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PUBLIC HOUSING

Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Vol. 1, No. 7

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

September 22, 1939

Hartford 3 Months Ahead of Schedule

The Housing Authority of Hartford, Conn., is 3 months ahead of the customary development schedule on its first project. Although President Roosevelt only approved the loan contract on September 13, architectural plans are nearly completed and the Hartford authority expects to advertise construction bids early in October.

This saving in the customary 3-month lag between Presidential approval of a loan contract and bid advertising was made possible by the initiative of the Hartford authority and its architect. Confident, because of close cooperation between the local housing authority and the USHA, that the 146-unit project, costing an estimated \$636,000, would be approved, the architect proceeded on his own responsibility with plans as early as last June.

Now the Hartford authority is giving further evidence of dispatch in getting on with its low-rent housing program. Even before advertising for bids on this first project, the authority has taken initial steps toward construction of a second project of approximately 250 units.

SLUMS COST YOU MONEY! *Harlem Housing*, August 1939, states that in a slum area of East Harlem, where community services presumably continue and are paid for out of taxes, 2,564 lots, out of a total 7,996, were in arrears 3 or more years on tax payments in 1935, and 408 properties were liable to tax sale.

Slum Clearance Dramatized in Movie Now Available to Local Authorities



Sleeping Under Handicaps. Scene from "Housing in Our Time." (Photo by Harold McCracken.)

Charleston and Augusta Announce Rent Schedule

Two more American cities advanced to the front line of the slum clearance and low-rent housing movement when Charleston, S. C., and Augusta, Ga., established rent schedules for three projects soon to be opened. As was the case with the first five USHA-aided projects opened July 4, rents will be the lowest ever achieved for decent modern housing in the respective communities, and will actually be lower than prevailing slum rents.

Average shelter rent for the 266-unit Robert Mills Manor Project in Charleston will be \$12.26. The 168-unit Sunset Homes Project for Negroes in Augusta will have an average shelter rent of \$8.99, while the comparable figure for Olmsted Homes (167 units), Augusta's white project, will be \$10.35.

Public housing in this country has its first motion picture. In "Housing in Our Time," a 20-minute sound film, the United States Housing Authority brings to the screen both the harsh reality of the slum and the proof that it can be removed. The film is a true story with a happy ending.

"Housing in Our Time" is a strictly documentary film, which means that it deals with nothing but facts. The ruthless eye of the camera roves over the land to dispel the comforting myth that the slum exists only in the big city. It explores the repulsive shacks of the small town as well as the dark alleys under the shadow of the Nation's Capitol. It finds in rural shelters no less misery than in the tenements of New York or in the miners' huts of Pittsburgh.

However, it is through its recording of the grim details of the everyday life of a low-income family in Jacksonville, Fla., that the film makes real the nature of the struggle that

(See SLUM CLEARANCE MOVIE on p. 3)

Young America "At Home." Scene from "Housing in Our Time." (Photo by Harold McCracken.)



[Redacted text]

America's Need for Public Housing Greater Because of World Crisis

By Harold S. Buttenheim, President, Citizens' Housing Council of New York, Inc.

The outbreak of war in Europe forces reconsideration of civic programs in America. From many sources we may expect clamor for a moratorium on all public spending for "nonessentials." But sane counsels will accept as essential—and as even more important than heretofore—the banishing of unemployment in the United States and the most speedy possible provision, by private and public effort combined, of decent housing and living conditions for all our people. Thus can we best demonstrate to the world the efficient functioning of democracy.

During the World War of 1914-18, industrial production and military and naval preparedness in the United States were handicapped by lack of adequate housing for workers in factories and shipyards. Feverish efforts to meet this need were begun, but so late were these Government housing projects undertaken that the war ended before most of them were even ready for occupancy. They have proved, however, to be among the few socially valuable assets left by the war years.

Whatever may be the present dangers to the United States from abroad, a major peril at home is the fertile soil of our city slums for the propagation of ideas hostile to our

free institutions. And our most burdensome public costs are those resulting from idle manpower, idle machinery, and idle land. The result we can least afford is that of failing to build and maintain the virile citizenship and the good life that our abundant resources make possible.

The call of service in the United States today is not to works of destruction, but to constructive activities that will achieve and safeguard such standards of living as will remove all danger of a social or economic revolution. The call also is for patriotism that will not succumb to shortsighted profiteering in rents, commodity prices, construction costs, or land speculation.

