Episode 4 final

April Hatfield: My name is April Hatfield. I am a resident of Grandy Village. I have been in Grandy Village now, ooh, for almost 10 years. I've been in this particular home for seven, and I have three children. You know, everybody was really excited because they were like, 'Ooh, you have central AC,' (laughing) and I was like, 'Ooh, that's not, like, the norm?'

Adrian: Grandy Village is a public housing community in Norfolk, sandwiched between Highway 2 64 and the Elizabeth River. It's a 10 minute drive east from downtown Norfolk.

April Hatfield: I had never even considered moving over here, but when I moved back from Georgia, [coughs] I was looking for somewhere to move to and one of my church members at the time worked for the Housing Authority. And she was telling me, she said, 'Look, I know you don't really want to live in public housing.' She said, 'But Grandy Village is [00:01:00] really getting ready to build up.' She said, 'They've made a lot of changes,' and she said 'it's becoming a workforce community.' So that's how I kind of ended up over here.

Adrian: Though Grandy Village is public housing owned and operated by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, some of the units are market rate rent-- meaning just regular, rentable apartments, not subsidized. Some units in Grandy Village have a higher income requirement than other public housing in Norfolk, which is what April referred to when she said it was a workforce community. Grandy Village is in an area called Chesterfield Heights.

In 2020, Chesterfield Heights and its neighbor Grandy Village were 75 and 100% African American, respectively. It's a 30% poverty rate over there, which is higher than the city's average by about half. Property values are relatively low compared to the rest of the city, but that is sure to [00:02:00] change at the completion of the Ohio Creek Watershed project.

The Ohio Creek project is one of three large scale infrastructure projects Norfolk has invested in to mitigate the effects of sea level rise. The first one was the St. Paul's Transformation, which we talked about in Episode Three. The other big one is the Downtown Flood wall, which we'll explore next episode.
The Ohio Creek project aims to reduce flooding and improve public space in the Chesterfield Heights area. The overall plan includes a berm, like a big seven foot mound that keeps the water in the river and not in the street, as well as raised roads, a wetlands park, outdoor learning area, sports field playgrounds, and a natural shoreline.

[00:02:48] April Hatfield: I tell people all the time, oh, I have waterfront property. (small laugh) Um, cuz I can literally wake up in the morning in my bedroom and look over the trees almost into-- and see the Elizabeth River. I love my neighbors. That's one of the things, a couple of the things that I really kind of like about being here. The park area that they're building-- now that, I will say, is very nice. There's a trail to walk on. They, they have benches over there. They're gonna put grills over there.

[00:03:19] Adrian: Champions of the project support it as an example of green infrastructure: reducing flooding without using tons and tons of concrete, to support wetland ecosystems as well as human cohabitants. It also aims to connect the three neighborhoods to downtown with a waterside boardwalk. But the project may have some unintended consequences.

It's been under construction for years, which has caused some trouble for residents of Grandy Village. Some residents, like April, are concerned that the increase in property value resulting from the project will lead to them being priced out.

[00:03:57] April Hatfield: I don't know. I feel like there's gonna be some requirements and some things are gonna change that are gonna boot some people out of here. And I think that's unfortunate. If there's residents breaking the rules, then that's one thing, but to change like the income requirements or something like that to get people out, I don't think that's okay. Norfolk kind of has a history of that. So (uncomfortable laugh)

[00:04:22] Adrian: (background music) You're listening to Wading Between Two Titans, a limited podcast series from the Repair Lab about sea level rise, housing and the history of race in coastal Norfolk, Virginia. I'm Adrian Wood. Welcome to episode four, where we will explore the relationship between the dream (twinkling sound in background) of resilience and the realities of gentrification and sea-level rise.

'Resilience' is a word that means a lot of things to a lot of people. For the Ohio Creek project, resilience is a goal of making the neighborhood better able to deal with chronic flooding that otherwise would get worse due to sea
level rise. This is why the Ohio Creek project exists: to protect residents like April from rising seas.

