



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Dear Reviewer:

The National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO), in coordination with the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), have cooperatively prepared the enclosed *Historic Context for Public Housing in the United States*. The purpose of this document is to establish a historic context and criteria for evaluating the National Register eligibility of individual public housing projects built between 1933 and 1949 and operated within the HUD public housing program. This document addresses public housing properties within a nation-wide historic framework.

The subject document will be made available to local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), HUD offices, and Federal, State, and tribal preservation officers following review and finalization to assist those agencies in meeting their responsibilities under Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Your review of this enclosed document is critical to the final stages of development.

The authors wish to stress this is a working document that will continue to evolve as research and careful consideration dictate. It is intended to address a wide audience from the cultural resource management professionals to the layperson interested in federal public housing programs. There are still gaps in our understanding of the development of public housing and the National Register encourages all readers to participate in the continuing development of this document.

We would appreciate receiving your comments no later than September 20, 1997. The point of contact for this project is National Register historian Paul Lusignan at (202) 343-1628; fax:(202) 343-1836; or e-mail: paul_lusignan@nps.gov. Please feel free to call him if you have questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Carol D. Shull
Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places
National Register, History and Education

Enclosure

Historic Context

Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949

Prepared for:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register,

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The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers

Draft

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USERS' GUIDE

This historic context report examines the development of the federal public housing program in the United States between 1933 and 1949. It evaluates the historic and architectural significance of public housing built during this period and establishes requirements for listing these properties in the National Register of Historic Places. The primary purpose of this report is to assist the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in meeting their responsibilities under Sections 106 and 110 of the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, as amended through 1992. Additional parties that may find this context report useful include State Historic Preservation Officers, the National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, local governments, public housing residents, and local historical societies.

Definition of Public Housing

For the purpose of this report, public housing is that class of properties consisting of large-scale, planned residential developments currently owned and operated by local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs). PHAs function as independent governing bodies established by local governments under state enabling legislation. They receive federal subsidies that allow them to build and operate housing for low-income tenants at rents below market rates. HUD has administered the federal public housing program since its creation in 1965.

Properties considered in this context report include nearly 700 "low-rent" and "defense" housing

projects built during the Great Depression and World War II that today function as federally subsidized public housing. These projects are in the inventories of more than 240 PHAs located in 39 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The *National Historic Preservation Act* created a national historic preservation program. It established the National Register of Historic Places which is currently under the administration of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. The National Register is "composed of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture." Sections 110 and 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act* set forth requirements for federal agencies in dealing with historic properties, which are defined as those listed in or eligible for the National Register.

Section 110 of the Act charges federal agencies with the stewardship of their historic properties. It states, in part, that "the heads of all Federal agencies shall assume responsibility for the preservation of historic properties which are owned or controlled by such agency." It also states that "each Federal agency shall establish . . . , in consultation with the Secretary [of the Interior], a preservation program for the identification, evaluation, and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and protection of historic properties."

Section 106 of the Act establishes a process for considering the affects of federal undertakings on properties eligible for the National Register. Specifically, Section 106 states:

The head of any Federal agency having direct or indirect jurisdiction over a proposed Federal or federally assisted undertaking in any State and the head of any Federal department or independent agency having authority to license any undertaking shall, prior to the approval of the expenditure of any Federal funds on the undertaking or prior to the issuance of any license, as the case may be, take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The head of any such Federal agency shall afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation established under Title II of this Act a reasonable opportunity to comment with regard to such undertaking.

HUD, as the federal agency administering the federal public housing program, has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that public housing properties are considered under the *National Historic Preservation Act*. PHAs, since they receive federal funding through HUD for their local programs, are delegated this responsibility under HUD's purview.

Section 106 does not require the preservation of all properties deemed eligible for the National Register; rather, it establishes a process through which federal agencies must examine their undertakings for effects on historic properties and consider mitigation of any adverse effects to those properties. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation summarizes the intent thus: "In short, the Section 106 review process ensures that an agency weighs preservation into the balance with the projected benefit of the completed undertaking, costs, and other factors."

In complying with Section 106, federal agencies must consult not only with the Advisory Council but also with State Historic Preservation Officers, local governments, relevant Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations, and the interested public. In dealing with public housing, the latter category might include public housing residents, local historical societies, or neighborhood organizations. A detailed discussion of the Section 106 process, its application, and guidelines for its implementation are provided in "36 CFR Part 800: Protection of Historic Properties".

Using This Context Report

Readers can use this report to evaluate public housing complexes within the historical framework of the federal public housing program and to assess the eligibility of the complexes for listing in the National Register. It is preferable that each PHA undertake such evaluation program-wide, for all properties within its inventory, in compliance with Section 110 of the *National Historic Preservation Act*. It is likely, however, that as federal undertakings arise, individual properties will have to be evaluated under Section 106. This context report can also be used for that purpose.

This report has been written to provide PHAs with the national historic context necessary to evaluate their local housing inventories, as the significance of any property can be determined only when it is placed within its historic context. In *Bulletin 15: How To Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, the National Register defines historic contexts as "those patterns, themes, or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property, or site is understood and its meaning...within history or prehistory is understood," and also as "historical patterns that can be

identified through consideration of the history of the property and the history of the surrounding area. ”

In order to evaluate a property within its historic context, the following five things must be determined:

1) the facet of prehistory or history of the local area, state, or the nation that the property represents; 2) whether that facet of prehistory or history is significant; 3) whether it is a property type that has relevance and importance in illustrating the historic context; 4) how the property illustrates that history; and 5) whether the property possesses the physical features necessary to convey the aspect of prehistory or history with which it is associated. If the property being evaluated does represent an important aspect of the area's history *and* possesses the quality of integrity, then it qualifies for listing in the National Register.

This report contains three basic sections: a historical narrative, a property type discussion with registration requirements for listing in the National Register, and four appendices which together comprise a comprehensive list of all public housing projects built nationwide during the period 1933-1949. It is important to note that this document does not provide a site-by-site evaluation of public housing properties. That is the responsibility of the PHA. Assessing eligibility of a specific property will require additional research at the local level, which may then be applied to this context. All property evaluations should be undertaken by the PHA in consultation with its State Historic Preservation Officer.

The historical narrative provides the context which establishes the significance of public housing. It describes the evolution of the federal public housing program during the Great Depression and World War II. It identifies the major phases in the development of federally subsidized public housing as represented by specific housing legislation, objectives, and philosophies. The narrative also discusses architectural trends in public housing, as well as the attempts of public housing to address the needs of racial and ethnic minorities. It has been developed using records from the Public Works Administration, the U. S. Housing Authority, and other federal agencies that sponsored public housing projects built during this period, as well as pertinent secondary sources.

Using the narrative as a basis, the registration requirements section explains how individual public housing properties may be eligible for the National Register. This context has a single property type: the public housing project. It is the primary unit which should be evaluated for National Register eligibility. The registration requirements outline the various elements necessary to establish the historical significance and physical integrity of a public housing property. For public housing, the primary historical significance is its association with the development of the federal public housing program; its secondary historical significance is its association with the ideals of modern architecture and urban planning. Some public housing may also be significant for association with individuals or for its potential to yield important information. The physical integrity of a public housing property will depend largely on its basic design and materials being intact. The configuration of the buildings and their relationships to open space are critical to significance, and, therefore, are the key elements of integrity. There are very few circumstances under which a single building within a public housing project could be found eligible for the

National Register.

The appendices provide a starting point for examining a PHA inventory and are an easy reference for determining when and under what legislation a particular project was built; they do not assess or imply eligibility for the National Register. The data for these lists was compiled from several official sources: the current HUD property database, known as the *System for Management Information Retrieval for Public Housing*; HUD's *Consolidated Development Directory* of 1975; and the Federal Public Housing Authority's wartime *Directory of Public Housing* of 1943.

Evaluation Methodology

The following provides a brief summary of the basic methodology necessary for using this report to assist in evaluating the National Register eligibility of historic public housing projects.

To evaluate public housing facilities associated with the context of U. S. Public Housing in the 1930s and 1940s, the following information about the property is needed:

- 1) name
- 2) location
- 3) date of construction
- 4) name/type of enabling law
- 5) size of project
- 6) architect

The database tables at the end of this report (Appendix II-IV) can provide the majority of this information for those public housing facilities where the information is not currently available. The database tables can also provide useful information on the name and number of other housing projects completed in a particular city or region and facts such as the original racial makeup of a project, the types of buildings erected, and the total costs of the project.

Once the above information is obtained, users can refer to relevant portions of the historical narrative to help place their particular project within the framework of the general history of public housing in the country, state, and local community. Users will want to pay particular attention to reviewing those chapters of the narrative dealing directly with the time period and federal programs under which their property was planned and constructed. The goal is to assess the linkage between the history and development of a specific housing project and those broad historic events and themes identified in the narrative that determined the form and substance of the national program. Users may wish to review the entire context in order to fully understand the evolution in public housing and how it affected local activity. Understanding the nature of these linkages is essential to the evaluation of National Register eligibility for individual properties.

The specific examples noted in the context chapters of the report reveal but a glimpse of the diversity of local operations and activity. The examples do point out, however, some of the more important issues associated with housing reform in the 1930s and 40s--racial segregation, slum clearance, local community activism, and the role of local/federal cooperation. The examples

highlight some of the important issues that need to be considered when evaluating other public housing properties.

Once a review of the context material has been completed--allowing users to place their property in the larger picture of public housing reform--the property type and registration requirements found in Chapter 5 of the report can be employed to help analyze the eligibility of specific housing projects for listing in the National Register. The property type and registration requirement sections outline a series of questions that need to be asked of each housing project in order to evaluate its contributions to the themes discussed in the context and to identify if the particular project meets the National Register criteria. In general terms those questions include:

1. **What is the nature of the property? Determine the date of construction, category of property, and nature of local involvement.**

2. **What aspects of the historic context does the property represent? Is it associated with the PWA program, the USHA, or defense construction? Was it associated with slum clearance? Was there an important racial component to its development? Was the architecture noted as an example of modern design? Was there an important local component to public housing activity and housing reform?**

3. **How does the property represent an important aspect of the historic context: through specific, important historical associations (Criterion A or B); architectural**

or engineering features (Criterion C); or information potential (Criterion D)?

4. How does the property compare with related properties? Does it retain the distinctive characteristics of its type? How does it compare historically with other properties important within the same historic context?
5. Is the property significant on a local, regional or national level within the historic context?
6. Does the property retain sufficient physical integrity to convey the significance of the historic context it represents?

Reviewing these questions and others outlined in the chapter will help users identify specific research questions that need to be answered in order to evaluate the National Register eligibility of their particular project. The record collections of the local public housing authorities, along with those of the Federal archives in Washington, local newspapers, and local historical societies and other organizations will provide the best sources of information to answer many of these research questions. Information on specific archival sources covering the development of public housing during this period can be found in the Report Methodology section of the study.

Users will need to carefully review the integrity guidelines provided in Chapter 5 to assess whether or not the subject property still retains sufficient physical integrity to merit listing in the

National Register. Housing projects that meet one of the historic or architectural eligibility criteria must still retain the characteristic physical features they originally contained and be able to physically convey that significance. The integrity issues outlined in this report will play an important role in the overall determination of eligibility for most historic public housing projects built during the time period under consideration.

Final responsibility rests with the accurate documentation of the research and evaluation process so that others will be able to understand the findings and make use of the materials. Public housing authorities and others undertaking National Register evaluations should coordinate their efforts with the local State Historic Preservation Officers, whose staff may have experience in dealing with similar properties. In addition, copies of previous National Register documentation efforts can be obtained from the National Register of Historic Places.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has administered a program of government-subsidized public housing since 1965, when Congress created the Department as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. Today, under the public housing program, HUD provides federal subsidies to more than 3,300 independently-chartered local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) nationwide. These subsidies offset the long-term costs of acquisition and construction of public housing as well as the short-term costs of operation and maintenance. In turn, PHAs provide 1.3 million units of reduced-rent housing to more than 3 million Americans, including lower income families and elderly, disabled, and displaced individuals, who would otherwise be unable to acquire decent accommodations on the open market.

The origins of the federal public housing program can be traced to a series of significant government initiatives begun in the 1930s to combat the converging problems of unemployment, expanding slums, and insufficient housing during the Great Depression. Further government programs in the early 1940s provided housing for defense industry workers and their families in overcrowded manufacturing centers during World War II. Nearly 700 large-scale public housing projects, built either as "low-rent" housing during the Great Depression or "defense" housing during World War II, continue to operate today within the federal public housing program. These projects comprise approximately 125,000 dwelling units and are in the inventories of nearly 250 local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in 39 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and

the Virgin Islands.

This report addresses the political, social, and architectural trends that shaped the program between 1933 and 1949, as well as earlier influences that led up to federal involvement in the program. It also establishes criteria for evaluating individual public housing projects for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The period under consideration begins with the Public Works Administration's housing construction program undertaken as an unemployment relief effort under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. This program led to the passage of the United States Housing Act of 1937, which established the concept of federal subsidies to local public housing authorities and set the cornerstone of the modern program. The report continues with a discussion of the relevant government housing programs during World War II, and concludes with passage of the United States Housing Act of 1949. This act renewed federal subsidies to local housing authorities after public housing had languished in the immediate postwar years. The 1949 act tied public housing construction to urban redevelopment, serving to relocate families displaced by federally funded construction and highway projects; and also began a new era of public housing construction, often characterized in the larger urban areas by vast high-rise developments built during the 1950s and 1960s, which are beyond the scope of this context.

Below are some of the key legislative and administrative issues that reformers, legislators, and government housing officials addressed in the early years of the public housing program.

- Should government be involved in the construction of housing, or is that role more properly reserved for private enterprise?
- Should the federal government own and operate public housing directly, or should the federal role be one of subsidization and regulation of local government housing efforts?
- Should public housing replace large, contiguous tracts of inner city slum property, or should it be built on vacant land, whether within a city or surrounding it?
- Should the federal government fund public housing only in times of emergency, such as the Great Depression and World War II, or should it create a long-term program with a permanent stock of government-owned housing?
- Should public housing design meet only the most basic standards of health, safety, and comfort within a carefully prescribed budget, or should innovative housing design be encouraged both for the benefit of the residents and the community as a whole?
- Should the federal government require racial integration in public housing, or should it allow segregation to continue according to local custom, as long as equal public housing accommodations are provided to all races?

The answers that evolved during this period determined the character, design, location, and social impact of the projects built in the 1930s and 1940s and continue to have ramifications on the program today. These and other legislative, design, and social issues are addressed in the course of this report.

CHAPTER 1

HOUSING REFORM BEFORE THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Prior to the 1930s, the federal government was removed from the housing debate. Its role in providing for the social welfare of its citizens was limited, with the expectation that local governments and private charities should address such matters. Yet the need for better housing was imperative. State, local, and private housing measures since the mid-nineteenth century had neither improved the dreadful living conditions in the slums nor provided a substantial increase in the supply of adequate new housing available to the poor.

Agitation for reform in American housing, particularly as it applied to accommodations for the poorer segments of the population, generated considerable debate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Federal efforts, however, to eliminate the nation's slums and to replace them with decent, low-rent housing for the urban poor did not begin until spurred by the Great Depression of the 1930s. Desperate to boost the stagnant construction industry and to create jobs, the government cleared slums and built housing under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.

A number of factors contributed to the development of public housing in America, some of which had been brewing for more than half a century. The Progressive Era contributed standards of construction, health, and safety which were clearly incorporated into the designs of new housing. The Garden City movement, with its ideal of building new towns for the future, spread from

Britain at the turn of the century, and gained many advocates in the United States, who honed their skills in the government-built defense housing projects of World War I and the residential suburban developments of the 1920s. Also, the rational-functional forms of European Modernist housing estates and the work of European Modernist architects became well-known in the United States through the travels of important American writers, and through the Modern Architecture exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1932.

Regulation of the Slum

A product of the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the nineteenth century, slums appeared in cities throughout the nation. Social pathologies attributed to the slums--poverty, disease, crime, promiscuity, delinquency--encouraged early reform efforts. This degraded environment seemed to threaten the physical and moral welfare of its residents, and of society as a whole. Cultural differences further provoked concern, as massive waves of immigrants, mostly impoverished and unskilled in industry or modern agriculture, filled the slums of the northeast and north-central industrial centers. The perception arose that these newcomers, if left unassimilated in their miserable surroundings, could erode traditional American values and destroy the existing social order.

Some cities attempted to regulate minimum acceptable building standards to restrict the construction of the worst types of slum housing. New York City had the nation's first tenement house law by 1867, a few years after the bloody Civil War draft riots had erupted among Irish immigrants in the Lower East Side slums. A specially formed Council of Hygiene and Public

Health investigating the draft riots in 1865 concluded that the "closely packed houses where the mob originated seemed to be literally hives of sickness and vice."¹ The law set minimum standards for ventilation, fire safety, sanitation, and weather-tightness, and prohibited the habitation of windowless cellars.² Yet enforcement was ineffective, opposition from property owners was strong, and any resulting improvements merely raised the price of decent housing beyond the ability of the poor to pay. State legislatures in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia also passed tenement house laws before the turn of the century, with similar results.³

The New York Tenement House Law of 1901

The legislature of the state of New York made several attempts to amend its Tenement House Law to make it a more effective weapon against the slums. Governor Theodore Roosevelt, who had battled tenement owners during his tenure as New York City's police commissioner, created a State Tenement House Commission in 1900, with Lawrence Veiller as its secretary. The commission recommended a prohibition on air shafts in future tenements, a maximum of 70 percent lot coverage, height restrictions for non-fireproof buildings, and private water-closets for every family. The new legislation created a professional inspection department and required that inspectors evaluate each tenement by an objective set of standards rather than according to

¹ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 187.

² Robert W. De Forest and Lawrence Veiller, ed., *The Tenement House Problem* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), pp. 94-96.

³ Marian L. and Howard A. Palley, *Urban America and Public Policies* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath & Co., 1977), pp. 162-163.

personal discretion. It also recommended new standards to modify existing tenements, including insertion of wall windows in interior rooms and the installation of more satisfactory fire escapes. The legislature passed the commission's proposals into law in 1901.⁴

Veiller established the National Housing Association in 1910, which published a "Model Housing Law" to encourage other states to enact municipal housing codes. Between 1901 and 1917, ten states passed tenement house laws based on New York's model. Veiller was dedicated to the reform of slum housing through regulation of the private market. He insisted that any attempts to build public tenements would be improper, inefficient, and subject to corruption. He predicted the political manipulation of tenant constituencies under such a program, as well as ponderous contracting processes and a dearth of qualified civil servants able to administer municipal housing. Private enterprise would be "driven out of the field" by public competition, and only city governments would build "accommodations for the poor."⁵

Nineteenth Century Model Tenements

No mechanism was yet in place to ensure that housing built to these new standards would become available to the poor. Some businessmen and philanthropists, especially in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati, felt that the private sector could overcome this problem by investing in "model tenements." They believed that well-designed, well-built housing at reasonable rents

⁴ Roy Lubove, *The Progressive and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), pp. 3-68.

