


FW3:71/28

PUBLIC HOUSING

Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Vol. 1, No. 28

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

February 20, 1940

Four Cities Open New Projects During Month

Augusta, Austin, Dayton, Allentown Get Homes—Incomes As Low As \$500

Four additional USHA-aided projects have been opened within the last few weeks, providing new homes for 776 low-income families. Two of the projects (Sunset Homes in Augusta, Ga., and Chalmers Street in Austin, Tex.) serve families with incomes averaging about \$500 a year. The projects in the two northern cities (De Soto Bass Courts in Dayton, Ohio, and Hanover Acres in Allentown, Pa.) reach families whose incomes average less than \$900 a year.

These four projects bring to 14 the total of USHA-aided projects now being tenanted. By January 31, 6,795 families had already moved into their new low-rent homes.

Lower Than Slum Rents in Same Cities

Average monthly shelter rentals in the four projects range from \$8.52 at Sunset Homes, to \$13.99 in Hanover Acres. In three of the four developments, the shelter rentals are well below average rents now paid for substandard housing in the same communities.

Sunset Homes, 168-unit development for Negro families in Augusta, was constructed on vacant land at an estimated over-all cost of \$4,519 per dwelling. Estimated tenant family incomes average \$498 a year. The average monthly shelter rent per unit is \$8.52.

At Chalmers Street (Austin) homes have been provided for 86 white families at shelter rents averaging \$8.62 a month. The median shelter rental for all substandard dwellings in the city is \$10.50 a month. Family incomes average \$490 annually.

Hanover Acres, white project in Allentown, provides 322 homes on what was formerly a vacant site. The over-all cost of the project is \$4,991 per dwelling. Estimated average annual income of tenants is \$878. Some 40 families are now living in the project. The average shelter rental is \$13.99 a month, or considerably lower than the \$17.55 which is the average rent paid by tenants in substandard dwellings in Allentown.

De Soto Bass Courts (Dayton), a Negro project built on a vacant site at an over-all cost of \$4,806 per unit, consists of 200 dwellings with average shelter rentals of \$12.72 a month. Shelter rentals for substandard Negro dwellings in Dayton average \$12.75 a month. The estimated average family income on the project is \$797 a year.

“Architectural Forum” Features USHA Program in Jan. Issue

Special Article Asks and Answers 13 Questions on Public Housing

“If the United States is to make inroads on its vast slum and low-rent housing problem, Government must help.” Thus the editors of the “Architectural Forum” answer the question, “Are Slum Clearance and Low-Rent Housing the Proper Functions of Government?”, with an emphatic “yes!” The question is one of 13 about the USHA-aided program, posed and answered in the January issue of the magazine, which devotes over 20 pages to an exhaustive analysis of public housing aims and accomplishments. Conclusions reached are not, the editors point out, intended to be final, but represent an “attempt to clarify current thinking and to provoke additional thinking and discussion.”

Housing Quiz

The housing section of the issue opens with an 18-question quiz (“If you score more than 50 percent, you know more about Public Housing than most”), includes photographs, site and floor plans, charts, and statistical material, as well as the 13 questions and answers which form the main body of text. The whole discussion is planned to provide a complete, clear survey of what the USHA-aided program has done, and what the major problems are.

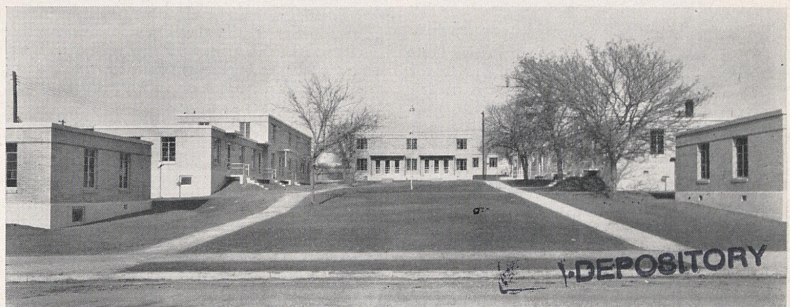
Significant conclusions by “Architectural Forum” are that the program: “Is not competing with private enterprise building . . . Is not costing the Government too much in

the light of existing conditions . . . Grants no greater rent subsidies than currently necessary . . . Operates for the present at a sufficiently low rent level . . . Builds to the lowest feasible standards . . . Is the proper function of Government.”

