

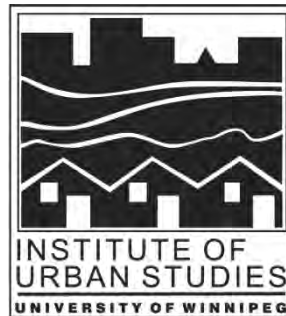
# **Gentrification and Public Service Demand**

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**by Robert Buchan  
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**The Institute of Urban Studies**





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**FOR INFORMATION:**

***The Institute of Urban Studies***

The University of Winnipeg  
599 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg  
phone: 204.982.1140  
fax: 204.943.4695  
general email: [ius@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:ius@uwinnipeg.ca)

*Mailing Address:*

***The Institute of Urban Studies***

The University of Winnipeg  
515 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9

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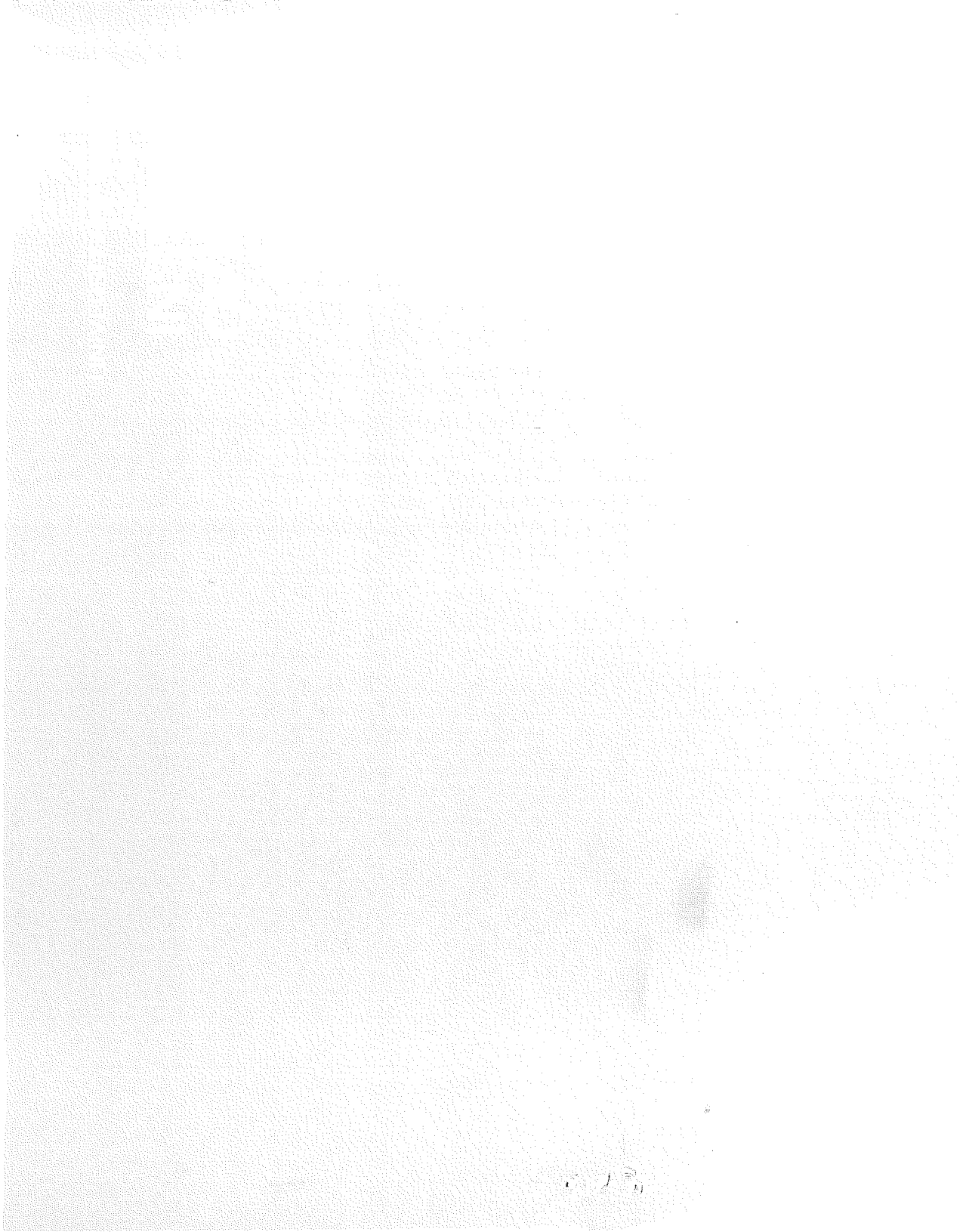
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GENTRIFICATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE DEMAND