The rate of sea level rise in Virginia is about double the national average. Because sea level is rising so much faster in Virginia, other cities in the US and even abroad are looking at Norfolk's response to model their own.

[00:05:31] Skip Stiles: So, Virginia has the highest rate of sea level rise on the East coast.

I'm Skip Stiles, Executive Director of Wetlands Watch, and we're a Norfolk based environmental group that works statewide to conserve and protect wetlands.

And since about 2007, we've been working on sea level rise.

[00:05:49] Adrian: Skip is a conservationist and an advocate. He's shown up in Norfolk and Hampton Roads again and again and again over the past few decades on local and [00:06:00] regional panels, committees, and boards for sea level rise response. Skip is also the kind of person who, in his free time, prints out flyers to stick on people's windshields to warn them to move their cars in advance of flood risky days.

[00:06:17] Skip Stiles: I mean this, this part, the southeastern part of Virginia is so flat that you can get flooding from tides when you don't expect it. The water will literally come up outta the ground. Or you can get it from rain. We've had about a 20% increase in rainfall intensity in Virginia over the last 20 years. So you can get flooded from above, below the side, whatever.

[00:06:39] Adrian: Water comes from all sides in Norfolk. The Chesapeake Bay area, including the Hampton Roads and great dismal swamp regions are special in that sea level rise is made worse by land subsidence. That's a geological way of saying the land is sinking.

Subsidence has to [00:07:00] do with centuries of pumping groundwater to support urban settlements. Subsidence is a few millimeters a year. Like, between one and three millimeters a year. So it's minuscule, but it's compounding. Meaning that it's expected that it will happen faster and faster over time because the land is sinking.

It means that sea level rise happens a little bit faster than it would otherwise. And it's because of subsidence that Virginia's facing sea level rise impacts faster
than anywhere else in the US. (soft synth pad in background with rhythmic shaker)

A 2017 report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicts that Norfolk may see up to seven feet of sea level rise between now and 2100. How tall are you? Not that tall. That prediction is based on a moderate estimate. A more extreme estimate would put sea level rise at 11 feet. That's higher than the first story of most buildings. Completely [00:08:00] underwater. (ascending arpeggio on synth in background)

[00:08:01] **Skip Stiles:** The wetlands are not gonna survive. Um, the current estimate by the state is that we'll lose about 90% of our tidal wetlands by 2080.

[00:08:14] **Adrian:** And what, what does that mean?

[00:08:17] **Skip Stiles:** Um, no more seafood. (small laugh) Um, , no more, uh, the wetlands also protect us from storm surges. They basically buffer against the waves that come in, and they also treat pollutants.

[00:08:31] **Adrian:** The pollution one is a real sleeper. The loss of that doesn't just mean polluted water. It means more greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, higher global temperatures, more melted ice in the Arctic, and yes, more sea level rise. So the wetlands that may protect Norfolk residents from sea level rise are also threatened by sea level rise. (ascending synth arpeggio in background)

We have already seen the effects of sea level [00:09:00] rise, and we will continue to see them not just in increasing coastal flooding, but in more intense and unpredictable hurricanes, cyclones, monsoons, and even tornadoes along the coasts. (gentle synth pad in background) Through Wetlands Watch, Skip worked on developing community-based resilience plans.

[00:09:19] **Skip Stiles:** So basically we were talking to local governments. At that point, our shrill message was, (in a falsetto) 'You gotta learn to adapt to sea level rise!'

(small laugh) One day, we were sitting around and we had one of those palm to forehead moments where you go, 'Wait a minute, what if the cities listened to us and actually adapt to sea level rise? There are no solutions on the table that we like.' They're all involving pouring a bazillion cubic yards of concrete along the shoreline. There's not a whole lot of nature-based adaptation.
Adrian: In 2015, Wetlands Watch started working on a resilience design specifically for Chesterfield Heights and the surrounding area.

