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PUBLIC HOUSING

Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Vol. 1, No. 1

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

August 11, 1939

A Message From the USHA Administrator

Local housing authorities and the USHA are erecting a new bulwark for democracy, largely without benefit of blue prints. In the fields of land assembly and planning, of financing, of design, of construction, and of management, they must do new things in new ways. They must find cheaper and better methods of producing better homes and neighborhoods. They must apply these new methods to replace the slums and substandard homes of the Nation.

Individuals or agencies working in isolation cannot hope to accomplish tasks so vast. Public housing is a cooperative job. Those engaged in it must learn from one another. They must pool their brains and experience in a common fund. The necessity of bringing housers and their ideas together has led the USHA to establish PUBLIC HOUSING as its official weekly publication.

The weekly will report the progress of the 250 existing local housing authorities and of those to be created.

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January Dead Line Set for WPA Survey Field Work

Important to local housing authorities contemplating WPA assistance in conducting similar surveys is the announcement that the field work for all surveys under the present WPA program must be completed before January 1, 1940. This means that applications for assistance should be presented to WPA as soon as possible.

First Five Projects Set Low-rent Record; Meet Needs of Lowest Income Groups

The American public housing movement reached maturity on July 4, when the opening of the first five USHA-aided low-rent housing projects demonstrated that a satisfactory solution to the slum problem could be achieved by local housing authorities in cooperation with the United States Housing Authority. On that date public housing became a reality for the country as surely as for those tenant families in Austin, Jacksonville, Buffalo, and New York City who led the way out of the slums and who will be followed by more than half a million people in the next 2 years. Eighteen months of careful planning and hard work by local authorities and USHA technicians have been re-

warded. The assembly-line of public housing is set up and in operation. From now on low-rent homes for the Nation's ill-housed will be produced steadily and in rapidly expanding volume.

Settling once and for all the question of what families will be rehoused in USHA-aided projects, rent schedules announced for the first five projects are not only the lowest ever reached for decent modern homes in this country, but are also lower than average slum rents in those communities.

Average shelter rents range from \$6.59 monthly per dwelling in Austin

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Management Institute Opened at N. Y. U.

On July 24 the Housing Management Training Institute opened at New York University. The opening marked an important milestone in the history of public housing in this country, as this is the first housing management course of its kind to be offered by any American university. The National Association of Housing Officials is cooperating with the University in the enterprise, and several staff members of the USHA are assisting in the work.

The course consists of 2 weeks of lectures and discussions at N. Y. U., and 2 weeks of field work in large-

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Construction Costs Cut 14 Percent Below Estimates

Through the constant efforts of local housing authorities to develop more efficient and economical methods of operation, with the active help of USHA, an average of \$484 per dwelling unit, 14.1 percent of the original estimates, has been saved in the construction cost of 23,188 dwelling units in the 53 projects now under loan contract. Estimated net construction cost of these projects is over \$8,000,000 less than the original estimates—enough to pay the entire development cost of 2,800 more low-rent dwellings.

These cost figures are based on exactly the same items—structural,

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Legal Notes

For the fourteenth consecutive time, the validity of the USHA-aided public-housing program was upheld by a State court of final appeal when the West Virginia Supreme Court on June 13 rendered a decision favorable to the Huntington Housing Authority in a suit brought by J. Paul Chapman. The Court reaffirmed the thirteen previous verdicts by ruling that slum clearance is a public purpose, resting upon "the foundation of the police power, which inherently resides in the legislative branch."

Construction Costs Cut 14 Percent Below Estimates

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plumbing, heating, and electrical installation—as are used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in compiling residential construction costs from building permit data.

The accompanying table shows by States the changes in net construction costs from loan contract estimates to the main construction contract awards.

Eighteen of the fifty-three projects showed declines of more than 10 percent in construction contract awards as compared with the loan contract estimates. Nine projects decreased more than \$500; these projects, in the order of their construction savings, are: Queensbridge Homes in New York City, \$1,382, or 33.3 per-

The West Virginia Housing Act "does not authorize housing projects apart from slum clearance," the Court held, but "The project may be built in any area within the exercise of the sound discretion of the Federal and State authorities and the council of the city, whether slum or not slum."