ROBERT BUCHAN



Robert Buchan

School of Community and Regional Planning:

The University of British Columbia

GENTRIFICATION AND

PUBLIC SERVICE DEMAND

Although much has been written about gentrification, scant attention has been paid to its potential impact on neighbourhood based public service demand. Clay (1979) and Weiler (as quoted in Laska and Spain, 1980), however, have suggested that the gentrifiers may demand costly public service improvements, such as parks, community centres, and public health clinics, which will likely exceed the increased tax revenue produced by upgrading. The only empirical work until now which has addressed the question of how gentrification affects public service demand was Laska and Spain's study of twelve gentrifying neighbourhoods in New Orleans. They found that the 'gentrifiers' do not pose major new demands, but rather add support to the demands of the traditional city residents. The research reported here differs from Laska and Spain's in three important ways: 1) whereas they compared the gentrifier's demands with a city-wide and a nation-wide sample, this study compares the gentrifier's demands with those of the traditional inner-city lower-income residents, and, therefore, is able to detect changes in inner-city neighbourhood public service demand; 2) whereas they only examined the use of a few neighbourhood based services, this study examines 19 types; and, 3) whereas they examined an American city, this study uses a Canadian city, Vancouver.

Because it is not clear how gentrification affects public service demand, urban policy makers are unable to plan for changes in demand. Knowing what will be demanded could facilitate efficient delivery of new services and efficient closure of costly underused services. Moreover, knowing what will be demanded may help decision makers arrive at better informed decisions. They will, for example, have a better idea of the probable impacts of a pro-gentrification policy and their implications for city revenue.

This study operationally defines gentrification as a private market process by which older, often rundown inner-city neighbourhoods incur a socio-economic and often physical upgrading. The process begins with immigrating singles, young couples, and young families who have professional, teaching, and arts occupations, but at its maturation people with primarily professional and managerial jobs are the new arrivals. It is important to note that the process is complex and may vary according to peculiar locational, social, political, economic, and environmental circumstances. The amount of renovation, for example, is dependent upon the gentrifier's tastes and wealth and upon the condition of the structure.

Because of the possibility of peculiar locational characteristics, the case study area is briefly described in the next section. Following that the research method is outlined. Lastly, highlights from the research are discussed.

#### The Study Area

The area chosen for this case study is Vancouver's Grandview Woodland--(see figure 1)-- an inner-city working class

