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PUBLIC HOUSING

Federal Works Agency - John M. Carmody, Administrator Vol. 2, No. 12 - September 17, 1940 U. S. Housing Authority - Nathan Straus, Administrator

New Publication Sums Up Defense Housing Need In Philadelphia

The publication within the last 2 weeks of *Housing and the National Defense* by the Philadelphia Housing Association is a forthright analysis of housing in terms of Philadelphia's defense activities.

In the foreword, J. A. MacCallum, President of the Philadelphia Housing Association, clearly explains the position of Philadelphians in the present emergency.

"In Philadelphia we are particularly concerned. Our city is the most strategic center of arms production in the country. Increased employment will place additional stress on an already serious housing situation. Eighty-two thousand Philadelphia families now live in homes which fall below the American standard of decency. Even in 1939 our vacancy rate was abnormally low. We must prevent further aggravation of this condition, and we must insist that whatever housing is done creates sound economic and social values that will stand . . ."

32,400 New Defense Jobs

The booklet asks and answers the question: How will the national defense program affect Philadelphia? In the shipbuilding, metal, textile, and other industries, heavy increases in personnel are to be expected, the booklet states. A brief summary of known possibilities for employment increases reveals that at least 32,400 additional jobs will soon be necessary. This prediction was based on reports from 32 private industries, the Frankford Arsenal, the Philadelphia Navy Yard, the Quartermaster depot, and the Cramps shipyard.

Although there are sufficient employables on relief to fill these jobs numerically, the positions require skilled labor. As a result, skilled workmen will have to be imported from less strategic industries. Unless something is done quickly, the booklet affirms, rents will increase, the narrow margin of vacancies (most of which are substandard) will decrease, serious overcrowding will be the rule, and a heavy labor turn-over will be the final result.

Philadelphia is not wholly unprepared to meet the housing emergency, the booklet says. "We are much better equipped for local action than we were at the beginning of the World War. . . . The city has established an official housing authority with almost 3 years of experience in the design, construction, and management of housing projects. . . . The city is in a position to prove that it is capable of dealing with its own problem, even under the stress of an emergency as great as the one we face."

Nation Better Prepared Than In '17 For Defense Housing Need, Says Straus

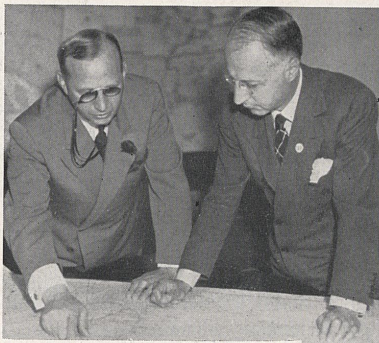
A WORSE housing emergency than that of 1917 finds the Nation far better prepared to solve its defense housing problem, declared Nathan Straus, USHA Administrator, in a recent radio address over a coast-to-coast network. "The mistakes and the delays of a quarter of a century ago" will not be repeated, and "within the next few months" there will be new homes for 8,100 families in 21 communities, Mr. Straus predicted.

The speech, called "Homes for Defenders," follows in abbreviated form: "Tonight I would like to take you behind the scenes for a confidential view of one of the most vital problems that confronts the defense program—the problem of housing the defenders.

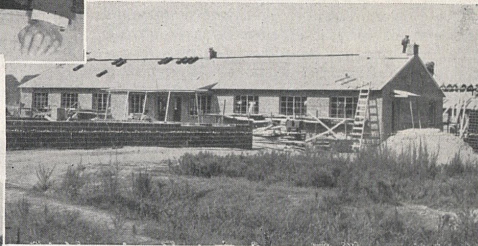
"Let us start on the Pacific coast in the Navy Yard City of Bremerton. There are men, women, and children who are sleeping tonight on the grass in the parks of that town. They are sleeping curled up on the seats of automobiles and in makeshift beds in garages.

