



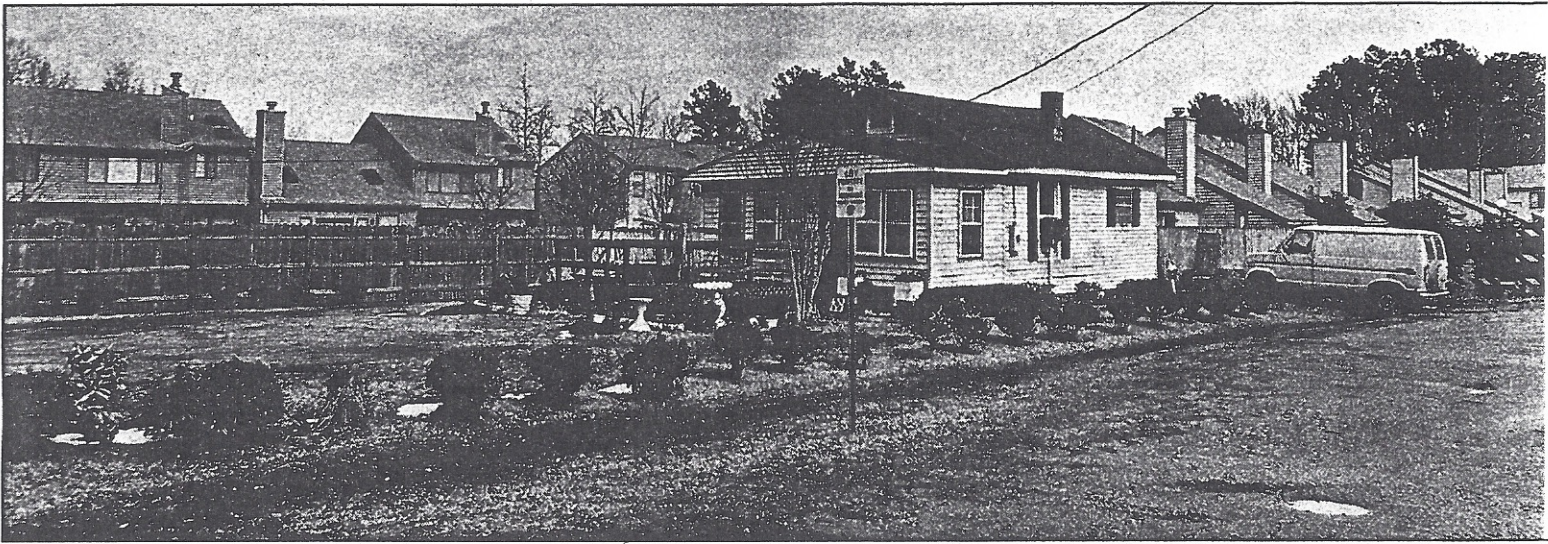
Today's story is the first of 10 neighborhood profiles in Virginia Beach

TARGETED FOR CHANGE

Seatack was one of 12 neighborhoods identified 20 years ago as pockets of poverty in need of help. Two decades

later, residents such as Sadie Shaw say redevelopment efforts have been a blessing and a curse.

PAGE 14



Staff photos, including color cover, by DAVID B. HOLLINGSWORTH

Hundreds of white residents have been attracted to new developments, which are encroaching on older homes in the formerly all-black neighborhood of Seatack.

PROGRESS QUESTIONED

Some Seatack residents say city has ulterior motives in its efforts to modernize this Oceanfront area.

BY BILL REED
STAFF WRITER

SUSPICION and distrust. The words best describe the feeling harbored by many who live in Seatack, a sprawling, predominantly black, urban-rural enclave snuggled next to the resort Oceanfront that encompasses 21 square miles of prime land.

Since 1975, the community has been undergoing a steady transformation, with the aid of \$8.9 million from the federal Housing and Community Development Act. The object was to provide the 938 residents of Seatack with improved housing and a better quality of life.

To do this, the city installed miles of sewer and water lines, improved drainage and paved wider streets. It also funneled millions of dollars in low-interest loans to Seatack residents to rehabilitate substandard housing.

