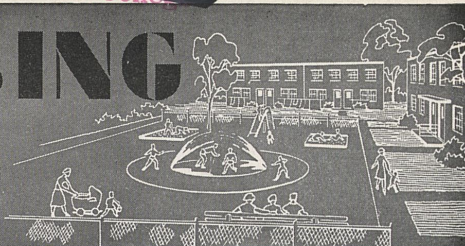


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# PUBLIC HOUSING

## Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING  
SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Vol. 1, No. 36

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

April 16, 1940

### Kentucky Housers Study State Program

The Kentucky State Housing Association, organized in December 1939, has planned a 3-day State-wide conference in Lexington later this month. The first day of the conference will be devoted to the problems of existing local housing commissions, giving special attention to bringing Federal aid to a greater number of Kentucky cities. The second day's discussions will center around the recent action of the Kentucky Legislature in passing five amendments to the State Housing Laws and in enacting legislation validating the procedure of existing commissions. One new law provides for rural housing by county authorities, and another authorizes fiduciary institutions to invest in securities issued by Kentucky housing authorities.

Owensboro, Madisonville, Somerset, Harlan, Hopkinsville, Richmond, Ashland, and Bowling Green are Kentucky municipalities which have passed or are preparing ordinances for establishing local commissions.

It is expected that Governor Keen Johnson and one or both of Kentucky's Senators, Hon. Alben W. Barkley, of Paducah, and Hon. A. B. Chandler, of Versailles, will be guests of honor.

### Time Praises New Film; Childbirth Tragedies Caused by Slums

In a recent review of *The Fight for Life*, U. S. Film Service portrayal of childbirth in the slums, *Time Magazine* points out the futility of the medical profession's fight to offset slum conditions.

"Because childbirth kills oftenest where poverty is greatest, *The Fight for Life* was shot in a slum clinic, Chicago's famed Maternity Center . . . The plot . . . is simply the daily struggle of doctors to bring slum women and children through childbirth . . .

"Dramatic without ever being theatrical, it makes even such top-notch Hollywood medical pictures as *Men in White* and *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* seem unreal and stagy . . .

"*The Fight for Life* is above all a studied social indictment. The question the Young Interne raises is: Why go to all this trouble to bring babies into the world alive so that they can multiply slums? By raising this question and deliberately leaving it unanswered, the film dramatizes its makers' belief that as long as slums and the conditions that create slums exist all the efforts of all the doctors are trivial and a little absurd."

### Memphis Project Open; Average Rent \$14.46

With the opening early this week of Lamar Terrace in Memphis, Tenn., 108 low-income families moved from slum dwellings to bright, new homes in a USHA-aided public housing project. Additional units in the project will soon be completed, and applicants accommodated.

The project provides homes for 478 families who pay an average monthly shelter rent of \$14.46 a dwelling. The maximum income per family at the time of admission ranges from \$766 to \$968 a year. The cost of all utilities (electricity for lighting and refrigeration, gas for heating and cooking, and hot and cold water) averages \$2.90 per month.

Two-story row houses and flats, grouped around open courts and playgrounds, on what formerly was an area cluttered with slum shacks, make up the project. The buildings are of reinforced concrete, brick, and tile. Equipment includes gas ranges and electric refrigerators in kitchens, space heaters in living rooms, and standard plumbing. The estimated over-all cost per dwelling is \$4,617; the net construction cost per dwelling (comprising about the same items as the residential construction costs compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, on the basis of building permits) is \$2,878.

The Memphis Housing Authority reports that during the past 8 years, only one new home has been provided in Memphis for every three new families. The long list of applicants waiting for vacancies in the two PWA Housing Division projects in Memphis, Lauderdale Courts (449 dwellings for white families) and Dixie Homes (633 dwellings for Negro families) is, the authority feels, striking evidence of the demand for decent housing at a rental low-income families can afford to pay.

The Memphis authority has another USHA-aided project underway, to provide homes for 900 Negro families. First units are scheduled to be ready for occupancy in September. The present Memphis program when completed will provide about 2,500 homes for low-income families.