Criticisms and Questions

While concluding that “USHA . . . has made a good beginning” and that “chances are bright USHA will do better with the next” 800 million dollars, the editors of the Forum take exception to certain aspects of the present program. USHA project costs are still too high, they feel, still out of line with the purpose of the dwellings. The 60-year amortization period for USHA loans is questioned. USHA has failed to “conduct adequate research and experimentation,” in the Forum’s opinion. The editors leave unanswered the question, “Is USHA Being Successfully Administered?” Both criticisms and explanations are listed. In the same way, no decision is reached as to whether current subsidies are too high. It is declared, however, that “for really low-rent housing, subsidy is now essential.” The editors suggest that the term slum clearance needs “revaluation—at least until the dwelling shortage is relieved.”

Four representative USHA-aided projects are given special treatment in 10 pages of pictorial display. Aerial views, construction shots, site plans, interiors, and floor plans are featured. Significant facts on each project are tabulated—size, costs, rents, construction and equipment, etc.



These neat, modern structures grouped around a spacious, open court assure light, air, and wholesome living conditions to the

tenants of the Chalmers Street project in Austin, Tex. Average monthly shelter rental is only \$8.62.

DEPOSITORY
UK LIBRARIES

San Francisco, California

The Diamond Jubilee edition of the San Francisco Chronicle (Sunday, January 28) ran a feature story by George De Carvalho, entitled "Survey of San Francisco's Housing Problem . . . and the Signs of Hope." It is here reproduced in shortened form:

WOVEN into the enduring fabric of the American dream is the concept of home, shelter, less as a necessity of life than a fertile field for living. In the creation of a continent, men who had little thought of rest dreamed of a home.

Americans built magnificently for work and production, but flimsily for their rest and sleep. Cramped by the dry verbiage of municipal statutes and city limits, the dynamic surge of business reached heavenwards in its expansion to create the skyscraper. The homes of urban America could only huddle tighter together to create the slum.

The shortage and the slums did not grow overnight. But through war boom and Coolidge prosperity they were almost ignored. It was not till the phrase "New Deal" came into the American language that "housing problem" became a national byword. On "housing problem" then was placed the blame for almost every canker that festered in the American system.

Much of that blame was rightly placed. In the filth of slum alleys machine politics and machine crime flourished. In the airless cellars of a tenement family disease took easy root. And America's very synonym for juvenile delinquency, "dead end kids," is taken from the slum.

San Francisco is way ahead of the West-ern pack, with three projects 'twixt blueprint and building; Holly Park, Potrero Hill, and Sunnyvale.

Transportation is but one angle of the city's responsibilities toward the projects. There are others. For instance, education. Outside of these services, only cost to the city will be negative: No taxes from the projects. However, many of the properties bought by the Authority were already tax-delinquent from way back. Estimated actual lost revenue will add about a \$0.05 tax to every \$1,000 worth of property. Further, it has been estimated that city services in slum areas cost \$5 for every \$3 taken in, which means no slums—less services—savings.

San Francisco has slum houses aplenty but no clearly defined slum district. The bad areas are Chinatown, easily the worst slum in San Francisco and perhaps in the West; the Fillmore District, in which white-occupied houses compete with Japanese and Negro dwellings in a mad race toward utter dilapidation; the Panhandle; South of Market and parts of the Mission District.