Slum clearance and low-rent housing developments do not deprive any person of equal protection of the laws contrary to the Fourteenth Amendment, the decision stated, since the fact that tenant families "will be benefited in a slight degree more than the rest of the community does not of itself constitute a denial of equal protection of the laws."

cent less; Red Hook Houses, also in New York City, \$998, or 24 percent less; Pine Haven in Daytona Beach, Fla., \$868, or 31.5 percent less; Major Bowman Terrace in Vincennes, Ind., \$778, or 25.3 percent less; North Boulevard Homes in Tampa, Fla., \$707, or 23 percent less; Brentwood Park in Jacksonville, Fla., \$571, or 17.6 percent less; Olmsted Homes in Augusta, Ga., \$539, or 17.5 percent less; Westlake in Youngstown, Ohio, \$528, or 15.3 percent less; and Sunset Homes in Augusta, Ga., \$501, or 15.7 percent less. Only eight projects showed increases from the estimates to the actual construction costs; none of these, however, amounted to as much as 7 percent.

Administrator

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It will provide a means for the exchange among authorities of information on technical developments. Through this publication, the 14 Divisions of the USHA will be able to circulate, in standard form and without loss of time, significant information of general interest. It will meet the need for regular release of vital statistical data.

All those engaged in public housing and those friendly to the program have constant need for the "control figures" of the low-rent housing program—volume of construction and employment, costs, rents, income groups served, and families rehoused. Moreover, the magnitude of the program vitally affects our national economy; its nature will alter the physical environment of us all. For these reasons the public should have access to the basic facts of the program at all times. The weekly will make these facts available.

In launching PUBLIC HOUSING, this Authority hopes and believes that it will help to unite all housers behind one of the greatest causes of our time.

NATHAN STRAUS,

Administrator.

Low-income Area Survey to Guide Louisville Housing

A new type of housing survey specifically aimed to guide a comprehensive long-range public-housing program has just been completed by the WPA under the joint sponsorship of the City of Louisville Housing Commission and the City Planning and Zoning Commission. The survey relates rentals paid by low-income groups to family size and income.

In addition to material on family size, income, rental, and condition of structures in low-income housing areas, the published reports include a brief history of Louisville, a study of land use, land coverage, and statistics on building activities between 1913 and 1938. Copies of Volume I may be obtained from the Municipal Housing Commission of the City of Louisville for \$1.35.

State	Number of projects	Loan contracts		Construction contracts	
		Average net construction cost	Average net construction cost	Decrease from loan contracts	
				Amount	Percent
California.....	1	\$2,791	\$2,970	¹ \$179	16.4
Florida.....	6	2,816	2,395	421	15.0
Georgia.....	3	2,873	2,443	430	15.0
Indiana.....	2	2,900	2,602	298	10.3
Kentucky.....	2	3,237	2,851	386	11.9
Louisiana.....	2	3,331	3,068	263	7.0
Maryland.....	1	3,101	2,810	291	9.4
Michigan.....	1	4,072	3,738	334	8.2
Nebraska.....	1	3,072	3,021	51	1.7
New Jersey.....	3	3,350	2,974	376	11.2
New York.....	8	3,913	3,026	887	22.7
Ohio.....	6	3,338	3,081	257	7.7
Pennsylvania.....	2	3,394	3,434	140	1.2
South Carolina.....	1	2,823	2,939	¹ 116	4.1
Tennessee.....	4	2,942	2,894	48	1.6
Texas.....	6	2,627	2,492	225	8.6
West Virginia.....	4	3,129	2,954	175	5.6
Total.....	53				
Average.....		3,427	2,943	484	14.1

¹ Increase.

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Attractive Pamphlets to Meet Local Needs

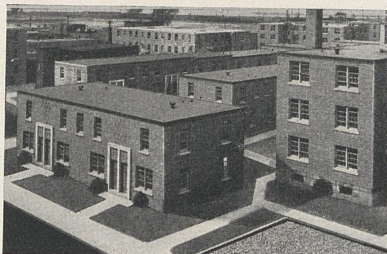
Local authorities, deluged with requests for information on the program, are finding it necessary to publish material on the purpose and scope of their activities. Recently received literature of this type includes two excellent pamphlets—*Slum Clearance and Low-rent Housing in Pittsburgh* and *Questions and Answers about Low-rent Housing in Louisville, Kentucky*.