Immediately responsible for slum clearance and low-rent housing in Memphis are the members of the local housing authority: Chairman, Edward F. Barry; Vice Chairman, Ike Gronauer; Secretary, Dr. H. P. Hurt; and Commissioners, L. M. Graves and Edward M. Knoff.

Mr. Barry was recently appointed to take the place of Walk C. Jones, Sr., who resigned as Chairman in January of this year after 5 years of faithful service.



Aerial view taken during construction of Lamar Terrace, recently opened 108-unit project in Memphis, Tenn.

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## Keyserling Addresses Town Hall Luncheon

Several hundred delegates, representing more than 50 labor, civic, church, and welfare organizations, meeting at the Town Hall Club in New York City recently, discussed pending housing legislation.

Addressing the group at a luncheon, Leon H. Keyserling, Deputy Administrator and Acting General Counsel of USHA, pointed out that the \$800,000,000 called for in legislation now before Congress, does not represent an expense to the Government.

"To say that the country's financial welfare is endangered because more housing bonds are issued," said Mr. Keyserling, "is equivalent to saying that we should view with alarm larger capital investment in automobile plants or food companies or commercial aviation."

Mr. Keyserling said that housing is a force for unity, one "which can rally the vast majority of people of all groups whose real interests are inseparable from the cause of democracy.

"Housing . . . is nonpartisan; it is concrete and dramatic; it is businesslike; it helps industry as well as labor, the producer as well as the consumer, the Nation as well as the locality. It thus combines economic desirability with political feasibility, and these two must be combined if practical people are to save democracy from the forces which threaten it throughout the world."

**CULBERT L. OLSON**, Governor of California, turning the first spadeful of earth at ground breaking ceremonies for the Ramona Gardens project in Los Angeles recently, said that he will propose legislation in May which would establish a State Housing Authority to deal with rural housing.

## Recreation Agencies Urged To Aid Housing Authorities

Pointing out that public housing is a responsibility shared by many local agencies, and not the sole problem of any one, the National Recreation Association recently urged its members to participate actively in the recreational aspects of housing. "It is most important," the NRA said, "that for the sake of effective recreational planning close cooperation be maintained between local housing authorities and public recreation departments." The statement prefaced a brief monograph on housing and recreation prepared by the USHA.

The monograph, designed to make recreation workers more familiar with the USHA program, lists five opportunities which a public housing project affords to recreation agencies:

- (1) A chance to plan a recreation program for an entire neighborhood.
- (2) An intimate contact with the home and family life of the program participants.
- (3) Opportunities for recreation research and experimentation.
- (4) A chance to expand the local recreation program.
- (5) A stimulating nucleus for the community program.

## Fences Are Out—Yards Are In

By Elbert Peets, USHA Technical Division

For years the housers have been divided into two hostile camps. Fierce battles have been fought between the "fencers" and the "no-fencers." Now, at last, peace reigns—the no-fencers have won. There must be no expensive fences to run up first cost and maintenance—and hence both rents and subsidies. Money talks; when an item means higher rents it has to be something you can't do without.

In most projects it will be found that people will want to take care of only one yard. It is in the front courts of row-house projects that an effect of breadth and openness can best be obtained, with perhaps a little planting and some sitting-out areas just in front of each house.

At the other side of the rows—that is usually the kitchen side—that is where the good old American tradition calls for a patch of ground that is the family's own—a place where the washing can be dried, rugs can be beaten, babies can absorb ultra-violet rays, petunias can bloom and tomato vines bear their appointed fruit, go-carts can be parked and bicycles can be greased.

In most cities the yard will be the principal element of similarity between the project way of living and the normal—perhaps we should say the ideal—way of living of workers' families. This is important—who wants to make the housing project a completely different thing from the city as a whole?

Above all, an inclosed private yard is almost essential to the happiness and normal social evolution of children—for whom, when you come down to it, housing projects are built. At the recent Conference on Children in a Democracy, unanimous approval was given to a statement that "The single-family house with its own yard is unquestionably the best type in which to bring up children."