⁵ Lawrence Veiller, *Housing Reform: A Hand-Book for Practical Use in American Cities* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910), pp. 79-82.

would ensure full tenancy, and could provide acceptable returns of up to six percent to the benevolent investor. In exchange for superior accommodations, owners insisted that tenants pay their rents promptly, and often required them to abide by strict standards of cleanliness, hard work, and moral behavior.⁶ Yet the movement ultimately failed because it did not attract enough investors willing to risk their capital in philanthropic ventures, and because its inherent requirement to provide both a small profit and decent shelter placed it beyond the means of families living at subsistence levels.⁷

A National Reform Movement

As states dealt with the inadequacies of their tenement house legislation and the model tenement movement struggled to provide a trickle of decent housing for the poor, reformers of the Progressive Era focused national attention on the housing problem. Before World War I, the settlement house movement, inspired by Jane Addams in Chicago, Robert Woods in Boston, and Lillian Wald in New York, brought the problems of immigrants in the slums to the attention of middle-class America. Settlement workers provided educational and social services to immigrants, raised money for parks and libraries in the slums, and lobbied for tenement house reform. Reformers in Washington, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and other major cities surveyed the

⁶ Alfred T. White, *Improved Dwellings for the Laboring Classes: The Need and the Way to Meet It on Strict Commercial Principles in New York, Brooklyn, and Other Cities* (New York: n.p., 1877; New Haven, CT: Research Publications, Inc., n.d., American Architectural Books Based on the Henry-Russell Hitchcock Bibliography, microform series 69000, reel 107, part 1385), pp. 21-27.

⁷ J. Paul Mitchell, "Historical Overview of Direct Federal Housing Assistance," in *Federal Housing Policy and Programs Past and Present*, ed., J. Paul Mitchell (New York: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1985), p. 190.

slums, compiling the grim statistics of poverty--overcrowding, mortality rates, crime rates--as quantifiable proof to the public of the horrors faced by the residents.⁸

During the same period, Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant and photojournalist, chronicled the slums of New York City in *How the Other Half Lives*. Using angry prose and dramatic photographs, Riis described the dangers of slum life to a national audience:

Tenements . . . are the hot beds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike: the nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails . . . that turned out in the last eight years a round half million beggars to prey upon our charities; . . . because above all, they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion.⁹

He urged local governments to provide effective tenement regulation, to condemn and destroy the worst neighborhoods, and to ensure proper education and health standards for children.

The Federal Government Takes Notice

Spurred on by Riis and other reformers, Congress appropriated \$20,000 in 1892 for the Commissioner of Labor to study the slums in the nation's 16 largest cities. The Commissioner wrote a lengthy constitutional defense of the appropriation as an acceptable federal intervention in an otherwise local matter. Inadequate funding, however, forced a reduction in the scope of the investigation. Surveyors compiled statistics on housing quality, public services, employment, immigration, literacy, drunkenness, and disease in parts of Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York

⁸ John A. Garraty, *The American Nation: A History of the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 539-540.

⁹ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Dover, 1971), p. 2.

City, and Chicago.¹⁰ Congress took no further action. The Commissioner submitted another report in 1895 on a study of European slums, which noted the success of model tenements in Europe, and concluded that "proper housing of the great masses of working people can be furnished on a satisfactory commercial basis."¹¹

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt convened the President's Homes Commission for another examination of the slums, this time in Washington, D.C. The commission reported that the slum problem had advanced far beyond the capabilities of any city to rectify it, and it called for an unprecedented federal intervention into local affairs, recommending both purchase and condemnation of slum properties by the federal government, and direct federal loans to property owners to finance reconstruction of urban neighborhoods. The commission believed that "a little government aid extended to these unfortunates to build habitable dwellings would tend immensely toward their uplifting."¹² These zealous recommendations went unheeded.

World War I Housing Programs

The country's mobilization for World War I, rather than the continuing problem of slums, proved to be the direct impetus for the first federal intervention in the private housing market. The

¹⁰ Carroll D. Wright, *The Slums of Baltimore, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia*, Seventh Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), p. 101.

¹¹ E. R. L. Gould, *The Housing of the Working People*, Eighth Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), p. 19.

¹² The President's Homes Commission, *Report of the Committee on Social Betterment* (Washington, D. C: The President's Homes Commission, 1908), p. 263.

enormous increase in industrial production and the resulting concentrations of population near shipbuilding and ammunition production centers created a serious shortage of housing for war workers of moderate income. Congress created the U. S. Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corporation (EFC) and the U. S. Housing Corporation (USHC) in 1918 to address this shortage. The EFC's charter authorized it to make loans to limited-dividend realty companies incorporated by private shipbuilding firms to construct housing for shipyard employees. The agency supervised the planning, design, and construction of 28 projects in 23 cities, including more than 8,000 houses and 800 apartment units owned by the realty companies under this program. In contrast to the EFC, the USHC had the unprecedented opportunity to undertake direct construction and management of housing for workers at arsenals and navy yards. The USHC built 27 new communities, consisting of nearly 6,000 single-family houses and 7,000 apartments, in 16 states and the District of Columbia.¹³

Following the armistice, Congress acted to remove the federal government from active participation in housing and to reaffirm its faith in the ability of private enterprise to fulfill the nation's housing needs. It quickly dismantled the administration and production structures of the wartime housing agencies. Beginning in 1921, the government sold all USHC housing and any EFC housing acquired through mortgage defaults. Many Congressmen demanded that issues of wartime housing and peacetime social reform be kept distinct. Senator William Calder of New York stated his uneasiness toward the "social uplifters and reformers" who seemed to operate the

¹³ Robert Moore Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing: Economic Aspects of the Federal Program* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), pp. 74-78.

housing program, wondering if they were using the war "to work out some schemes of their own."¹⁴ Yet two important precedents were in place: federal loans to private housing corporations and direct public construction to meet housing needs during a national emergency. These concepts served to broaden federal housing policy during the 1930s.¹⁵

The Emerging National Housing Movement

After the war, many housing experts began to encourage a more active government role in clearing the slums and housing the poor. Awareness was growing that restrictive laws alone could not solve the housing problem. Edith Elmer Wood, who had been active before the war in the effort to eliminate the notorious alley slums of Washington, D.C., presented the first significant challenge to Lawrence Veiller's regulatory approach to housing reform. Writing in 1919, Wood stated that the "best restrictive legislation is only negative. It will prevent the bad. It will not produce the good . . . at a given rental." She blamed the slum problem not on greedy landlords or insufficient housing regulation, but on the inherent abuses of modern industrial society: workers crowded into inner city neighborhoods to be near their employment, but low wages and high property values forced them to accept substandard housing. She called for the control of housing as a public utility, just as the government already controlled the distribution and quality of water, electricity, transit, and education. Only if the "community itself undertakes to provide suitable houses at cost for such of its citizens as need them" could the United States

¹⁴ Harry Bredemeier, *The Federal Public Housing Movement: A Case Study of Social Change* (n.p.: Arno Press, 1980), pp. 43-44.

¹⁵ Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 79.

avoid its next great housing problem.¹⁶

Wood proposed the creation of a national housing commission that could make low-interest loans to local communities and private limited-dividend corporations. She also proposed an amendment to the Federal Reserve Act to allow national banks to supply federally guaranteed loans to home buyers.¹⁷ In 1931, Wood, along with a wide array of social activists, urban planners, and architects, formed the National Public Housing Conference to promote "good housing through government loans and public construction."¹⁸ This group would be instrumental in convincing the federal government to undertake its first experiments in low-rent public housing.

The Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), whose members included writers Lewis Mumford and Catherine Bauer, and architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, also helped to bring housing to a national debate in the 1920s. The members of the RPAA were strongly influenced by a number of contemporaneous international developments, including the English Garden City movement, the success of large-scale European housing estates after World War I, and the work of European Modernist architects.

¹⁶ Edith Elmer Wood, *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1919), pp. 20, 60, 239.

¹⁷ Roy Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920's: The Contribution of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh: 1963), p. 27.

¹⁸ Eugenie Ladner Birch, "Woman-made America: The Case of Early Public Housing Policy," in *The American Planner: Biographies and Recollections*, ed. Donald A. Krueckeberg (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 161.

The Garden City model, as first espoused by Englishman Ebenezer Howard in the late nineteenth century, proposed the establishment of self-sufficient towns to solve the problem of housing affordability with new, nonspeculative forms of real estate. Several Garden Cities were constructed in England in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and the design vocabulary of these new cities was quite influential in the creation of new residential communities in the United States. Features such as winding streets, clearly delineated open spaces, large building blocks closed to vehicular traffic, and a definite hierarchy between major roads and secondary streets, were quickly incorporated into American public and private housing alike.¹⁹

After World War I, many European cities faced major housing shortages, which they addressed by creating, funding, and implementing extensive housing programs. For example, the Social Democrat-controlled city of Vienna, Austria embarked on an ambitious housing program in 1923, which rehoused nearly 10 percent of the city's population within the next decade. The large apartment complexes of "Red Vienna" included kindergartens, libraries, meeting halls, and health and recreation centers--all collective facilities which reflected the social agenda of the city leaders. Germany also created a great deal of publicly supported housing during this same period, which was generally regarded as more modern and experimental than what was being built in Austria. The German housing estates utilized new building materials, construction techniques, and architectural forms; these materials and techniques often increased amenities while reducing costs. In a novel site plan called *Zeilenbau*, buildings were arranged in parallel rows, so that each

¹⁹ Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.31-32.

individual unit received the maximum amount of natural sunlight.²⁰

The work of the European Modernist architects was publicized in America mainly through the writings of housing scholar Catherine Bauer. Bauer spent a year in 1926-27 in Paris after graduating from college, where she first learned of the new developments in European housing and architecture. While in Paris she became acquainted with the work of the leading French Modernist architect Le Corbusier, and with the new technologies and new materials which were transforming the appearance and construction of European housing.²¹

On a second European tour in 1930, which included visits to Sweden, the Netherlands, France, and Germany, Bauer was particularly impressed with the work of German Modernist architect Ernst May, especially as building director for the city of Frankfurt am Maim. In 1925, May created a master plan for the entire metropolitan region surrounding and including Frankfurt, and housing was an integral part of this plan. May's finest accomplishment in the implementation of this plan, which created housing for approximately 10 percent of the city's population, was the suburb of Romerstadt. Located to the northwest of the old city, overlooking the Nidda River valley, the town contained several different types of garden apartment buildings and row housing; Bauer's favorite of these was a two-story rowhouse with a one-story apartment above, and a garden in the rear. The town's 1,200-unit housing development of mostly rowhouses, included

²⁰ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 60-61.

²¹ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p. 65.

shops, day care centers, laundries, and shared gardens.²²

The work of two additional European Modernist architects also influenced the development of American public housing, again made known to Americans by the writings of Catherine Bauer. German Modernist architect Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus, the national design school in Dessau, Germany, in 1918, and he later came to America fleeing the Nazis who had closed the Bauhaus. In 1938 he was appointed chairman of the Harvard School of Design. Gropius is best known for his design of the glass and steel Bauhaus School, and for a number of office and factory buildings in his native Germany.²³ Dutch Modernist architect J. J. P. Oud, while serving as architect in charge of housing for the city of Rotterdam, designed a number of workers' housing complexes.²⁴

The Museum of Modern Art held its landmark "Modern Architecture International Exhibition" in the spring of 1932. Beginning at the museum in New York City, and traveling to cities across the nation, including Philadelphia, Hartford, Los Angeles, Buffalo, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Rochester, Toledo, Cambridge, and Worcester, the exhibition served to diffuse the ideals and designs of the Modernist movement.²⁵ The content of the exhibition was divided into the two distinct areas of architecture and housing. The section on architecture, organized by Henry-

²² Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 69-73.

²³ John Peter, *Masters of Modern Architecture* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1958), p. 218.

²⁴ Peter, *Masters of Modern Architecture*, p. 221.

²⁵ *Modern Architecture International Exhibition* (New York: Arno Press for the Museum of Modern Art, First printed 1932, Reprint edition 1969), p. 3.

Russell Hitchcock, Jr. and Philip Johnson, exhibited the work of important Modernist architects including Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, J. J. P. Oud, Mies van der Rohe, Raymond Hood, Howe & Lescaze, Richard Neutra, and the Bowman Brothers.²⁶ The smaller section on housing, organized by Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, Catherine Bauer, and Lewis Mumford, contained photographs of several German and Dutch housing estates and of only one American example, Radburn, New Jersey.²⁷

Influenced by all of these new ideas in architecture and housing, the central goal of the RPAA became making large-scale, planned residential communities accessible to low-income groups. They believed that such developments were essential components of a humane urban environment that should be integrated into all regional planning efforts. To this end they believed that government should concentrate on increasing the supply and reducing the cost of new housing. Early RPAA recommendations for New York included creation of a central state housing agency, a state housing credit system, and municipal housing boards to acquire land and build housing.²⁸ To test their planning and development theories, RPAA members formed the City Housing Corporation to design, finance, and build two residential suburbs outside New York City: Sunnyside Gardens in Queens in 1924, and Radburn, New Jersey, in 1928. Each of these communities was an innovative example of Garden City design, intended to draw workers away from the inner city; but the high costs of privately financed, large-scale development prohibited

²⁶ *Modern Architecture International Exhibition*, pp. 5-6.

²⁷ *Modern Architecture International Exhibition*, p. 6.

²⁸ Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920's*, pp. 33-34.

either project from providing affordable housing to low-income families.²⁹

Housing Programs in the States

Despite all their efforts, housing reformers failed to convince the federal government of the 1920s to take steps toward a housing program of any sort, whether regulation of the private market or construction of public tenements. Times were too prosperous for the federal government to give serious consideration to housing programs for the poor. After a post-war construction slump, the 1920s proved a boom time for the American housing industry, producing 937,000 units in 1925, a record unsurpassed until 1949.³⁰ Following World War I, the initiative in housing legislation passed from the federal government back to the states. Yet state programs targeted the middle class; they could not afford to provide housing for a permanent class of the poor.

The Massachusetts state legislature established a Homestead Commission in 1917 to buy land "for the purpose of relieving congestion of population and providing small houses and plots of ground for wage earners." The law required the state to sell these houses at cost, following a warning from the Massachusetts supreme court that a state housing program "not [become] a plan for pauper relief." In 1919, the Commission built 12 houses near Lowell, selling them to workers at long-term, low-interest mortgages. The state soon lost interest and dissolved the program.³¹

²⁹ Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920's*, pp. 45-51.

³⁰ Peter G. Rowe, *Modernity and Housing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 103.

³¹ Dorothy Schaffter, *State Housing Agencies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 15, 25-33.

The California state legislature enacted the Veterans Farm and Home Purchase Act in 1921 to assist men returning from World War I. The state issued \$10 million in bonds to set up a revolving fund allowing veterans or their widows to borrow up to 95 percent of the price of a new house or farm at 5 percent interest.³² Repayment of the fund by the qualifying veterans assured that taxpayers would not subsidize the program, precluding housing from becoming a public burden. One legislator proudly asserted that the program was "self-sustained and free from any element of charity, while building substantial law-abiding, home-owning citizens."

The New York state legislature made several attempts to stimulate the housing market during the 1920s. The legislature passed a 10-year real estate tax exemption on all new construction completed before April 1924.³³ With no limits on rent or selling price, however, this law produced scant housing for low-income families.³⁴ In 1922, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company convinced the legislature to amend the insurance code, permitting insurance companies to invest their burgeoning profits in housing. Metropolitan Life Insurance company opened its first housing development in 1924 in New York City as a direct result of this action.³⁵ To ensure that this housing would reach the working class, the code required rents not to exceed a very low \$9 per month per room, at a time when newly built apartments in New York City rented for at

³² Schaffter, *State Housing Agencies*, pp. 183-184.

³³ Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 150.

³⁴ Edith Elmer Wood, *Recent Trends in American Housing* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 107.

³⁵ Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, p. 151.

least \$15 per room.³⁶

The New York State Housing Law of 1926 provided further incentives to private builders. It exempted limited-dividend housing corporations from state and city taxes and granted them the right of eminent domain to condemn and assemble large tracts of land on which to build new housing projects. The act stipulated a maximum of 6 percent return to investors and set specific rent ceilings. Only 6 corporations in New York City took advantage of this act by 1932, building 11 garden apartment projects with housing for over 1,700 families.³⁷

Privately financed developers also attempted to address the housing needs of low-income families in a few large-scale projects. In 1928, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., built the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Apartments as New York City's first cooperative development for African Americans.³⁸

Philanthropists in Chicago built the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments and the Marshall Field Garden Apartments in 1929.³⁹ Despite extremely low profit margins, none of these projects could reduce rents to reach below the economic level of the middle class. Like the projects built under the New York Housing Law of 1926, high costs of large-scale development prohibited these projects from providing housing to low-income families.

³⁶ Louis H. Pink, *The New Day in Housing* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 140.

³⁷ Edith Elmer Wood, "A Century of the Housing Problem," in *Urban Housing*, ed., William L. C. Wheaton, et. al. (New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp. 3-4.

³⁸ Edith Elmer Wood, *Recent Trends in American Housing*, p. 226.

³⁹ Devereux Bowly, Jr., *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago, 1895-1976* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 8-16.

By the eve of the Great Depression, housing reform had reached a turning point. State and local governments clearly had demonstrated that they could not provide adequate housing for the poor, while the federal government was unwilling to fill the void. Private developers, no matter how well-intentioned, could not build decent housing at a price the poor could afford. Edith Elmer Wood expressed the fondest hope of many housing reformers in 1931 when she called for a "major statesman to make housing on the grand scale the chief plank in his platform."⁴⁰ Their aspirations came true only when the crushing economic circumstances of the Great Depression forced the federal government to intervene.

⁴⁰ Wood, *Recent Trends in American Housing*, p. 246.

CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC HOUSING AS PUBLIC WORKS

The Great Depression refocused attention on the inequities of the housing market and on the smoldering slum problems of America's cities, as economic collapse devastated home ownership and the residential construction industry. Housing construction had fallen steadily beginning in the late 1920s to a low of 93,000 units by 1933, down a full 90 percent from the record high in 1925.⁴¹ Fourteen million Americans, one-third of them from the building trades, were unemployed, and 273,000 families lost their homes to mortgage foreclosure in 1933 alone.⁴² Decaying inner city neighborhoods became more congested than ever by people forced out of better, less affordable housing. The condition of the already decrepit housing stock available to the poor worsened as property owners deferred maintenance, and new construction came to a near standstill. Migrants from farms and small towns exacerbated the slum problem as they crowded into cities in search of employment or public relief.

A New Deal for Housing

In his first inaugural address in March 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed his firm intention to lead the nation into recovery through unprecedented, but unspecified, government intervention. Although he acknowledged the "tragedy" of foreclosure on small homes and farms, he indicated no particular housing program or plan of attack against the slums. He declared with

⁴¹ Rowe, *Modernity and Housing*, p. 103.

⁴² Gertrude S. Fish, "Housing Policy during the Great Depression," in *The Story of Housing*, ed. Gertrude Fish (New York: Macmillan, 1979), p. 196.

certainty only that "our greatest task is to put people to work," and called on Congress to provide him with emergency powers necessary to create employment.⁴³

The prospect of federal funding inspired the National Public Housing Conference (NPHC) to promote low-rent housing construction and slum clearance as legitimate forms of unemployment relief, creating both much-needed construction jobs and useful permanent dwellings. Mary Simkhovitch, president of the NPHC, convinced Senator Robert F. Wagner during the spring of 1933 to include housing activities in any upcoming public works legislation.⁴⁴ Wagner, a Democrat from New York who had grown up in the slums of Manhattan, would become the statesman whom housing reform activist Edith Elmer Wood had sought to lead the housing cause.

Congress responded quickly to the new President's request for action, passing the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in June 1933. Title II of this act allotted \$3.3 billion for the formation of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (PWA) to provide "massive work relief activities quickly." True to his word, Senator Wagner inserted authorization for the PWA to include among its list of projects "construction . . . under public regulation or control of low-cost housing and slum clearance." To this end, the PWA could make loans to limited-dividend corporations, award grants to state or local agencies, or build projects on its own.

⁴³ Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, 9 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1941), Volume 2, pp. 11-15.

⁴⁴ J. Joseph Hutchmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 206.