They are pitching tents on the outskirts of the city. So says the *Seattle Times*. To the visitor it might appear that Bremerton is suffering from a wave of unemployment and that those families sleeping in the parks are destitute or have been evicted from their homes. But the truth is the opposite. Bremerton is not suffering from unemployment; it is enjoying an unprecedented increase in employment—due to great expansion at its navy yard. To quote an officer of the Bremerton Police Department:

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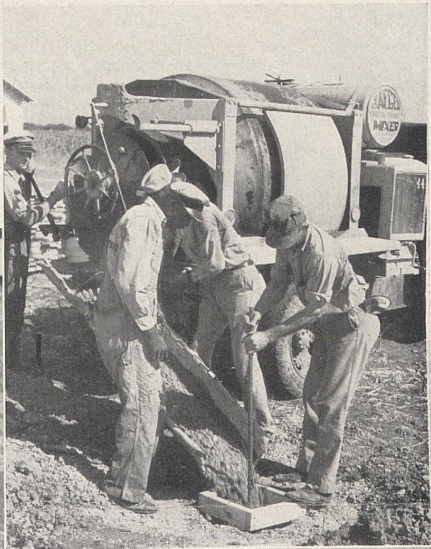


Defense housing plans are checked by USHA Administrator, Nathan Straus, and Kai Nielsen, Chairman of the Moline (Ill.) housing authority.



An air force of 50,000 planes will mean serious housing shortages near Army Air Bases such as Maxwell Field at Montgomery, Ala. Shown above are hundreds of new homes being pushed rapidly to completion by the Montgomery housing authority.

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'They're not bums and they have good jobs. They are skilled workers—most of them—in the navy yard. They arrive here in the city and go from door to door asking for a place to live, but there just are not any vacancies. We have been forced to allow some of them to spend a night in the city jail.'

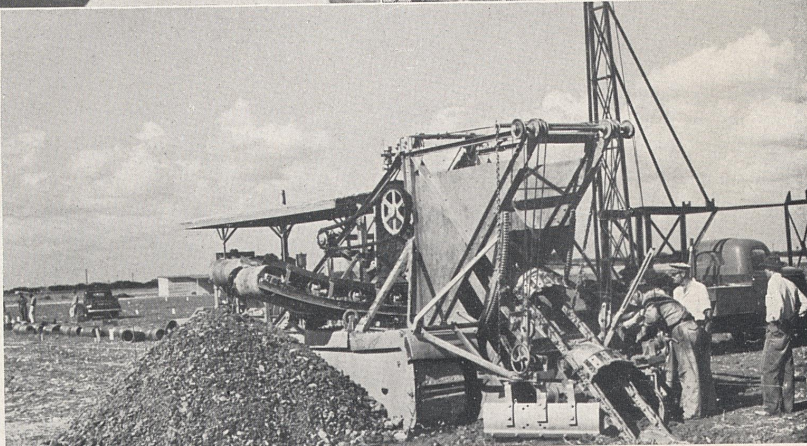
Housing Needed in 200 Communities

"That is the picture in one city. Is it an exception? Hardly. What you can see in Bremerton, Wash., you can see also, to a greater or lesser degree, in nearly 200 communities throughout the United States: Rock Island, Ill., where men are flocking to work at the Army's largest arsenal; Hartford, Conn., where, as a result of a housing shortage, thousands of workers have to live far outside the city and travel long distances, yes, as far as 70 miles to work each way; Beaver County, Pa., where some of the world's largest steel mills are moving full blast ahead; Columbus, Ga., where, according to Brigadier General Singleton, a thousand additional homes are needed right now to house the families of enlisted men at Fort Benning; Newport, R. I., where because of tremendously expanded naval activities, there is a shortage, according to high naval officials, of more than 3,000 homes.

"In one way we are much worse off today than in 1917 and 1918. There is today no surplus of homes and vacancies to act as a cushion while the defense housing program is getting under way. Although the national defense activity is only starting, the housing shortage is nearly as acute as during the worst days of the last war.

Nation Better Prepared Today

"But there is also a bright side to the picture. At the outbreak of World War Number 1, housing was a field in which our Government had no experience whatsoever. As a result, public housing for defense purposes did not get under way until the summer of 1918, and the first tenant did not move into one of these homes until 2 months after the Armistice was signed.



Men and machines rush work on the defense housing project in Corpus Christi, Tex. The concrete crew (*above, right*) follows hard on the heels of the excavation machines to pour cement for 20-foot pilings. A ditchdigging machine is shown directly above extending the city sewer lines to the project site. Foundation work was started here before the contractor's office was finished. Blueprints are being checked in the picture at the left, above, by Chief Architect Bob Vogler (*center*), A. J. McKinnon, Clerk of the Works (*left*), and Roy Gardner, General Supt.

"But today, America is prepared to solve its need for defense housing.

"There are today existing, functioning, Government agencies, equipped to undertake the defense housing program. In fact, one agency has already stepped into the breach. The United States Housing Authority and the 498 active local housing authorities all over the country constitute an efficient mechanism which has already undertaken the construction of new homes for national defense.