Chinatown land costs are from \$2 to \$3 a square foot. The interiors of those old buildings—on which gay neon signs flaunt night clubs and curio shops—are ill-ventilated, seldom penetrated by even the feeblest beam of sunlight. In 20 square blocks 20,000 people live.

Add the fact that Chinatown's people seldom venture out of the close alleys—and

Around The Country

With The EDITORS

simple arithmetic presents you with the grim paradox that San Francisco's most famous, most interesting, and most visited area is San Francisco's worst slum. Result, according to 1937 health figures: tuberculosis in Chinatown, 123 out of 100,000 against the city-wide 60; infant mortality in Chinatown, 84 out of every 1,000 against the city-wide 34.

* * *

Most of San Francisco's, and the Nation's, juvenile delinquency is bred in the slum. Aside from the waste of youthful lives, each juvenile delinquent costs the city an estimated \$200. Any plague, any epidemic would almost certainly be incubated to virulent maturity in slums. Tuberculosis hits its target twice as often in slum areas. And, again from the bookkeeping angle, tuberculosis costs the city money for treatment. There is, too, the human anguish which can be felt but not measured.

Macon, Georgia

Under the headline, "Mother Asks MHA Home Here So Stomach-Cheating Can End," the Macon (Ga.) Telegraph printed the following, January 25:

AT LEAST one Macon mother considers the local housing projects a godsend and has made her application for an apartment in Oglethorpe Homes "with a prayer."

To her an apartment will mean not only a better home, but more food for her four small boys whose stomachs "we have to cheat," and a little money with which to buy bed clothes and dishes "we need so very much."

Last week she talked with R. J. Flournoy, tenant selector, and then she wrote a letter to Jack Cutler, executive director of the Macon Housing Authority.

Her plea for a new home reads in part: "Dear Mr. Cutler:

"I made application this morning for one of the Oglethorpe Homes apartments. Now I am in a fever of fear, fear that for some reason I will not be accepted. Perhaps it is because it seems too good to be true to happen to me.

"Why, it would not only mean better living conditions. It would mean better food, better clothing, and a better heart to do the best we can, Mr. Cutler, it will mean a rest to brain and a peaceful soul.

"Our gas, lights, and water expenses and payments on a gas stove, heater, and refrigerator amount to one-fourth of what my husband makes a month, and the rent is a little more than a fourth.

"That leaves \$22.49 for food to feed six people 31 days, four of whom are growing boys less than 10 years of age.

"We have to cheat our stomachs and promise them a really full meal when we spend the day at grandmother's or auntie's, because we can't put the rent, gas, lights, and water off with a promise.

"But no matter how you stretch and figure, a dollar will only buy a dollar's worth.

"Would you let me know as soon as possible if I am accepted. Then I could let my refrigerator and heater go back and buy some dishes and bedclothes that I need so very much.

"The ages of my boys are 9, 7, 6, and 2. I'm sending up a prayer with this letter."

Yonkers, New York

"Mulford Gardens To Boost Savings" is the heading for the following story from the Yonkers Daily Times of January 2:

THE fortunate families who qualify for apartments in Mulford Gardens, Yonkers' \$3,000,000 housing project, will probably pay rents even lower than they are paying for their present substandard dwellings, it was indicated yesterday. So Matthew F. Kelley, chairman of the municipal housing authority, declared in commenting on the progress being made by the Authority's Tenant Selection Division in handling early applications for apartments in the new project.

"Mulford Gardens is going to be a low-rent housing project in fact as well as in name," Mr. Kelley said, "and our experience with tenant selection so far indicates that the families we rehouse are really going to save money on rent.

"This means that they are going to pay less for Mulford Gardens' light and airy homes, with all modern conveniences, than they are now paying where dark and stuffy rooms and primitive sanitary facilities exist."

USHA Issues Manual of Management Reports

USHA Policy and Procedure Bulletin No. 28, "Manual of Management Reports," is now ready for distribution to local authorities. This Bulletin, the newest in the Policy and Procedure series, is designed to guide local housing authorities in preparing their management reports.

