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PUBLIC HOUSING

Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING
SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Vol. 1, No. 11

Federal Works Agency, U. S. Housing Authority — Nathan Straus, Administrator

October 24, 1939

Pittsburgh Celebrates Cornerstone Laying for First Project

The Pittsburgh housing authority brought its program dramatically before the public October 11, when an enthusiastic group of citizens, civic leaders, and USHA officials participated in the cornerstone laying ceremony for Bedford Dwellings, the city's first public housing project.

Mayor Cornelius D. Scully and Chamber of Commerce President Frank Duggan whole-heartedly approved the project and pledged their continued support of the program. Local housing authority Chairman George E. Evans stated that rents on the new project will reach the lowest income groups among Pittsburgh's slum families.

Jacob Crane, Assistant USHA Administrator, hailed the project as "an enterprise in Democracy." Reading an address for Federal Works Administrator John M. Carmody who, at the last moment, was unable to attend, Mr. Crane said: "The war in Europe doubles the urgency of the need for low-rent housing in this country. It increases the housing shortage from which every city in the country suffers."

During the ceremonies, members of community and social organizations displayed placards bearing such slogans as "Wipe Out the Slums and Wipe Out Disease!" and "New Houses and a New Life!"

Bedford Dwellings, when completed, will provide homes for about 420 low-income families. It is the first of three projects in Pittsburgh.

Charleston Project Opening Speeds Advance of Public Housing in South

The opening on October 15 of Robert Mills Manor, the first of two low-rent housing projects in Charleston, S. C., added to the rapidly expanding volume of public housing in the South.

Dedicatory ceremonies, attended by the Mayor and members of the local authority, were held on the project site, as the first group of families moved into their new homes. Robert Mills Manor is now substantially complete and will be ready for full occupancy early in November.

Rents for the 266 dwelling units, in keeping with other low-rent housing projects recently opened, will be the lowest ever achieved for decent modern housing in Charleston and are lower than the city's average slum

rents. The average shelter rent per dwelling per month is estimated at \$12.26. In addition, there will be a small charge for utilities, which include water and electricity for light.

Charleston may well be gratified at the preservation of the Jenkins Orphanage designed by Robert Mills, famous American architect born in Charleston in 1781. The restored orphanage will be used as an administration building and community hall. The old county jail, erected in 1820, which with the Orphanage and the old Medical School formed a triangle of historic places on the project site, will be used as a marine armory and general museum.

California State Enabling Act Upheld in Test Case; Fifteen Supreme Courts Now Rule for Public Housing

Action of the State Supreme Court of California October 11 brought to 15 the number of State high tribunals upholding the constitutionality of public housing legislation. The California court upheld State enabling acts for low-rent housing against 17 specific charges.

The Court's decision took the form of a writ of mandate ordering Isidore B. Dockweiler, Chairman of the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles, to carry out the purposes of the authority in the construction of a low-rent housing project. Mr. Dockweiler, in a test suit of the State law, had refused to execute a

note in accordance with the terms of the USHA loan contract.

Among the issues involved were: whether housing is a public purpose, whether the Los Angeles authority is regularly and validly organized under the law, whether the law attempts to delegate power of eminent domain to private enterprise, and whether the tax-exemption provisions of the law violate the State Constitution.

Other States in which the highest courts have upheld State housing laws are: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

Current Housing Literature

ONE HUNDRED AND ONE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CONCERNING SLUM CLEARANCE AND LOW-RENT HOUSING. City of Detroit Housing Commission, Detroit, September 1939, 18 pp.

Describes Detroit's housing program, activities of Detroit Housing Commission, and the maintenance and operation of housing projects.

HOUSING IN YONKERS. The Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers, Yonkers, 1939. 27 pp.

Summary of the work of the Yonkers housing authority from 1937 through summer of 1939. Copies of pamphlet available to other local authorities.

A SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY FOR 1938. The Housing Association of Metropolitan Boston, Boston, 1939. Variously paged.

Progress report of the Housing Association of Metropolitan Boston. Supplement in question-and-answer form describing its character and activities.

HOUSING PROJECTS SHOW PROFIT FOR 1938, *Real Estate Record*, Sept. 30, 1939, pp. 2-3.

Summary of report of New York City Housing Authority on operation of three low-rent housing projects.

THE EFFECTS OF A LARGE-SCALE HOUSING PROJECT ON ADJOINING PROPERTY VALUES, by Brendan Sullivan, *Real Estate Record*, Oct. 7, 1939, pp. 12-13.