Even "business as usual" at normal price levels is no adequate slogan for the present crisis. "Jobs for all and slums for none" would be a challenge more in line with the needs and opportunities of these times that try men's souls.

To help the Nation's metropolis to do its part in building the kind of community that other cities and nations will wish to emulate, is an obligation that the Citizens' Housing Council must meet in the months ahead. The movement for better housing and neighborhood conditions must go forward.

Detroit Children's Plea for Play Space Granted

The needs of children for space to play and for conditions favorable to their play are recognized by extensive changes now being prepared in the layout of open space at the Parkside project, built by the PWA Housing Division, in Detroit.

The changes will provide a wading pool and an increased amount of recreation space. They were suggested some time ago by Administrator Straus after a visit to the project.

A letter from the Parkside Lone Ranger Safety Club to the editor of

the project's newspaper justifies the Administrator's action and explains, with an eloquence of its own, the position of the children.

To the Editor:

"We little kids have been told not to go to the Park because we might get hurt crossing the street, or get hit by a swing; we can't play in the playground because we get our faces and knees skinned and our mummies are tired of having us look like a skinned rabbit. We can't play on the grass; we can't even have our toys because we might lose them . . . so what can we little guys do?"

THE PARKSIDER LONE
RANGER SAFETY CLUB.

Cooperation of Tenants Held Vital Factor In Management

Up to the present, management of private rental properties has been treated as primarily a task of collecting rents and, secondly, of safeguarding property. Management of public housing projects, however, calls not only for good business judgment but for wise and tactful guidance in cooperative living.

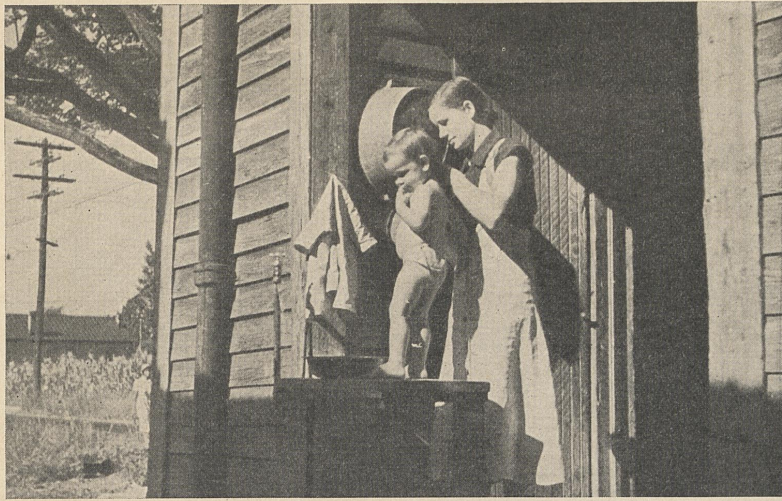
Several years of experience in the operation of PWA Housing Division projects have both clarified the nature of such duties and furnished examples of successful solutions to community problems. Defacement of walls in hallways, basements, and dwelling entrances, for example, is a typical if minor problem.

Noted below are only two of the methods of approach which have been attempted in solving this problem. In the first instance the project manager called together a group of boys aged 14 to 16, living in the project dwellings. He explained the problem to them, and asked if they were willing to help. Flattered by the prospect of responsibility and by the manager's trust in them, they readily agreed. He then assigned two boys to police each hallway, report twice daily on any violations of house rules, and assist the younger children in keeping the walls clean and the floors free from paper and refuse. The boys organized themselves into a commission, held elections, and took great interest in cooperating with the manager. This method proved highly successful.

In the second instance the management posted signs on the walls and published in the tenant newspaper a list of "DON'TS."—"Do not write or draw pictures on the entrance walls or in the basements. The defacement of walls and landings is prohibited by the management."

This method aroused resentment among the tenants, contributed to the popular misconception that public housing means regimentation, and failed to accomplish its purpose.

10/12/39



The Family Bathroom. Scene from "Housing in Our Time." (Photo by Harold McCracken.)

Slum Clearance Movie

(Continued from p. 1)

millions of Americans must carry on to maintain self-respect and create a home in slum dwellings. These scenes give the picture distinction and demonstrate the irresistible necessity for public housing.

The second half of the film tells in pictures and words that all can understand how a local housing authority functions in cooperation with the USHA. The film follows a project from the granting of a loan by the USHA, through demolition and construction, to occupancy. It analyzes the benefits of public housing to labor, to industry, and to the taxpayer.