Skip Stiles: We said, 'Okay, we're gonna flood proof this community, but here's the deal. You've got to, um, preserve or expand the ecosystem services,' the ecosystem services being the good things that the wetlands do and the natural open area. So you can't just pave this place. We began early on trying to figure out how do we allow the shoreline to remain natural instead of blocked off by rocks or concrete.

Adrian: Wetlands Watch went in heavy on the community engagement, according to Skip, doing interviews and a community profile. They consulted with the Civic League, a council of neighborhood representatives. Residents wanted to be able to see the water from their house and go fishing, but didn't wanna be at risk of having the water come into their living rooms. Wetlands Watch built those desires into their design.

The design was adapted by the City, who submitted it to a National Disaster Resilience Competition sponsored by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD. This design became the Ohio Creek Watershed Project, the same resilience project that affects Chesterfield Heights and Grandy Village that we introduced at the beginning of the episode. (descending arpeggio on woodblocks accompanied by rhythmic shaker)

In 2017, when the grant was awarded by HUD, Skip and Wetlands Watch became much less involved in the project as it transitioned from dream to funding and construction reality. The City, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and a few other nonprofits became the primary drivers. They led nine community sessions in Chesterfield Heights in 2017, with the aim of involving residents in the project.

The Ohio Creek Watershed Project really began as a dream (twinkling in background) of a flooding resiliency project that genuinely aimed to center impacted communities while protecting fragile wetland ecosystems.

According to the City of Norfolk website, the project meets the city's three point resiliency strategy goals.

One. Design a coastal community able to deal with future floods.

Two. Create economic opportunity.
Three. Connect communities, strengthen neighborhoods, and deconcentrate poverty. We talked a lot about that last one in episode three. It's a strategy intended to build mixed income neighborhoods. But instead, it often disperses poor people and unravels communities.

(crunchy footsteps in background)

[00:12:42] **Adrian:** Those are the goals. On the ground, things look different.

(From field recording in background) This is Grandy Village. There's like a ton of, uh, construction going on.

(narrating) The Ohio Creek Watershed project has been under construction for several years. As I walked from my car to April's house, I had to pass through a large area under construction for the project.

(from fieldin recording, footsteps crunching) You have to like walk through a construction site to get there. (sounds of construction backup beeps, machinery)

(narrating) I walked along a road that had been closed to cars instead of tarmac pavement. It was blanketed with loose dirt, about a foot deep. Since that road was closed this past spring, there's only one way in and out of Grandy Village by car for the almost 200 people who live there. It's a narrow road and it wasn't designed for two-way traffic.

[00:13:39] **April Hatfield:** I don't really feel like there's ever been really a regard for the residents as far as the process is concerned. You know, there were some times where there was so much dirt caked up, especially after it rain, to where people who were parked on the street could not get their cars out of the mud. It was kind of bad.

[00:13:58] **Adrian:** Construction on the Ohio Creek project has created issues for the residents on a scale of kind of a hassle to life threatening.

[00:14:07] **April Hatfield:** I remember one day I was about two hours late for work because it was completely blocked off. No one could get out of the neighborhood cuz there was no other exit and there was a wreck.

There have been two different times where in the middle of the night, like 10 o'clock one night, and maybe the next time it had to be about midnight, where I had to park my car at the school at Chesterfield and walk through the path to get to my house because there was no other entrance into the neighborhood.
It's not too far. It's probably about four or five minutes, which is not too bad, but in the dark, the path is not lit and it's kind of like a dirt path that they just kind of created in the construction.

[00:14:46] **Adrian:** Some of April's neighbors and Grandy Village were so disturbed by the dangerous traffic pattern, they made time to give public comment at city council meetings.

[00:14:57] **Ashley Hobbes:** My name is Ashley Hobbes. I'm a resident of Grandy Village. Um, I'm here this evening because ever since the Ohio Creek project has started, Grandy turned into a one way in one way out neighborhood. I live basically at the entrance of Grandy.