Title II provided an additional \$25 million to establish a Division of Subsistence Homesteads to build rural communities to provide for the redistribution of the "overbalance of population in industrial centers."⁴⁵ When the Resettlement Administration absorbed it in 1935, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads had begun 50 communities to provide for the relocation of urban families from the slums or farm families from submarginal lands. This division also served families displaced by New Deal crop reduction or rural electrification programs, unemployed miners at Arthurdale, West Virginia, and urban working-class African Americans at Aberdeen, Virginia.⁴⁶

The PWA Limited-Dividend Housing Program

President Roosevelt placed the PWA within the Department of the Interior and appointed Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes as its Administrator. Ickes established a Housing Division to carry out the PWA's slum clearance and low-rent housing mandate. The primary purpose of the Housing Division was to "reduce unemployment and to restore purchasing power" by employing workers in the construction trades and from the building supplies industry. Beyond this immediate goal, however, the Housing Division also hoped to "awaken . . . a feeling of local responsibility" for the long-term housing needs of the urban poor.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hutchmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, p. 208.

⁴⁶ Paul A. Conklin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 332-334.

⁴⁷ U. S. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division Bulletin No. 2, *Urban Housing: The Story of the PWA Housing Division, 1933-1936* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 14-16.

The PWA undertook its first housing projects by providing low-interest loans to limited-dividend housing corporations. This initial PWA program was similar to plans developed under the Hoover administration in 1932. An outgrowth of recommendations from the 1931 Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) drew in over 600 proposals for possible housing projects, of which only one was built.⁴⁸ Successful applicants to the PWA program who agreed to limit their profits could receive federal loans of up to 85 percent of the project development cost at four percent interest over 30 years.⁴⁹ Like the RFC, the Housing Division received over 500 requests to finance various types of housing ventures. The Housing Division staff in Washington, D.C. carefully scrutinized the proposals to verify that they met minimum program standards for construction and financing. Despite the PWA's liberal loan requirements, only seven projects met PWA requirements and eventually received funding [See Appendix II: PWA Limited-Dividend Housing Projects]. These projects, all built between 1933 and 1935, included two unnamed projects in Altavista, Virginia, and Euclid, Ohio; Hillside Homes in the borough of Bronx, New York; the Carl Mackley Houses in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Boulevard Gardens in the borough of Queens, New York; Boyland (also called Boylan Housing) in Raleigh, North Carolina; and Neighborhood Gardens in St. Louis, Missouri. Of these seven projects, all were built for white tenants, and all but Neighborhood Gardens were built on vacant land.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Pommer, Richard. "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. 37 (December 1978), p 236.

⁴⁹ Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Urban Housing*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p. 93.

Early PWA architecture showed the influence of both the Garden City and the European Modernist movements. Architects for the PWA were encouraged to be creative, and there was little bureaucratic meddling in the design and construction of the limited-dividend housing complexes. As a result, many of the early PWA projects are innovative in their design and use of materials. PWA housing projects had a number of characteristics in common, including a rejection of the rehabilitation of existing slum housing, the use of the superblock to organize neighborhoods, minimal ground coverage by buildings, compact building interiors without corridors, on-site community centers, and a public art component.

The first PWA limited-dividend project to be completed was the Carl Mackley Houses in Philadelphia, designed by German Modernist architects Oskar Stonorov and Alfred Kastner, and constructed in 1934-35. The plan for the complex placed four three-story buildings in alignment with the sun for maximum natural light. The buildings were "bent" at the ends and indented in the center to create communal courts, with passageways running between them. The units were covered in burnt yellow and orange industrial tile, which gave the complex a sleek, modern appearance. The interior of the site was enclosed by the buildings, and traffic was restricted from this area.⁵¹ "When completed, the complex contained nearly 300 apartments (most with porches), a pool, an auditorium, underground garages, a nursery school, basement rooms for tenant

⁵¹ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 129-130.

activities, and rooftop laundry facilities."⁵² Like many of the early PWA efforts, the completed design was an important illustration of the compatible molding of European design theories and federal programmatic guidance.

The first apartments at the Carl Mackley Houses were completed in 1935, at which time tenants began to move in. Approximately one-quarter of the complex's early tenants were white-collar workers, as living in the Mackley Houses proved to be too expensive for many of the blue-collar hosiery workers for which the complex was intended. Rents at the complex were set approximately 20 percent higher than originally planned, in order to pay off the federal loan according to the terms required by the PWA.⁵³ The early residents did appear to enjoy living in their newly built community, taking advantage of amenities like the swimming pool, nursery school, and cooperative grocery store. The level of activity at the Carl Mackley Houses subsided substantially after World War II; the complex's nursery school closed in 1964, and in 1968 it was sold to private investors, to be operated as a moderate-income commercial rental apartment complex.⁵⁴

Another important PWA limited-dividend project, the 1,416-unit Hillside Homes, in the Borough of Bronx, New York, was built for white tenants on a vacant site. Designed in 1932 by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, and constructed from 1933 to 1935, the garden apartment complex

⁵² Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p. 130.

⁵³ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 132-133.

⁵⁴ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 132-141.

contained storage, incinerator, boiler, and community rooms; workshops; offices; a playground; wading pools; and a nursery school.⁵⁵ As it was created by essentially the same design team, the concept for Hillside was similar to that of Radburn, except that Hillside had a higher density. The plan included a neighborhood unit which was superimposed within a superbblock of residential streets and open space.⁵⁶

At the time of its construction, Hillside Homes was the largest federal public housing project underway. One of the project's most interesting features was the inclusion of basement apartment units, which were accessed by walking down one-half story from the main entrance. The sides of these units opposite the stair were above ground level, where French doors led to private gardens enclosed by hedges. These units were an excellent way to build the project into the site's existing topography of rolling hills. The plan for Hillside Homes divided the site into five superbblocks, and three acres of the project's center block was reserved for recreation fields.⁵⁷

The limited-dividend housing project built in St. Louis for the Neighborhood Association provides an example of the coordinated efforts of local and federal agencies that shaped early public housing. The Neighborhood Association was formed in 1911 by the merger of the Self-Culture Hall and the North Broadway Settlement, local Progressive-era organizations dedicated

⁵⁵ Rowe, *Modernity and Housing*, p. 358.

⁵⁶ Rowe, *Modernity and Housing*, p. 202.

⁵⁷ Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), pp. 82-83.

to bettering life in the poorest parts of the city.⁵⁸ Local housing studies undertaken in the early twentieth century had revealed a substantial slum problem in the areas of St. Louis known as Wild Cat Chute and Clabber Alley, where wooden shanty towns provided meager shelter to thousands of impoverished residents. Despite a series of reports highlighting the city's growing housing problems, the public attitude toward housing reform was characterized as "lethargic and indifferent."⁵⁹ Official government attempts to create housing reform through regulation had proved as ineffective in St. Louis as they had in other urban centers. The attitude of many was that real housing reform would not succeed until proof was available that the private sector could profit from slum clearance and the construction of new housing. The Neighborhood Association saw its task as providing just that proof.

In 1930, the Neighborhood Association established a Better Housing Committee and supported a study of low-cost housing in Europe by the Association's Managing Director J.A. Wolf. Upon his return from Europe, Wolf ardently pressed the Association to undertake its own housing construction program, similar to those he had seen in Vienna, Munich, and Frankfurt. Wolf cultivated public interest through articles in the local newspaper and by producing a series of models and drawings for a possible project in association with local architects Hoener, Baum and Froese. P. John Hoener served on the Neighborhood Association's Better Housing Committee as well as the President's Conference on Home Ownership, while his

⁵⁸ Toft, Carolyn H., National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. "Neighborhood Gardens Apartments." September 1985, page 8.

⁵⁹ Toft, Carolyn H., National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. "Neighborhood Gardens Apartments." September 1985, page 8-2.

partner Ewald R. Froese had completed his own study of German public housing.⁶⁰

Key to the Neighborhood Association's efforts would be their ability to convince local businessmen to invest in the project through the formation of a limited-dividend housing corporation. In the end, financing was provided by the Neighborhood Association itself with members of the Board putting up \$10,000 apiece with the remainder obtained through a PWA loan of \$640,000. With PWA funding and project approval in hand, ground was broken for the new housing project in May of 1934. Construction of the 252-unit Neighborhood Gardens housing project occupied a full city block and employed 250 men working 30 hours a week. The three-story brick and concrete buildings were completed in 1935 and conformed to the typical public housing schemes being developed through the PWA program with low-rise construction organized around large open spaces and courts, low site coverage, flat roof, International-style architectural lines, and a number of community buildings and other public amenities.⁶¹

Like many of the earliest PWA-funded housing projects, the Neighborhood Gardens' imaginative use of materials, detailing, and unit configurations set the project apart as a striking example of modern domestic design, aptly integrating the needs and goals of its social service agency client, the PWA, and the visions of its skilled modernist architects. Even

⁶⁰ Toft, Carolyn H., National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. "Neighborhood Gardens Apartments." September 1985, page 8-2.

⁶¹ Toft, Carolyn H., National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. "Neighborhood Gardens Apartments." September 1985, page 8-2, 3.

before the construction was complete prospective tenants flooded the offices of the Neighborhood Association. The Neighborhood Gardens project, however, would provide evidence of the financial and logistical problems faced by other PWA limited-dividend projects. While initially intended to serve as replacement housing for the impoverished slum residents displaced during project construction, the required rents of \$19 to \$33 per month were beyond the means of the majority of these people. The result was a residential complex providing housing to the "better class families" whose income had been reduced by the Depression.⁶²

As seen in the examples above, the PWA limited-dividend projects were of high quality in both design and construction. The overall results, however, were unsatisfactory; rents charged were beyond the means of low-income families, and none of the projects complied with the PWA's objective of creating new housing while at the same time clearing slum areas.⁶³ Like the RFC before it, the PWA loan program was impractical during the Depression. Most applicants could not bring to their project even the modest 15 percent equity required by the law, and the limited profit requirement proved too burdensome to attract significant interest from private developers.⁶⁴ One Housing Division official later explained the failure as an

⁶² Toft, Carolyn H., National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. "Neighborhood Gardens Apartments." September 1985, page 8-3.

⁶³ John Hancock, "The New Deal and American Planning in the 1930s," in *Two Centuries of American Planning*, ed. Daniel Schaffer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 210.

⁶⁴ Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Urban Housing*, p. 29; Michael W. Strauss and Talbot Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 38.

inherent result of limited-dividend financing: without a direct federal subsidy, the projects could not be operated nor their debts liquidated unless rents were charged "which are more than can be paid by persons of truly low incomes."⁶⁵

The PWA limited-dividend housing program was an important first step, however, in establishing a federal role in housing reform and in opening new doors to increased local-federal cooperation.

The PWA Direct-Built Housing Program

Anxious for more satisfying results while the emergency appropriations were available, Ickes suspended the limited-dividend loan program in February 1934 and announced that PWA would begin the direct financing and development of low-rent housing projects. From this point on the PWA acquired the land, let contracts for slum clearance and construction, and owned and operated the completed housing.⁶⁶ By the fall of 1937, when PWA ended its housing responsibilities, the Housing Division had completed or begun construction on 51 projects in 36 cities in the continental United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands [See **Appendix III: PWA Direct-Built Housing Projects**]. Of these 51 projects, 21 were constructed for black tenants only; six contained segregated buildings for black and white tenants; and 24 were built solely for white tenants.⁶⁷ Overall, the PWA allotted approximately

⁶⁵ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Urban Housing*, p. 30.

⁶⁷ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 100-101.

one-third of its total constructed housing units to black tenants.⁶⁸

The PWA's Housing Division quickly organized their operations to effectively direct the creation of new public housing. By July 1934, the PWA created the Branch of Initiation, staffed mainly by young architects, who began to assess the need within the many cities that had applied for new housing. The primary duty of this branch was to discern where the need for housing was greatest, and where justifiable projects could be built. The limited-dividend program had spotlighted the fact that few areas of the country had the necessary skills or knowledge to wade through the statistical, sociological, and technical information required to intelligently plan for large scale public housing projects. The Housing Division's project initiators determined exactly where and what to build; their tasks included site selection, choosing the size and type of project, and preparing a detailed program for each complex.⁶⁹ Project initiators also investigated typical family sizes and ethnic background in the cities in which their projects were to be built; this helped to determine the size and distribution of dwelling units. The PWA usually recommended units which ranged from two to five rooms in size; and the average unit size in PWA projects ranged from 2.9 rooms in Birmingham's Smithfield Court, intended for black tenants, to 4.1 rooms in Boston's Old Harbor Village, which was occupied largely by Catholic families of Irish, Italian, and Lithuanian descent.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p. 104.

⁶⁹ Michael W. Strauss and Talbot Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 58.

⁷⁰ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 73.

Upon formal approval of a proposed project, the Branch of Land Acquisition was brought in to supervise site development and acquisition; these responsibilities usually lasted anywhere from four to eight months for PWA-built projects.⁷¹ The PWA also created a Branch of Plans and Specifications, staffed by architects, engineers, landscape architects, and cost estimators, who worked closely with the related branches project initiators. As the deficient applications for the PWA limited-dividend projects clearly indicated that most American builders were not yet capable of designing large-scale public housing projects that met the standards of the Housing Division, the Branch of Plans and Specifications was created to assist local architects and engineers in this task.⁷² In the fall of 1934, the Plans and Specifications Branch began the preparation of a series of plans for the basic units of public housing complexes, including apartments and rowhouses of all types and sizes. Published by the division in May 1935 in *Unit Plans: Typical Room Arrangements, Site Plans and Details for Low Rent Housing*, these drawings and specifications formed the basis of PWA public housing design, and were used by local architects across the county.⁷³

As soon as PWA approval was given for a particular housing project, contracts were let with private architects and engineers chosen from the city involved. Local approval and recommendations by the host city were an important part of the contracting process. To the degree possible, the architectural contracts were made with groups of architects who sometimes

⁷¹ Hackett, Horatio B. "How the PWA Housing Division Functions." *The Architectural Record* (March 1935), p. 150.

⁷² Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 66.

⁷³ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 67.

formed informal consortiums to distribute the limited design work available during the depths of the Depression. The PWA contracts provided for the preparation of a set of plans and specifications to be developed in cooperation with the Housing Division branch staff, who visited the project sites to monitor progress on a regular basis.⁷⁴ As these local architects were more accustomed to designing individual buildings, and had little experience in planning larger sites, the Housing Division also assisted them in handling the planning and the topography of individual sites. Experienced PWA site planners drew sketches which expressed the general ideas of the division as adjusted to specific sites.⁷⁵ The PWA advocated the lowest possible density of development in their public housing complexes; they specified a maximum of four-story buildings covering no more than 30 percent of the site. The only exception to this rule was in New York City (which had the highest land cost in the nation), where high-rise apartments with elevators were allowed.⁷⁶

Many of the PWA specifications were driven by a desire for economy. Attached dwellings were suggested for public housing complexes as they afforded considerable savings over detached housing models. Building attached units halved the necessary exterior wall area, and greatly reduced the length of sewer, water, gas, and electric lines. Suggested materials were based on a number of factors, including whether or not they were fireproof, efficiency, and initial and maintenance costs; the Housing Division thought that it was "economical in the long run to build

⁷⁴ Hackett, Horatio B. "How the PWA Housing Division Functions." *The Architectural Record* (March 1935). p. 150.

⁷⁵ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁶ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 69.

well.”⁷⁷

As a building type, public housing projects constructed in America between 1933 and 1937 are best defined as a grouping of multi-family, low scale, residential buildings which were organized on a site, around large open spaces and recreational areas, as part of a larger and deliberate plan. Typical city blocks were often combined to form superblocks as a way to organize the larger neighborhood, and a clear hierarchy between primary roads and pedestrian thoroughfares was an integral part of the site plan. The buildings usually took the form of several-story walk-up apartments and rowhouses. They were most often constructed of brick, simply designed and generally well-built, and contained modern conveniences in both kitchens and bathrooms. These public housing projects frequently had a non-residential component, including community centers, management offices, recreation and community rooms, nursery schools, and garages.

It appears that the only part of the design of PWA public housing not influenced by the Housing Division was the style in which the buildings were built; this decision was left to the local architect. As PWA public housing scholars Michael W. Strauss and Talbot Wegg wrote:

The style of buildings, whether they should be “modern,” colonial, Spanish, or what-not, was on the whole left to the decision of local architects. They had only one watchword, simplicity. As a result there is, to the layman’s eye, great variety in the exterior design of projects. New York, Chicago, Camden, Cleveland, and some others are modern; Jacksonville and Miami are of typical design; Charleston recalls the graciousness of its heritage; Boston is in keeping with the New England tradition; Dallas suggests the distinctive architecture of the Southwest.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 71.

⁷⁸ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 68.

As the federal housing program matured, the use of standardized plans and model unit designs became more and more evident. Whereas the earlier limited development projects advanced a certain freedom of design and architectural innovation, later works were increasingly constrained by efforts to speed up development and monitor rising costs. The Housing Division's branches of Construction and Management were responsible for the final aspects of project development, including slum removal, construction supervision, and administration of tenant services.⁷⁹ The administration of the PWA's Housing Division was under the direction of Horatio Hackett, a Chicago architect-engineer with limited experience in housing reform issues before coming to the PWA. Among the consultants on staff were architects, Alfred Fellheimer and Harvard-educated Angelo R. Clas.⁸⁰

In the midst of the Depression, the design, planning, and construction of these projects employed thousands of people, and the projects themselves served to reinforce the concept that there was a role for the federal government in public housing. The PWA direct-built housing projects provided housing for nearly 22,000 families at a cost to the federal government of over \$130 million;⁸¹ and the PWA's slum clearance efforts eliminated about 10,000

⁷⁹ Hackett, Horatio B. "How the PWA Housing Division Functions." *The Architectural Record* (March 1935). p. 150.

⁸⁰ Pommer, Richard. "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. 37 (December 1978). P. 236.

⁸¹ National Association of Housing Officials, Coleman Woodbury, ed., *Housing Officials' Year Book 1938* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1938), pp. 120-133.

substandard units.⁸² The PWA direct-built projects also added considerably to the housing stock of cities across the nation, including Atlanta (1,393 units); Chicago (2,414 units); Cleveland (1,849 units); Detroit (1,478 units); Memphis (1,082 units); and New York City (2,196 units).⁸³

The Housing Division opened Techwood Homes in Atlanta as the first federally owned low-rent housing project in the nation on August 15, 1936. Atlanta was the site of two early PWA direct-built public housing projects: Techwood Homes, intended for white tenants, and University Homes, intended for black tenants. Both projects replaced two of the city's worst slum areas. The 604-unit Techwood Homes project replaced a nine-block area known as Techwood Flats, which was located between the Georgia Institute of Technology and the city's central business district; and the 675-unit University Homes project replaced the Beaver Slide slum, which was located between the campuses of Spellman and Morris Brown Colleges.⁸⁴ The major difference between the two Atlanta projects is the types of buildings which were constructed. At Techwood Homes, 13 three-story buildings and 7 two-story rowhouses were built; while at University Homes 42 buildings were constructed, with a separate entry and a small plot of land for each unit.⁸⁵

⁸² Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 90.

⁸³ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 100-101.

⁸⁴ Carol A. Flores, "US public housing in the 1930s: the first projects in Atlanta, Georgia," *Planning Perspectives* 9 (1994), pp. 410-411, 417.

⁸⁵ Flores, "US public housing in the 1930s," *Planning Perspectives*, p. 420.