Few Americans understand public housing—why it is, what it is, and how it works. This lack of public understanding is the most serious obstacle in the path of local housing authorities. "Housing in Our Time" should help them to clear away that obstacle. The film is suitable for showing to every type of audience.

The Informational Service Division of the USHA, under whose direction the film was made by Courier Productions, Inc., of New York, plans to have 16-millimeter prints made available for purchase by local authorities and any others who want them. The cost of a 16-millimeter print, including reel and fiber case, will be about \$17.

Pittsburgh Provides Guides to Conduct Tours of Sites

Aware that its spectacular feat of leveling hilltops is the biggest show in the city, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh has instituted a series of conducted tours of the sites of the USHA-aided projects.

Under guidance of trained employees, three to four groups, averaging about 15 persons each, are daily conducted over the sites. The tours begin with a brief explanation of the public housing program by the guide and answers to questions by the visitors. The group is then conducted over the three sites and shown the work of grading, demolition, and construction. The tours have become popular in Pittsburgh and frequent requests are received from civic, labor, church, and other organizations.

Foreign Housing Studies Available

Sponsored by the New York City Housing Authority, a Division of Foreign Housing Studies has been created by the WPA for the City of New York. This project has already published 8 studies in the field of housing, and has announced forthcoming publication of 13 more.

Local authorities and others may obtain free copies of these reports by applying directly to the Division, 1780 Broadway, New York City.

WPA Survey in St. Louis to Guide City's Plans for Public Housing

Planning for low-rent housing projects must be based on complete data concerning local housing needs and conditions. In recognition of this fact, the newly formed St. Louis Housing Authority took immediate steps to obtain WPA funds for a Low Income Housing Area Survey.

Recent approval of the survey by the Washington office of WPA has released \$342,545 of WPA funds for the purpose, to which will be added \$19,300 as the city's contribution. It was announced that 777 security wage workers would be employed for 6 months collecting information on rental values, types of construction, density of population, and family income.

Designed to "supplement the Real Property Survey by securing additional data on composition, income, and expenditures for household facilities, of families eligible for low rent housing," Low Income Housing Area Surveys are already under way in various cities throughout the country. In each of these cities the extent of substandard housing has already been established by a previous Real Property Inventory or Survey.

In cities which have fewer than 20,000 substandard dwellings, the entire number will be enumerated. In larger cities a sampling process will be used, with 10,000 schedules set as the minimum.

Jewish War Veterans Urge USHA Program Extension

The National Jewish War Veterans' Association, at their National Convention in Miami, Fla., September 6, passed a resolution favoring the extension of the public housing program and commending the administration of the Wagner-Steagall Act by the United States Housing Authority. Similar resolutions have been passed by the American Legion Departments of Massachusetts, Connecticut, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.



Current Housing Literature

HOMES FOR LOW WAGE EARNERS OF DENVER, The Denver Housing Action Committee, 1939, unpag.

Describes conditions in Denver's slums, and offers a housing plan for their alleviation. Contains plans, spot maps, and illustrations.

LAND, MATERIALS, AND LABOR COSTS, National Resources Committee, Housing Monograph Series No. 3, 1939, 101 pp.

A technical report on location factors, site planning, small house design, building material costs, labor costs, and building regulations. Contains charts, maps, and plans.

LOW RENTS FOR HOUSING IN GOVERNMENT PROJECTS, by Edward Roberts Moore, *America*, August 26, 1939, pp. 460-462.

Discusses rents and distribution of dwelling units by family size in New York City's USHA-aided projects.

HOUSING AND HOMES, *The Index*, Autumn 1939, pp. 41-46.

Reviews problems of providing shelter by both public and private enterprise.

DETROIT HOUSING COMMISSION, FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT, 1938, Detroit, Mich., 1939. Mimeographed, 86 pp.

Records Detroit's present and future housing program, with maps, charts, and plans. Illustrated.

HOUSING FOR RELIEF FAMILIES, Cincinnati Division of Public Relief, 1939. Mimeographed, unpag.

Analyzes rent policies and housing for relief families in Cincinnati. Suggests a housing program for such families only.

HOUSING OF THE DEPENDENT AGED, *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1939, pp. 295-301.

Reviews existing accommodations for the housing of the aged.

HOUSING PROGRESS IN SCOTLAND, by G. B. Johnson, *Commercial Intelligence Journal*, July 22, 1939, pp. 150-156.

Covers recent developments in connection with Scotland's program.

A DIGEST ON SLUM CLEARANCE, by Reverend Stephen J. Panik, *Connecticut Federationist*, Summer 1939, pp. 23, 44-47.