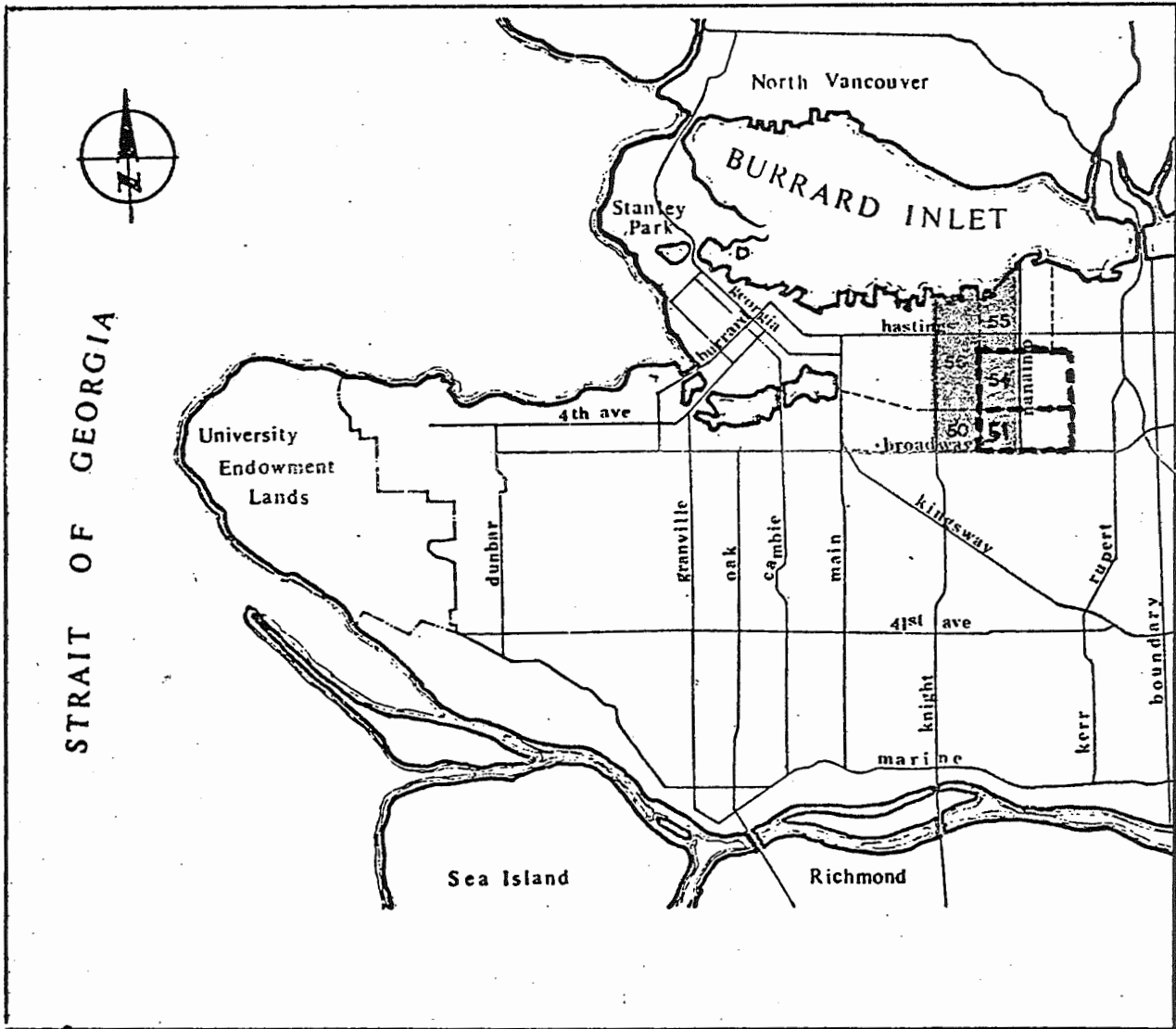
neighbourhood with a large ethnic component. It is where Britannia, a multi-use educational, cultural, and recreational community centre, was established in the mid 1970's. Grandview Woodlands is composed of three apartment zones, one light industry zone, and a single and two family dwelling zone. The latter zone (areas 51 and 54 on figure 1), which contains about half of the area's population (Vancouver City Planning, 1979), is the area from which the samples were drawn.

Grandview began as a working class neighbourhood and enjoyed its first major growth boom between 1905 and 1912. The area developed its multi-ethnic character after World War 1 when Italian, Chinese, and East European populations settled in the neighbourhood, and by 1930 most of the buildings had been constructed (Jackson, 1984).