Seatack was the largest of the city's 12 so-called "Target Neighborhoods," an area populated largely by the descendants of slaves and tenant farmers, who tilled the land bordering what is now Oceana Naval Air Station.

When the money began pouring in to fix up their streets and



- 1 Burton Station
- 2 Newsome Farm
- 3 Lake Smith
- 4 Reedtown
- 5 Atlantic Park
- 6 Seatack
- 7 Queen City
- 8 New Light
- 9 Gracetown
- 10 Mill Dam
- 11 Beechwood
- 12 Doyletown

homes, longtime residents like Sadie Shaw and Susie Whitehurst viewed it with mixed feelings.

So did Elbert Parker and some of his Carver Avenue neighbors.

On one hand, all of them saw it as a boon to low- and middle-income residents who relied on pit privies for home sanitation and lived in leaky, drafty homes bordering unpaved and unlit streets.

On the other, they viewed Uncle

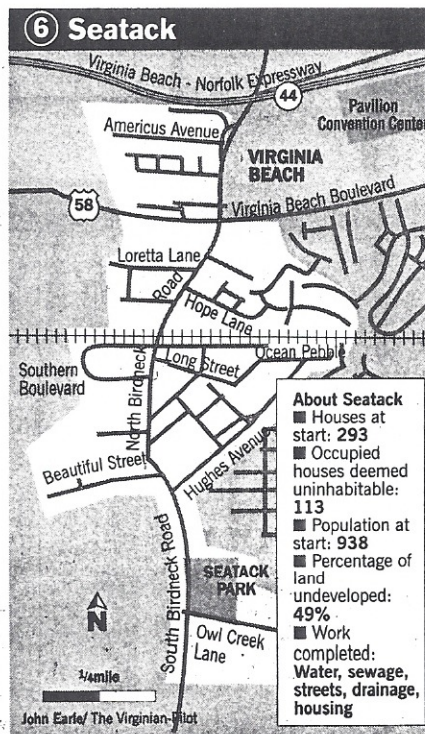
Sam's helping hand as a tool of the city's white power structure to force them from their homes to make room for commercial and multi-family residential development.

Both visions, it has turned out, have come to pass in Seatack.

Paved streets with curbs and gutters bordered by rows of modest brick and framed homes — many of them recently spruced up

with vinyl siding and new driveways — are now the norm. The homes are served by sewer and water lines and are illuminated by street lights.

But the improvements have attracted the development of strip commercial development such as the Birdneck Community Shops and the Jack Rabbit storage complex at Birdneck Road and Norfolk Avenue.



This is the first of 10 profiles on the city's Target Neighborhoods. **Next:** A look at Gracetown in Wednesday's Beacon. **Also:** See related story by staff writer Karen Weintraub in today's Virginian-Pilot.

And on Carver Avenue, crime has become a constant companion for Parker and his neighbors. It stems from droves of youths who loiter at curbside, within a stone's throw of the often troubled Friendship Village housing complex.

At a meeting at Parker's house on a late fall evening, a stocky man with a fringe of beard and the arms of a blacksmith angrily protested the city's seeming indifference to the neighborhood.

"They don't do what they're supposed to do like they would in a white neighborhood," said the man, who declined to reveal his name. "Like they would in Birdneck Point or Bay Colony."

Added Parker: "The only time the police come down here is when somebody calls them. They killed a guy in my back yard about two years ago and the police came up here and woke me up."

Please see following page

Continued from previous page

Parker's anonymous and irate guest declared that the federal money used to underwrite target neighborhood improvements was nothing more than a ploy by greedy developers to push poor blacks out of areas like Carver Avenue, which is a block south of Seatack Elementary School.

"This is prime land, and they want to push us out."

In a section of Seatack bracketing Birdneck Road and Norfolk Avenue, Sadie Shaw, harbors similar feelings.

In her 70s and a retired English teacher from the Virginia Beach school system, Shaw was born in Seatack and voices both faint praise and hostility for the government-sponsored renovations.