The Manual was developed after intensive consultation with representative local housing authorities and with a small group of experienced housing managers. The following principles were kept constantly in mind: (1) The time required for preparation must be held to a minimum. (2) Reports must directly benefit the local authorities in reviewing management activities. (3) They must directly benefit the staff of a local authority in evaluating its own work. (4) They must enable the USHA to serve as a medium for exchange of experiences, methods, and results. (5) The reports must enable the USHA to fulfill the requirements of the United States Housing Act in reviewing project administration and in making its own annual report to Congress.

The Manual contains sample copies of the reports required, together with complete instructions for filling them out.

The USHA will furnish the local authorities with an initial supply of the report forms as soon as they are available from the Government Printing Office.

Aspects of Initial Tenant Selection in Buffalo

By NAN ROCHE, Tenant Selection Supervisor, Buffalo, N. Y.

One of the many answers to the question on how best to service the prospective tenants of a project is to have a conveniently located application office. In the smaller cities, it is often sufficient to have the central tenant selection office located near the opening project. Even then the applications are sometimes limited to the section in that part of town, so it is generally good procedure to have branches spotted in areas where prospective tenants live. However, I am told that one centralized office means that the records can be kept intact and confusion resulting from duplication and complicated files is avoided. My answer is that, whatever the mechanical complications for the authority are, the point is to service the prospective tenants with as much practical convenience to them as is possible. It may mean one centralized office, either near the project or in the center of the city, or a number of branch offices—the answer depending upon the size of the city and the neighborhood distribution of likely applicants for dwellings in the project.

The tenant selection office, or branch offices, should be open from 8:30 a. m. to 9:00 p. m. as many days during the week as the size of the staff allows, and service on Saturday afternoon and Sunday is necessary.

Methods for Stimulating Applications

I stress again the value of advertising the location of the central office and the hours. We announced it in the papers and in our various publications. The Public Library cooperated with us and printed matter was placed in 16 branch offices. We also placed announcement brochures and other material in hospitals, schools, churches, fraternal organizations, and welfare agencies. We got the cooperation of the Superintendent of Schools, and contacted teachers who knew families eligible for dwellings in the project. I met with some of the District Supervisors in the public welfare departments and also in the private agencies, the Jewish Federation, the Catholic Charities, in the Family Service Department; all of those agencies had contact with low-income families.

Civic clubs—the Rotary, Kiwanis, and others, have been cooperative and helpful in stimulating interest and aiding in directing eligible families to the project. All these contacts are important and tie us in with the community, thus helping us in our future relationship with the public and agencies with which we will have contacts throughout the stage of management.

Requirements should be clear and well publicized. Exceptions to admission policies and verification of eligibility should not be permitted.

Demonstrations in Home Furnishings

The League of Women Voters undertook the job of equipping a 4½-room house in Lakeview, and showed what can be done with very little cash and considerable ingen-

uity. The purpose was to show, through this "demonstration dwelling unit" how tenants could make attractive homes without going into debt. Second-hand furniture and the most inexpensive new home accessories were used throughout. The Good Will Industries agreed to give us furniture.

Since many of these families were coming from rooming houses, the need of a decent type of bed was our first considered problem. In one room we utilized the sofa type of bed and put our money into a decent mattress and springs. We don't have a craft shop, but we utilized the vocational schools in the adult educational center, and, of course, the community resources, in making bedframes and converting an old chest of drawers and old chairs into neat, attractive pieces of furniture. The most gratifying result of this demonstration unit was that many men in the project are taking old furniture and repainting and rebuilding it in the adult educational classes, under expert supervision.