According to Atlanta housing scholar Carol A. Flores, both of these projects exemplify the PWA's attention to health, comfort, and safety. At the University Homes site, central courtyards were provided to give residents access to sunlight and fresh air; while at the Techwood Homes site, the rowhouse units were given private yards, and the apartment buildings were set back from the streets to create open spaces.⁸⁶ To assure the comfort of the residents, the units at both projects featured utilities, including hot and cold running water, electricity, and steam heat; modern appliances; well-designed kitchens; closets; and storage space.⁸⁷

Lakeview Terrace, the nation's third PWA direct-built housing complex, was constructed in Cleveland, "a city with no tradition in housing and small reputation in architecture, [which] was to become a center of urban housing under the PWA second only to New York."⁸⁸ The complex was built for white tenants on a 22-acre slum area that was originally part of Old Ohio City, founded in 1854 as the first location for the city of Cleveland. This site, a steep slope overlooking Lake Erie, was a challenging one. Forty-six red brick, International Style, two-and three-story apartment and rowhouse buildings and 118 garages were terraced down the slope. These buildings, containing a total of 620 units, covered approximately 26 percent of the site, and were arranged around a large playground and a community center containing an auditorium, gym, kitchen, club and game rooms, and a nursery school. Lakeview Terrace was

⁸⁶ Flores, "US public housing in the 1930s," *Planning Perspectives*, p. 416.

⁸⁷ Flores, "US public housing in the 1930s," *Planning Perspectives*, pp. 416-419.

⁸⁸ Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37 (December 1978), p. 244.

the first American public housing complex to include a community center, and was also the first complex to be operated by a female manager, Mrs. Mary C. Maher. The complex included an early example of a retail component, 13 shops which were arranged around a small plaza at the main entrance. These shops were later demolished so that a high-rise building for elderly residents could be built in their place.⁸⁹

The 574-unit Harlem River Houses was the first PWA direct-built project to be constructed in New York City. Unlike the majority of the second phase of PWA public housing, the Harlem River Houses were not a slum clearance project; the sloping site in Harlem was vacant prior to the complex's construction. The project, which was the work of the design team of Archibald Manning Brown and prolific New York City apartment house architect Horace Ginsbern, consisted of three distinct groups of four- and five-story red brick, International Style buildings arranged on a 9-acre site for a low-density land coverage of approximately 30 percent. Amenities offered on site included a nursery school, health clinic, social and children's play rooms, and community laundries.⁹⁰

When the Harlem River Houses opened in October 1937, over 14,000 families applied to

⁸⁹ Jane Lauder, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "Lakeview Terrace," September 10, 1971, pp. 7.1, 8.2; C. W. Short and R. Stanley Brown, *Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and Other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration* (Washington, D.C: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 659.

⁹⁰ Joan Olshansky, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "Harlem River Houses," July 11, 1979, pp. 7.1, 8.1 .

reside in the 574 apartments. The New York City Housing Authority was given the task of selecting residents, which they did by rating prospective tenants by conducting home visits, interviews, and after making sure that they could pay their rent.⁹¹ Once selected, "new residents could choose to participate in a wide range of social and educational activities. A 1939 management report noted that residents had organized a tenants' association, community newspaper, women's club, mothers' group to support the work of the WPA recreational programs for children, men's club, parent-teachers association of the nursery school, and Boy Scout troop."⁹² Early tenants seemed to appreciate living in such high-quality housing. Resident Melvin Ford, when interviewed for a 1939 magazine article, commented that he felt lucky to live at the Harlem River Houses, as he had a nicer place to live than he had before, or than where most people lived.⁹³

The 274-unit Langston Terrace Dwellings were built on a 13-acre sloping site overlooking the Anacostia River in northeast, Washington, D.C. Like the Harlem River Houses, Langston was a project built for black tenants on a vacant site. The complex was comprised of attached brick rowhouse units, ranging from 2 to 4 stories in height, which formed 14 separate blocks of housing arranged around a large, rectangular, open, common space. A number of Langston's defining features conformed to the PWA standards which were established in 1935, including the central common, high standards of construction, and low-density site coverage

⁹¹ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp.165-167.

⁹² Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p.168.

⁹³ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p. 170.

by buildings of 20 percent. A restrictive project budget encouraged the use of readily-available materials, and of basic unit plans which could easily be replicated. Within those constraints project architect Hilyard Robert Robinson was able to create a highly successful Modern design. So well received was his design that Federal housing officials often used the project as a demonstration model for the "possibilities of ...low-rent housing."⁹⁴ Langston Terrace had a particularly fine public art component included in its design. A terra-cotta frieze entitled "The Progress of the Negro Race" crowned the arcade entrance to the complex, and five animal sculptures constructed of reinforced concrete were placed in the playground within the common area.⁹⁵

All of the second phase of PWA projects operated under the terms of the George-Healey Act, which stated that the PWA should fix rents at an amount sufficient to pay for the operation of each project and to repay 55 percent of the total development cost at 3 percent interest over a period of 60 years. The balance of 45 percent was considered an outright federal grant. The act also authorized the PWA, whose federally owned projects were exempt from property taxes, to make annual payments to local governments out of project rent revenues in compensation for municipal services.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Glen B. Leiner, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "Langston Terrace Dwellings," December 1, 1986, pp. 8.1-8.2.

⁹⁵ Glen B. Leiner, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "Langston Terrace Dwellings," December 1, 1986, pp. 7.1- 7.2, 8.1-8.2.

⁹⁶ Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 88.

The substantial capital subsidy and the longer amortization period did allow the PWA projects to achieve lower rents than had been possible with the limited-dividend program. Total development costs, including site acquisition and clearance, averaged \$6,200 per unit. Since rents were based on development costs, however, the PWA projects still were only within the reach of the working poor and were unable to serve the majority of slum inhabitants.⁹⁷ The PWA, like all the other low-rent housing ventures before it, failed to meet the housing demands of those with the greatest need.

The PWA and the Slums

The PWA was determined to prove the feasibility of combining slum clearance with the construction of low-rent housing. Harold Ickes declared that the top priority of the Housing Division was to "seek out some of the worst slum spots on the municipal maps and abruptly wipe them out with good low-rent housing."⁹⁸ Through speeches and pamphlets, the PWA showed the public that slums and inadequate housing were problems faced by every community in the nation, not just big cities of the east:

Popular imagination seized on the noisome Lower East Side with its lung-blocks and Devil's Kitchen as the essence of the American slum. Too frequently it was an American city's boast that "we have no slums in this town" simply because no five-story railroad flats dangled the day's wash over unpleasant back yards. . . . Meanwhile, Memphis and New Orleans had their "Arks," . . . Philadelphia had its picturesque "bandbox" or "high-hat" houses . . . San Antonio found itself with its "Corrals," single rooms inhabited by Mexican families of as many as eight or ten persons. Youngstown had its "Monkeys Nest" . . . There seemed

⁹⁷ Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 85.

⁹⁸ Harold L. Ickes, "The Federal Housing Program," *New Republic* 81 (December 19, 1934), p. 16.

to be no definite end in sight; the slums, the appendage of the poor, appeared to possess enduring life.⁹⁹

With Ickes' encouragement, the Federal Civil Works Administration (CWA) conducted a Real Property Inventory in 1934, examining living conditions in 64 cities nationwide. The CWA report declared that much of the nation's housing was "obsolete." It revealed that 2.3 percent of all dwellings were unfit for human habitation; 15.6 percent needed major structural repair; and only 37.7 percent were in good condition. Many units lacked indoor plumbing, were without access to a private toilet, or had no electricity, and one-third still relied on wood- or coal-burning stoves for heat.¹⁰⁰ The inventory gave statistical proof that the nation suffered from a grave shortage of decent housing, a claim that reformers had made long before the Depression. Edith Elmer Wood, now a consultant to the PWA, estimated that fully one-third of all Americans lived in housing so inadequate as to "injure the health, endanger the safety and morals, and interfere with the normal family life of their inhabitants."¹⁰¹

The PWA also highlighted the economic costs of slums. Charles Palmer, the prime force behind the Techwood and University Homes slum clearance projects, reported statistics from Atlanta:

⁹⁹ U. S. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division, *The American Program of Low-Rent Public Housing* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), pp. 1-2, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, Record Group 196, Entry 3, Box 1.

¹⁰⁰ Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Urban Housing*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰¹ Edith Elmer Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United State*, U. S. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division Bulletin No. 1 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 3.

We found that every individual in the slum was costing the government \$33 more than was collected in taxes. Since 60,000 people in Atlanta are inadequately housed, this represents a subsidy to the slums of \$2 million, enough to amortize the investment and pay the interest on \$50 million worth of homes. . . . We figure it is better business to subsidize housing than to subsidize slums. As slums are eradicated, insurance rates and police and health expenditures go down and property values go up.¹⁰²

In each city where PWA housing was eventually built, the primary interest of the Housing Division's project initiators was slum clearance. Where slum clearance was not possible, local sponsors were offered projects on vacant land. In cities where clearing slums was the sole objective, local applicants refused to sponsor projects on vacant land, and the division was forced to withdraw. Cities such as Charleston and Louisville achieved limited slum clearance by demolishing a number of slum dwellings which were approximately equal to the number of units provided in the new housing complexes. Despite the PWA's strong commitment to clearing slums, nearly half of the PWA public housing complexes were built on vacant land.¹⁰³

While housing reformers generally agreed on the need for government subsidies to finance low-income housing, they were divided over the issue of slum clearance. Traditional reformers like Wood and Simkhovitch saw slum clearance as an integral component of public housing. Slum clearance would not only eliminate the blight, overcrowding, and disease

¹⁰² Charles F. Palmer, *Adventures of a Slum Fighter* (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, Inc., 1955), p. 8.

¹⁰³ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, p. 62.

caused by substandard housing, but its replacement with new low-income housing would allow the poor to continue to live near their places of employment.¹⁰⁴

A more radical group, originating from within the Regional Planning Association of America, believed that slum clearance was a waste of time and money. Catherine Bauer characterized slum clearance as benefitting only the real estate industry intent on selling slum property at inflated prices. She contended that new housing built on former slum sites would be so costly as to force "the dispossessed tenants . . . to move into some neighboring run-down district and crowd it more thickly than it was before."¹⁰⁵ Lewis Mumford prescribed a government housing program that would allow the poor to relocate to better housing outside of the cities, using Sunnyside and Radburn as models, stating, "if we wish to produce cheap dwellings, it is to raw land that we must turn. . . . The proper strategy is to forget about the slums as a special problem. . . . When we have built enough good houses in the right places, the slums will empty themselves."¹⁰⁶

Demise of the Housing Division

Legal issues of slum clearance became the greatest challenge faced by the Housing Division. The PWA acquired many of its slum sites by condemnation, invoking the power of eminent

¹⁰⁴ Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Bauer, "Slum Clearance or Housing," *The Nation* 137 (December 27, 1933), pp. 730-731.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis Mumford, "Break the Housing Blockade," *New Republic* 80 (May 17, 1933), p. 8.

domain granted to it by the NIRA. Those sites held by a single owner or a small group of owners usually posed no significant problems. Complications arose as the number of owners multiplied; some slum sites had hundreds of owners with which the PWA had to negotiate.¹⁰⁷ In Atlanta, for instance, the Housing Division placed a blanket condemnation order over the entire 25-acre Techwood site; it paid 120 property owners \$450,320 in compensation for property appraised at \$558,554.¹⁰⁸

Inevitably, a few property owners on each site were unwilling to sell their property to the federal government. A disgruntled owner challenged the PWA in 1935 when it attempted to condemn his property at a proposed site in Kentucky. In *United States v. Certain Lands in the City of Louisville*, a federal district court held that the federal government could not acquire slum property by eminent domain. According to the court, it was not a proper "governmental function to construct buildings in a state for the purpose of selling or leasing them to private citizens for occupancy as homes." The NIRA notwithstanding, the judge found that the federal government had no police power in any state allowing it to condemn and destroy properties that it considers to be a menace to public health or safety.¹⁰⁹ The federal government did not appeal this decision. As a result, the PWA built all subsequent housing on

¹⁰⁷ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 225.

¹⁰⁸ *PWA Land Purchase Record*, July 18, 1936, Project 11-1100, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, Record Group 196.

¹⁰⁹ William Ebenstein, *The Law of Public Housing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940), pp. 32-34.

vacant land or on sites for which it could negotiate clear title.¹¹⁰

Although the federal government no longer could undertake slum clearance as a legitimate function, state courts posed no comparable legal obstacles to slum clearance carried out by state agencies. The New York Court of Appeals found in 1936 that the state's use of eminent domain for purposes of slum clearance did constitute a public use. In *New York City Housing Authority v. Muller*, the court listed crime, disease, delinquency, and tax loss as "unquestioned and unquestionable public evils" that the state could alleviate through slum clearance. State authorized local agencies should use their right of eminent domain "to protect and safeguard the entire public from the menace of the slums."¹¹¹ It became obvious that local governments, working under state enabling legislation, would have to build and operate housing if a federal program was going to succeed.

Adverse court decisions were not the only cause for concern over the continuation of the PWA housing program. The Housing Division also faced budgetary battles with other New Deal agencies as it became evident that housing construction did not generate employment as quickly as other activities. In September 1935, President Roosevelt rescinded the Housing Division's \$120 million allotment from the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, which had been passed in April to supplement the NIRA relief agencies. The Administration rechanneled this money to finance other relief efforts, such as the Works Progress Administration, which

¹¹⁰ Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 86.

¹¹¹ Ebenstein, *The Law of Public Housing*, pp. 57-63.

could employ a greater number of people, on smaller, less costly projects.¹¹² The President then ordered that funding for the Housing Division be confined to those projects which it could "put into construction expeditiously," effectively curtailing the housing activities of the PWA.¹¹³

The Housing Division approved only one additional project after 1935--Baker Homes in Lackawanna, New York--using funds in the amount of \$1.5 million that were saved from previous appropriations. Lackawanna, an industrial suburb of Buffalo, was suffering from one of the most serious housing shortages in the country. When visiting the town, PWA project initiators discovered crowded slums worthy of clearing, and an overall housing vacancy rate of less than 1 percent. These two factors combined induced the PWA to build new housing in Lackawanna; as clearing the town's crowded slums prior to building additional housing would have left the slum dwellers with few viable housing options. Baker Homes was built on a 12-acre vacant site. The 24 buildings, comprised of two-story apartments and rowhouses, were constructed of frame with a veneer of brick, for a land coverage of 25 percent. The apartment units had three rooms, and units in the rowhouses ranged between three and six rooms.¹¹⁴

The Struggle for Local Control

While the PWA developed its centralized low-rent housing program, it also encouraged state

¹¹² Ellis L. Armstrong, ed., *History of Public Works in the United States 1776-1976* (Chicago: American Public Works Association, 1976), p. 529.

¹¹³ Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Urban Housing*, p. 37.

¹¹⁴ Strauss and Wegg, *Housing Comes of Age*, pp. 60, 131-132, 207-208.

legislatures to enact laws that would enable local governments to participate in housing activities. Although Ickes was determined to retain federal ownership as a means of ensuring the quality of the projects and the honesty of the program, he was willing to allow more local control and management.¹¹⁵ In September 1933, Ohio was the first state to pass legislation enabling its municipalities to clear slums and build and manage housing. Drafted by Cleveland city councilman Ernest J. Bohn in the hope of attracting PWA housing funds, the Ohio law allowed its cities to set up independent housing authorities that might act more expeditiously outside the confines of the municipal bureaucracy.¹¹⁶ In December 1934, at the request of Secretary Ickes, President Roosevelt wrote the governors of each state to encourage further legislation.¹¹⁷ By 1938, 30 states, the District of Columbia and Hawaii, had passed enabling legislation and nearly 50 communities had established housing authorities,¹¹⁸ and 13 PWA projects were under the management of their local authority.¹¹⁹

Local housing officials formed the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO) in 1933 to provide technical assistance to inexperienced public housing professionals and to encourage

¹¹⁵ Charles Abrams, *The Future of Housing* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. 257.

¹¹⁶ Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 319-320.

¹¹⁷ Timothy McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1957), p. 41.

¹¹⁸ Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 89.

¹¹⁹ National Association of Housing Officials, Coleman Woodbury, ed., *Housing Officials' Year Book 1938* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1938), pp. 120-133.

states and the federal government to develop long-term housing policies.¹²⁰ In Autumn 1934, Ernest Bohn, president of NAHO, conducted three eminent European housing experts on a 14-city tour of the United States to solicit their evaluation of the American housing situation. On a stop in Cincinnati, Sir Raymond Unwin of the United Kingdom tried to allay one of the most-widely held concerns about public housing:

I know that many persons over here believe that private enterprise is going to be interfered with by this work. Don't believe it . . . You will see that although we have built 800,000 houses in England by public credit and through municipal enterprise, private enterprise has had the era of its life in the last two years.¹²¹

Immediately following the tour, NAHO convened a housing conference in Baltimore to discuss the Europeans' recommendations. The Baltimore conference produced *A Housing Program for the United States*, which presented the principles that would form the foundation of the permanent federal public housing program. These principles reflected the tested British practices in providing public housing. The document called on the federal government to create a permanent housing agency for coordination and guidance, but emphasized that "housing is essentially a local matter." Ultimate responsibility for planning and management had to rest with local authorities. It recommended that the federal government should provide a substantial subsidy for local construction and that rents should be set according to the tenants' ability to pay. The report recognized slum clearance as an important goal, but

¹²⁰ Coleman Woodbury, "The First Year of the National Association of Housing Officials," in National Association of Housing Officials, Coleman Woodbury, ed., *Housing Officials' Year Book 1935* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1935), p. 58.

¹²¹ Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, pp. 324-325.

recommended that high-cost, inner-city sites be avoided. The final location of housing, however, like all other housing matters, should be a local decision.¹²²

The PWA's highly centralized administration came under severe criticism almost from the beginning of the housing program. In *Modern Housing*, published in 1934, Catherine Bauer denounced the Roosevelt administration for having "only a half-hearted desire to tear down a few of the more spectacular slums" with no real commitment to providing a significant number of replacement units. Having just returned from an extensive tour abroad, Bauer praised the European efforts to allow local governments to produce "millions of low-rental, high-standard, modern dwellings in communities planned carefully to provide a maximum of amenity, pleasantness, efficiency, and long-time economy." She called on labor, as both builder and consumer of housing, to insist that government provide for its housing needs.¹²³

The Drive for National Legislation

The recommendations of the Baltimore conference were crucial in forming a united coalition for public housing and for building support for a long-range federal program. The National Public Housing Conference drafted a bill based on these recommendations; Senator Wagner introduced it before the Senate in 1935. The Labor Housing Conference had drafted a similar bill for Congressman Henry Ellenbogen of Pennsylvania to present before the House of

¹²² "Summary of a Housing Program for the United States," in National Association of Housing Officials, Woodbury, ed., *Housing Officials Year Book 1935*, p. 54-57.

¹²³ Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), pp. 241, 90, 255.

Representatives. Local labor leaders in Philadelphia, under the direction of Catherine Bauer, had formed the Labor Housing Conference in 1934 to stimulate support for housing among local unions. Neither housing bill was acted upon in 1935.¹²⁴

Further support for public housing came when the American Federation of Labor (AFL) endorsed the efforts of the Labor Housing Conference in October 1935. The AFL backed a resolution which took its cues from both *Modern Housing* and *A Housing Program for the United States*. The resolution called for labor to demand better housing, and it urged the government to stop undercutting the federal housing program by treating it as an emergency relief measure. Instead, the government should subsidize local efforts to ensure that large-scale, well-planned, low- and moderate-income housing could be provided for all families. Communities with good labor policies would be given preference in receiving housing subsidies, and only union labor would be employed for construction. The endorsement by organized labor gave the public housing movement the political clout which it desperately needed by engaging a major segment of Roosevelt's political base.¹²⁵

In December 1935, Senator Wagner began another campaign to see the housing bill through Congress. In a speech before the NPHC, he defended his stand on public housing against attack from the right:

¹²⁴ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, pp. 88-111.

¹²⁵ Mary Susan Cole, "Catherine Bauer and the Public Housing Movement," 2 vols. (Ph. D. dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, D. C., 1975), Volume 2, pp. 428-431.