"I said there are advantages and disadvantages," she said. "The advantage to the city is that it gets more revenue. The disadvantage is that it's squeezing me out of my home."

She and her husband, Cylester, have lived at their Norfolk Avenue address for 50 years. Their brick and frame home recently was moved to the back of their once spacious and rectangular lot to make room for the widening of Norfolk Avenue. But Sadie Shaw fears that the city has further designs on her property for additional road improvements.

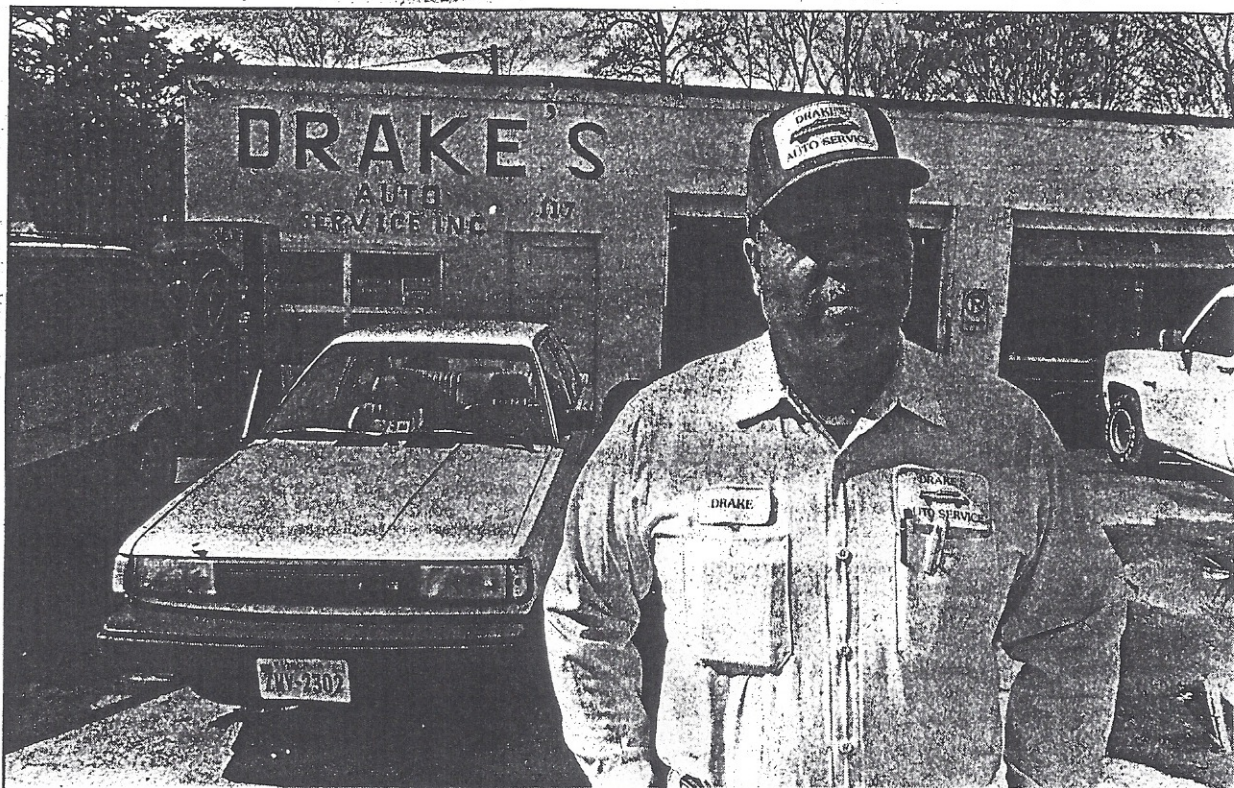
"If it comes east of Burfoot Avenue and if they widen Norfolk Avenue to four lanes, it'll come right through my living room — then where will I go?" she asked.

The normally assertive Whitehurst, in her 40s and president of the Seatack and Atlantic Park Civic League, is surprisingly upbeat about the improvements.