The clothes presses in the project presented another problem because they have no doors. The purchase of inexpensive heavy crash material did the trick. NYA girls did the sewing on these covers as well as on the drapery hangings, bed covers, and shower curtains. Attractive dressing tables were made from packing boxes and orange crates. Parenthetically, some of the boys at the Lakeview Project are now building dressing tables for their sisters. Some of the men are now making Pullman style dinettes, which we didn't have sufficient time to do when the demonstration unit was first set up. We have all noticed that the women are getting a great deal of satisfaction out of getting together to talk over their common problems. They are making, among other things, parchment lamp shades and oil cloth curtains.

The nursery, or the children's room, was the center of most interest to most of the people coming into the project. Not only were our prospective tenants interested, but it also served as a demonstration to social agencies in the city.

In our model apartment we set up a bulletin in each room showing the cost of each article. The prospective tenant, after viewing the rooms and studying the cost charts, consulted our Home Bureau people concerning certain paints, certain materials, and the mechanics of making old furniture very attractive. We felt that we had accomplished our purpose—that we had encouraged our tenants to utilize what they already had.

In conclusion, I might add that our experience indicates it is wise to have an apartment maintained as a demonstration unit in the project. There are many advantages—one that the privacy of the homes is intact at the same time visitors have an opportunity to become acquainted with the project.

"New Homes for Old" Latest Headline Book

Latest in the Foreign Policy Association's series of "Headline Books" is the recently published "New Homes For Old," written by William V. Reed in collaboration with Elizabeth Ogg. Attractively designed, with over 90 illustrations, this small (112-page) volume is the first complete summary of European housing to be written for popular consumption. While the relevance to Americans of European experience is adequately stressed, the emphasis throughout is upon the housing policies and methods of the various European nations during the last 30 years (and especially since 1918).

The chapter headings are challenging—"Why Housing?," "Patchwork Remedies and Promising Plans," "America, What Next?" In general, the method followed is that of first tracing the historical growth of the housing problem (beginning with a pre-industrial-revolution Yorkshire village and progressing to the modern metropolis), then discussing the several types of solution attempted through the public housing programs of England, France, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Holland, and the rest.

"In Europe homes are blacked out," the volume begins. But the authors go on to observe that, while housing progress has been interrupted by war in Europe, "Europe's experience can be a great help to us . . . For after the World War Europe found itself in much the same kind of housing dilemma that was forced upon our attention during the depression. Though they didn't by any means finish the job, between wars some European countries did go a long way toward cracking their worst housing problem. That's why we shall do well to find out what their experience has been."

Like all "Headline Books," "New Homes For Old" aims to vivify an important problem for a wide audience. Its price (25 cents), appearance, and readability recommend it for such a purpose.

Mr. Reed, an architect and housing consultant, spent 2 years in Europe gathering material for his book. Miss Ogg is a member of the Foreign Policy Association staff.

Housing Is Best Market For Lumber Industry

Calling the low-cost housing program the salvation of the West Coast lumber industry, Edmund Hayes, President, the West Coast Lumbermen's Association, recently predicted that low-cost housing will continue as the lumber industry's major market for the next 10 years.

"What the West Coast lumber industry would have done in the last 2 or 3 years without this market, I cannot venture to guess," he said.

"The most important thing to be done for lumber is to organize and focus the resources of industry upon continuing the program of low-cost housing."

Roosevelt Approves More Loan Contracts

President Roosevelt recently approved loan contracts totaling \$15,857,000 for the construction of 16 low-rent housing projects in 12 communities. The new loans brought the total of approved USHA loan contracts to \$597,633,000 for 153 local housing authorities. These programs call for the erection of 362 projects in 162 different communities, and will provide a total of 133,834 dwelling units to rehouse about 536,000 persons.

Largest of the new contracts is \$2,282,000 for the Bridgeport (Conn.) housing authority, to build some 510 low-rental dwellings. Six authorities are receiving their first USHA loan contracts. They are: Montgomery, Ala.; New Britain, Conn.; Marietta, Ga.; Alexander County, Ill.; Lawrence, Mass.; and Pawtucket, R. I. Estimated average construction cost per dwelling is lowest (\$1,419) on the 534-unit project in San Juan, Puerto Rico; highest (\$3,140) on the 356-unit development in Washington, D. C.