The attractive 16-page pamphlet of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority effectively presents its housing problem and describes steps being taken toward a solution. The publication is well illustrated with photographs of slum conditions and demolition work. Pictorial charts and maps indicate the housing need and the cost to the community for health services and police and fire protection in slum areas. Photographs of architects' sketches indicate the salient features of Pittsburgh's three USHA-aided projects.

The Louisville Housing Authority uses the question and answer technique throughout. There are nine sections. The first and second are concerned with the USHA and the local authority. The remaining sections give the history of Louisville slums, the cost of slums to the taxpayer, the USHA definition of a sub-standard dwelling, data on the shortage and condition of dwellings, the projects in operation and those being planned for the community.

USHA's Informational Service Division is now preparing an outline form which, it is hoped, will be helpful to local authorities contemplating issuance of such material.

Aerial view, Lakewood Project, Buffalo, N. Y.



Management Institute

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scale housing projects. The lecturers are persons who are actively engaged in managing projects at the present time, outstanding housing experts, and members of the USHA staff. While most of the lectures deal with management problems and administrative procedures, the history of housing and its socio-economic concepts are considered.

The field work will be done in several projects, typifying different kinds of developments, located in New York City, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, and Stamford, Conn.

Four years ago the National Association of Housing Officials, in cooperation with the Housing Division of the PWA, held a similar institute in Washington for the purpose of training managers of housing projects. To date, this earlier course is the only one of its kind ever held. The present Institute reflects the increasing interest of colleges and universities in the field of public housing.

Five Projects

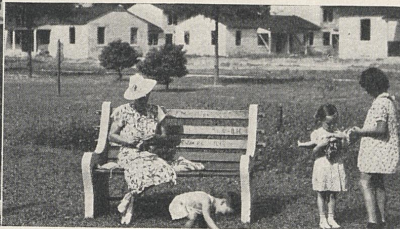
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to \$17 monthly in Brooklyn, with the Jacksonville average \$10.58 and Buffalo \$13.25. Varying materials, labor, and maintenance costs explain the difference. Rents are proportionately low and equally unique in all four cities, however. Anticipated tenant incomes are shown in the following tabulation:

	Average annual family income	Lowest annual family income
Austin.....	\$400	\$300
Jacksonville.....	750	500
Buffalo:		
White families..	850	600
Negro families..	750	500
Brooklyn.....	950	700

Sound design and economy of construction characterize the first five

Brentwood Park Project, Jacksonville, Fla.



Red Hook Project, Brooklyn, N. Y.

projects, illustrating what may be expected in the 155 other communities with USHA commitments.

Jacob Crane, Assistant USHA Administrator, attributed economy to local control. "Local housing authorities built these homes, from start to finish," he said. "Bids were made on local specifications, local building methods were followed, and the houses went up more quickly and cheaply than would have been possible under centralized supervision.

"Furthermore, agreements with labor unions helped keep costs down by establishing wage rates and preventing jurisdictional disputes. A third factor was design. The projects were simply and effectively planned by local housing authority architects and engineers in cooperation with USHA technicians."

Distinctively local architecture reflects living needs and habits in the several regions where the projects are located. In the short, one-story rows of the Austin plan, for example, modern efficiency combines with traditional Southwestern practice. By contrast, the six-story apartment houses of the Red Hook Project in Brooklyn proved the best answer to the low-rent housing problem in the Nation's most congested urban area.

Construction—Santa Rita Project, Austin, Tex.



Current Housing Literature

MUCH ADO ABOUT HOUSING, by the Rev. E. R. Moore, Ph. D. Member, New York City Housing Authority, *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 10, 1939, p. 25, 114-118.

Reply to article attacking public housing by Chester T. Crowell, *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 26, 1938.

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LARGE-SCALE HOUSING PLAN, *Real Estate Record* (Management Edition), June 3, 1939, pp. 25-27.

THE LOW COST HOUSE, *The Architectural Forum*, April 1939, pp. 234-320.

Fifty recently built low-cost houses, with illustrations, cost analyses, and construction outlines, are presented.

HOUSING TRENDS IN EUROPE, by George B. Mangold, *Sociology and Social Research*, Jan.-Feb. 1939, pp. 211-221.

The background of the European housing situation is briefly outlined. Describes in some detail the English housing programs, and mentions briefly the housing projects in Vienna and Stockholm.

