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PUBLIC HOUSING

Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Vol. 1, No. 18

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

December 12, 1939

No Early Cost Rise Expected by Crane

According to a statement released recently by USHA Assistant Administrator Jacob Crane, there is no immediate prospect of any sharp increase in the construction cost of housing projects.

Development costs on USHA-aided projects, according to Mr. Crane, have risen from 2 percent to 3 percent during the months of September and October; but this is not necessarily the result of the present European War. A slight upswing in construction costs had already begun before the war started. If this movement were to continue in a regular line, the next 6 months would see an increase over today's costs of from 6 percent to 9 percent.

Mr. Crane feels, however, that the present line of increase will tend to level off rather than rise during the next 5 or 6 months. One of the chief reasons, according to Mr. Crane, is that the construction industry will be

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Annual Report by Atlanta Authority Sets Standard With Excellent Maps

Rebuilding Atlanta, the first annual report of that city's housing authority, deserves the careful attention of all public housing agencies in America. In 34 pages, it tells the story of the Atlanta authority's first year (June 11, 1938, to June 30, 1939) simply, directly, and convincingly. Photographs and maps fill 20 pages.

The report clearly outlines the local program against the background of actual housing needs. "Within Atlanta's city limits, there are 83,171 dwelling units, exclusive of hotels, dormitories, and institutions. Of these, 45,664, or nearly 55 percent, are unfit for decent living." But Atlanta has made an excellent beginning with two PWA Housing Division projects, and it has secured USHA funds to build additional new homes for some 2,500 families, or about 10,000 people.

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Detroit Authority Opens New Project

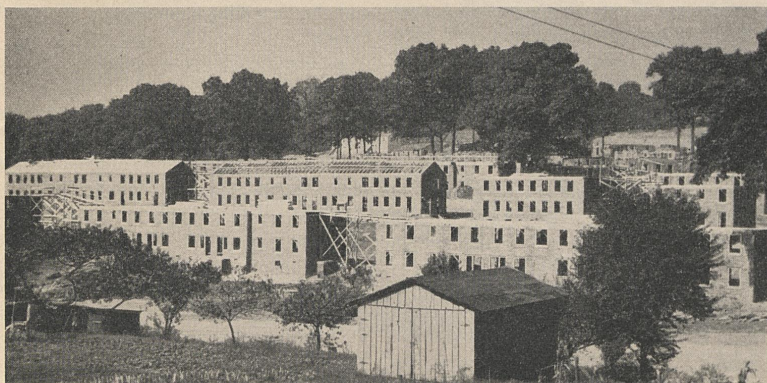
Nearly 2 months ahead of schedule, the first of the 148 new homes at Brewster Addition in Detroit will be completed and ready for occupancy about December 15, according to Carl L. Bradt, Director-Secretary of the Detroit Housing Commission.

The construction contract for the project was let in March 1939, and the scheduled completion date was set for February 1940. Intelligent cooperation between contractors, architects, the local housing commission, and the USHA, said Mr. Bradt, is responsible for the excellent production record. All the units will be completed by January 10, 1940.

The tenants will be selected from over 6,300 applicants. They will be welcomed to their new homes by hostesses who are tenants of Brewster, parent project of the Addition. The Visiting Housekeepers Association and the Good Will Industries have set up one of the units as a model apartment, with furniture and equipment within the means of low-income families.

The Commission has been fortunate, Mr. Bradt said, in obtaining the assistance of the Department of Public Welfare which has transferred four of its case workers to assist in the selection of tenants.

Besides the Addition, the Commission is already operating Brewster and Parkside under a lease agreement with the USHA, and has three other projects approved. USHA funds totaling \$16,564,000 have been loaned to the Commission, and an additional sum of \$13,436,000 has been earmarked.



Western Heights, the 244-unit Knoxville, Tenn., project shown above, is rapidly taking shape.

First Comprehensive Report on Consumer Demands Issued by National Resources Com.

"The total volume of income flowing into the hands of the Nation's families and individual consumers during 1935-36 was approximately 59.3 billion. Out of this amount, 50.2 billion, or about 85 percent, was spent for current consumption . . . Food claimed by far the largest share of the outlay . . . approximately 17 billion, or 29 percent of the total income . . . Housing came second in order of outlay, taking 9.5 billion, or 16 percent of income." (*Consumer Expenditures in the United States*, National Resources Committee, Washington, D. C.)

The recently published report of the National Resources Committee is the first detailed and comprehensive summary ever made of the consumption demands of different groups of American consumers. The report is one of a series based on data obtained in the Study of Consumer Purchases. In this Study, detailed information on income, expenditures, and savings during a 12-month period in 1935 and 1936 were secured from a sample of more than 60,000 families living in 51 cities, 140 villages, and 66 farm counties—in all, 30 States were represented.