"When the emergency is over, homes built in established communities will be community assets to be used for families from the slums and areas of blight. Sound construction and lowest costs are being achieved under the defense program just as these twin goals are also being achieved under the regular slum clearance program of the United States Housing Authority.

"However, in the defense housing, the greatest emphasis is being put upon speed of construction. In most cases, two shifts of workers are being used and the new homes will be occupied less than 6 months after the ground-breaking. Yes, in some cases, the construction timetable calls for such amazing speed that tenants will move in 120 days after the construction contract is let.

"Where housing is needed on Army and Navy posts, the Army and Navy Departments are building it and should continue to do so. Other Federal agencies are ready to do their part and should be utilized. The local public housing authorities throughout the country, with the aid and guidance of the United States Housing Authority, are now launched on the job of providing defense housing, and their capacities should continue to be utilized to the utmost."

9/25/40

New Haven Closes Police Station As Project Lowers Crime In City

The benefits of public housing were illustrated graphically and early in New Haven, Conn., recently, when the Board of Police Commissioners ordered the Dixwell Avenue police precinct, located immediately adjacent to the city's first low-rent housing project, to be closed and offered for sale.

The Dixwell Avenue station, built in 1893 and operated continuously since, is located in one of the most congested areas of bad housing in New Haven, with dark tenement buildings providing curtains behind which petty criminals might operate. Police records have long shown a high percentage of arrests in that district.

Mayor John W. Murphy and Chief of Police Philip T. Smith have each gone on record as crediting the work of the housing authority in establishing better conditions in the neighborhood as one of the prime factors leading to the decision to close the precinct.

Mayor Praises Project

"The low-rent housing project in that neighborhood was a definite factor in considering the closing of the police station directly across the street," Mayor Murphy said, "We anticipate further and more certain benefits when the project is open and fully occupied."

"The removal of the old, dark, high and unlighted buildings where crime and misbehavior could take place undetected, and the substitution of neat, well-lighted and well-supervised buildings makes the closing of the station possible," he said. "We look forward to innumerable benefits, not the least of which will be an incentive to live decent lives in the decent and healthful surroundings being provided. It has been a blessing to have those old buildings demolished."

Chief Smith said that "there is no denying that the building of the project played a part in the decision to close the Dixwell Avenue precinct station."

No police records are available in such form as to indicate the percentage of the decrease in crime in the vicinity of the housing project, but it is generally conceded to have been noticeable enough to influence the police commissioners to close the 47-year-old station house.

200 Families Moved From Slum

Elm Haven, the housing authority's first low-rent project, will not be completed until next spring, but has been responsible for the "breaking up" of a concentration of persons who have kept police constantly on the alert. The project is clearing out a 17-acre slum district, and to date has evacuated one-half of the 400 families originally housed in the district.

Chief of Police Smith, in a recent discussion with B. M. Pettit, director of the housing authority, agreed that one interesting factor in the cleaning out of the Dixwell Avenue area was the fact that police problems did not recur in other parts of town, nor was there any particular increase in the same conditions elsewhere as a result of the relocation of the inhabitants.

The police chief attributed this to the breaking up of the groups, bearing out the general theory that negative elements magnify when concentrated, and tend to decrease when distributed.

Nuisance Demolished Near Site

The housing authority, in evacuating a portion of the site, relocated many of the former tenants in widely separated areas. It has already begun demolishing a "business" block across the street from the police station which has a long history of vice and delinquency.

Chief of Police Smith said that the district would now be policed from the Headquarters station located in the heart of the city and more than a mile from the Dixwell Precinct.

