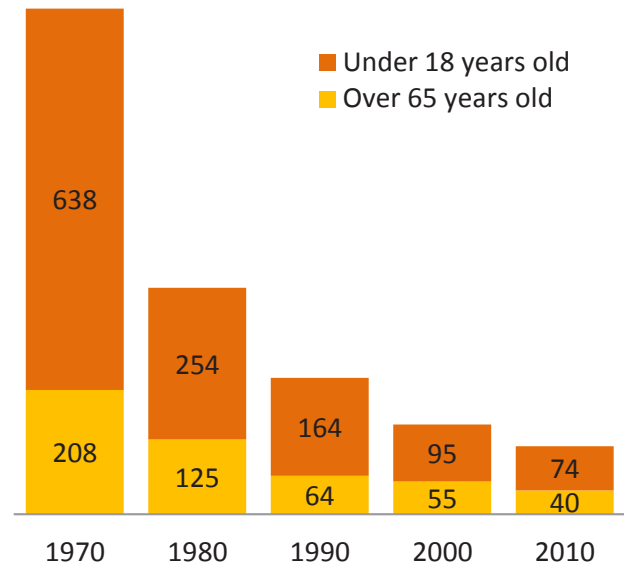
The census tract containing Oregon Hill experienced a population decline of almost 900 individuals from 1970 to 2000, with a population rebound of approximately 360 individuals as of 2010. The area’s residents are predominantly white, and this demographic characteristic has been consistent since 1970 (see Figure 1). As of 2010, the census tract had relatively small, but roughly equivalent populations of African American and Hispanic residents that were each approximately 4.9 percent of the total population. The area has experienced dramatic decreases in the number of residents under 18 and over 65 years old (see Figure 2). The percentage of residents under 18 years old decreased from 37.4 percent in 1970 to 6.3 percent in 2010.

Figure 1: Racial Composition in Oregon Hill’s Surrounding Census Tract, 1970-2010



Note: Sample only includes individuals who self-identify as one race.
Source: GeoLytics, Neighborhood Change Database (1970-2010).

Figure 2: Age Composition in Oregon Hill’s Surrounding Census Tract, 1970-2010



Source: GeoLytics, Neighborhood Change Database (1970-2010).

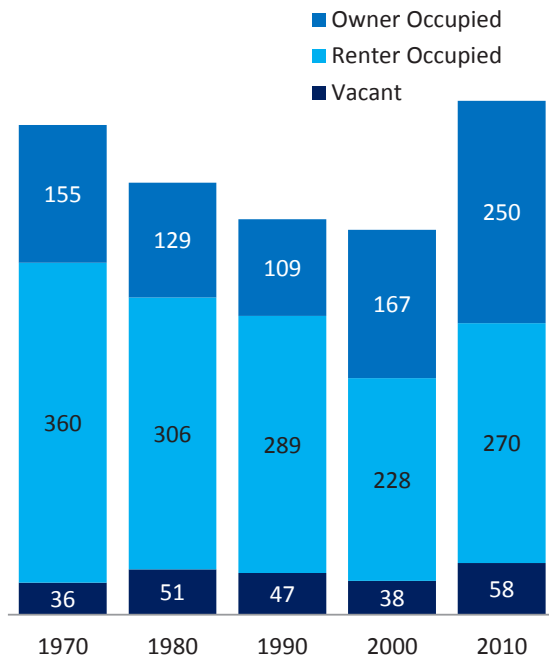
Note: When measuring the investment and impact of NiB in the early 2000s, the City and external researchers defined the Oregon Hill measurement area as the census tract that contained the target area. This profile also uses that definition, and the measurement area includes the following 2010 census tract: 51760041200.



The census tract containing Oregon Hill has consistently had more renter-occupied housing units than owner-occupied housing units (see Figure 3). Decennial data indicate that the tract's percentage of owner-occupied housing units at 43.3 percent was higher in 2010 than in past decennial years. The census tract had its highest percentage of renter-occupied housing units in 1970 at 65.3 percent. By 2010, the percentage of renter-occupied housing units had decreased to 46.7 percent.