The object of public housing . . . is not to invade the field of home building for the middle class or the well-to-do. . . . Nor is it even to exclude private enterprise from participation in a low-cost housing program. It is merely to supplement what private industry will do, by subsidies which will make up the difference between what the poor can afford to pay and what is necessary to assure decent living quarters.¹²⁶

Opposition began to organize. One of the strongest and most vocal rebuttals to the philosophy of Wagner and his allies came from the president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), Walter S. Schmidt, of Cincinnati:

It is contrary to the genius of the American people and the ideals they have established that government become landlord to its citizens. . . . There is sound logic in the continuance of the practice under which those who have initiative and the will to save acquire better living facilities, and yield their former quarters at modest rents to the group below.¹²⁷

Other business organizations followed suit, with the National Association of Retail Lumber Dealers, the U.S. Building and Loan League, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce expressing fierce opposition to public housing legislation.

Wagner and Ellenbogen collaborated on another bill in 1936, which easily passed the Senate in June, but again died in committee in the House. Public housing legislation was not a significant issue in the 1936 Presidential campaign, despite Wagner's insertion of a general commitment to housing for low-income families in the Democratic party platform.¹²⁸ Yet following his landslide reelection in November, Roosevelt gave his full support to the Wagner-

¹²⁶ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, p. 136.

¹²⁷ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, p. 139.

¹²⁸ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, pp. 235-236.

Ellenbogen Bill, especially after the AFL declared that "organized labor is determined to place the United States Housing Bill on the statute books next year."¹²⁹

The President made his intentions clear to the nation in January 1937. He declared to Congress in his State of the Union address that housing was still one of the "far-reaching problems" for which the country had to find a solution. He cited the fact that millions of Americans continued to live "in habitations . . . which not only fail to provide the . . . benefits of modern civilization but breed disease and impair the health of future generations."¹³⁰ A week later he wrote a statement for the NPHC in which he characterized the nation's housing situation as an obstacle to "healthy democracy" and "inimical to the general welfare." He promised to help that body bring their cause "before the people."¹³¹

The President delivered his strongest show of support to public housing in his second inaugural address on January 20, 1937, in which he stated:

I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope--because the Nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out. . . . The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.¹³²

"One-third of a nation" became a rallying cry for the public housing movement.

¹²⁹ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, p. 238.

¹³⁰ Rosenman, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Volume 5, p. 637.

¹³¹ Rosenman, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Volume 5, pp. 685-686.

¹³² Rosenman, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Volume 6, p. 5.

The efforts of the PWA during the limited-dividend and direct-built programs had served a number of important objectives during the first half of the 1930s. Not only did they provide an important (if limited) source of public employment during the early years of the Depression and help replace a number of the country's worst urban slums with safe, modern housing, but more importantly they set the stage for the development of more extensive public housing programs during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In the end, the PWA Housing Division described its own work during the period as "demonstration projects," proving the essential feasibility of federal involvement in public housing reform. These early projects provided essential opportunities for experimenting with and improving on new construction methods, design theories, and management principles, all of which added substantially to the body of local and federal experience in planning, constructing, and operating large scale public housing in the United States. During the depths of the Depression, the PWA housing programs provided local communities with more than 26,000 units of new public housing.

As has been shown, the design of public housing flourished during the New Deal. Creativity took precedence over cost control, and many fine projects were built by the PWA in an attempt to provide the maximum employment opportunities for architects and construction labor alike. Yet public housing was becoming institutionalized within a large bureaucracy, influenced by the participation of local communities, and subject to the budgetary scrutiny of Congress. Especially after 1937, factors such as cost limitations and standardization of design soon brought a sense of sameness to public housing that continues to be a defining characteristic of the program even today.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNITED STATES HOUSING ACT OF 1937

With Presidential support behind them, public housing advocates felt assured of ultimate triumph in their pursuit of a sustained federal public housing program. The United States Housing Act of 1937 passed both houses of Congress by a wide margin in November, establishing a firm federal commitment to provide a supply of decent, low-rent housing to America's urban poor. This Act created the federally funded, locally operated public housing program which continues to function to this day. Enthusiasm for the program was high among local communities, and over the next five years more than 370 housing projects were built by local public housing authorities with federal subsidies.

The Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill

Congressman Henry Steagall of Alabama, chairman of the House Committee on Banking and Currency, replaced Henry Ellenbogen as cosponsor of the Wagner Bill in 1937. Steagall personally opposed public housing, and had killed the bill in committee in 1936. He was willing to bring the bill out of committee under his own sponsorship only after the President gave it his unqualified support.¹³³ Conceding to Catherine Bauer, Steagall reportedly explained his conversion as a simple matter of party loyalty: "I'm against it, it's socialism, it's

¹³³ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 135.

Bolshevist, it will bankrupt the country, but the leader wants it."¹³⁴ Wagner and Steagall reintroduced the housing bill into their respective houses of Congress in the summer of 1937.

Opponents of public housing testified in force before the House Committee. The Chairman of the Committee on Housing for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce declared that

the government should [not] build publicly owned houses to improve the conditions of the poorest families, because it is inconceivable that the public can . . . supply the housing required. . . . Such a process will restrain private efforts on which we must rely if accomplishment over the next ten years is to meet requirements.¹³⁵

The Secretary of the National Lumber Dealers' Association felt that the government should restrict its housing activities to those areas in which private enterprise could not participate, stating

When it is clearly demonstrated that the benefits of this legislation will go to wage earners in the group earning between \$1,000 and \$750 you are coming dangerously close to direct competition with private industry, which can demonstrate to you that it is today building low-cost houses for wage earners in this group.¹³⁶

Many public housing advocates also came forth with their support, including Secretary Ickes. New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and housing experts Edith Elmer Wood and Catherine Bauer. The most remarkable show of support, however, came from Stewart MacDonald,

¹³⁴ Eugenie Ladner Birch, "Woman-made America: The Case of Early Public Housing Policy," in *The American Planner: Biographies and Recollections*, ed. Donald A. Krueckeberg (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 169.

¹³⁵ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Banking and Currency, *Hearings on (H. R. 5033) (S. 1685), To Create a U. S. Housing Authority* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1937; Bethesda, MD: Congressional Information Service, U. S. Congressional Committee Hearings, Microform Y4.B22/1:H81/3/rev, 1983), p. 249.

¹³⁶ U.S. Congress, *To Create a U.S. Housing Authority*, p. 273.

Administrator of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the greatest rival of public housing among the federal housing programs. MacDonald admitted the "undeniable need" for slum clearance in the nation's cities and noted the millions of low-income families who could never afford a private home and thus could not partake of the FHA's services.¹³⁷ After two years, the Committee finally relented and recommended that the bill be brought before the House for a vote.

Although there was a general feeling of support for the bill in both houses of Congress, there was much quibbling over the details of finance and operation. A group of rural Congressmen expressed concern that only large cities, and Wagner's New York City in particular, would benefit from the housing program. Time and again they charged that the program would "not be of the slightest service to the rural areas or towns or small cities," and that "it would not apply to more than six, eight, or ten cities in the country." Wagner argued that the housing program would "attack poor housing wherever it existed." Holding Wagner to his pledge, critics pushed through an amendment preventing the expenditure of more than 10 percent of USHA funds in any single state.¹³⁸

Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, a staunch supporter of government economy, was only concerned with the cost of the program. He demanded assurances that the public housing program would not repeat the "extravagant" \$16,000 per unit construction costs found at the

¹³⁷ U.S. Congress, *To Create a U.S. Housing Authority*, p. 42.

¹³⁸ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, p. 355.

Resettlement Administration's Greenbelt towns. Byrd's amendment limited construction costs on each project to \$1,000 per room and \$4,000 per unit (excluding land, demolition, and non-dwelling facilities) in cities under 500,000 population, and \$1,250 per room and \$5,000 per unit in larger cities, a significant reduction from the earlier PWA average project cost of \$6,200 per unit.¹³⁹

Senator David I. Walsh, a proponent of slum reform from Massachusetts, added the "equivalent elimination" provision to the bill, which required the local authority to remove substandard slum units from the local housing supply in a "substantially equal number" to the public housing units it built. The local authority could meet this requirement by "demolition, condemnation, and effective closing," of substandard units, or through rehabilitation by "compulsory repair or improvement." Walsh was determined that slum clearance should remain a goal of public housing and not merely an afterthought. This stipulation also ensured that public housing would not add to the total number of housing units in a community, but would merely improve the quality of housing within the existing supply.¹⁴⁰ A subsequent amendment in the House allowed deferment from the Walsh amendment if a locality could prove that it suffered from a serious shortage of housing.¹⁴¹

These modifications placated much of the immediate apprehension in Congress and allowed the

¹³⁹ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, pp. 324-332.

¹⁴⁰ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, pp. 349-350.

¹⁴¹ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, p. 393.

Wagner-Steagall Bill to pass the Senate by a vote of 64 to 16 on August 6, 1937. It passed the House on August 18 by the wide margin of 275 to 86. President Roosevelt signed the bill into law on September 1 as the United States Housing Act of 1937.¹⁴²

The United State Housing Act of 1937

The United States Housing Act of 1937 established a permanent low-rent public housing program grounded in a partnership between the federal government and local communities across the nation. It declared that the official policy of the United States government would, for the first time, be:

To promote the general welfare of the Nation by employing its funds and credit . . . to remedy the nonsafe and unsanitary housing conditions and the acute shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of low-income, in urban and rural non-farm areas.

It established the United States Housing Authority (USHA) within the Department of the Interior to take charge of the federal program.¹⁴³ The USHA could not directly build or manage public housing, as the PWA had done; local public housing authorities (PHAs) established under state enabling legislation were given that function.

According to the provisions of the new legislation, the USHA would make 60-year loans to the PHAs for up to 90 percent of the development cost of low-rent housing or slum clearance projects, with local communities responsible for the remaining 10 percent.¹⁴⁴ To raise funds

¹⁴² McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, p. 402.

¹⁴³ *United States Housing Act of 1937, Statutes at Large*, 75th Congress, 1st Session, Chapter 896, September 1, 1937, Public Law 412, Sec. 3(a).

¹⁴⁴ *United States Housing Act of 1937, Statutes at Large*, Sec. 9.

for these loans, the USHA could sell its tax-exempt bonds in amounts up to \$500 million.¹⁴⁵ To service the debt on the federal loan, the USHA would make "annual contributions" to the PHAs to "assist in achieving and maintaining the low-rent character of their housing projects." This contribution, determined in a contract between the USHA and the individual PHA would enable the PHA to set rents no higher than necessary to pay annual operating costs of the project.¹⁴⁶ When asked in debate about families whose income would not allow them even to pay rent based on operating costs, Wagner replied "there are some people whom we cannot possibly reach; . . . this bill cannot provide housing for those who cannot pay the rent minus the subsidy allowed."¹⁴⁷

Congress authorized the USHA to enter into local contracts of not more than \$5 million in 1937, and up to \$7.5 million for the next two years; additional appropriations from Congress were necessary after 1939. The local government was also required to make a small contribution to the operation of the local public housing authority, equal to 20 percent of the federal contract, usually in the form of an exemption for the public housing project from local property taxes.¹⁴⁸

With these subsidies, the local public housing authority could assure that its housing would be

¹⁴⁵ McDonnell, *The Wagner Housing Act*, pp. 395-397.

¹⁴⁶ *United States Housing Act of 1937, Statutes at Large*, Sec. 10.

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence Meir Friedman, *Government and Slum Housing: A Century of Frustration* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), p. 109.

¹⁴⁸ *United States Housing Act of 1937, Statutes at Large*, Sec. 10.

available only to families "in the lowest income group . . . who cannot afford to pay enough to cause private enterprise in their locality . . . to build an adequate supply of decent, safe and sanitary dwellings for their use."¹⁴⁹ It set the maximum income limits for tenants at no more than five times the rent plus utility costs, and six times for larger families.

The United States Housing Authority and Its Housing Projects

Although Secretary Ickes had successfully convinced Congress to place the USHA within the Department of the Interior, President Roosevelt chose to appoint Nathan Straus as the USHA administrator. Ickes, who viewed Straus as a "dilettante" with ties to "that group of starry-eyed people in New York" avoided further direct contact with the public housing program.¹⁵⁰ With enthusiastic support from housing reformers, Straus changed the emphasis of the federal housing program. He quickly seized on the deferment clause of the Walsh amendment, and gave priority to construction over slum clearance:

If the public housing program is put first, low income families that now live in the slums will be immediately benefited, the road will be cleared for the acquisition of slum properties at a fair price, and . . . the chief causes of slum and blight, the lack of decent housing at low rentals, will be remedied.¹⁵¹

Straus placed an enthusiastic Catherine Bauer in charge of granting deferments. By 1942, the USHA had built more than 100,000 new housing units but had eliminated fewer than 70,000

¹⁴⁹ *United States Housing Act of 1937, Statutes at Large, Sec. 2.*

¹⁵⁰ Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, Vol. 2, *The Inside Struggle, 1936-1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 218-219.

¹⁵¹ Nathan Straus, *The Seven Myths of Housing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p. 92.

substandard slum dwellings. The USHA constructed more than one-third of its projects on inexpensive, vacant sites outside of the inner city slums, a practice that inspired much protest from the National Association of Real Estate Boards.¹⁵²

Although willing to sidestep the Walsh amendment, Straus was eager to address the concerns of rural Congressmen by encouraging smaller cities to apply for support from the USHA. In testimony before the House, Straus declared that "we do not subscribe to the principle that slum conditions and the ill-housed poor are phenomena existing only in large metropolitan areas." By 1939, smaller communities, such as Paducah, Kentucky, and Twin Falls, Idaho, began applying for and receiving substantial allotments; fully one-fourth of USHA allotments went to city's with populations under 25,000.¹⁵³ The USHA further broadened its political base that year with the establishment of 205 local public housing authorities in thirty-three states.¹⁵⁴

The USHA was ultimately responsible for supporting the completion of public housing units for nearly 120,000 families at a total cost upwards of \$540,000,000. The 370 housing projects ranged in size from the relatively small projects built for Twin Falls, Idaho (28 units), Williamson, West Virginia (38 units), and Montgomery, Alabama (44 units), to the enormous Ida B. Wells

¹⁵² Roger Biles, "Nathan Straus and the Failure of U.S. Public Housing, 1937-1942," *The Historian* 53 (Autumn 1990), p. 39.

¹⁵³ Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 64.

¹⁵⁴ Biles, "Nathan Straus and the Failure of U.S. Public Housing," *The Historian*, p. 39.

Homes in Chicago (1662 units) and Allequippa Terrace in Pittsburgh (1851 units). Urban centers as diverse as Atlanta, New Orleans, Washington, D.C., and Toledo, Ohio each witnessed the local construction of six to seven USHA-sponsored projects during the 1930s. New York City would claim the largest USHA projects with the impressive Red Hook (2545 units) and Queensbridge (3148 units) Houses, both completed in 1939.¹⁵⁵

Unlike the centralized organization of the earlier PWA Housing Division, which was responsible for every component of project planning and administration, operations at the newly established USHA were increasingly decentralized. The major focus of responsibility now lie with the local PHAs, while the Washington bureaucracy provided program direction, financial support, and consulting advice. It has been remarked that the federal government moved from the role of builder to that of banker during the period. Local housing authorities were now responsible for initiating, designing, building, and managing the local housing projects, while the USHA acted as the financial agent. Site analysis, land acquisition, tenant distribution, and project design became the direct prerogative of the local community housing agencies within the constraints of the federal program. The USHA furnished technical guidance and design assistance, as well as project review, through the issuance of program standards, management guidelines, design models, architectural standards, and building prototypes.¹⁵⁶

The passage of the 1937 United States Housing Act, with its stringent new cost guidelines and

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix IV--Federal Public Housing Projects 1933-1949.

¹⁵⁶"Public Housing," *The Architectural Forum*, May 1938 pp. 345-349.

objective of providing affordable housing to the poorer segments of the population, led to an increased emphasis on economy and greater standardization in American public housing. For example, though the new legislation revived the languishing Red Hook housing project in New York City, it also placed severe cost restrictions on the renewed project. Originally planned in 1935 with a varied combination of three- and four-story apartment buildings separated by broad boulevards; the design was revised to a series of regularized six-story buildings with elevators on the same multiblock site. The result was a total cost per room nearly half that of earlier PWA efforts in New York City, but at a density far exceeding the well-received Harlem River and Williamsburg projects.¹⁵⁷ Among those entering into the debate over how best to provide economical housing was the National Association of Housing Officials, who published their own report on standardized designs and plans for public housing projects in 1938.¹⁵⁸

An early project built under the new legislation was the 535-unit James Weldon Johnson Homes. Constructed in North Philadelphia and completed in 1940, this was the first public housing project to be built by the Philadelphia Housing Authority. The city's public housing authority was committed to solving the housing crisis for low-income black residents, and the Johnson Homes were significant as the city's first predominantly black housing complex. Planned by architects W. Pope Barney and Frank R. Watson, the complex was modeled after

¹⁵⁷ Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, p. 256.

¹⁵⁸ "Housing Standards" *The Architectural Forum*, May 1938.

William Penn's concept of a "green country town," containing public courtyards and other more private outdoor spaces. The 18.4-acre site contained a combination of two- and three-story garden apartment and rowhouse buildings which were oriented towards the center of the site.¹⁵⁹

The establishment and early efforts of the Philadelphia Housing Authority (Authority) reveal a common pattern of local activity and civic activism that accompanied enactment of the Housing Act of 1937 across the country. The Pennsylvania Legislature, in anticipation of the Act, had approved the Housing Authorities Law of Pennsylvania on May 28, 1937. The state law provided for the establishment of local housing authorities in communities that could provide clear evidence of an immediate need for safe, decent low-rent housing. The Philadelphia City Council identified just such a need in August of 1937, citing "numerous unsafe, insanitary, inadequate, or overcrowded dwellings" and an acute "shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings within the reach of persons of low income," and quickly moved to establish a local housing authority under state law. The Philadelphia Housing Authority's first volunteer members included influential local businessmen and professionals, including representatives from the building and real estate fields and the President of the Building Trades Council of Philadelphia, James L. McDevitt. Labor had played an important role in the passage of the 1937 Housing Act and local interest in employment generating opportunities like public housing projects was keen.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Carol Benenson Perloff and Abby Victor, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "James Weldon Johnson Homes," March 15, 1995, Revised July 19, 1995, pp. 7.1, 8.5.

¹⁶⁰ Carol Benenson Perloff, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Public Housing in Philadelphia," March 15, 1995, pp. E-2.

The Authority's initial efforts focused on identifying the physical and financial needs of the local housing market. Funded with startup money from the City, the Authority undertook a number of studies to assess the most pressing needs of the program, including the location of the city's worst slums, the ethnic and racial dimensions of the housing problem, and the suitability of locations for possible new housing. The Authority evaluated many different factors in choosing possible sites, taking into account zoning regulations, comprehensive planning studies, population distribution, the condition of existing homes, the existence of community facilities such as transportation, schools, churches, and employment opportunities, and the existence of physical elements such as utilities and roads. From an initial list of 23 sites, the Authority eventually selected three sites for proposed low-rent housing projects. Taking advantage of the clause in the U. S. Housing Act that allowed deferring slum clearance in cases where severe overcrowding would result, the Authority was able to initiate housing project plans on vacant or nearly vacant land for two of its first three projects.¹⁶¹

Armed with plans for the development of 2,859 units of low-rent housing the Authority approached the USHA for financial assistance and project guidance. By June of 1939, the Authority had contracts with the USHA for \$32 million of slum clearance and low-rent housing for Philadelphia. In addition to the James Weldon Johnson project discussed above, the Authority also used the USHA money to complete the 1000-unit Tasker Homes and the 1324-unit Richard

¹⁶¹Carol Benenson Perloff, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Public Housing in Philadelphia," March 15, 1995, pp. E.2-E.4. Philadelphia Housing Authority, "Clearing Slums in Philadelphia: First Annual Report of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 17.