FROM THE *Administrator*

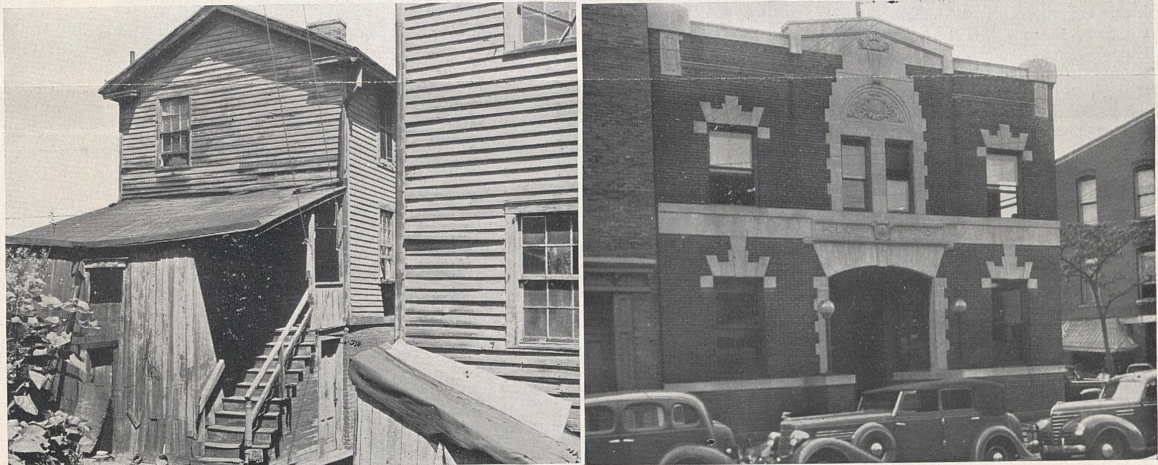
The Golden Mean: One of the most difficult jobs of the Administrator of any public program is the job of finding the golden mean, of steering the best possible course. The question comes up in a hundred ways.

Take the question of sites. Some believe that the USHA should not concern itself with land costs at all. That, they say, is a responsibility of the local authority and the USHA should allow the local authority to pay what it pleases for such sites as it chooses. Others believe that the USHA should insist that all housing projects be built on sites that are now slums or areas of blight. Still others believe that the USHA should insist that all projects should be built on low-cost, outlying land, thus saving substantially in land cost and at the same time giving tenants better living conditions.

The USHA has attempted to follow a middle course between unwise leniency in respect to cost of land purchased with USHA funds and, on the other hand, an equally unwise policy of prescribing rigidly the nature of sites and the prices to be paid for them. The policy of the USHA is to allow a local authority to choose its own sites, providing the land chosen is suitable for a low-rent housing project and the price to be paid is the fair market value.

When an unusually high-priced site is chosen by the local authority, the USHA requires that a part of this excess land cost be met by a cash or other contribution by the locality. This policy may not be the golden mean—but it seems about the best approach to it at present.

Nathan Thaus



For Sale. Clearance of the above slum, to make way for a housing project, ended the need for New Haven's Dixwell Avenue Police Station. The building has been closed and is offered for sale.

Short-Term Notes Save On Interest Charges

It was recently announced that 28 more local housing authorities will sell \$44,580,000 of Temporary Loan Notes to private bidders offering the lowest interest rates.

The short-term paper will be offered at public sale in two groups, one to be advertised for opening of bids on September 19, and the other for bid opening on Sept. 26.

Since November 1939, when the first of these notes were offered for sale, various local housing authorities have issued a total of approximately \$361,000,000 of such notes.

The sale of these notes makes possible substantial savings, because local authorities will pay interest rates of less than one-sixth of what the USHA is required to charge for its loans. These savings in interest will reduce the cost of the projects of these authorities by at least 2 percent, and this will also reduce the Federal subsidies which are computed on the basis of capital cost of the projects.

With part of the lower-interest funds thus obtained, the local housing authorities will repay to the USHA all moneys already advanced on their loan contracts, together with accrued interest. With the remainder, they will meet the costs of construction of their USHA-aided projects during the term of the notes.

The last offering of these short-term notes, totaling \$51,000,000, were sold in July at interest rates ranging from .456 to .57 of 1 percent.

Local housing authorities in the following cities will participate in the offering:

Bids advertised Sept. 12, opened Sept. 19:

City	Amount
Atlantic City, N. J.	\$1,720,000
Augusta, Ga.	2,090,000
Corpus Christi, Tex.	900,000
Fort Wayne, Ind.	275,000
Gary, Ind.	880,000
Hammond, Ind.	850,000
Hartford, Conn.	1,545,000
Holyoke, Mass.	820,000
New Haven, Conn.	2,400,000
Norwalk, Conn.	560,000
Savannah, Ga.	2,500,000
Springfield, Ill.	1,400,000
Waco, Tex.	500,000
Wheeling, W. Va.	1,070,000
Williamson, W. Va.	355,000
Total	\$17,865,000

Bids advertised Sept. 12, opened Sept. 26:

City	Amount
Memphis, Tenn.	\$7,800,000
Montgomery, Ala.	1,400,000
Toledo, Ohio	575,000
Zanesville, Ohio	1,100,000
Total	\$10,875,000