Now, there has been three very, very bad car accidents right in front of my house. My daughter is deaf. She's legally blind, and she's disabled. I have to put her in and out my van. Cars come speeding past me. I almost got hit a few times trying to put her in the car. Four of our, my neighbor's cars were all hit, and my daughter's nurse's car was totaled.

When I report them, I requested for speed pumps to bumps put in Grandy. The City of Norfolk tells me. That's the NR H A's responsibility. NRHA tells me that it's a City of Norfolk responsibility because (fading out)

[00:15:00] **Adrian:** The Ohio Creek Watershed project wasn't always so aloof. When the City of Norfolk first received funding from HUD for the project in 2017, one of their first steps was community engagement and feedback sessions. But maybe they weren't as accessible as they could have been.

(From interview tape) **What was your participation like in the planning process?**

[00:16:30] **April Hatfield:** Zero to none. They decided, and then we had a meeting so they could tell us, Hey, this is what, this is what's happening.
Adrian: April and her neighbors are feeling the distance from decision making that affects them. This distance deepens as the bureaucracies of City, Housing Authority, developer and construction company grow.

April Hatfield: When they came in and they bought the company that is responsible for the project and they were explaining it, it wasn't easy to understand. To me, they explained it as if they were talking to their colleagues, you know, and not to a group of people who know nothing about flooding or, you know, or architecture or any of that type, you know. All of the technical terms and the schematics and, yeah, that doesn't do anything for us. Like, what is gonna happen, you know, for us, or to us, with this project? (ominous synthsq)

Adrian: Ground was first broken for the project in January, 2020. At that time, it was scheduled to be finished in Fall 2022. Now that it's January, 2023, it seems like the end date keeps getting moved further and further back.

April Hatfield: Obviously, the timeline keeps extending. I wish that the communication was definitely more frequent. It would be nice if the same group of contractors who came in to give us this big grand explanation would come in every now and then and say, 'Okay, this is what the progress is.' Or, 'We're sorry about the delays,' or anything. Just something. To, honestly, to admit that this has really taken, one, longer than you guys imagined, and that it's okay to admit to the residents that, like, you made a mistake, or that things aren't going the way that you thought they would go. (descending woodblock riff)

Skip Stiles: While it's a groundbreaking dream of a project for Norfolk, the reality of the Ohio Creek project raises some important concerns about who it's for and who will benefit. All of the inconveniences and slowdowns have led April to wonder, why is this happening the way that it is? Why are we being treated like means to an end?

All that to say, what even is the end goal? If it's resilience, what does that word mean? And who gets to define it?

Unknown 1: We throw that term out loosely. Um, but it really needs to be defined in how each one of those localities, how they apply resiliency and how they measure it.
Adrian: This is from the Virginia Joint Subcommittee on Sea Level Rise, a group made up of state delegates and state senators that met a number of times in 2021 to produce some recommendations and publish a statewide Climate Resilience Master Plan.

Unknown 1: Delegate Keam.

Keam: Uh, Mr. Chair. The definition of resiliency that you use in your proposed Title XV, uh, where is that language from?

Unknown 1: That's been circulated through the engineering communities. A transportation organization, VDOT, specifically. They have a definition of resiliency as well. Um, I think coming up with a definition that I think everyone agrees on, I think is something that would be beneficial going forward.

Keam: Have we not defined resiliency before? I just assumed we did. (shakers in background)

Unknown 1: There's no overall definition of resilience, so, and (fading out)

Adrian: they didn't define it yet. Resiliency remains an ambiguous shapeshifting goal, but one still featured prominently in the city budget and the Vision 2100. It means different things in different places. For the Ohio Creek project, definitely it means some degree of flood proofing. But the danger of aspiring to a dream so amorphous is that anyone can bend the word resilience to mean what they want it to mean and use it to shape reality to their own desires. (slow snare beat in background with light synth pad)

The City of Norfolk and a handful of local and state groups and nonprofits collaborated on the Ohio Creek project. All of them often point to it as an example of an equitable protection plan that centers a predominantly Black area, Chesterfield Heights, and its neighboring Grandy Village. Ironically though, the project also has the unintended consequence of making the area more gentrifiable.