Allen Homes project. The Authority also took over management of the PWA-built 258-unit Hill Creek housing project. To adequately handle the influx of applications for apartments in the city's new low-income projects, the Authority established field offices at each project for tenant selection and management. The field offices operated relocation services for those displaced from housing as a result of slum clearance and devised criteria assessing the suitability of applicants for housing units in the different projects. While financial need was the overriding criteria, the Authority, as a matter of policy, sought to make the racial balance of a project compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.¹⁶²

The Authority also saw an important role for itself in fostering public support for its programs and the new housing projects. The Authority took every opportunity to educate the public, potential residents, neighbors, and influential officials in their programs, using city newspapers, ground breaking and dedication ceremonies, tours of sample homes, radio broadcasts, and a host of pamphlets and printed material. The Authority also constructed models of the units to allow interested citizens a first-hand glimpse of the evolving public housing programs being undertaken in their community.¹⁶³ The Authority, like housing authorities established in hundreds of other communities during the 1930s, played an essential role in supporting, promoting, and carrying out local public housing reform. The projects they built in association with the USHA represented an enormous outlay of time, effort, and civic resources. In some cases these projects reflected the

¹⁶²Carol Benenson Perloff, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Public Housing in Philadelphia," March 15, 1995, pp. E.3-E.4.

¹⁶³Carol Benenson Perloff, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Public Housing in Philadelphia," March 15, 1995, p. E.5.

most significant Depression-era activities undertaken within a local community.

The Ida B. Wells Homes in Chicago, completed by the Chicago Housing Authority in January 1941, was the last of the prewar public housing projects to be constructed as a result of the legislation. When completed, it was the largest public housing project in Chicago and among the largest in the country. The complex, planned by the PWA and built by the Chicago Housing Authority, contained 868 apartments in three- and four-story buildings and 794 two-story rowhouses, which covered 24 percent of the total land area. The Wells Homes was the first public housing project in America to include a city park within its boundaries.¹⁶⁴

The USHA surmounted its first political hurdle in 1938 when Congress increased its funding from \$500 million to \$800 million. With the 1938 election, however, antagonism toward the program began to grow. A downturn in the national economy and a strong anti-New Deal sentiment brought in a Congress much more responsive to the complaints of private enterprise against public housing. Ironically, in 1939, a much brighter economy and a recovery in the construction industry made public housing seem superfluous. In an unusual action, the House of Representatives refused to consider a bill to extend the public housing program beyond its originally mandated three-year period.¹⁶⁵ Congress would extend no further funding to low-rent public housing until 1949.

¹⁶⁴ "Report on Chicago Housing Authority Developments, Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places," April 18, 1994, Section II, Part D.

¹⁶⁵ Nathaniel Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis Since 1930* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), p. 38-39.

From an architectural perspective, the increasing USHA emphasis on standardized unit plans and restrictive budgets conspired to significantly inhibit creativity in housing design. Economy of materials and design took precedence over the exploration of new design alternatives, resulting in what some critics have labeled an “unnecessarily barrackslike and monotonous” look.¹⁶⁶ The social-psychological elements of project planning so important in the earlier years were replaced by the goal of meeting minimum human needs of clean air and light within increasingly limited budgets. The result was the completion of substantial numbers of new modern housing units, but each lacking the aesthetic embellishments of earlier models. While the overall architecture of the housing projects built under the USHA did not match that of the PWA---although certain exemplary models were completed--the design work executed during the late 1930s and early 1940s still represents a significant body of modernistic architecture, of a scale and form unlike almost anything built up to that time in America.

During its three-year reign, the USHA greatly expanded the number of public housing units available to low-income residents across the country. These housing projects reflected significant cooperative ventures between local housing authorities and the federal government to reduce slums, provide a much needed economic stimulant to a rebuilding economy, and supply adequate, safe housing to thousands of poor and low-income residents.

¹⁶⁶Pommer, Richard. “The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United State during the Early 1930s.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. 37 (December 1978). p. 256.

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC HOUSING IN WORLD WAR II

Just as Congressional interest in public housing began to wane at the end of the Great Depression, World War II provided new impetus for the continuation and expansion of federal housing efforts. As German armies swept through western Europe in the spring of 1940 and overwhelmed the opposing French and British forces, the United States quickly turned away from its own domestic problems to confront the ominous threats to its national security. Unlike its reaction to World War I, the nation almost immediately set itself on a course toward war. Industrial capacity increased tremendously, both at established manufacturing centers such as Chicago and Detroit and at new sites on the west coast and elsewhere throughout the nation. A great migration of civilian population moved toward these cities, and the nation's inadequate stock of urban housing soon became a serious threat to the productive potential of America's vital war industries. Decent and inexpensive housing for defense industry workers and their families became as much a part of the wartime construction program as did cantonments for the military or shipyards and factories for manufacturing the tools of war. The federal government revived the public housing program in mid-1940, but changed the goal of the program from that of housing low-income families to housing defense workers on the homefront.

The prewar debate over the propriety of direct government housing construction quickly resumed. Although public housing advocates embraced their new role in the nation's defense

effort, they struggled to ensure that the war would not undermine their long-range goal of a permanent low-rent public housing program. They encouraged the federal government to place planning and management responsibilities for defense housing with the United States Housing Authority and its vast network of local housing officials, both to benefit from the experience of the pre-war housing program and to ensure continuation of that program after the war. They also argued for the construction of sturdy, well-designed defense housing projects that would readily convert to low-rent use after the war to meet the inevitable postwar housing shortage.

Private enterprise and its supporters in Congress, on the other hand, once again mounted a vigorous opposition to public housing. They claimed that only private industry could offer the speed and efficiency necessary to meet the immediate demand for defense housing.

Government efforts, they argued, should concentrate on loans and mortgage guarantees to support private construction. Public construction should be limited only to temporary, inexpensive accommodations that would pose no competition on the postwar housing market. The success of this argument against government-built defense housing severely limited the extent of the public housing program during the war, and delayed resumption of the program for many years afterwards.

The National Defense Act

During the year and a half prior to the United States' entry into World War II in December 1941, an estimated 3 million war workers and their families--a total of about 8 to 10 million

Americans--migrated to jobs in the nation's 200 or so defense industrial centers.

Approximately 1.7 million of these workers found accommodations in existing housing, decent or otherwise, leaving 1.3 million families dependent on new construction.¹⁶⁷ Throughout 1940 and 1941, Congress passed a number of laws designed to increase public and private housing construction to meet this staggering demand.

Despite its reluctance to fund the public housing program after 1939, Congress included responsibilities for the United States Housing Authority under the National Defense Act in June 1940. Known as Public Law 671, this act had been proposed at the request of the nation's military leaders and received bipartisan support as a means "to expedite shipbuilding and other purposes" related to the ongoing defense buildup. Much to the chagrin of conservatives in the House of Representatives, however, these "other purposes" included a new and expanded role for public housing in the national war effort.¹⁶⁸ Title II of P. L. 671 authorized the USHA to assist the more than 500 local housing authorities and to cooperate with the Navy and War Departments to make "necessary housing available for persons engaged in national defense activities." These included enlisted military personnel and civilian employees on military reservations, as well as civilian workers with families who were employed in essential defense industries.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis Since 1930*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁶⁸ "Defense Housing," *Architectural Forum*, 73 (November 1940), p. 441.

¹⁶⁹ *National Defense Act, U. S. Statutes at Large*, 76th Congress., 2nd and 3rd Sessions, Chapter 440, June 28, 1940, Public Law 671, Title II, Sec. 201.

Although P. L. 671 was generally an extension of the United States Housing Act of 1937, it exempted defense housing from several important limitations set by Congress on the original low-rent public housing program. For the duration of the emergency, the act provided the USHA with federal powers of condemnation that would allow it to acquire large parcels of land that it could resell cheaply to local authorities without threat of costly court battles. It also allowed the USHA to finance 100 percent of individual defense housing project costs, eliminating the requirement that local communities must contribute a 10 percent share to each project.¹⁷⁰ These new stipulations helped to centralize power back to the federal housing agency away from the local authorities, allowing the federal government more control over defense housing allocations.

More significantly, however, P. L. 671 abandoned the two hallmarks of the program which had defined the philosophy of public housing before the war. First, the act waived the low-income requirement for tenancy and made defense housing available to all workers facing the housing shortage. It ordered local authorities to "fix rentals" at variable rates to be within the financial reach of all families engaged in defense activities. Then the new act exempted local authorities from the "equivalent elimination" clause, no longer requiring the demolition of an equal number of slum housing units for all public housing units built.¹⁷¹ Consciously or not, Congress gave credence to the earlier views of Lewis Mumford and Catherine Bauer that had proven so divisive among public housing advocates before the war. For a while, at least, the

¹⁷⁰ *National Defense Act, U.S. Statutes at Large, Sec. 204.*

¹⁷¹ *National Defense Act, U.S. Statutes at Large, Sec. 204.*

war had opened public housing to a wider spectrum of American society, and had shown that slum clearance was expensive, time consuming, and wasteful of available housing in a limited market.

The National Defense Act made no new appropriations for public housing, but instead allowed the USHA to use up to \$150 million in unexpended funds from its final \$800 million prewar appropriation.¹⁷² All low-rent public housing projects that were in various stages of planning or construction were to be reassessed under P.L. 671 for their possible contribution to the national defense program. Only those projects which the President had determined to be in areas with "an acute shortage of housing" would be completed.¹⁷³ Projects under construction by local housing authorities in vital defense areas would be converted solely to use by defense industry workers and their families. Other projects in areas which did not suffer from the crush of migrant war workers, but which nonetheless continued to face severe housing shortages, were completed only when the supply of manpower and precious building materials would allow.¹⁷⁴

Local housing authorities in strategic defense areas quickly converted their unfinished projects from low-rent to defense housing. By the beginning of 1942, more than 65,000 low-rent

¹⁷² "Defense Housing," *Architectural Forum*, p. 441.

¹⁷³ *National Defense Act, Statutes at Large*, Sec. 201.

¹⁷⁴ Herbert Emmerich, "Public Housing in 1941," in National Association of Housing Officials, Coleman Woodbury, ed., *Public Housing Officials' Yearbook 1942* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1942), p. 10.

public housing units which had been under construction or ready for occupancy in late 1940 were converted to defense housing by local housing authorities. In Los Angeles, California, for instance, the local housing authority was operating nine projects with nearly 2,700 units of housing exclusively for workers in the aviation and other defense industries. By contrast, the 610-unit Ramona Gardens, the first public housing project built by the local housing authority in 1940-41, was the only project in Los Angeles to serve the general low-income population during the war. Other housing authorities on the West Coast--San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond in California and those in and around Seattle, Washington--soon had huge stocks of housing serving the aviation or shipping industries. On the east coast, housing authorities in Virginia, Philadelphia, and Baltimore provided housing for shipyard workers, those in Pittsburgh and Chicago served the steel mills, in Houston the petroleum industry, and in Detroit migrant workers who had come north to build tanks and trucks for the automotive industry.

A representative example of a USHA project which was converted to defense housing was San Felipe Courts, the largest of the four public housing complexes constructed in Houston, Texas, between 1939 and 1944. Built on the site of a former black slum, San Felipe Courts displaced poor black residents in order to create a public housing complex for poor white tenants. The project was designed in 1940, and the first 564 units were constructed between 1940 and 1942. When the United States entered into World War II, the project had to be reclassified to defense housing so that it could be completed. The remaining 436 units were then constructed between 1943 and 1944. The final project consisted of 68 two-story housing blocks, 12 three-story

blocks, and two two-story Project Center buildings occupying a site of 37 acres. Set in parallel rows of thin rectangular slabs, their long sides facing north and south framing long rectangular garden courts, the buildings were of reinforced concrete and masonry construction. Conceived of as the Housing Authority of the City of Houston's premier housing project due to its size and prominent location, the completed design received critical attention. Architectural periodicals of the time noted the project's well-designed units plans, the integration of units of differing size into row houses, and the contrasting three-story blocks which occupied the central area. The project was one of only two Texas low-income developments to receive such recognition. The project architects were Associated Housing Architects of Houston, a consortium of twelve Houston architectural firms formed during the Depression. The lead project architect was Karl Kamrath, a respected modernist architect with the local firm of MacKie & Kamrath. J. Allen Meyers, Jr. was the landscape architect.¹⁷⁵ Because the project was reclassified, and not originally conceived as defense housing, it was better designed and built than other solely defense projects.¹⁷⁶

The USHA, however, was not content to merely convert existing projects into defense housing. Nathan Straus, chief administrator for the USHA, quickly realized that local housing authorities would have to pursue aggressive construction programs during the war in order to ensure public housing's survival after the war. By February 1941, Straus had approved new loans to twenty housing authorities under the terms of P. L. 671 for the construction of 6,344 units of defense

¹⁷⁵Stephen Fox, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "San Felipe Courts Historic District" December 1987. pp. 7.1, 8.1-8.8

¹⁷⁶ Stephen Fox, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "San Felipe Courts Historic District," December 1987, pp. 8.1-8.8.

housing. Straus recommended that all local housing authorities look to their postwar needs when planning defense housing. Permanent structures built as integral parts of the local housing program would, according to Straus, become "available to families from the slums on the same low-rent basis . . . as our regular program" after the defense emergency had passed. The first defense housing project, Moreno Court, opened its 200 units to defense workers and their families in Pensacola, Florida, in November 1940, just 87 days after construction had begun.¹⁷⁷

Wartime construction would introduce significant new problems and urgencies into the national housing picture. The scarcity of construction materials and short time lines required major adjustments from peacetime standards in order to carry out the mandates of wartime housing. Design work, which had already become increasingly standardized under the USHA program, was restrained even more. The well-planned pedestrian courts and varied building units of early housing projects gave way to rows of increasingly severe and regularized buildings lacking all but minor architectural elaboration. Maximum program efficiency, which allowed the erection of projects like Pensacola's Moreno Court in just 87 days, became the watchword.

The Lanham Act

The National Defense Act was merely the first step in the federal wartime housing program. The military looked to the USHA and local housing authorities as the only means available at the time to provide an immediate program of defense housing. It soon became apparent,

¹⁷⁷ Nathan Straus, "Public Housing, 1940-1941," in National Association of Housing Officials, Coleman Woodbury, ed., *Housing Officials' Yearbook 1941* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1941), pp. 235-236.

According to Colean, however, government's primary role should be to facilitate private housing construction through federal loans and mortgage insurance. He also advised the federal government to coordinate all new industrial construction as much as possible around existing housing supplies and labor surpluses, so as to avoid all unnecessary construction or migration. Only as a "last resort" should the federal government undertake direct housing construction, in order to avoid unnecessary competition with private enterprise. Since wartime wages would be relatively high, Colean felt that the vast majority of defense workers could easily afford housing on the open market. Public housing built by local housing authorities should be limited to its original intent: to provide shelter for those families whose incomes placed them clearly beyond the reach of even the most inexpensive private rental housing. He opposed opening public housing to all defense workers regardless of income, as P. L. 671 had allowed.¹⁸¹

Colean's report immediately spawned anew the confrontation between public housing advocates and private enterprise. Congressional conservatives like Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia and Republicans from rural constituencies were quick to endorse the diminished role of public housing. They did not want defense housing funds to be appropriated to the USHA for its "socialistic experiments" in the big cities. They were more adamant than ever that public housing should not emerge after the war to compete with private enterprise.¹⁸² Palmer declared in the *New York Times* in November 1940 that "sociology" was not part of his job and

¹⁸¹ Colean, *Housing for Defense*, pp. 127-140.

¹⁸² *Congressional Record*, October 25, 1940, p. _____.

refused to support any federal efforts that would provide public competition to the postwar housing industry.¹⁸³

In direct opposition to the USHA, Palmer drafted a new housing bill that would severely restrict federal efforts to build public war housing. Introduced in the House on behalf of Palmer by Republican Congressman Fritz Lanham of Texas, the so-called "Lanham Act" was signed into law by President Roosevelt in October 1940. The Lanham Act provided \$150 million to the Federal Works Administration to provide massive amounts of federally built housing quickly and cheaply in the most congested defense industry centers. As can be expected in a wartime crisis, the Lanham Act emphasized both speed in construction and economy of materials. Between 1940 and 1944, the federal government built approximately 625,000 units of housing under the Lanham Act and its amendments with a total appropriation of nearly \$1 billion. More than 580,000 Lanham Act units were of temporary construction, such as demountable plywood dormitories and trailers, that would pose no competition to private enterprise either during the war or after.¹⁸⁴

The Division of Defense Housing of the Federal Works Agency was created in April 1941 to undertake direct supervision of the new defense housing program. The timely completion of defense housing was paramount under the new program and the Lanham Act clearly spelled out

¹⁸³ Funigiello, *The Challenge to Urban Liberalism*, p. 84.

¹⁸⁴ Mary K. Nenno, "Housing in the Decade of the 1940s," in Gertrude Fish, ed., *The Story of Housing*, p. 248.

maximum unit costs, which were much lower than USHA housing guidelines. As amended, the Lanham Act eventually required that the average cost of all permanent dwelling units be no greater than \$3750 per family unit, with no single unit exceeding \$4500, including construction costs, contractor's fees, and equipment. Where possible it was assumed that projects would be constructed for less, if local conditions allowed. These severe restrictions placed additional constraints on the architectural design and planning for new housing under the Lanham Act.¹⁸⁵

While the scale of the new program dictated central control in directing certain aspects of the program, such as the preparation of standard plans, the mass purchase of scarce supplies, and the development of overall program guidelines, the construction and management aspects of the operation were quickly decentralized to regional offices. Wherever possible, local communities and public housing authorities actively participated in determining what type of development would occur in a particular area and the selection of architects. Where this partnering was not possible, the Federal government commissioned architects directly and supervised construction. In Philadelphia, survey work undertaken by the Regional Defense Housing Coordinator and the Philadelphia Housing Authority determined that the City's long-range needs for low-rent housing dictated that a portion of the defense housing should be of permanent construction, with the idea that it would be converted to low-rent housing at the end of the war. Lanham Act funds for the construction of 2,400 units of defense housing were subsequently allocated to the housing authority, which was designated as agent of the Federal Works Administrator for the construction

¹⁸⁵National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, Standards for Defense Housing, Lanham Act Projects, March 1942, p. 2.

and management of the defense projects. The Federal government acquired and retained ownership of the land. The 2400 units of permanent defense housing built in Philadelphia were distributed among four projects: Passyunk Homes, Abbottsford Homes, Bartram Village, and Oxford Village. Earlier construction efforts, funded by the USHA under Public Law 671, were responsible for smaller additions to the James Weldon Homes and Tasker Homes. In 1943, Lanham Act funds were also used to construct four temporary housing projects in Philadelphia, all of which were demolished after the war.¹⁸⁶

In Philadelphia the architectural design aspects of project planning were managed by contracting with an architectural staff called the Technical Board, which coordinated the work of the various architects and construction contractors hired for the specific projects. The design contracts were awarded to consortiums of architects who could provide the manpower and technical expertise necessary for such large-scale projects. Many of the city's premier designers were involved in the war effort. The results of the severe limitations on budget and time were clearly visible in the built products, as rather unimaginative repetitive buildings became more common. A combination of increasing standardization and war-time pragmatism resulted in a de-emphasis on aesthetics in favor of a more utilitarian approach to design and construction. The divergence was most apparent in communities where examples existed of housing projects built during several different eras.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶Carol Benenson Perloff, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Public Housing in Philadelphia," March 15, 1995, p. E.5-E.6.

¹⁸⁷Carol Benenson Perloff, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Public Housing in Philadelphia," March 15, 1995, p. E.5-E.7.