The report confirms certain hitherto unverified opinions concerning living costs for the "lower-third" income group—families and single individuals with incomes of less than \$780 a year. American consumers in this group spend, on the average, half their income (50.2 percent) for food, and over one-third (35.8 percent) for housing (shelter and household operation). With 86 percent of income thus absorbed, and with another 10 percent expended for clothing, it is obviously impossible for this third of the Nation to provide for all other necessary living expenses without running into debt. As a result, we find that average annual expenditures for this group exceed average income by 16.7 percent.

A previous NRC report showed the magnitude of consumer income and how it was divided among various

population groups in 1935-36. The present study summarizes money expenditures under 14 broad categories. In a later report these major categories will be subdivided to show expenditures for a more detailed list of items.

The NRC reports are summaries for the country as a whole; regional and city reports are being published currently by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture—the Bureaus that did the field work on the Study. All reports may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Although the *Consumer Expenditure* report does not differentiate between owned and rented homes nor between rural and urban housing, these differences will appear in later NRC reports, as well as in the publications of the other two agencies.

The basic material contained in the series is of inestimable value to all who are concerned with planning effective local or National programs for achieving social or economic improvement in American life.

No Early Cost Rise Expected

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reluctant to allow its recovery to be checked again by artificial increases in costs.

Indexes of wholesale building material prices for this year, using 1926 costs as 100, reveals that building materials as a whole have risen from 89.6 in August to 93.0 on October 28.

Since there is usually a considerable lapse of time between preliminary cost estimates and the actual purchase of materials, the fluctuation of construction costs is significant to both USHA and local authorities.

Mr. Crane's statement is reassuring and timely. USHA's research staff is noting construction cost fluctuations and preparing analyses which will be announced periodically.

Atlanta Annual Report Sets High Map Standard

(Continued from p. 1)

In line with the latest trends in public reporting, *Rebuilding Atlanta* includes a group of maps which represent perhaps the finest cartographical work yet displayed by a local housing authority. One map feature is the use of the transparent overlay. In two cases the site plan of a new project has been plotted in red and laid over a black-and-white property map of a slum area. Inserts on the base map show typical project floor plans. The most ambitious (and instructive) aspect of the report is a four-page folding map at the end of the volume. It is a reproduction of that portion of the Atlanta city map which includes slum areas, with the latter areas shaded in pink, the two existing housing projects plotted in darker pink, and the four new housing projects plotted in red. The maps and photographs together form a compelling brief for housing in Atlanta.

Not the least valuable portion of the report is the section labeled "Honest Doubts," in which are listed and answered the questions most frequently asked about public housing.

"What sort of tenants will you accept?" is one query. The answer, "Those who can and will pay their rent and who will be good neighbors."

"Question: But can you get that kind from the neighborhoods you are tearing down?"

"Answer: Brother, remember that a slim pocketbook is more often than not the traveling companion of a good heart."

Another question reads: "Why should the rest of the community pay for housing which admittedly the poor cannot provide for themselves?"

The answer: "You are now paying the upkeep of the rotten housing in Atlanta. Just because you have never seen the receipted bill does not alter the fact."

Members of the Atlanta authority are: C. F. Palmer, Chairman; James D. Robinson, Jr., Vice-Chairman; A. R. Dorsen, Treasurer; Frank G. Etheridge; and O. M. Harper.

Results of USHA Research Will Aid Local Authorities

USHA Publishes New Booklet on Recreation and Housing

Housing and Recreation, a new USHA illustrated booklet, has just come off the press, and is now being distributed to local authorities. In his preface, entitled "A New Pattern of Living," Nathan Straus, USHA Administrator, states, "The purpose of this pamphlet is to show how careful planning may provide opportunity for happier and healthier living at a minimum cost for maintenance and operation."

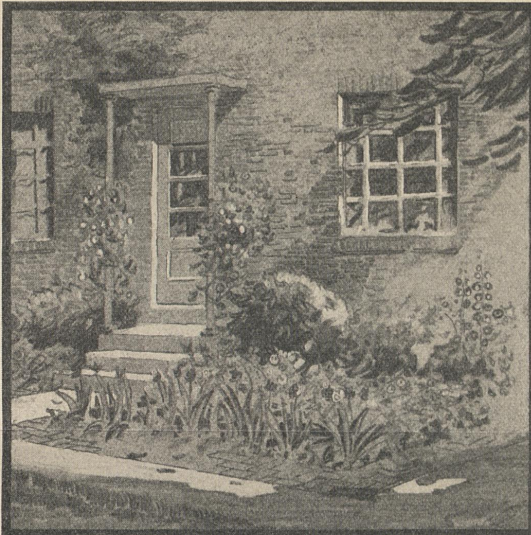
Pointing out that "A good rough measure of the success of a public housing project is the extent to which community activities develop among the tenant families," Mr. Straus likens the well-planned project to the New England Colonial village green in the encouragement of these activities.