Since fences—at any rate high and tight ones, with gates and all—are ruled out, while yards are not, it is now up to the

friends of inclosed yards to exercise their ingenuity in devising forms of inclosure that come within the budgetary limitations. It can be done. Here are some hints:

1. Use hedges if a cheap hedge material is available and your landscape budget will allow it. The plants can be spaced out—even if they are 4 to 6 feet apart they will mark the line. Throw a group or a block of yards together and plant a hedge around the group, leaving it to the tenants to mark the lines between the yards.

2. Spot the clothes posts where they will help if a tenant wants to plant some flowers along the boundary of his yard. In one project an additional post, a low one, is being set on the boundary line to facilitate stringing a line, for example, to support some sweet peas or morning glories.

3. Let the tenants put up their own fences. This is a very unorthodox suggestion. A lucky and tolerant manager, however, might be able to keep the tenant-built fences within bounds, so to speak, with the help of such rules as:

(a) Neighbors must agree and cooperate, so that yards will be fenced in groups, preferably somewhat uniformly.

(b) No fences over 3 feet high. Low fences look better and don't dwarf the yards so much.

(c) All fences to be painted dark green or some other color agreed on by the group. Use white only on very neat little fences.

4. Don't forget that poultry netting is the cheapest and (while it lasts) one of the best fence materials. The 3-foot width costs about 2 cents a running foot. The posts may be 6 or 8 feet apart, and it is absolutely necessary to have heavy top and bottom wires. The common hairpin lawn fences are more expensive but last longer. A really good and really cheap fence is much needed. Perhaps one solution is for the project to put in low-maintenance long-life posts and for the tenant to supply and replace some cheap material that will support vines.


## THE NEED FOR BETTER HOMES!


UNITS COMPLETED



APPLICATIONS



Each complete  represents 10,000 units completed

Each complete  represents 10,000 applications received for units completed

Data based on reports from 16 cities as of March 30, 1940

4/25/40

## Management Contacts With Tenants

By Frank Dorman, Buildings Manager, Williamsburg Houses,  
New York City Housing Authority

The chief contact that we have with the tenants in Williamsburg Houses is during rent collections.

In spite of a population of 1,622 families, the weekly visit of the management assistant for the collection of rent becomes as expected as the regular visits of an old friend. It has become a part of the daily routine—or weekly routine—of the housewife, and so has done away with any feeling of "intrusion."

To go back to days of initial occupancy, for the purpose of this article, we experienced problems similar to those of most projects under the circumstances. It is no doubt true that the larger the city the less opportunity low-income families have had for a familiarity with better living conditions. A close contact at first, with the management, means an easier adjustment for the new tenants. Many things, besides a change of neighborhood perhaps, or the leaving of a former dwelling, are involved. They get proper instruction on the use of physical equipment and prompt information about many useful things. Management assistants began visiting apartments from the day tenants moved in, and so were on hand to answer the many questions: "What school do I send my little girl to? How do you bake a cake in an electric oven? Do I have to wash the windows? Would there be a hospital clinic in the neighborhood? Does the key open all the doors? The toilet has water in it all the time and I don't know how to get it out." Not all the questions were the same—not the same persons asked the questions—but by listening over a period of time, management can be aware of the extent to which tenants have become adjusted. We come to: "How do we get a speaker for our club? If I have another baby, can I get a larger apartment. We want to ask your advice . . . etc." Questions asked, which would not be asked without a relationship between management and tenant, gained through regular contact.

It works both ways. The shoe is often on the other foot with "the office" needing information. Essentially all public housing developments are concerned with proper living standards. If households are dirty, why? If damage is done to property, who and when? Management needs to have some information which is required, income statements and changes in the composition of the family, and some which is informative such as vital statistics, health, and education figures, etc. Tenants may be encouraged to participate in maintenance, to whatever extent it is practical, as in doing their share toward keeping clean the public rooms and spaces which they have used, and training their children to have the proper regard for tidiness in stairhalls and grounds. Is all this to be given willingly? It is, if we have developed a feeling of mutual exchange.