The area was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, there were several indications that gentrification was occurring. Rhonda Howard (a Vancouver City Planner), for example, cited the growth of 'chic' shops in the commercial area as anecdotal evidence of gentrification. Also, an examination of the census data from the area's single and two family dwelling sub-area suggested that the process was indeed occurring (see table 1). The percentage of people in Grandview with professional and arts occupations and university educations increased between 1971 and 1981 at a rate almost twice that of the general Vancouver population. Second, because the area is at an early stage of gentrification, the traditional resident's tastes and use of public services would likely not have been altered by the small number of gentrifiers. Third, because

Figure 1

The Boundaries of Grandview Woodland within Vancouver City, and its Census Subdivisions. Sub-areas 51 and 54 include the single and two family dwelling zone.



(Source: Adapted from Grandview Woodland: An Information Handbook Vancouver City Planning Department, 1975.)

TABLE 1

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS OF GENTRIFICATION

	GRANDVIEW WOODLANDS			VANCOUVER CITY		
	1971	1981	% CHANGE	1971	1981	% CHANGE
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME	7,581	20,317	168	9,317	24,856	167
% PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATION	6.9	13.6	97.1	17.4	26.5	52.2
% UNIVERSITY EDUCATION	6.1	13	113.1	13.7	22.4	63.5

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA 1971 AND 1981



gentrification is not complete, a comparison of demands between the populations is possible. Lastly, because the neighbourhood is bound on three sides by primary arterials, and on the fourth by waterfront, it is a discrete neighbourhood unit.

### The Research Method

To determine how gentrification affects the demand for neighbourhood public services, 41 gentrifier and 41 traditional resident households were interviewed using a questionnaire designed to gather information about the populations' demographics, satisfaction with street and traffic conditions, and their use of, satisfaction with, and attitudes toward neighbourhood public services.

The questionnaire contained 37 questions and took about 25 minutes to administer. For the major section on public service utilization and satisfaction, the respondents were presented with a list of services which was derived from an agency directory compiled by the Grandview Woodland Area Council. They were asked the number of times each service was used by all members of the household in a typical month during the summer and the winter.

The traditional residents were selected randomly from the area's provincial voters' list. Because this list includes the voter's occupation, it was at first assumed that a sample of gentrifiers could also be derived from it; however, since it yielded only 21 respondents, a snowball sampling (networking) technique was used to complete the gentrifier sample. These 21 gentrifiers identified 27 new gentrifiers, and of these, 20 were interviewed.

During the snowball sampling procedure, better than half of the professionals were referred to by more than one gentrifier. In fact, towards the end of the interviewing few new names could be identified. This suggests that a significant portion of the gentrifier universe in the study area had indeed been sampled.

### Data Analysis

The Grandview Woodland gentrifiers' household income, occupation, and education levels concur with that of the stereotype described in the literature (Black, 1980; Cybriwsky, 1982; Gale, 1983)-- that they are primarily highly educated, professional, and economically secure urbanites. In contrast to the gentrifiers described in the literature (Black, 1980; Gale, 1983), however, only 15% of the gentrifiers are single. In fact, the percentage of singles and non-singles is identical to that of the traditional population.

The gentrifiers are significantly younger than the traditional residents, as 84% of the gentrifiers fall in the 21 to 40 year age bracket compared to 30% of the traditional residents. Lastly, while 61% of the gentrifiers have children, significantly more of the traditional residents (88%) have children.

Table 2 displays the responses to two questions: "Why did you choose this neighbourhood to live in?", and "What do you particularly like about this neighbourhood?". Since the respondents frequently treated these questions as synonymous, the responses need to be treated more generally as perceived positive neighbourhood attributes. The greater importance of

the most costly new demands created by the gentrifiers is the high demand for park space. Their higher demands for racquet sport facilities, a family centre, and public health clinic may also cost the city a considerable amount.

Another point is that there is no significant difference between the populations' use of five of the twelve services. This means that the use rates of these services may be maintained by the gentrifiers.