The 40-page booklet contains nearly 50 illustrations (sketches, diagrams, site-plans, and the like). It is divided into three main sections: Elements of Recreation in the Planning of Housing Projects; Five Case Studies in Site Planning for Recreational Use; and Suggestions for

Spray Pools—Designs and Specifications.

In the first section the several important elements of recreation are discussed in relation to the site-plan, each topic being explained in a half page of text and illustrated by three or more sketches showing desirable procedure. The topics are self-explanatory: Active Play for Children, Wading and Spray Pools, Play for Youths and Adults, Open Space for Varied Uses, Flower Gardening, Neighborliness at the Entrance, Use of Natural Features. Sketches show children using concrete table tennis equipment outdoors, mothers sitting on shaded benches near play areas, games of shuffleboard and horseshoes.

The "Five Case Studies" include original and revised site-plan studies from every region of the country, il-



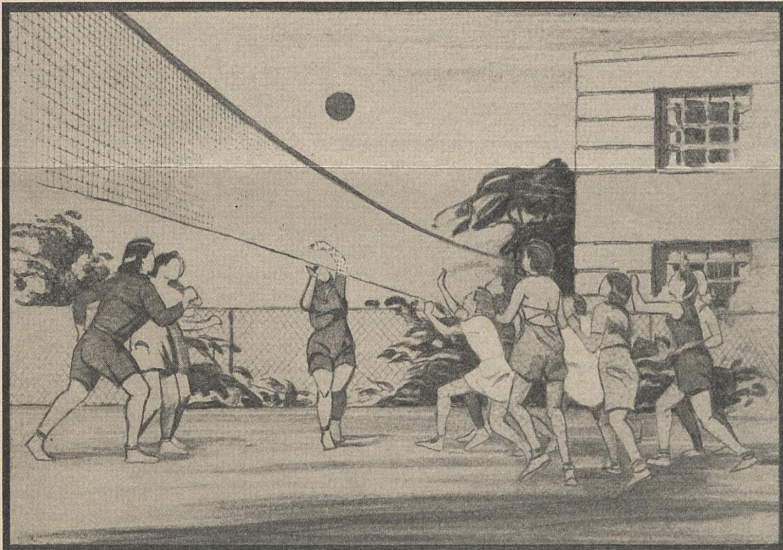
"... the allocation of open space to the tenants for their own care is in accord with American tradition and will aid in keeping down the cost of maintenance." This front yard flower garden (from *Housing and Recreation*) can be cultivated by the tenant family during leisure hours.

lustrating avoidance of traffic streets within the project, concentration of open space, location of community buildings, and other factors in recreational planning. Slum sites, vacant sites, and additions to existing projects are all represented.

One of the five case studies presents the problem of designing the project so as to eliminate traffic hazards. In the first plan the buildings are skillfully arranged, but a street divides the neighborhood, separating the community building and the surrounding play space from every building in the project. In the revised plan the traffic is deflected around the project.

The "Spray Pools" section of the booklet is both complete and specific. Sketches and diagrams for five types of pools are presented. Costs, ranging from \$320 to \$455, are listed in each instance. Play sculptures, used either in conjunction with the water source or separately, are recommended. One page is devoted to "suggested specifications for wading and spray pools."

Copies of *Housing and Recreation* may be secured for 10 cents from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.



Volley ball, as illustrated in *Housing and Recreation*, is "one of the multiple recreational uses of the central area." A 3-foot net, with the top 8 feet from the ground, is tightly stretched between two uprights. Court dimensions can be varied to accommodate as many as 16 players.