Comments about the social and economic consequences of blighted areas.

CHEAPER HOUSES? by Raymond Moley, *Newsweek*, August 28, 1939, p. 44.

Editorial comments on the difficulties in the way of attaining cheaper housing.

Construction Report Analysis

During the week ended September 15, three new projects went under construction. (See table.) The largest of the three projects—1,023 units, in Boston, Mass.—with average over-all cost per unit of \$4,570 and average net construction cost per unit of \$2,830, was responsible for the fractional declines in the Nation-wide averages. The other two projects—both in Trenton, N. J.—showed average net construction costs per unit slightly above the average for all 95 projects now under construction.

Federal Welfare and Housing Agencies Cooperating

Public housing will assist in the solution of many public welfare problems. Certainly, local housing authorities need the understanding, support, and advice of welfare officials.

In order that welfare and housing officials might find their grounds of common interest, a joint conference was held in Chicago last May under the auspices of the American Public Welfare Association and NAHO. At this meeting it became apparent that further study of the subject was needed.

At the request of the Social Security Board, the USHA has loaned a staff member of the Management Review Division until October 15 to survey such matters of mutual concern as the rent allowance policies of public welfare agencies and the policies of local housing authorities in accepting families on relief as tenants. The ultimate objective of this preliminary survey is to develop material and to establish relationships which will be of benefit to local communities in achieving the social goals common to public housing and welfare.

The cooperation of local housing authorities and managers of PWA Housing Division projects will be needed in supplying certain information.

Coming Events

Tenant selection supervisors representing 36 local housing authorities will meet in Washington October 2-7, in a conference called by USHA to discuss tenant selection procedure.

Construction Bids

State and local authority	Project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
BID OPENINGS DEFINITELY SCHEDULED			
Charlotte, N. C.	NC-3-2	452	9-22-39
Cincinnati, Ohio	OHIO-4-3	264	10-18-39
Columbia, S. C.	SC-2-1	236	10-18-39
Columbus, Ga.	GA-4-1-R	300	10-2-39
Harrisburg, Pa.	PA-8-1	200	9-25-39
Los Angeles Co., Calif.	CAL-2-2	300	10-5-39
McComb, Miss.	MISS-3-1	90	10-24-39
Mobile, Ala.	ALA-2-1	100	10-5-39
Peoria, Ill.	ILL-3-1-R	400	10-9-39
Peoria, Ill.	ILL-3-2	606	10-9-39
Perth Amboy, N. J.	NJ-6-1	258	9-25-39
Reading, Pa.	PA-9-1	400	10-6-39
Wilmington, N. C.	NC-1-1	216	9-25-39
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF BID OPENINGS ¹			
Boston, Mass.	MASS-2-2	873	10-20-39
Butte, Mont.	MONT-3-1	225	10-23-39
Corpus Christi, Tex.	TEX-3-2-R	198	10-26-39
Corpus Christi, Tex.	TEX-3-3-R	102	10-26-39
Gary, Ind.	IND-11-1	305	10-30-39
Holyoke, Mass.	MASS-5-1	167	10-25-39
Lexington, Ky.	KY-4-1	86	10-23-39
Lexington, Ky.	KY-4-2	206	10-23-39
Lowell, Mass.	MASS-1-1	536	10-19-39
Meridian, Miss.	MISS-4-1	89	10-20-39
Meridian, Miss.	MISS-4-3	81	10-28-39
New York City, N. Y.	NY-5-3	1,631	10-23-39
Ponce, P. R.	PR-1-1	300	10-24-39
Tampa, Fla.	FLA-3-1-R	184	10-20-39
Zanesville, Ohio	Part II OHIO-9-1	324	10-30-39

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.

Material for Public Housing should be addressed to Informational Service Division, U. S. Housing Authority, Washington, D. C.

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Such problems as "Timing of Tenant Selection Activities," and "Aspects of Community Relation With Reference to Initial Tenant Selection," will be considered.

Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended September 15, 1939	Week ended September 8, 1939	Percentage change
Number of projects under construction.....	95	92	+ 3. 26
Number of dwellings under construction.....	40, 894	39, 377	+ 3. 85
Total estimated over-all cost ¹ of new housing.....	\$189, 420, 000	\$182, 417, 000	+ 3. 84
Average over-all cost ¹ of new housing per unit.....	\$4, 632	\$4, 633	- 0. 02
Average net construction cost ² per unit.....	\$2, 904	\$2, 905	- 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) non-dwelling facilities.

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