A DUTCHMAN'S FARM—THREE HUNDRED AND ONE YEARS AT CORLEARS HOOK, *Survey Graphic*, June 1939, pp. 389-394.

Records history of the site of the Vladeck Houses project in lower Manhattan; analyzes Henry Street Settlement role in future lower East Side planning.

THE SLUMS BEGIN TO FALL, *The New Republic*, June 7, 1939, p. 118.

Inventory of current USHA activity.

WHAT HOUSING MEANS TO TEACHERS, by Nathan Straus, *School Life*, June 1939, pp. 258-259.

Suggests appointment of housing committees composed of teachers to submit recommendations to local housing authorities.

BIG PUSH, *Time*, July 24, 1939, p. 13.

Quotes speech made by Administrator Straus at the Institute of Public Affairs. Summarizes relationship of housing to the activities of the Temporary National Economic Committee.

Material for Public Housing should be addressed to Informational Service Division, U. S. Housing Authority, Washington, D. C. Publication is approved by the Director, Bureau of the Budget, as required by rule 42 of the Joint Committee on Printing.

Rhode Island Begins Active Participation

The Providence Housing Authority, the first authority to be formed in the State, has requested an earmarking of \$20,000,000 to provide decent homes for low-income families now living in substandard structures. Mr. David J. Barry, Chairman, said that the amount requested would take care of only about one-fifth of the Providence families in need of safe and sanitary housing. Statistics show that there are 20,000 substandard dwellings in Providence, whereas the \$20,000,000 requested would provide for no more than 4,000 families.

The Providence request is regarded as evidence of increasing interest in slum-clearance throughout the State. The Pawtucket Housing Authority was recently organized, and other Rhode Island cities are reported to be preparing to take similar action.

Concrete Shutters Used to Defy Tropic Storms

High winds have led the Puerto Rico Housing Authority to develop a reinforced concrete window shutter for low-rent housing projects on the island. The repair and replacement of wooden shutters constitutes one of the costliest single items of maintenance, and consequently one of the largest elements in rents. The experimental concrete shutters, 1½ inches thick, reinforced with ¼-inch pencil rods are planned to resist both climate and insects.

The need to cut costs on public housing develops many techniques of value to private industry.

Construction Bids

State and local authority	Project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
Kentucky:			
Covington ¹	KY-2-1.....	263	9-21-39
Covington.....	KY-2-2.....	168	9-21-39
Massachusetts:			
Boston.....	MASS-2-3.....	1,023	8-23-39
New York:			
New York City.....	NY-5-4.....	448	8-31-39

¹ Readvertise, 8-21-39

New Technique for Sinking Piles Developed

Peculiar subsoil conditions have led engineers on the Magnolia Street low-rent housing project in New Orleans to develop a new technique for sinking piles. It was discovered that at a depth of about 38 feet, the long-leaf yellow pine piles encountered sufficient resistance to cause serious "brooming" and breaking. Indeed, the piles, when withdrawn, revealed that instead of sinking under the hammer blows they had been splintering against a well-nigh impenetrable layer of sandclay.

Had the piles not been withdrawn and examined they would have been considered sound, and the buildings they were meant to support would have been subject to sinking as much as 8 feet, depending on the damage done to the base of the pile.

To remedy the situation pile tips are now cut square and the piles are driven down into the hard stratum about 6 inches—just enough to be firmly embedded. Thus the base is unimpaired by futile attempts to penetrate the resistance, and the pile will carry a load of 25 tons although only a 12-ton capacity is required. About 150 piles are used for each building.

Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended August 5, 1939	Week ended July 29, 1939	Week ended July 22, 1939	Week ended July 15, 1939
Number of projects under construction.....	81	63	57	55
Number of dwellings under construction.....	35,020	28,260	25,383	24,600
Total estimated over-all cost ¹ of new housing.....	\$162,954,000	\$134,016,000	\$119,423,000	\$116,313,000
Average over-all cost ¹ of new housing per unit.....	\$4,652	\$4,742	\$4,705	\$4,788
Average net construction cost ² per unit.....	\$2,912	\$2,945	\$2,928	\$2,941

¹ Includes: (1) Building the house, including plumbing, heating, and electrical installation; (2) dwelling equipment, architects' fees, local administrative expenses, and financial charges during construction; (3) land; (4) nondwelling facilities.

² Includes building the house, including structural, plumbing, heating, and electrical costs.