Building Permits Up 40% in '39—USHA Large Factor

During 1939, 343,084 new dwelling units were provided in the urban areas of the United States, according to a release of the United States Department of Labor. Of this number, 55,438, or 16 percent, were in USHA-aided projects.

In 1939 more dwelling units were provided in urban areas in this country than in any year since 1929 when building permits were issued for 400,000 dwelling units. The 1939 total is more than nine times that of 1933—the lowest year of the depression—and is 40 percent above the 1938 total. When USHA-aided projects are excluded from the total, private building still shows a substantial gain over 1938—20.3 percent.

Encouraging as this record seems to be, the 1939 total is still far short of the total number of dwelling units which must be built annually if our cities are to eradicate the dwellings which are "unfit for use" or if they are to relieve the acute housing shortages developed over the past decade.

Schedule of Bid Opening Dates¹

Local authority and project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
Akron (Ohio-7-1).....	276	3- 7-40
Baltimore (Md.-2-2)....	434	3-20-40
Butte (Mont.-3-1).....	225	3- 9-40
Charlotte (N. C.-3-1-A)	108	3-15-40
Fajardo (P. R.-3-1)....	210	3-15-40
Frederick (Md.-3-2)....	50	3-19-40
Lexington (Ky.-4-1)....	86	3-16-40
Lexington (Ky.-4-2)....	206	3-61-40
McComb (Miss.-3-2)....	90	3-20-40
New Orleans (La.-1-8)...	746	3- 7-40
Omaha (Nebr.-1-2).....	272	2-27-40
Savannah (Ga.-2-3)....	330	3- 5-40
Tampa (Fla.-3-2).....	320	3-10-40
West Palm Beach (Fla.-9-2)	120	3-10-40

¹ There is usually a 30-day period between bid advertising and bid opening.

Publication is approved by the Director, Bureau of the Budget, as required by rule 42 of the Joint Committee on Printing. For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. Subscription price \$1 domestic, foreign \$1.80 per year. Single copies, 5 cents. Material for Public Housing should be addressed to Informational Service Division, U. S. Housing Authority, Washington, D. C.

WHY PUBLIC HOUSING IN DALLAS ?

Below: A family of seven lives here; pays rent of \$2 per week, \$9.65 per month.

★
How
The
"Other
Half"
Lives
★



BOTH OF THESE HOMES IN DALLAS ARE OCCUPIED BY LOW-INCOME FAMILIES.



Above: A three-room home, much like this, will rent for \$7.50 per month.

★
Scene in
Better
Life
and
Living
★

Why Public Housing In Dallas

This effective cover appears on a leaflet prepared by the Housing Authority of the City of Dallas, an excellent example of locally issued, educational material. The eight-page, 8" x 10" bulletin features well-chosen photographs and striking captions, together with a simple, straightforward text

which presents the case for public housing in Dallas. "Dallas PAYS For Its Slums," "Contrasts and Comparisons in Life. For Dallas . . . Which?," and "How Do the Slum Families Live?" are some of the page headings. Results of a local housing survey are dramatically summarized. "In the Mexican area 96.3 percent of dwellings were unfit for occupancy."

Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended February 9, 1940	Week ended February 2, 1940	Percentage change
Number of projects under construction.....	173	167	+3.59
Number of dwellings under construction.....	67,878	66,340	+2.32
Total estimated over-all cost ¹ of new housing.....	\$304,240,000	\$297,901,000	+2.13
Average over-all cost ¹ of new housing per unit.....	\$4,482	\$4,491	-0.20
Average net construction cost ² per unit.....	\$2,816	\$2,820	-0.14

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.