Unconsciously management takes the place of the landlord in the minds of tenants in public housing. There may be fear, or antagonism, as naturally there must be cer-

tain regulation and control. But the "collector," as a management assistant, becomes an intermediary. Without being intimate, one with the proper aptitude and training can offer advice, give counsel, and at the same time unobtrusively protect the interest of the management. It is not easy, but is made less difficult because it is expected regularly. However, the success of the contact with the tenant depends largely on the caliber of the person serving as management assistant or rent collector.

Ideally, in a project the size of Williamsburg Houses, we are able to have a balanced staff, experienced in special fields and, therefore, able to develop among tenants various activities and interests. Because the management assistants, through their regular contacts with tenants have learned their interests, have learned what really serves as recreation for a tenant, how they think and react, the management is better able to offer in recreational and educational activities, that which is most practical and effective. In spite of the best intentioned planning in advance, it is difficult for any theorist actually to decide what is best for a specific tenant group, along these lines. Over a 2-year period of operation we have been able to start many activities at the time they were most effective in filling a tenant need; demonstration cooking classes, lectures and displays of furniture, and health talks for educational purposes.

Social clubs and special groups become a fine management contact in many cases, but very ineffective in some ways. There is little chance for individual acquaintance except with leaders, and at a time and place usually devoted to recreation. The contact we have with tenants, therefore, during the collection of rents, becomes by far the most effective.

## Housing Exhibit Draws Thousands in Baltimore

Presenting the story of slum clearance in graphic fashion, "before" and "after" exhibits of the Baltimore housing authority at the annual Better Homes Show, held during the week of March 31 at the Fifth Regiment Armory, attracted thousands of Baltimoreans.

The story was told simply and effectively by models, photographs, and charts. The "before" section of the exhibit featured a scale model of what is designated Area K, in the authority's seven-project program.

In miniature was reproduced the 17-acre area bounded by Eden, Lexington, Fayette, Bethel, and Orleans Streets, house for house, block for block.

Bertram L. Keyes, a model maker of national reputation, working from aerial photographs and surveyors' plats, faithfully recreated dilapidated row-type houses whose walls enclose dark, badly ventilated rooms. Their run-down high-board fences surround rubbish-cluttered yards, dilapidated out-buildings, and outdoor toilet facilities.

From various of the houses red ribbons lead up to a wallboard background where a photograph shows actual conditions within the four walls when the authority took over the property.

On a table opposite was the "after" model, showing just how the low-rental dwelling units will appear when they are finished next year.

It represents the work of James R. Edmunds III, a member of the authority's staff, and shows at a glance how careful planning and arrangement of the buildings will transform the slum area into an attractive development to be known as the Frederick Douglass Homes.

The two- and three-story structures will contain flats and duplexes, each with their own private entrance. The buildings, ranging from 80 to 140 feet long, are, the model shows, located about landscaped courts.



"Before and After" exhibit at Baltimore Better Homes Show.



Not all New York State slums are in New York City. A small town contribution to sub-

standard housing, from the 1940 Report of the State Superintendent of Housing.

### N. Y. State Housing Supt. Issues 1940 Annual Report

The recently issued 1940 Report of the New York State Superintendent of Housing gains added interest from the fact that New York is the only State where public housing can be financed by the State itself. Under the Public Housing Law of 1939, the State Superintendent (now Commissioner) of Housing is authorized to "enter into contracts to lend municipalities or housing authorities a sum not exceeding the development cost of low-rent housing projects to be repaid within 50 years," "to borrow \$150,000,000 by issuing 'housing' bonds," and "to make annual grants," to achieve low rents, the amount of the grant to be matched by the municipality.

Mr. Edward Weinfeld's report analyzes this legislation, and describes the first project to be financed by the State—New York City's 3,528-dwelling-unit Navy Yard Project. It also discusses the need for housing, pointing out that "the construction of 1,031,000 dwelling units . . . would be required to relieve the shortage of suitable dwellings" in New York State.