Schedule of Bid Opening Dates ¹

Project location, number, and name (when available)	Number of units	Date of opening
Champaign Co. (Ill.-6-3, Defense):		
Rantpud.....	100	Oct. 3
Cincinnati (Ohio-4-2):		
English Woods.....	750	Oct. 3
Columbus (Ohio-1-3):		
West Rich Street.....	252	Oct. 1
Danville (Ill.-11-1):		
Fair Oaks Park.....	179	Oct. 3
Danville (Ill.-11-2):		
Beeler Terrace.....	50	Oct. 3
Granite City (Ill.-5-1):		
Ridgedale Homes.....	151	Oct. 1
Hattiesburg (Miss.-1-1)	120	² Oct. 9
Hopewell (Va.-5-1)	96	Sept. 17
Key West (Fla.-13-1)	136	Oct. 3
Key West (Fla.-13-2)	84	Oct. 3
Lawrence (Mass.-10-1)	291	Sept. 17
Newark (N. J.-2-8):		
Felix Fuld Court.....	300	Sept. 26
Norfolk (Va.-6-1, Defense)	500	Sept. 25
North Little Rock (Ark.-2-1)	152	Oct. 8
Philadelphia (Pa.-2-3)	1,250	Sept. 17
Rock Island (Ill.-18-1, Defense)	300	Oct. 1
San Antonio (Tex.-6-1-A)	248	Oct. 16
San Juan (P. R.-2-2):		
Casario San Antonio.....	132	Oct. 8
Washington (D. C.-1-7):		
Navy Yard.....	314	Sept. 17

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

² Information not definite.

Bids advertised Sept. 19, opened Sept. 26:

City	Amount
Athens, Ga.	\$900,000
Beverly, N. J.	300,000
Bridgeport, Conn.	1,700,000
Houston, Tex.	4,150,000
Los Angeles City, Calif.	1,750,000
Los Angeles County, Calif.	4,080,000
Marietta, Ga.	500,000
Muncie, Ind.	1,135,000
Washington, D. C.	1,325,000
Total	\$15,840,000
Grand Total	\$44,580,000

Langdon Post to Head Region VII for USHA

Langdon Post, former New York City Tenement House Commissioner and nationally known housing expert, has been appointed Director of USHA's Region VII, including the States of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, and the Territory of Hawaii. Winters Haydock, former Regional Director, is being recalled to Washington to assist Mr. William P. Seaver, USHA Assistant Administrator. Mr. Post, now on an extended tour of defense housing and slum clearance projects, is expected to arrive in San Francisco Oct. 1 to take over his new duties.

Norfolk Students Make Public Housing Movie

For 4 years the students of Blair Junior High School in Norfolk, Va., have been learning about public housing and slum conditions in their own city through the medium of various projects suggested by their civics teacher, Mr. J. J. McPherson. Last year they produced their own 16 mm., 20-minute movie, entitled "This Is Our Challenge."

All work on the film was done by the students themselves, including preparation of the scenario, photography, direction, editing, and titling. Exterior scenes were taken on location in Norfolk slum districts, but for the interior scenes a special set was built across from the school. Pictures of completed housing projects were secured on field trips, and were supplemented from USHA photographs, taken in cities all over the country.

The completed film, one of the first of its kind reported by any school in the country, was shown to Blair students at an admission price of 10 cents, to cover production costs of the picture.

In previous years Mr. McPherson's students have prepared models of slum districts and of housing projects and have presented a housing play, entitled "A Day in the City."

Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended September 5, 1940 ¹	Week ended August 30, 1940	Week ended September 8, 1939
Number of projects under construction ²	267	267	92
Number of dwellings under construction ²	97,450	97,450	39,377
Total estimated over-all cost ³ of new housing	\$421,481,000	\$421,481,000	\$182,417,000
Average over-all cost ³ of new housing per unit	\$4,325	\$4,325	\$4,633
Average net construction cost ⁴ per unit	\$2,717	\$2,717	\$2,905

¹ With this week's issue of PUBLIC HOUSING the date of the weekly construction report is changed, so that it represents the status of the program as of the close of business on the Thursday preceding the date on which PUBLIC HOUSING goes to press. In this issue, therefore, the construction report does not represent a full week's program. In the future, the 1940 data will be represented as of a Thursday, whereas data for 1939 will represent the status of the program at the close of business on Friday of each week.

² Includes projects which have been completed.

³ 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.

⁴ The cost of building the house, including structural, plumbing, heating, and electrical costs.

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.