Although many Lanham Act projects were managed by local housing authorities, the act specifically retained ownership by the federal government. To restrict the public housing program further, Congress amended the Lanham Act in July 1943 to stipulate that no additional housing could be built under this act after the war was over, and that existing units would be disposed of "within two years after the President should declare an end to the war emergency." It specifically forbade the use of such housing after the war as subsidized housing for low income families.¹⁸⁸

Public housing supporters quickly spoke out against the Lanham Act. Charles Abrams, of the New York Housing Authority, posed a telling question in the title of an article in *The Nation* published just four days after passage of the Lanham Act: "Must Defense Wreck Housing?" Abrams warned that temporary housing had a bad habit of becoming permanent housing after such previous emergencies as the Galveston flood and the San Francisco earthquake. He predicted that the temporary housing of the Lanham Act would become new slums "of vice and contagion" in the face of a postwar housing "famine." All the valiant work of the New Deal slum clearance program would be reversed by the "short-sighted plans" of real estate interests trying to protect their investments.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Paul F. Wendt, *Housing Policy: The Search for Solutions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963), p. 154.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Abrams, "Must Defense Wreck Housing?," *The Nation*, 151 (October 19, 1940), pp. 361-362.

Nathan Straus continued to advocate the resumption of the low-rent public housing program after the war. He felt that only by continuing and expanding the wartime program would "community revitalization through slum clearance and the provision of decent inexpensive housing" go forward after the war.¹⁹⁰ In testimony before Congress in October 1941, Straus accused Palmer of "heeding the siren song of the speculator" by accepting the "erroneous notion" that private enterprise could provide a large part of defense housing. He declared that Congress should entrust the entire defense housing program to the USHA which, because it functioned through established local housing authorities, could best serve both the federal defense program and the needs of local communities and industry.¹⁹¹

Edith Elmer Wood also became an outspoken critic of the early defense housing program. Like Colean, she used the World War I experience to advance her argument, warning that "private enterprise will not produce housing for an emergency of uncertain duration . . . because there is too much risk involved."¹⁹² She called on the federal government to place existing dwelling units under strict rent control and to begin a massive program of public housing construction in coordination with the expansion of industry. Graduated rents, according to Wood, could make public housing available to a wider range of defense workers,

¹⁹⁰ Biles, "Nathan Straus and the Failure of U.S. Public Housing, 1937-1942," *The Historian*, p. 42.

¹⁹¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *To Transfer from the District of Columbia Departments and Independent Agencies to Other Localities*, H. Res. 209, 77th Congress, 1st Session 1942, Part 8, pp. 138-141.

¹⁹² Edith Elmer Wood, "Building for Defense," *Architectural Forum*, 75 (April 1941), p. 28.

rather than just to those of the lowest incomes. Looking to the future, she advocated that all new public housing built for the defense program should be well-designed and of substantial construction, so that it could be incorporated into a city's public housing program after the war.¹⁹³

Planning for Postwar Housing

The Lanham Act was clearly a victory for private enterprise and foretold the difficult fight that public housing faced after the war. All told, local housing authorities built only 48,000 new units of defense housing during the war, hardly a dent in the inevitable need for low-income housing after the war. No bills for additional appropriations to the USHA were even suggested to Congress during the war. Private enterprise, on the other hand, flourished during the war. Congress showed itself to be far more favorable to allowing the federal government to provide tents and trailers for temporary accommodations, while private developers received the benefit of an expanded federal mortgage guarantee program in March 1941. Private developers built nearly 900,000 new housing units during the war, primarily small, affordable single family homes built apart from the inner city near the wartime industrial centers. These new developments would form the nucleus of postwar suburbanization, and would further jeopardize the public housing program as it had been originally envisioned.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Edith Elmer Wood, "Public Housing: Defense and Normal," *Public Housing Progress*, 4 (February-April 1941), pp. 1-2.

¹⁹⁴ Nenno, "Housing in the Decade of the 1940s," in Fish, ed., *The Story of Housing*, pp. 248-249.

Nathan Straus resigned in disgust in 1942, with more than a sense of relief from the President. Roosevelt had blamed Straus' stubbornness in the face of an antagonistic Congress for the failure of public housing to gain more of the share of federal housing money during the war.¹⁹⁵

The President took the opportunity of Straus' resignation to consolidate the public housing program and 16 other federal housing agencies under the new National Housing Agency (NHA). Under the NHA, the public housing program and the various other federal construction programs were further consolidated under the Federal Public Housing Administration (FPHA). For the rest of the war, the FPHA contented itself with the construction of temporary war housing and the administration of the existing public housing program. Public housing once again seemed to have faded from federal priorities.

Concerns about housing shortages after the war, however, soon brought a revival of the public housing program back into the realm of postwar possibilities. In November 1944, the National Housing Agency had published a preliminary estimate of the nation's postwar housing need. It calculated that 12,600,000 non-farm dwelling units would be needed in the United States during the first ten years after the war. The NHA estimated that 36 per cent of the total number of units required after the war would be needed in the \$30 or less per month rent range, which was considered to be low-rental housing for low-income families. The NHA inferred in its report that the nation could not expect private enterprise to supply new units at such a low monthly rent, citing the lack of profit opportunities that would entice private

¹⁹⁵ Biles, "Nathan Straus and the Failure of U.S. Public Housing, 1937-1942," *The Historian*, p. 45.

builders to enter this market.¹⁹⁶

In light of the NHA's pessimistic predictions for the supply of low-rent private housing, the FPHA surveyed local housing authorities to assess the postwar needs for additional public housing. Their survey asserted that no new public housing would be provided where low-rent needs could be met by existing housing or where a substantial gap did not exist between potential and actual rentals charged in public housing. Even with these restrictions, 336 housing authorities proposed the need for 360,000 new public housing units within the next five years, at a total estimated development cost of nearly \$2 billion. It was evident, in the opinion of the FPHA, that these estimates were legitimate and that they demonstrated an urgent need for a major postwar program of public housing construction.¹⁹⁷ It was now up to Congress to provide new appropriations to expand the program to meet postwar housing needs.

The inevitable crisis in housing followed the war, with the nation's main focus on returning veterans. Although the G. I. Bill had guaranteed special loans for veterans when it was passed in 1944, the private construction industry was unable to gear up for the massive influx of veterans onto the market at war's end. Public housing was called on to provide a cushion for the veterans until their private housing needs could be met.

¹⁹⁶ National Housing Agency, *National Housing Needs* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1944), pp. 5-6.

¹⁹⁷ National Housing Agency, *Fourth Annual Report* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1945), p. 238.

An executive order was issued in 1945 to give priority to veterans in disposition of defense housing projects built under Public Law 671. According to the law, these projects would revert to low-income status as soon as it could be determined that they were no longer required to serve specific war needs. Although these projects had remained in the inventories of the local housing authorities, the conversion process was to involve a gradual shift to low-rent status.¹⁹⁸ By February 1946, the FPHA had identified 132 of the 190 defense housing projects as no longer needed for war use. Local housing authorities, at the insistence of the federal government, agreed to make defense housing projects available to veterans regardless of their income status, and immediately began the task of conversion.¹⁹⁹ This conversion process would continue into the 1950s, ending ultimately in the absorption of all P. L. 671 projects into the low-rent housing program.

The second problem facing the FPHA concerned the housing built under the Lanham Act. Although the original intention was to demolish temporary war housing, the extreme housing shortage caused local communities to move more slowly with their disposition. Local housing authorities in Chicago, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., among other cities, continued to operate non-permanent housing projects into the early 1950s, primarily to supplement veterans housing. Although the flimsy temporary structures were eventually abandoned by local housing authorities, the postwar housing shortage convinced Congress to include a provision in

¹⁹⁸ National Housing Agency, *Fifth Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 238.

¹⁹⁹ National Housing Agency, *Fifth Annual Report*, p. 259.

the Housing Act of 1950 for the disposal of permanent Lanham Act housing by the Public Housing Administration (PHA), the post-war successor to the FPHA. This act authorized the PHA to dispose of emergency war housing through demolition or by sale to educational institutions, veterans' groups, nonprofit organizations, or local housing authorities.²⁰⁰ Over 24,000 dwelling units in 82 projects built under terms of the Lanham Act were transferred to local housing authorities for use in their public housing programs. Housing authorities were required to pay net operating receipts from these units to the federal government over a 40-year period.²⁰¹

Public housing had proven its worth in providing housing during a national crisis, during the Great Depression, World War II, and during the postwar housing shortage. With prosperity near at hand, public housing would face a long battle in Congress before its advocates could be confident of its postwar survival. In general, the public housing that was constructed in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s was planned to create a sense of community and was well-constructed. The urban renewal movement and the vast high-rise housing projects constructed after 1949 were to drastically change the complexion of American public housing.

²⁰⁰ *Housing Act of 1950, Statutes at Large*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Chapter 94, Public Law 475, April 20, 1950, Title VI.

²⁰¹ Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, p. 107.

CHAPTER 5

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES, 1933-1949²⁰²

PROPERTY TYPE:

The "public housing project" is the sole property type associated with this historic context, "Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949," and should be evaluated for its eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. The public housing project will normally consist of a formal assembly of multi-family residential buildings, along with one or more community buildings, maintenance facilities (garages, powerplants, offices), and accompanying landscape features such as open recreational spaces, circulation networks, and any number of smaller playing or sitting areas. Only in rare instances will individual buildings be considered eligible for listing, most often in association with themes or contexts unrelated to the federal housing programs of the period (e.g. the residence of a significant individual or the site of an important historical event).

DESCRIPTION:

Associative Characteristics

The public housing projects eligible for listing under this context will have been built between 1933 and 1949 under one of the federal programs for low-rent or defense workers' housing

²⁰² This chapter is considered a working draft. The National Register and NCSHPO anticipate the content to evolve as comments are received and work continues on the evaluation of additional public housing projects.

outlined in the historical narrative.

Physical Characteristics

The design of public housing projects from the 1930s and 1940s represents a fundamental ideal of the social housing movement developed in Europe in the 1920s and adopted in the United States in the 1930s. Government-built housing was intended not merely to provide a supply of adequate, low-rent housing for the urban poor. It was also meant to create a new environment, a clearly distinct alternative to the congestion and squalor of the slums. The site plan, the relationship of the buildings to one another, and the repetition of design and form created a sense of communal identity that clearly distinguished the public housing project as a separate entity, distinct from its surrounding neighborhood.

Typically, a public housing project of this period will consist of an assemblage of multi-family, low-rise residential buildings situated in a deliberate plan around large open spaces and recreational areas. The site itself may reflect the European innovation of the *Zeilenbau*, in which a number of typical city blocks are combined and redeveloped into "superblocks," characterized by limited traffic flow, pedestrian walkways, and park-like open spaces. Others may conform to the confines of a number of contiguous city blocks, with residential buildings along the periphery or in parallel rows down the length of the block. Buildings will seldom occupy more than 25 percent of the site.

There is no limit to the number of residential units that may constitute a project, nor is the

number of dwelling units per building standardized. Public housing projects erected during the period 1933 to 1949 range from the 3,148-unit Queensbridge Houses in New York City to the 30-unit Victory Courts project in Conway, Arkansas. Residential buildings are primarily three-to-five story walk-up apartment buildings or two-story rowhouses, although a few projects consist of single-family or two-family dwellings. Only New York City built high-rise elevator-accessible projects during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The primary construction material of most public housing projects is brick, although some wood frame and concrete block buildings also exist. Following the examples set by early twentieth-century Bauhaus design in Europe, and adhering to the strict low-cost guidelines set by the federal programs, most of these properties are of a functional, utilitarian design: long, unembellished lines, flat roofs, and minimal architectural decoration. The few decorative elements that do exist include cantilevered concrete canopies at entries, brick or concrete belt courses, and simple quoining. Some properties employ a differentiation in materials or colors to indicate particular wall details such as windows, entryways, or stair towers. Windows were either metal casement or wood sash, many of which have been replaced over the years by wood or metal sash.

The architectural style of the buildings is dominated by the concept of "functional modernism," and the belief that the buildings should reflect, to the degree possible, the utilitarian ideals of European architectural precedents in public housing. Where other "decorative" styles are applied, these styles usually represent minimalistic treatments advanced by local architects in keeping with regionally accepted forms, such as the Colonial, Georgian, or Spanish Colonial Revivals.

A number of the housing projects completed during the early phases of federal involvement in the construction of public housing during the period are widely acknowledged for setting high standards of design, site planning, and construction. Most possessed a liveable human scale and revealed a satisfactory balance between buildings and open space, with attentive detail to landscaping elements. Overall these initial projects represent perhaps the best amalgam of European design theories and contemporary American housing reform philosophies. In contrast, the architectural design of later housing projects has as a whole been labeled depressingly monotonous and the site planning increasingly unimaginative. Constrained by increasingly limited budgets, shorter construction time lines, and federal guidance that often emphasized minimal standards, the later housing designs lacked the architectural quality that distinguished the earlier projects.

Non-residential buildings are also significant components of any public housing project from this period. Nearly every project included a prominently located community center, usually a one-story building containing management offices, recreation rooms or classrooms, and a large room for community functions such as dances or meetings. As a focal point for community activity, these buildings were usually located near the path of greatest tenant traffic and adjacent to the major access points to the project. Larger projects often included self-contained heating plants, generally characterized by a tall smokestack. Public housing sites may also include maintenance buildings, automobile garages, and buildings originally containing retail or office spaces. In the case of larger housing projects or those placed in more isolated locations, the complement of associated commercial and community buildings

often exist as a miniature community within the larger neighboring community.

Careful site planning and landscaping are fundamental components of each housing project design. Many housing projects retain important elements of these design features including parks, circulation patterns, recreational areas, and private and semi-private garden and courtyard areas. Public art is also an important component of the early PWA-era projects and some later designs.

The interior spaces of the individual residential units are of a spartan utilitarian nature, usually consisting of one to four bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and full bathroom. The kitchen was usually supplied with a gas range and electric refrigerator. Kitchen cupboards and closets were often built without doors, to provide an additional cost savings. Interior hallways were considered wasted space, and most apartments were designed without them. All apartments, however, were situated to take advantage of maximum natural sunlight and ventilation, and were arranged so as to provide utmost privacy to family members.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Public housing projects built across the National from 1933 to 1949 may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A or C. Under Criterion A it may be shown that the project is associated with a broad pattern of national, local, or, in some cases, statewide history. These patterns of history may include 1) the federal public works efforts of the Great Depression; 2) the earliest federal efforts to assist local communities in

slum clearance and low-rent housing construction; and 3) federal efforts to alleviate severe housing shortages in important industrial centers during World War II. The public housing projects under consideration in this context study were an integral part of President Roosevelt's New Deal federal reform and relief programs and his later programs for military defense preparedness. The resulting housing projects infused communities large and small throughout the country with thousands of modern and affordable dwelling units and represented significant cooperative efforts by local and government agencies to provide housing and employment during times of desperate need. Under Criterion C, a public housing project may be significant as an example of a planned residential community, a representation of a distinctive architectural style, or a major work of a nationally or locally prominent architect.

The specific areas of significance attributable to public housing projects may include: 1) Social History, because public housing was an outgrowth of the long-held concern that government intervention was necessary to better the lives of the poor living in the nation's slums; 2) Politics/Government, for the federal and local government's acceptance of responsibility, through legislative and direct action, to assist in providing housing for low-income residents during the Great Depression and for World War II industrial workers; and 3) Community Development, where information reveals that public housing served to alleviate a persistent housing shortage among low-income residents during the Great Depression or among migrant defense industry workers during World War II. Community Development may also apply under Criterion C for the design and construction of planned communities.

A few projects may be significant under Ethnic Heritage as the federal or local government's first attempts to provide adequate housing for African Americans or Mexican Americans; such projects often developed into centers of cultural pride within the minority community.

Although segregated--an ugly by-product of the cultural mores of the era--these projects were accepted by many African American leaders as important steps forward in government provision of equal services. Some projects may also be significant for Architecture as being representative of an architectural style, especially the International Style, or for their site plan.

Public housing projects as a whole are unlikely to be eligible under Criterion B, unless the project was the direct product and major achievement of an individual's career. Although many projects are named in honor of famous national or local figures (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Sojourner Truth, Jacob Riis), these are not eligible under Criterion B unless the project's namesake can be shown to have had a direct role in the development of that particular project or lived in the project while achieving his or her most significant work. Criterion B may come into effect if a significant person achieved his or her most important work while living in a particular public housing project; however, only the building that contained that person's home will be eligible for listing, and not the entire project. A public housing project that served as a birthplace or childhood home of a significant person does not qualify under Criterion B, unless that project is the only property remaining to represent that person's life. Areas of significance under Criterion B will depend on the accomplishments of the individual.

Public housing projects are also unlikely to be eligible under Criterion D. Many projects, especially those built as slum clearance projects, may lie over urban archeological sites which may contain potentially significant information on the history of the site prior to the construction of the public housing project. Although these archeology sites may be significant in their own right, they will have no significance to the public housing project itself and are not considered as part of this context. Public housing managers should be aware, however, that archeological concerns, either prehistoric or historic, may arise when undertaking ground-disturbing activities such as new construction.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS:

In order to meet National Register Criteria A or C as described in the Property Type Significance, a public housing project must have been built and operated as public housing between 1933 and 1949. The resource may have been conceived as either low-rent or defense worker's housing.

The majority of the eligible projects will be significant at the local level, reflecting the important implementation of federal programs to stimulate the economy, resolve the worsening slum problem, solve a growing local housing problem, or meet local demands associated with the massive defense buildup in anticipation of World War II. Whether or not the particular public housing project under consideration is significant to its community depends on the historical development and architectural character of that community as well as on the specific attributes of the property itself. Eligibility evaluations must be grounded in a thorough

understanding of the local context in order to fully understand the importance of a particular project. The mere association of a project with one of the Federal public housing programs is not sufficient to justify local significance. For example a small 30-unit USHA housing complex might be historically or architecturally significant in one town where it is the lone example of its type, while a nearly identical project in a large city like Baltimore, which witnessed the construction of a substantial number of public housing projects during the historic period, might be quite undistinguished. In communities with a wealth of extant military defense or World War II-era industrial resources, the historical significance of federally-subsidized defense worker housing may require closer scrutiny. Evaluations of architectural significance will require a sound understanding of the local architectural context. Key questions to ask when considering architectural importance may include how does the housing project compare with other local examples of International Style or contemporary design? Is this property the sole or best representation of (federal) design theories regarding large-scale public housing? Or how did the completion of this public housing project affect later architectural design or planning in this community? The importance of contemporary accounts in local publications or architectural journals, and later scholarly research will assist significantly in the evaluation process.

Armed with the contextual information provided in this historic study and local research it should be possible to identify and establish the potential local significance of particular projects to the community's social and political history, community development, or architecture. State level significance will be less applicable to public housing, since states themselves had

little to do with implementing public housing programs. Only New York State had its own public housing construction program, which has been absorbed into the federal program, whose properties may qualify for state level significance. The chart found at the end of this section outlines some of the possible important characteristics and themes that public housing projects may represent. These themes should be considered when judging a project's potential historical or architectural eligibility.

Select examples of public housing projects, because of their extraordinary contributions to national programs or outstanding architectural design, will merit consideration at the national level. Based on the research conducted to date and available scholarly evaluations, the most likely candidates for national level significance would be those projects built under the Public Works Administration. These projects were not only the first to serve as government built low-rent housing, but they were for the most part superior examples of the property type. They initiated the public housing program, helped to convince Congress of the need for a permanent federal role in providing low-rent housing, and convinced local governments to establish housing authorities that could participate in the federal program. In addition to embodying the principles, policy, and standards of the PWA program, many of these housing projects also reflected the foremost principles of architectural design and urban planning of the 1930s.