"If I evaluate the whole project, I would say it's a positive thing and I would say that it really was needed," she said. "But there are some negative points."

One of them, she and Seatack neighbor Rosa Norman agree, has been the foot-dragging by city officials in building a new Seatack Community Center, complete with indoor pool, gymnasium and locker rooms. Although not part of the Target Neighborhood program, they view a new center as essential to upgrading the quality of life in Seatack.

Another negative has been the



Wallace Drake, the burly owner of Drake's Garage on Birdneck Road at Norfolk Avenue for the past 15 years, says his outlook about the changing of the community is tempered by a businessman's pragmatism. "I'll sell," he says. "But I can wait 'til I get the price I want."

Staff photos by DAVID B. HOLLINGSWORTH

ON THE COVER

"I said there are advantages and disadvantages. The advantage to the city is that it gets more revenue. The disadvantage is that it's squeezing me out of my home."

— Sadie Shaw, Seatack resident pictured on the cover

gradual departure of younger generations of old Seatack families to newer, more modern areas of the city.

Still another, Shaw and Whitehurst said, is the encroachment of commercial and residential growth.

Where once the community was all black and stretched all the way to the oceanfront, it now is cut off from the east by apartment, condominium and single-family housing developments.

These relatively new developments have names like Rudee Villas, Sand Pebbles and Salt Marsh Point and they have attracted hundreds of white residents, diluting Seatack's racial makeup.

"Virginia Beach is on the Atlantic Ocean and if it's going to expand they can't go east or they can't go north or south, so they're going to go west and wipe us out," Shaw said.

ment with apparent detachment.

Drake remembers setting up shop on his corner lot when Birdneck Road was nothing but a winding two-lane road that gave commuters a back door entrance to the Oceana Naval Air Station. At the time, a neighborhood grocery operated across the street next to a fuel oil company storage yard.

"There used to be a Sparrow's Grocery over there," he said, pointing to the east side of Birdneck Road now occupied by the Birdneck Community Shops. "And the oil company used to park its trucks over there."

Soon Birdneck Road will be a four-lane thoroughfare, Drake explained. It will be designed to divert increasing volumes of tourist traffic from the Virginia Beach-Norfolk Expressway exit to General Booth Boulevard and the Oceanfront.

The road widening is making

Drake's cluttered corner lot more attractive to potential commercial buyers, along with the adjacent half-acre lot that he owns.

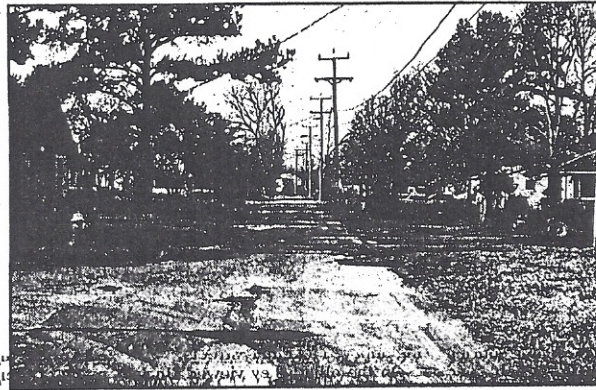
"I'll sell," said Drake, who also serves as an assistant pastor at the nearby Mount Olive Baptist Church and is an active booster of community voter registration activities. "But I can wait 'til I get the price I want."

If Drake sells his business, it will be another Seatack landmark that will fall to the march of progress. "They used to have a fire station over there," he said, nodding southward. "And that small community center over there is supposed to be torn down."

Across the street from Drake's Garage is the small frame house of Nelson G. Davis. Davis' family has occupied the home for 75 years,

Please see following page

Some Seatack residents rap city officials for foot-dragging in turning the Seatack Community Center into a modern recreation center, complete with indoor pool, gymnasium and locker rooms.



This view of Southern Boulevard looking west toward Birdneck Road, near Buford Avenue, was part of the Phase I redevelopment of Seatack.

Photo courtesy of City of Virginia Beach