As the Chesterfield Heights area gets surrounded by more and more amenities--the park, the pier, the grills--the value of the land by square foot will increase. If you're a renter there, your rent will skyrocket. But if you're a homeowner, this seems good, right? This kind of question came up in a city council meeting before the project even broke ground, in January, 2018.
[00:21:38] **Paul Riddick:** I don't know whether, uh, the entire community. Is embracing this. Uh, I see the need for it. But (fades out)

[00:21:47] **Adrian:** That's city council member, Paul Riddick, now retired.

[00:21:51] **Andria McClellan:** So the, you said there have been nine community meetings since this summer? (fading out)

[00:21:55] **Adrian:** That's city council member, Andria McClellan.

[00:21:58] **Andria McClellan:** And I don't know, um, the history like you do, Mr. Riddick, but it seems like this would be an improvement to their property values.

[00:22:04] **Paul Riddick:** Well, it's a little, little bit more deeper than that.

[00:22:07] **Andria McClellan:** Okay.

[00:22:07] **Paul Riddick:** Uh, and you know, I just wonder. (fading out)

[00:22:10] **Adrian:** Like Mr. Riddick said there, it's a little more complicated than that. Because it was historically disinvested in, property values in this area are relatively low compared to the rest of the city. Increasing property values means making this area a future target of investment. It's similar to a process we observed happening across the river in Berkley in episode two. (light background synth music)

Considering the housing crisis in Norfolk right now, and patterns that we've seen play out in other cities, gentrification of the Chesterfield Heights area following completion of the Ohio Creek Watershed Project seems kind of likely.

That kind of process may look a little different for Grandy Village since it's owned by the N R H A. But the end effect of displacement would be similar.

This is something that's been weighing on April Hatfield of Grandy Village. Here she is talking about the plans for the finished project.

[00:23:18] **April Hatfield:** It looks beautiful. I mean, the way we're on the water and the way that you can even go down like the pier
Adrian: As construction has drawn on and on and caused inconveniences, April wonders if current residents are really the intended recipients of all the benefits of the project.

April Hatfield: I don't know. I feel like there's gonna be some requirements and some things are gonna change that are gonna boot some people out of here. To change like the income requirements or something like that to get people out. I don't think that's okay. Norfolk kind of has a history of that. So (laughing uncomfortably) yeah.

Adrian: For April, it seems like there's two very closely aligned fears. One is that the residents of subsidized housing in Grandy Village might get priced out after an income requirement hike. The minimum requirement could get raised by the N R H A , and then the folks who couldn't meet it would be forced out.

April's other fear has to do with those market rate apartments in Grandy Village. They're there with the intent of making it a mixed income community. Again, with the goal of deconcentrating poverty.

April Hatfield: And I'm not opposed to to mixed neighborhoods, to mix races, to mix incomes, but it should be just that. It should be mixed. And it should not be that you are displacing someone else because of the way you want something to look.

Adrian: April is worried that she and the other residents of Grandy Village are being treated as collateral damage while the City invests in raising the neighborhood's property value, making those market rate apartments and the surrounding area go up in rent.

Andrew Kahrl: I think those fears are very well grounded.

My name is Andrew Kahrl. I'm a professor of History and African American Studies here at the University of Virginia.

Adrian: Andrew is also a co-director of the Repair Lab and our resident expert on coastal and waterfront real estate development in the US. Andrew told me about how waterfronts on the East Coast, especially in the South, have been engineered through public works for white residents starting in the 1900s.
Andrew Kahrl: For centuries, these have been seen as places that were not suitable for real estate development. In the beginning of the 20th century, you see massive amounts of public investment in stabilizing shorelines, all in the interest of growing these areas' housing markets.

Adrian: Andrew helped me understand the relationship between private investment and the form of home ownership, and public investment in the form of waterfront resilience projects.