At present there is a remarkable degree of similarity between the populations' overall satisfaction with the services they use (see table 6). This may be because the gentrifiers compose such a small proportion of the neighbourhood's population that their relatively higher demands and use of public services has not yet placed a burden on the services; however, as the gentrifier population increases, the services will inevitably become overburdened and satisfaction with them will likely decrease.

There are, though, significant differences between the populations in how important they consider the neighbourhood services which they use (significant at .0004). Sixty-one percent of the gentrifiers compared to only 18% of the traditional residents consider the public services which they use to be very important to their households. Clearly the gentrifiers have attitudinal motivation to demand the services they want and use, and their attitudes are much more demanding than the traditional residents'.

The last type of public service examined was public schools. The findings indicate that the gentrifiers are just as

TABLE 6

SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES USED

COUNT ROW %	EXCEL.	GOOD	SATISF.	POOR.	V. POOR	ROW TOTAL
GENTRIFIERS	43 22.8	83 43.9	51 27.0	10 5.3	2 1.0	189
TRADITIONAL RESIDENTS	27 19.9	69 50.7	35 25.7	5 3.7	0 0.0	136
						325

Percentages and totals based on responses.  
 78 valid cases.  
 4 missing cases.

likely to send their children to public schools as are the traditional residents. Therefore, demand for local public schools will likely be maintained. It is also possible, however, that because most of the children are under five years, they may create an overdemand for primary school facilities.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the evidence presented that gentrifiers value parks, good street and traffic conditions, and other public services more than the traditional residents do. The behavioural data indicate that the gentrifiers present significantly greater demands for parks, family centres, tennis and raquetball courts, community centres, and public health clinics. They only decrease demand for ethnic centres, and they maintain demand for the other neighbourhood public services. It is also apparent that the gentrifiers have the attitudinal motivation for securing the public services they desire. This is evident in their attitudes towards improving street and traffic conditions and the importance of public services in general.

Although the gentrifiers are satisfied with the neighbourhood, they will likely be active in realizing improvements in its livability, and because of their greater use of the services and the importance of those services to them, significant service improvements will likely be demanded as the process continues. These results have important implications for urban policy makers: a successful pro-gentrification policy in Grandview, for example, would likely result in a burden on Vancouver city's finances. It would be risky, though, to

generalize these findings to other gentrifying areas. However, because this research has demonstrated both that it is possible to compare demands and that there are significant differences in demand, additional case studies are justified and needed in order to determine whether these demands are typical of gentrifiers and traditional residents elsewhere.

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Table 2

Positive Neighbourhood Attributes

<u>ATTRIBUTE</u>	<u>GENTRIFIERS</u>	<u>TRAD.</u>	<u>RESIDENTS</u>
Cultural/ethnic mix	30		3
Affordability	28		17
Central to work/city	24		22
Local shops	19		15
Neighbourhood services	19		6
Friends here	13		9
Family area	10		4
Good neighbouring	9		17
Architecture	8		1
Socio-economic mix	6		1
Political character	6		0
Neighbourhood feeling	6		0
Parks	6		2
Schools close by	5		15
Working class area	5		0
Small town feeling	5		0
Stable area	5		1
Relatives here	2		7
Familiar area	1		16
Safe feeling	1		6
Grew up here	0		9
Quiet area	0		14
Good transit	0		6
Total Responses	208		171
	n=82		



neighbourhood services and parks to the gentrifiers than to the traditional residents suggests that they may be more likely to generate a greater demand for such attributes. In comparison, the traditional residents seem to be more interested in social relations, such as good neighbouring and having relatives in the area than do the gentrifiers.

The five most mentioned negative neighbourhood attributes are listed in table 3. It is apparent that there are far fewer negative responses than positive ones, and that the gentrifiers are more critical of the neighbourhood than the traditional residents. The gentrifiers gave 83 negative and 208 positive responses, and the traditional residents gave 38 negative and 171 positive responses. The gentrifiers also seem to be more demanding of the neighbourhood in terms of amenities; therefore, they may place greater demands on city revenues.