Statistical study of area surrounding Knickerbocker Village indicates that private housing projects do not reclaim blighted areas or improve adjacent property.

APARTMENTS FOR THE POOR, by Barry Byrne, *Commonweal*, Sept. 29, 1939, pp. 515-516.

Although many obstacles remain to be overcome, the current situation regarding slum clearance is encouraging.

MR. ARNOLD UNLOCKS HOUSING, by Jonathan Mitchell, *The New Republic*, Sept. 13, 1939, pp. 153-155.

Significance of Assistant Attorney General Arnold's forthcoming antitrust indictments of the building industry.

LABOR AND UNIT COSTS IN PWA LOW-RENT HOUSING, by Herman B. Byer and Clarence A. Trump, *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1939, pp. 578-586.

Study of labor requirements and distribution of expenditures on 47 low-rent housing projects.

SELF-HELP COOPERATIVE HOUSING, *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1939, pp. 566-577.

Description of miners' homestead project near Uniontown, Pa., and of the Iona self-help cooperative, Iona, Idaho.

A HOME AND AN ACRE—\$2,600, by Arthur Van Vlissingen, *Barron's*, Aug. 28, 1939, p. 8; also *Readers Digest*, October 1939, pp. 7-11.

How four brothers of Hammond, Ind., with little capital, successfully established a community of low-income home owners.

SOVIET HOUSING LAW, by John N. Hazard, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1939, 178 pp.

Analyzes Soviet housing statutes and court practice. Reviews social and political consequences of Soviet housing policy.

RESTRAINTS OF TRADE IN BUILDING, by Thurman Arnold, *Freehold*, Oct. 15, 1939, pp. 291-293.

Assistant Attorney General Arnold discusses restraints of trade in building industry and describes how antitrust laws can remedy the situation.

HOW CAN WE SOLVE THE HOUSING RIDDLE, by Robert L. Davison, *Dun's Review*, October 1939, pp. 5-11.

Study of housing market reveals need of centralized, impartial, and well-financed research on methods of reducing costs. Floor plans, graphs, illustrations.

Housing a Vital Problem to Schools of America; Teachers Recognize Need for USHA-Aided Program

By Floyd McMurray, State Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction, Indiana

The housing movement, like soil conservation, has long been overdue in America, and educators are deeply interested in a growing desire to clear substandard areas and to provide adequate housing for American people. We are particularly interested in the public housing program because adequate housing can help stop the waste, the *erosion* of human lives. It can help reclaim, and free them. Educators are in a position to see intimately how urgent is the need for this conservation of human resources.

Those who have lived in slums—cramped for room both physically and spiritually—or who have spent some time helping to educate the cross-section of privileged and underprivileged children to be found in any typical American public school, should readily understand what the public housing program means for education. At present a certain proportion of the taxpayers' money spent for public education is spent in an uphill fight: trying to build up, during a few hours each day, bodies and minds and character that an unwholesome physical and social environment—which means, in part, substandard housing—is subtly undermining most of the day.

Slums are breeders of disease; they are breeders of crime and a maladjusted existence. And teachers, as well as doctors, know that *all* groups of children in a school—not merely those who come from the slums—are endangered by the spread of disease. We must get children out of the darkness of hovels and into the sunlight.

The homes which we are going to build must, by a provision of the United States Housing Act of 1937, be built to last at least 60 years. It should be clear that at the end of 60 years the project might be practically obsolete if adequate recreational, social, and educational facilities for the families were not "built into" the projects, or if these facilities should become seriously out of date. I am, therefore, particularly interested in the attention which our local housing authorities, and the USHA, are giving to families' requirements in recreation, in enriched community relations, and in education. These are being "built into" the projects, to meet the demands not merely of today but of years hence: in short, to make a sound investment, along with the brick and mortar, for at least 60 years.

(See HOUSING AND THE SCHOOLS on p. 4)

Before



This view of the slum dwellings which formerly occupied the site of Robert Mills Manor in Charleston, S. C., was taken from the same spot as the picture on the opposite page, which shows the project nearing completion.

USHA Aid Sought by 31 Cities Since August

Although it is generally known that available USHA funds have long since been committed, local plans are still being developed and applications filed for USHA assistance.

Since the adjournment of the regular session of Congress in August, when a bill to extend USHA lending powers failed to come to a vote in the House, some 31 local housing authorities have applied for aid to build 49 projects. The applications represent housing authorities in cities all over the United States. Twenty-one of the applications, covering 30 projects, have been received since September 1.