Andrew Kahrl: Thing is, is that much of that private development is being made possible by massive amounts of public investment. Public is funneling all this money into private developers' hands. Ultimately, the end result is predictably and inevitably going to raise costs of housing. That's the intended result of this.

Adrian: When housing costs go up, communities change. And often it's communities of color that pay the price. What Andrew said reminded me of an observation Mr. Riddick made about how Chesterfield Heights is changing.

Paul Riddick: But now every time a home is sold over there, somebody white coming back.

Whites moved out of there. But now, as homes are being sold there, there are whites coming back to the uh, waterfront property.

Adrian: It's remarkably similar to what Andrew was saying went down in the early 1900s, where public funding went to stabilizing beaches to build up waterfront property. In the same vein, publicly funded efforts like the Ohio Creek Watershed Project contribute to the resilience of the neighborhood, but that also makes it eligible for a massive turnover on the housing market, as families who have been there for generations get priced out and higher bidders by their way in.

Paul Riddick: I see it changing. You know, it used to be all white. It used to be all white. And with our light rail-- we have a stop that's three or four blocks from Grandy Village.

Adrian: The light rail is public transportation that connects Norfolk to Virginia Beach.

Paul Riddick: One day, I see a lot of the people that live in Virginia Beach tired of getting in that traffic. And they're gonna start-- some of --you
have some housing in Grandy Village that has market rent. So I can see, you know, that area gradually changing to a market rent community dominated by whites. (synth chords)

00:28:00 Adrian: Now that Black people have acclaimed to desirable waterfront real estate, it is threatened to be torn away by market forces and real estate speculation.

00:28:13 April Hatfield: If I'm honest, I am a little bit worried that once they get this the way they want it

00:28:19 Adrian: Here, April is talking about the city and the N R H A

00:28:23 April Hatfield: That (haltingly) the, a lot of the residents (in a sudden rush) are not gonna be able to live over here anymore. I feel like there's going to be some type of... buffoonery, dat they're gonna come up with that is going to almost resemble the St. Paul's Quadrant. Only, there's nothing to rebuild because these are brand new. But I think they're going to probably change some of the requirements to live out here. That is going to probably force a lot of the residents out. In an effort to change this neighborhood to what they want it to look like. (quiet synth chords)

00:29:05 Adrian: Considering the ground we've covered in the past three episodes, from the debacle of redlining to the removal of Black residents from the St. Paul's area through redevelopment, April's fears are rooted in Norfolk's historical reality. Cities all over the country have been shaped in similar ways to prioritize real estate investment over people.

For example, it's a similar story with Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood, a high elevation area that's been rapidly gentrified as wealthy white residents seek higher ground. Or in New Orleans, where the City used the disaster of Hurricane Katrina to shut down public housing that wasn't even damaged by the storm.

Climate gentrification patterns like this can be disrupted, but the best solutions will always come from the communities who are most affected. In episode five, (background music begins -- quiet synth chords and a simple beat) we'll focus on one proposed solution to the problems we've investigated over the past four episodes. It's a proposal that could intervene in inequitable market forces to make housing more accessible and sustainable to Norfolk's residents of color.
Kim Sudderth: Well, this started. It started as a wonder. I just wondered, how does climate change, and specifically in Norfolk, flooding--how that intersects with our current housing crisis.

Vincent Hodges: The tenant base that I work with are economically transitioning folks. A program here that's actually working, that we can actually get and get into some homes? Man, that would be fantastic.

(background beat with shakers)

Adrian: Follow us on Twitter. At the repair lab or find us online at twotitans.org. [00:31:00]

This episode was written, recorded, produced, edited, mixed, mastered, and hosted by me. Adrian Wood.

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Consultation and visioning with 2022 practitioner in residence, Kim Sudderth.

The Repair Lab is part of the Karsh Institute of Democracy at the University of Virginia. Our co-directors are Kimberly Fields, Andrew Kahr1 Sarah Milov and Sally Pusede. Our post-doctorate research associate is Jonna Yarrington. Transcriptions of this and all episodes are available on our website at twotitans.org

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