Significantly more of the gentrifiers (43%) than traditional residents (7%) are not satisfied with the street conditions. Table 4 displays the range and frequency of street improvements which the respondents feel are necessary. These results clearly indicate an area where the gentrifiers will demand more improvements than the traditional residents.

The perception that traffic volumes are either too heavy or much too heavy in the neighbourhood is significantly associated with the gentrifiers; therefore, traffic volumes are another area where gentrifiers may increase demands on city resources in order to create a more amenable environment.

Though the gentrifiers are more critical of the neighbourhood's inadequate parks, traffic, and street

Table 3

Negative Neighbourhood Characteristics

<u>CHARACTERISTIC</u>	<u>GENTRIFIERS</u>	<u>TRAD.</u>	<u>RESIDENTS</u>
Inadequate parks/beaches	13		0
Traffic	13		5
Crime	7		1
Delpidated houses	5		6
Vancouver specials*	5		2
<u>Other**</u>	<u>40</u>		<u>24</u>
Total Responses	83		38

n=82

\* 'Vancouver special' is the term given to inexpensive and standardized box construction housing.

\*\* The 'other' category is composed of 34 types of responses and they are not listed because of low frequencies.

TABLE 4

NECESSARY STREET IMPROVEMENTS

	TREE MAINT.	MORE TREES	STREET CLEANING	PAVING	SIDEWALKS	CURBS	REMOVE PHONE WIRES	ROW TOTAL
TRADITIONAL RESIDENTS N=3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
GENTRIFIERS N=18	1	4	3	4	2	7	2	23

conditions, they are very satisfied with the area-- 88% of the males and 85% of the females are satisfied. Perhaps this inconsistency between their criticisms and satisfaction can be explained if the gentrifiers' satisfaction pertains in part to the area's potential. This, then, would mean that they have 'higher' aspirations for the livability of the area. Also, being satisfied with the area does not necessarily mean that they will not try to improve it.

The data presented above clearly indicate that the gentrifiers have attitudes towards their neighbourhood which may generate greater demands for neighbourhood public services and better traffic and street conditions. Table 5 displays the behavioural expressions of some of the differences in the populations' attitudes toward public services. The mean monthly averages were calculated for each population's use of each public service, and a T-Test was used to determine if there were significant differences between the means.

Twelve of the 16 neighbourhood services used in the questionnaire are listed in table 5. The daycare facilities, teen drop-in centre, consumer help office, and immigrant resources office are not listed because they were not used on a monthly basis by any of the respondents. The first point to be made from these data is that there are significantly different usage rates by the populations in seven of the twelve listed service types. The gentrifiers present a greater demand in six of the seven services (parks, tennis courts, racquet courts, family centre, community centre, and the public health clinic), and a lesser demand for only the ethnic centre. Perhaps one of

TABLE 5

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PUBLIC SERVICE USAGE

SERVICE		$\bar{X}$ MONTHLY USAGE	SIGNIFICANCE	DEMAND
FAMILY CENTRE	G. T.R.	3.90 0	.005	UP
PARKS	G. T.R.	23.43 14.77	.005	UP
TENNIS COURTS	G. T.R.	2.46 1.00	.10	UP
RACQUET COURTS	G. T.R.	.59 .05	.04	UP
COMMUNITY CENTRE	G. T.R.	2.32 0.90	.109	UP
PUBLIC HEALTH CLINIC	G. T.R.	.37 .02	.008	UP
ETHNIC CENTRE	G. T.R.	.219 .804	.13	DOWN
LIBRARY	G. T.R.	3.02 3.76	.509	SAME
SWIMMING POOL	G. T.R.	6.51 5.07	.35	SAME
SKATING RINK	G. T.R.	.98 .68	.478	SAME
GYMNASIUM	G. T.R.	2.29 1.17	.241	SAME
CULTURAL CENTRE	G. T.R.	.12 .0	.164	SAME

N. = 82

G = GENTRIFIER

T.R. = TRADITIONAL RESIDENT