Enfield Industrial Workers Survey City's Housing Needs

A new method to enlist public support for local low-rent housing projects has been adopted in Enfield, Conn., where thirty volunteer industrial workers, members of the Textile Workers' Union, are making a survey to determine housing needs.

Window cards, similar in size to those provided Red Cross contributors, bearing the legend, "We have cooperated with the Enfield Housing Committee," are being given to householders who answer the questionnaire distributed by the enumerators.

Conference Studies Recreation and Housing

Public housing was an important item on the agenda of the National Recreation Conference held in Boston, October 9-13. The Conference featured a seminar on recreation in housing projects and a USHA exhibit contrasting planned community life with slum conditions. In a simple, straightforward manner the exhibit explained who pays for and who benefits from public housing. About 1,400 delegates from over 300 cities in 38 States attended the conference.

The special problem for consideration of the delegates was: how can local public housing programs best be made to mesh with municipal recreation programs? USHA representatives emphasized the value of advice from recreation executives in site

selection, acquisition of additional recreational facilities for existing projects, and design of community facilities within the project.

Underlying the whole housing recreation program is the fact that housing is more than shelter. Housing, to eliminate slum conditions, must provide for the recreational and leisure-time activities of *all* the tenants. But public housing projects—homes built for the lowest income families—must also be constructed and operated as economically as possible. Since nearly all communities have municipal recreation agencies equipped and willing to supply the necessary facilities, some plan should be devised to bring public housing and public recreation programs together.

Newspaper Column Spreads N. Y. Project Information

All local housing authorities will be interested in the success of a "question-and-answer" feature recently introduced in the *Brooklyn Sunday Eagle*. The second column of the series appeared October 1, and reads, in part, as follows:

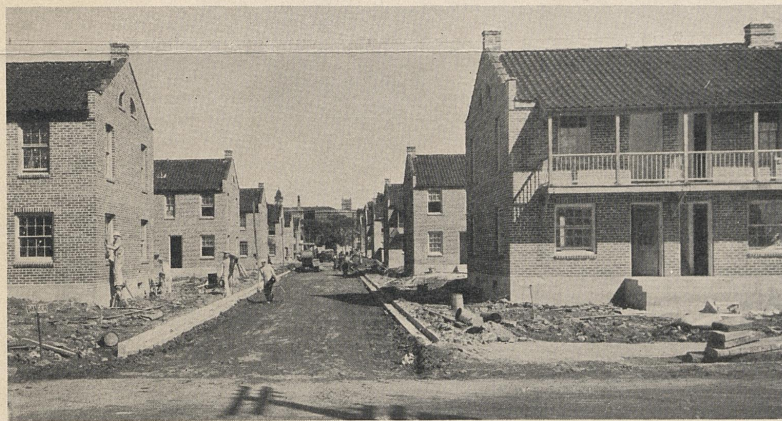
Public Housing Problems Aired and Answered

During the past week the following questions on life at Red Hook houses were received. These questions indi-

cate that many people mistakenly believe that families living in public housing projects are restricted by unnecessary rules and regulations. Answers show that there are no more rules at Red Hook than are required for the comfort and convenience of all in any apartment building, public or private.

- Q. I've heard that the lights are turned out at 10 p. m. Is that true?
A. No. The current is on at all times.
- Q. Can I have company in my apartment?
A. Of course. Your apartment is your home and you can entertain as you please provided that you do not make so much noise that you disturb your neighbors.
- Q. I work on a night shift and get home about 2 a. m. Could I get into my apartment at that hour?
A. Yes. The entrance doors are kept locked at all times but each tenant has a key to the front door of the building in which he lives.
- Q. If I move in to Red Hook, can I keep my dog?
A. No. Dogs, cats and other animals are not permitted, but you may keep a bird or a bowl of fish.
- Q. Can I bring beer or liquor into the apartment?
A. Yes, but if you or your guests become boisterous or disorderly such conduct will not be tolerated.

After



New homes for low-income families being built on the slum site shown on the opposite page. These new low-rent homes were ready for occupancy on October 15.