In his conclusion, Mr. Weinfeld emphasizes the small town housing problem. "In the smaller villages, housing conditions exist which, from the standpoint of overcrowding, lack of sanitary conveniences,

inadequate water supply, fire hazards, dilapidation and general undesirability are as bad, in many instances, as the worst conditions in the larger cities. The chief reason that this problem has received little, if any, attention in the past is the fact that in these smaller communities the problem usually involves only a handful of families. It is obvious that the large scale type of project which now characterizes the public housing program in large cities is not appropriate for these small communities. The Division of Housing is making an intensive study both with respect to existing housing conditions in small communities and the best methods of dealing with the problem in all its aspects."

### Fort Smith College Students Conduct Local Housing Survey

Junior college students in Fort Smith, Ark., began a housing survey of Fort Smith recently for the local housing authority. Royal S. Curry, of the college faculty, is acting as field supervisor. The survey will collect information on race, occupation, size, and income of Fort Smith families, as well as on structural condition, value, and rentals of various types of residential structures throughout the city. The survey offers the students an excellent educational project, and will provide the local housing authority with invaluable information.

### Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended April 5, 1940	Week ended March 29, 1940	Percentage change
Number of projects under construction	193	190	+ 1.58
Number of dwellings under construction	74,279	73,835	+ 0.60
Total estimated over-all cost <sup>1</sup> of new housing	\$330,955,000	\$329,516,000	+ 0.44
Average over-all cost <sup>1</sup> of new housing per unit	\$4,456	\$4,463	- 0.16
Average net construction cost <sup>2</sup> per unit	\$2,796	\$2,801	- 0.18

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

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## Western Courts Uphold Housing Legislation

The Supreme Courts of Colorado and Montana recently upheld public housing legislation in decisions involving the right of local authorities to acquire land by grant and condemnation (Colorado) and the validity of contracts between municipalities and local housing authorities (Montana).

The Colorado Supreme Court affirmed the judgment of a lower court in dismissing the case of J. E. Stokes, who had questioned the right of the Denver housing authority to use public money in the acquisition of land by grant and condemnation. Stokes had demanded that the Denver authority show "by what right it claims to use and enjoy said privileges and franchises." He refused to accept as satisfactory the authority's reply and appealed his case. It was dismissed. He then appealed to the State court of last resort, where the decision of the lower court was affirmed. The Supreme Court pointed out that the authority was acting in accord with State legislation and was therefore justified in its activities.

The Montana Supreme Court issued, at the request of the Great Falls Housing Authority, a writ of mandamus, ordering the City of Great Falls to fulfill its obligations as set forth in a cooperation agreement with the Great Falls Housing Authority. In the agreement, the city had contracted to vacate certain streets and alleys and to rezone "the lands incorporated in the Great Falls project when requested to do so." The request was made in January 1940, and the city refused to comply, challenging the status of the Great Falls Housing Authority. The court found that "the city council of the City of Great Falls, since it regularly authorized the Great Falls Housing Authority, must comply with the provisions of the Act insofar as their cooperation is required."

The decision of the Colorado court was the first test of public housing legislation in that State. The Montana Supreme Court had twice previously upheld the State housing laws. At present, courts of last resort in 22 States have upheld housing legislation.

### Schedule of Bid Opening Dates<sup>1</sup>

Local authority and project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
Birmingham (Ala.-1-4-R)	480	4-25-40
Chester (Pa.-7-1)	396	4-30-40
Cincinnati (Ohio-4-1)	750	4-25-40
Denver (Colo.-1-2)	346	5- 2-40
Detroit (Mich.-1-1, Pt. II)	92	5- 7-40
Detroit (Mich.-1-2, Pt. II)	183	4-24-40
Helena (Mont.-4-1)	72	5- 3-40
McComb (Miss.-3-2)	90	5- 1-40
Nashville (Tenn.-5-1)	350	4-19-40
New York City (N. Y. 5-5)	1, 170	4-30-40
San Antonio (Tex.-6-4)	236	5- 2-40

<sup>1</sup> There is usually a 30-day period between bid advertising and bid opening.