

Victoria Glasgow

Final Exam

PUBP 500-001

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Evaluation of the Janus Project

The Janus Project is a public-private solution addressing limited affordable housing within Washington, D.C. While it presents eye-opening statistics and highlights how new policies are eminently needed, the model needs adjusting before it can be viable. Further analysis of this policy proposal has yielded three revision recommendations:

1) Feasibility: Better Understanding of Zoning Processes Needed

The proposal's greatest weakness is that it is built on an abstract concept of land-use policy. Thrice the writers state that Janus will "lobby for mixed-use": nowhere do they demonstrate that the landowner or developer will need to apply for a rezoning, nor do they identify who will instigate this process. Rezonings are either approved or denied by Council vote after a public hearing, and in stating that "it shouldn't be too difficult to receive support" for mixed-use development, the authors underestimate the fervency of neighbors near proposed affordable housing despite its apparent benefits. Janus could ask the District to amend its comprehensive plan to include stronger statements supporting this policy, which would make Council more likely to approve the petition regardless of public opposition, yet such a change would take years to transpire even if successful.

Authors omitted crucial development standards that affect their project such as Floor-Area Ratios. Researching D.C.'s zoning requirements would protect Janus from any rude surprises when they attempt to get their plans approved. The project proposes a 5-story model that can be scaled up to 10, yet most mixed-use zonings in D.C. have a height limit of 40-55 feet. Unless the grocery store is underground, Janus' proposal cannot exist without amending D.C.'s Zoning Ordinance. It is thus recommended that Janus works with planners to create a flexible model that would apply to each of D.C.'s different mixed-use neighborhoods then revise their proposal accordingly. Janus should also reach out to nearby residents before projects are started: building relationships will reduce the likelihood of NIMBY-ism emerging in and affecting the outcome of public hearings.

2) Economics: Ensuring Financial Incentives for a Sustainable Program¹

The report mentions that D.C. will fund the purchase of buildings or land: it is unclear whether the District would title the land to a developer, charge rent, or merely allow for work to be done on public property. In all three instances, the means for adequate incentivization is suspect. Landlords must receive enough income to maintain the building and make a living, otherwise they will abandon units due to financial losses (68). Grocery stores and social facilities are not the most lucrative commercial uses: building owners may find that these rents do not make the Janus model solvent. Additionally, if D.C. purchases land on behalf of a private entity, it might disincentivize other developers from building new units (70). The report also mentions that tenants would have the flexibility to move between floors, but removing the element of housing gridlock may invariably reduce stability for landlords (71).

¹ Miller, R. L. R., Benjamin, D. K., & North, D. C. (2018). *The Economics of Public Issues* (20th ed.). Pearson.

A more efficient use of resources would be increasing the overall housing stock and thus lowering rents across the board (69), but rather than use this approach, Janus can include luxury units in their model. This would supplement revenues and give other developers more incentive to follow suit. Janus plans to promote opportunity zones, yet the benefits may not offset costs: instead, Janus could help developers navigate bureaucracy during the project's entirety. Fewer maintenance headaches mean fewer hurdles for investors and may be an aspect that convinces ambivalent investors.

3) **Community: Resident Participation Makes for Lasting Success²**

Janus is encouraged to incorporate Community-Based Participatory Research in its final proposal. Affordable housing projects that neglect to utilize stakeholder input often fail because they do not consider resident needs. Researchers may find that residents would rather have something other than grocery on the first floor, perceive social hierarchy in how the floors are stacked by % AMI, are willing to pay higher rents for the option to choose their neighbors, or have a policy-changing opinion regarding luxury units that Janus did not foresee.

Using CBPR for Janus will ensure appropriate implementation and continuation of this policy by identifying problems and desires known only to residents before the project is built (11). Additionally, resident input will be crucial when gathering data to measure outcomes of the very first project: researchers can identify pitfalls in real time and resolve problems before they snowball into dilapidation.

As a final yet preeminent note, Janus should be wary of how it recruits minorities for its project. Public housing was once a way to segregate “undesirables” from the community at large. People who remember these instances may misinterpret Janus’ attempt at inclusivity. Residents have deep community knowledge that observers cannot glean (10), yet this means they may also have shared memories outsiders are not sensitive to.

² PolicyLink et al. (n.d). Promoting Healthy Public Policy through Community-Based Participatory Research: Ten Case Studies. https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CBPR_PromotingHealthyPublicPolicy_final.pdf