Construction Bids

Local authority and project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
BID OPENINGS DEFINITELY SCHEDULED		
Asbury Park (N. J.-7-1)	126	10-30-39
Atlanta (Ga.-6-2 Pt. II)	358	11-14-39
Boston (Mass.-2-2)	873	10-27-39
Charlotte (N. C.-3-1)	254	10-24-39
Knoxville (Tenn.-3-3)	200	11-21-39
Laurel (Miss.-2-2)	125	11-13-39
Lexington (Ky.-4-1)	86	10-23-39
Lexington (Ky.-4-2)	206	10-23-39
Los Angeles (Calif.-4-1)	610	11- 8-39
Lowell (Mass.-1-1)	536	11- 1-39
McComb (Miss.-3-1)	90	10-24-39
Meridian (Miss.-4-1)	89	11-13-39
Meridian (Miss.-4-3)	80	11- 8-39
New York (N. Y.-5-3)	1,531	10-23-39
Ponce (P. R.-1-1)	300	10-25-39
San Francisco (Calif.-1-2-R)	472	11- 7-39
San Juan (P. R.-2-1)	420	11- 8-39
Tampa (Fla.-3-1-R Pt. II)	184	10-25-39
Zanesville (Ohio-9-1)	324	10-26-39

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF BID OPENINGS¹

Baltimore (Md.-2-7)	700	11-16-39
Gary (Ind.-11-1)	305	11-20-39
Hartford (Conn.-3-1)	146	11- 6-39
Savannah (Ga.-2-2)	460	11-15-39
Toledo (Ohio-6-2)	112	11-17-39

¹ There is usually a 30-day period between bid advertising and bid opening. None of the bid openings shown here have as yet been definitely scheduled.

New Local Authorities

During the month of September, 5 new local housing authorities were created, bringing to 264 the total for the country. The new authorities are:

Fairfield (Ala.) Housing Authority.
The Housing Authority of the City of Stamford (Conn.).
Rock Island Co. (Ill.) Housing Authority.
Housing Authority of Montgomery Co. (Md.).
Alexandria (Va.) Housing Authority.

Housing and the Schools

(Continued from p. 2)

Those who are engaged in public education always have a real responsibility in public affairs. Housing is a subject which we cannot and will not ignore in our schools. Most of our boys and girls upon leaving school have to deal with housing problems of their own. Our schools can help spread understanding of housing not only in the classes, but by cooperating with other civic organizations through the use of school buildings for forums, lectures, moving pictures, etc., on housing. In furthering adult education on such public problems, the schools will be functioning at the very center and core of American democracy, carrying on the tradition of the early settlers' town meetings.

I look to the public housing projects to bring about a *release of energies* to people who have previously been, through no fault of their own, cramped in body and in spirit by living in substandard homes. Some of the energies and talents released will turn to science, to statesmanship, to the arts, to creating a more happy and wholesome world to live in.

Construction Report Analysis

The addition of two new projects in Covington, Ky., brought to 106 the number of projects under construction during the week ended October 13. The addition of the new projects caused an increase of almost 1 percent in the number of dwellings under construction and an increase of slightly more than 1 percent in the total over-all cost of new housing.

Systematic Efforts Made to Relocate Families

Aware that the problem of relocating families forced to leave their homes on project sites calls for careful investigation and organization, housing authorities throughout the country are tackling the job systematically.

Scattered throughout New York City's five boroughs are branches of the New York City Housing Authority's Vacancy and Rehousing Bureau which aids in rehousing not only families from project sites but also those who must move for other reasons.

Families living on the site of the proposed Orange and Nesbitt project in Newark, N. J., were in the lowest income group, many of them on relief. Between June and September the Newark authority had assisted 296 families in finding new homes.

It was possible for Cleveland to utilize the Merrick Settlement House, near the site of the future Valley View project, as headquarters for its vacancy and relocation bureau. Backed by civic and religious groups, the authority found homes for approximately 250 families.

The Philadelphia authority convinced business, civic, and welfare organizations that rehousing required the support of all civic-minded citizens. Forty rental agents have agreed to cooperate by submitting listings of vacant accommodations. To date 300 families have been relocated.

Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended Oct. 13, 1939	Week ended Oct. 6, 1939	Percentage change
Number of projects under construction	106	104	+ 1.92
Number of dwellings under construction	44,076	43,678	+ 0.91
Total estimated over-all cost ¹ of new housing	\$203,236,000	\$201,187,000	+ 1.02
Average over-all cost ¹ of new housing per unit	\$4,611	\$4,606	+ 0.11
Average net construction cost ² per unit	\$2,897	\$2,896	+ 0.03

¹ Includes: (a) Building the house, including structural costs and plumbing, heating, and electrical installation; (b) dwelling equipment, architects' fees, local administrative expenses, financial charges during construction, and contingency expenses; (c) land for present development; (d) nondwelling facilities.

² The cost of building the house, including structural, plumbing, heating, and electrical costs.

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