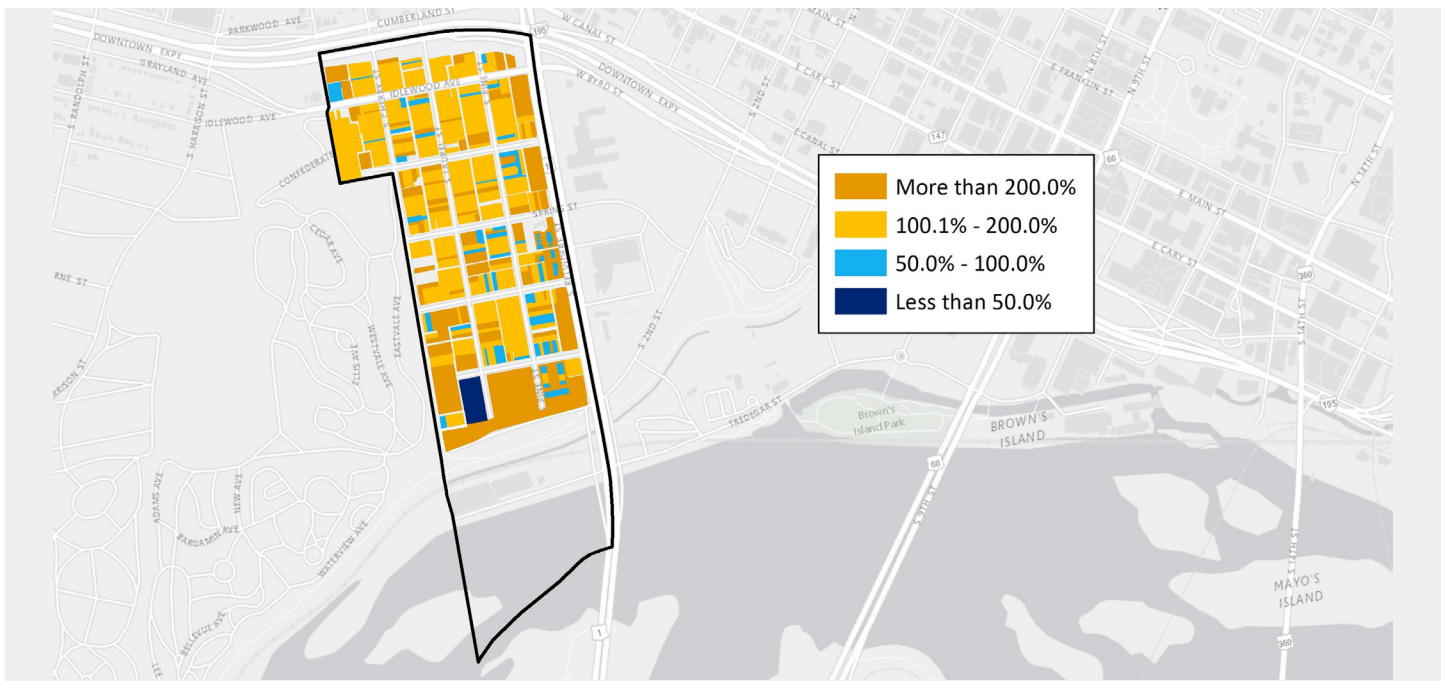
Of the 561 Oregon Hill residential land parcels that were assessed both in FY2006 — immediately following the official end of the NiB program — and in FY2016, 464 (82.7 percent) experienced an increase in nominal assessment value (see Map 2). Of these, 134 parcels (23.9 percent) more than doubled their 2006 assessed value by 2016. One parcel (0.2 percent) experienced no change in nominal assessment value over the 10 year time period and 96 parcels (17.1 percent) had a lower nominal dollar value in FY2016 than in FY2006.

Figure 3: Housing Occupancy in Oregon Hill's Surrounding Census Tract, 1970-2010



Source: GeoLytics, Neighborhood Change Database (1970-2010).

Map 2: 2016 Assessment Value as a Percent of 2006 Assessment Value in Oregon Hill



Source: City of Richmond Assessment Data, FY2006-FY2016.

INVESTMENT AFTER NEIGHBORHOODS IN BLOOM

Public Investment

After NiB officially ended, data from the City's Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Reports (CAPERs) from FY2006 to FY2014 indicate that the City did not continue to invest Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) funding in the neighborhood.

Nonprofit Investment

The nonprofit organizations operating in Oregon Hill during NiB included the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA), the Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Oregon Hill Home Improvement Council. After the culmination of NiB, sales and building permit data from the City indicate that nonprofit development organizations did not make additional place-based investments in the neighborhood.

As of 2016, 3.9 percent of the parcels in the Oregon Hill NiB target area were vacant, which is 8.4 percentage points lower than the overall vacancy rate in the City. The 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates indicate that 46.9 percent of residents in the census tract containing the Oregon Hill target area are housing-cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs. This figure is one percentage point above the 45.4 percent of housing cost-burdened residents in the City as a whole.

Cover photo by Emily Wavering

Additional Sources: [U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, "Oregon Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places Registration Form" \(February 5, 1991\).](#)

1 The American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Estimates for the City indicate a vacancy rate of 12.3 percent.

According to the 2015 ACS 5-year estimates, the census tract that contains the Oregon Hill target area has a median family income of \$78,523 and a poverty rate of 13.2 percent. By comparison, the City has a median family income of \$50,307 and a poverty rate of 19.3 percent.

CONTINUING TO BLOOM: OREGON HILL TODAY

Oregon Hill's location and mixed income housing opportunities encouraged steady growth after NiB began in 1999. Restaurants, corner shops, and a few start-ups found a home in Oregon Hill after the economic downturn of 2008. The area is attracting private investment for housing development and rehabilitation, and the Oregon Hill Neighborhood Association (OHNA) actively engages developers to ensure new or renovated housing will maintain the neighborhood's historic character.

In 2012, a private developer proposed converting an abandoned commercial building into 24 high-end apartments. OHNA initially opposed the plan, citing residents' apprehension of potential student tenants from nearby VCU. By 2013, the developer and OHNA agreed on a revised plan to create a 12-unit apartment complex with policies restricting college student rental, and to construct a single family home on an adjacent lot. The resulting apartment building, Victory Lofts, began leasing in January 2014.

2 The share of the population that is housing-cost burdened may be a function of housing supply, housing prices, household incomes and personal preferences.

3 [David Larter, "Victory for Oregon Hill apartments plan," Richmond BizSense \(January 8, 2013\).](#)