Construction Bids

BID OPENINGS DEFINITELY SCHEDULED

Local authority and project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
Allegheny Co. (Pa.-6-2)	288	12-20-39
Anniston (Ala.-4-1)	166	12-18-39
Atlanta (Ga.-6-3)	634	12-22-39
Atlantic City (N. J.-14-1)	375	12-20-39
Austin (Tex.-1-1-A)	81	12-20-39
Austin (Tex.-1-2-A)	70	12-20-39
Columbia (S. C.-2-2)	250	12-15-39
Columbus (Ga.-4-2-A)	104	12-12-39
Corpus Christi (Tex.-8-1-R Pt. II)	24	12-13-39
Corpus Christi (Tex.-8-2-R)	210	12-13-39
Corpus Christi (Tex.-8-3-R)	100	12-13-39
El Paso (Tex.-3-2)	314	12-22-39
Great Falls (Mont.-2-1)	156	12-15-39
Kingsport (Tenn.-6-1)	128	12-20-39
Kingsport (Tenn.-6-2)	48	12-20-39
McKeesport (Pa.-5-1)	206	12-19-39
Meridian (Miss.-4-2)	119	1-3-40
Meridian (Miss.-4-4)	89	1-3-40
Newark (N. J.-2-5)	614	12-21-39
New Haven (Conn.-4-1)	460	12-19-39
New Orleans (La.-1-3)	916	12-22-39
New Orleans (La.-1-5)	903	12-20-39
Oakland (Calif.-3-2)	154	12-13-39
Pensacola (Fla.-6-1)	120	12-14-39
Pittsburgh (Pa.-1-3)	1,758	12-22-39
Raleigh (N. C.-2-1)	200	12-20-39
San Francisco (Calif.-1-3)	750	12-19-39
Savannah (Ga.-2-3)	330	12-19-39

BID OPENINGS TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED¹

Local authority and project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
Los Angeles Co. (Calif.-2-4)	500	1-12-40
Norwalk (Conn.-2-1)	136	12-29-39
Omaha (Nebr.-1-2)	283	1-11-40
Tampa (Fla.-3-3)	328	1-15-40
Washington (D. C.-1-2)	246	1-16-40

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.

Construction Report Analysis

During the week ended December 1, four new projects were added to those under construction. The addition of the new projects—two of which were in Puerto Rico—caused a decline in both the average over-all cost of new housing per unit and in the average net construction cost per unit for all projects under construction.

Branch Libraries in Housing Projects to Aid Both Tenant Families and Community Residents

To provide tenants in the LaSalle Place project with library facilities, the Louisville Free Public Library has cooperated with the local housing authority in establishing a library station at the project. In one of the community rooms the housing management constructed a locked bookcase, accommodating about 200 books. The Public Library supplies the books, changing them at intervals in order to keep the collection as alive as possible. The library attendant has been a WPA worker, especially selected and instructed by the library to do this kind of work.

The library is open 3 days a week; from 1 to 5 o'clock 2 days, and 1 to 8 o'clock 1 day. A sewing class is held in the room at other times. This multiple use of a room is an illustration of the community relations plan to utilize community space to its utmost capacity.

In Memphis, the Cossitt (public) Library has established a station at Dixie Homes project. It is open 3 days a week, from 2 to 5 and 6 to

8 p. m. A room was provided in the administrative building, fully equipped, and the local housing authority staffed the library from their office after the public library had trained a person. Cossitt Library furnishes all books, library supplies, and administrative supervision.

Several other public libraries, notably those of Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, and Columbia, S. C., have cooperated with housing managers in establishing libraries in projects. These substations are all open to the residents of the neighborhood, as well as to project tenants. Cooperation of this kind is of mutual advantage to both libraries and housing projects. It provides library facilities for project tenants within easy reach of their homes. To the libraries it presents an unusual opportunity for extension and improvement of their services.

Another type of cooperation is reported from Cleveland, where the public library book caravan makes frequent stops at the Lakeview Terrace project.

Construction Report Weekly Data

Item	Week ended December 1, 1939	Week ended November 24, 1939	Percentage change
Number of projects under construction	126	122	+3.28
Number of dwellings under construction	52,517	51,053	+2.87
Total estimated over-all cost ¹ of new housing	\$237,927,000	\$234,340,000	+1.53
Average over-all cost ¹ of new housing per unit	\$4,530	\$4,590	-1.31
Average net construction cost ² per unit	\$2,856	\$2,891	-1.21

Summary of USHA Program as of December 1, 1939

Item	Projects under loan contract	Projects under construction	Projects being tenanted ³
Number of projects	309	125	8
Number of local authorities represented	140	85	5
Number of States and Territories represented	32	25	4
Number of loan contracts	199		
Value of loan contracts	\$536,577,000		
Number of dwelling units in projects	117,960	52,437	7,005
Number of dwelling units completed			3,504
Total estimated development cost ⁴	\$596,331,000	\$257,987,000	\$35,436,000
Total estimated over-all cost of new housing ¹	\$548,451,000	\$237,611,000	

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.

³ Including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii.

⁴ Includes over-all cost of new housing plus the cost of purchasing and demolishing old slum buildings and the cost of land bought for future development.

⁵ As of November 18, 1939.

NOTE.—Monthly summary is as of close of business Nov. 30.

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