A few other projects that demonstrate a decisive or pivotal role in the development of the later federal housing programs or in the formulation of U. S. housing policy and standards may also

be eligible at the national level. Those examples that were pivotal influences in the development of American architecture or are exceptionally illustrative examples of an architectural style, housing type, or urban design may merit designation at the national level on the basis of architectural significance. Documentation of architectural significance in contemporary journals or scholarly publications would be essential to justify national significance. All properties considered for such designation must also exhibit an exceptionally high degree of historic integrity.

Integrity issues will be key to determining a public housing project's eligibility for the National Register. Public housing projects which possess significance in association with one of the identified themes under Criteria A or C may still not be eligible for listing in the National Register if they no longer possess architectural and historical integrity. The integrity of a property is assessed by evaluating its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and to what degree these characteristics have been altered since the property's period of significance. The overall character of housing projects lies in both the design of the individual buildings and in their placement within the framework of the complex. The integrity analysis will involve carefully looking at both the overall character of the project as a planned community of functionally related resources and the physical integrity of the individual building units. Formal site plans where a character defining element of the government housing projects of the time and must be assessed for integrity. To be considered eligible, the majority of the buildings must be intact.

The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgement, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the characteristic aspects of integrity noted above. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant.

Location. Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. The actual location of an historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons.

Design. Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. Design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, ornamentation, and materials. A property's design reflects historic functions and technologies as well as aesthetics.

Setting. Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the character of the place in which the property played its historic role. It involves how, not just where, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open spaces.

Materials. Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. A property must retain the key exterior materials dating from the period of significance. If the property has been rehabilitated, the historic materials and significant features must have been preserved.

Workmanship. Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history. It is the evidence of artisan's labor and skill in constructing or altering a building, structure, object, or district. Workmanship is important because it can furnish evidence of the technology of a craft, illustrate the aesthetic principals of a historic or prehistoric period, and reveal individual, local, regional, or national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principals.

Feeling. Feeling is the property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character.

Association. Association is the direct link between an important historic theme, event, or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer.

In order to meet the registration requirements for Criteria A and C, a public housing project

must retain the defining features and components of the property type. Among the essential physical features required for eligibility include:

- intact original site plan, including setting, building orientation, and the relationship between built and open spaces;
- high percentage of original buildings, including non-residential buildings such as community centers and maintenance facilities;
- original building design features, including fenestration patterns and roof configuration (minor features, such as stoops and entry canopies, are not essential);
- original building facade materials, except those for roofs and windows;
- any original architectural ornamentation, such as belt courses or quoins, (WPA artwork, such as friezes or free-standing statuary, while integral features may not be essential); and
- the basic characteristics and dimensions of representative interior plans (some degree of alteration is acceptable).

Given the more than fifty years of hard service on these buildings, minor renovations and improvements for maintenance and safety will not necessarily compromise the integrity of housing projects. In addition, while many public housing projects may retain a high degree of exterior and site integrity, a majority of their interiors will have been modernized. Buildings that have experienced unsympathetic interior alterations may remain eligible as contributing elements in a historic district.

POSSIBLE NATIONAL REGISTER THEMES & AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

ARCHITECTURE

Criterion C: Serves as a physical symbol within a community of housing design and construction standards developed through the efforts of the housing reform movement.

Represents an important example of a particular architectural style influential to the development of public housing.

Represents a good example of a particular architectural style or building technique important to the local community.

Represents an important example of the work of an architect or builder of national, state, or local prominence.

Contains good examples of design features, facilities, or equipment distinctive to its use as public housing.

ART

Criterion A: Contains significant public sculpture, murals, or other art that had a significant

impact or influence on the actions or attitudes of later artists or residents.

Criterion C: Contains fine examples of public sculpture, murals, or other works of art reflecting the work created during the Great Depression under the Federal government's WPA artists' program.

Contains public sculpture, murals or other works of art created by an artist of national, state, or local prominence as an important design element of the overall public housing project.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Criterion A: Represents a community's significant efforts to eliminate its slums and to develop well-planned low-cost housing for the urban poor.

Represents significant federal efforts to encourage community development through the construction of public works projects.

Represents the rapid growth of a community brought about by the development of an important defense industry or military installation during World War II, for which the construction of new housing for migrating civilian workers and their families was imperative.

Is or was perceived as a symbol of community pride and achievement in a particular accomplishment or period of its history.

Criterion C: Represents an important or exemplary illustration of early large-scale housing development in which uniformity of design, low ground coverage, and precise spatial relationships and traffic patterns were combined to create a new environment for the urban poor in place of the squalor and congestion of the slums.

ETHNIC HERITAGE

Criterion A: Represents an important local attempt to improve the housing conditions of a specific ethnic group.

Served as an important center of cultural or community activity among a specific ethnic group.

Served as the focus of an important event significant to race relations or the history of a specific ethnic group.

Criterion B: Is associated with the career of a significant cultural or political leader of a specific ethnic group or a person who had a significant role in the development of public housing for a specific ethnic group.

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Criterion A: Represents an important effort by the federal government to provide local employment opportunities through the construction of public works during the Great Depression.

Represents an early interaction between the federal government and a local community to eliminate slums and to improve the housing available to the urban poor.

Represents an important effort by the federal government and a local community to provide low-cost family housing for workers involved in vital defense industries during World War II.

Represents the influence of a significant political party or group active in the local community during the period.

Represents a project that significantly affected federal, state, or local law, policies, or programs during the period.

Provides an important early example of federal design and construction standards and policies for public housing.

SOCIAL HISTORY

Criterion A: Represents the efforts of a significant housing reform organization or movement in a local community.

Exemplifies the social ideals and planning standards of federal public housing at the local level.

Represents important efforts to provide domestic support for migrant defense workers and their families during World War II.

Served as an important focus of community pride and community activity.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this historic context report is to provide a means to evaluate the historic significance of properties currently operated under the federal public housing program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The period under consideration covers the Great Depression and World War II, beginning with construction of the first federal housing projects by the Public Works Administration under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. It continues through the establishment of the permanent federal public housing program under the U. S. Housing Act of 1937 and onto the various public housing efforts of World War II. The period concludes with passage of the U. S. Housing Act of 1949, which renewed funding for public housing after a period of inactivity following the war and began a new era of construction.

Research for this project was conducted primarily at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, the Library of Congress, and the Gellman Library at George Washington University in Washington, DC. The following is a brief evaluation of the materials found at each of these locations. Please note that the bibliography for the current historical context included only those sources cited in the report. The project files, which are housed at the National Register of Historic Places offices in Washington D. C. contain many other important sources, some of which are discussed below.

The National Archives has organized all of its holdings on public housing in record group (RG)

196. This includes documents of the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration from 1933 to 1937, the United States Housing Authority (USHA) from 1937 to 1942, the National Housing Agency during World War II, and the Public Housing Administration in the postwar years. RG 196 includes memos, policy statements, public information bulletins, press releases, speeches, statistical analyses, land acquisition records, and other official documents.

The vast majority of the files in RG 196 are comprised of the 500 plus applications made by local communities to the PWA loan program in 1933-34, prior to the PWA construction program beginning in 1935. RG 196 contains very few of the official publications of the PWA Housing Division. While PWA Bulletins Nos. 1 and 2, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States* and *Urban Housing* respectively, are readily available in area libraries, the very rare *Unit Plans* was only available from the Ohio State University Library. The most important documents in RG 196 are the bulletins published by the USHA, which explained federal policy and gave direction to local housing authorities. The full set of 36 bulletins is in RG 196. Copies of the most pertinent bulletins, including those on site selection, tenant selection, slum clearance, and construction standards are available in the project files located at the National Register.

RG 196 also contains an unpublished treatise from the late 1940s on the history of race relations in public housing, a copy of which is included in the project files. Although this paper is somewhat vague and often ponderous, it provides a reasonably candid insider's view on the subject written by an African American official of the Public Housing Administration. The most important contemporary writings on racial policy in public housing are the published works of

Robert Weaver, the highest ranking African American official in Roosevelt's New Deal and, in 1965, the first Secretary of HUD. Weaver's works include his book, *The Negro Ghetto*, and many journal articles, several of which are included in the project files.

Omitted from the Archives is information on specific housing projects. While the architectural records division has a file of basic site plans for most of the PWA projects, all of the detailed architectural drawings for these projects appear to have been transferred by the federal government to the local housing authorities along with the transfer of the actual PWA housing projects. Original architectural plans for those projects built by local housing authorities after 1937, if they exist at all, are located at the local housing authorities. The photographic records division at the Archives maintains a file of photographs on public housing. Although most of these photos document the local slum conditions that public housing was to replace, there are several good photographs of public housing projects built by local housing authorities after 1937. Both the Archives and the Library of Congress maintain large photographic collections of PWA construction projects, yet neither contained examples of PWA housing projects. Although there are many published photographs of PWA housing projects, originals were not located in any of the official federal collections.

Secondary sources came both from the Library of Congress and the Gellman Library at George Washington University. While Gellman Library contained only two secondary sources not available at the Library of Congress (both were dissertations), its open stacks and excellent collection on the subject made research somewhat more convenient than at the Library of

Congress. The Library of Congress, of course, has a superb collection of period journals, which provide excellent insight into the philosophy, politics, and architecture of public housing in the 1930s and 1940s. These include articles in the *Octagon*, the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and other journals by such important housing advocates as Robert Kohn, Edith Elmer Wood, Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, Albert Mayer, Catherine Bauer, and Charles Abrams. *Architectural Record* and *Architectural Journal* also carefully followed the progress of public housing construction during the Depression and World War II and provided articles on construction methods, financing, and brief descriptions of specific noteworthy projects. The latter often included photographs and examples of plans. The architectural journals also contain a few advertisements in which manufacturers proudly tout the use of their products in public housing construction. Copies of pertinent articles and advertisements are included in the project files.

Works published in the 1930s and 1940s by Edith Elmer Wood, Catherine Bauer, Nathan Straus, and Michael Straus chronicle the social, architectural, and philosophical influences on public housing and are available at the Library of Congress or Gellman Library. The best recent secondary sources include Richard Pommer's article in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* on the architecture of the PWA housing program. Timothy McDonnell's *The Wagner Housing Act* provides a blow by blow account of the political struggle for the creation of the federal public housing program during the Great Depression. McDonnell provides an especially good synthesis of the Congressional debates on the subject. Books by Gwendolyn Wright, Gerturde Fish, Mel Scott, and Lawrence Friedman also provide good insights into the creation of the program. Philip Funigiello's *The Challenge to Urban Liberalism* includes an excellent

chapter on the influence of World War II on public housing, as does *World War II and the American Dream*, compiled by the National Building Museum to accompany its wartime construction exhibit. Copies of the later two references are included in the project files. Robert Moore Fisher's *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, focuses on financial data from the 1950s, now out of date, and contains little information relevant to this project.

Other good references to specific public housing projects are located in the National Register property nomination forms and determination of eligibility studies, all of which are included in the project files. A list of the housing projects for which National Register documentation already exists is provided in Appendix I of this report. Richard Plunz's book on housing in New York City and Devereaux Bowly's history of public housing in Chicago also provide comprehensive coverage of the architecture, social history, and politics of public housing in those cities. John Bauman's works on Philadelphia focus less on architecture, but are especially valuable for their discussion of racial policies in public housing. Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., also provides a chapter on race and public housing in *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit*. Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl do the same for Miami, Florida in *Urban Policy in Twentieth Century America*.

Other research was less successful than efforts at the Archives and Library of Congress. The National Register call for information and a questionnaire sent to local housing authorities provided minimal information. The questionnaire to the State Historic Preservation Officers provided some information about determinations of eligibility for public housing, although the responses were not as forthcoming as originally hoped. Travel to Atlanta and Chicago provided

excellent tours of actual public housing projects. The Chicago Housing Authority was especially accommodating providing tours of every project built during the period under consideration. Research into the files at these housing authorities, however, was less fruitful. Historical data generally was unorganized, unlabeled, missing, or unknown. Both the Atlanta and Chicago historical societies have copies of original architectural plans and photographs relating to early public housing in their collections and copies of these may be ordered from these societies. Researchers looking for site specific information may want to identify local historical societies in their area as a potential source for organized reference materials. Local newspaper archives are also likely to have historic contemporary accounts and documentation.

The database of public housing projects incorporated as Appendix II-IV of this report was compiled using three sources: HUD's current database, HUD's 1975 Consolidated Development Directory, and the National Housing Agency's comprehensive wartime list of all government housing published in 1943 and available at the Library of Congress. The 1943 book is an invaluable resource for this database as it lists essentially all housing projects relevant to this context (only a handful were built between 1943 and 1949) and provides the name of the government program under which they were built, reliable construction dates, and other pertinent information. All listings were cross checked in the 1943 book with the current HUD database and HUD's 1975 publication in order to determine which projects continue to function under the modern public housing program. The HUD database is not always reliable on exact construction dates, especially with the federal projects built under the PWA and Lanham Act and later transferred into the program. Construction dates for these projects usually reflect the date of

transfer from federal ownership to local ownership rather than the date of actual construction.

Data for the lists of PWA housing came from the PWA bulletin *Urban Housing* and Straus and Wegg's *Housing Comes of Age*.

The historic context is organized chronologically, beginning with the nineteenth and early twentieth century influences on the program. The period under consideration, 1933-1949, conveniently divides itself into three distinct periods: the PWA, 1933-1937; the USHA, 1937-1942; and World War II and the immediate postwar period, 1942-1949. Each of these periods has its distinct political, administrative, social, and racial characteristics and seemed to be a logical way to organize the historical narrative. Gaps in the current documentation exist in the discussion of the typical architectural treatments for Lanham Act and other World War II-era projects, in the discussion regarding the various architects hired to complete PWA, USHA, and WWII projects, and in the examination of government involvement at the local level during the World War II-era programs.

The Registration Requirements section was developed by a careful review and analysis of the research information compiled as part of this study and the work of other outside researchers. This material was synthesized with information contained in previous National Register evaluations completed by HUD, local housing authorities, state historic preservation officers, and the National Register. The final evaluation discussions borrow from previously completed National Register eligibility studies for public housing sites, National Register studies completed in association with other Federal government programs, and the general National Park Service

guidance on applying the Criteria for Evaluation. This report is a working document that will continue to evolve as research and the evaluation of public housing projects proceeds. As our understanding of the architectural and historical development of public housing expands through the analysis of physical resources, revisions to the context study may be necessary.

APPENDIX I

PUBLIC HOUSING LISTED IN OR ELIGIBLE FOR LISTING IN THE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES 1933-1949

National Register of Historic Places listings

- Langston Terrace, Washington, District of Columbia (1936)
- Techwood Homes Historic District, Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia (1935) (Demolished)
- Neighborhood Gardens Apartments, St. Louis, St. Louis County, Missouri (1935)
- Harlem River Houses, New York, New York County, New York (1936)
- Laurel Homes Historic District, Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio (1936-38)
- Public Housing Projects in Memphis, Tennessee 1936-1943, MPS
 - Lemoyne Gardens Public Housing Project, Memphis, Fayette County, Tennessee (1941)
 - Lauderdale Courts Public Housing Project, Memphis, Fayette County, Tennessee (1938)
- Cedar Springs Place, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas (1935)
- San Felipe Courts Historic District, Houston, Harris County, Texas (1941)

Draft National Register nomination prepared

- Public Housing in Philadelphia, MPS
 - Hill Creek, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania (1936)
 - Tasker Homes, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania (1939)
 - James Weldon Johnson Homes, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania (1939)
 - Passyunk Homes, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania (1941)

Determinations of Eligibility

- Ida B. Wells Houses, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (1939)
- Francis Cabrini Houses, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (1941)
- Altgeld Gardens, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (1943)
- Jane Addams Houses, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (1935)
- Julia C. Lathrop Houses, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (1936)
- Trumbull Park Houses, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (1936)
- Lockfield Garden Apartments, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana (1938)
- Cedar Apartments, Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio (1935)

APPENDIX II

PWA LIMITED DIVIDEND HOUSING PROJECTS

State	City	Project Name	Loan Amt	Legislation	Units	Developer	Architect
VA	ALTA VISTA	ALTA VISTA HOUSING	\$84,000	NIRA	50	HARRY M. LANE	STANHOPE S. JOHNSON & R. O. BRANNAN
NY	NEW YORK CITY	BOULEVARD GARDENS	\$3,069,587	NIRA	957	GEORGE C. MEYER	T. H. ENGELHARDT
NY	NEW YORK CITY	HILLSIDE HOMES	\$5,060,000	NIRA	1,416	HILLSIDE HOUSING CORP w/ NATHAN STRAUS	CLARENCE STEIN
NC	RALEIGH	BOYLAN	\$198,000	NIRA	54	RUFUS BOYLAN	LINTHICUM & LINTHICUM
PA	PHILADELPHIA	CARL MACKLEY HOUSES	\$1,030,000	NIRA	284	AMERICAN FEDERATION OF HOSIERY WORKERS	W. POPE BARNEY with OSKAR STONOROV
OH	EUCLID	EUCLID HOUSING	\$432,000	NIRA	72	EUCLID HOUSING CORP.	GEORGE MAYER
NY	NEW YORK CITY	KNICKERBOCKER VILLAGE	\$8,000,000	ERC	1,593	FRED F. FRENCH CO.	JOHN S. VAN WART & FREDERICK ACKERMAN
MO	ST. LOUIS	NEIGHBOURHOOD GARDENS	\$632,868	NIRA	252	J. A. WOLF & LEE JOHNSON	HOENER, BAUM & FROESE

LIMITED DIVIDEND HOUSING PROJECTS

APPENDIX III

PWA DIRECT-BUILT HOUSING PROJECTS

PWA HOUSING PROJECTS

State	City	Project Name	Race	Current Status	Appropriation	Units	Slum/Vacan	Architect
AL	BIRMINGHAM	SMITHFIELD COURT	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,500,000	544	S	D. O. WHILLDIN
AL	MONTGOMERY	RIVERSIDE HEIGHTS	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$411,000	100	V	AUSFELD & JONES
AL	MONTGOMERY	WILLIAM B. PATTERSON COURTS	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$506,000	156	S	COOPER & SMITH
CT	STAMFORD	FAIRFIELD COURT	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$884,000	146	V	WILLIAM J. PROVOOST
DC	WASHINGTON	LANGSTON	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,842,000	274	V	ROBINSON, PORTER & WILLIAMS
FL	JACKSONVILLE	DURKEEVILLE	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$948,000	215	V	MELLEN C. GREELEY
FL	MIAMI	LIBERTY SQUARE	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$969,880	243	V	P. E. PAIST
GA	ATLANTA	TECHWOOD	W	DEMOLISHED 1996	\$2,933,500	604	S	BURGE & STEVENS
GA	ATLANTA	UNIVERSITY HOMES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,592,000	675	S	EDWARDS & SAYWARD
IL	CHICAGO	JANE ADDAMS HOUSES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$7,041,759	1,027	S	JOHN A. HOLABIRD
IL	CHICAGO	JULIA C. LATHROP HOMES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$5,862,000	925	V	ROBERT S. DEGOLYER
IL	CHICAGO	TRUMBULL PARK HOMES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,038,000	462	V	JOHN A. HOLABIRD
IN	EVANSVILLE	LINCOLN GARDENS	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,000,000	191	S	EDWARD J. THOLE
IN	INDIANAPOLIS	LOCKEFIELD GARDEN APARTMENTS	AA	PRIVATIZED AND PARTIALLY DEMOLISHED 1983	\$3,207,000	748	S	RUSS & HARRISON
KY	LEXINGTON	BLUE GRASS PARK / ASPENDALE	MX	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,704,000	286	V	HUGH MERIWETHER
KY	LOUISVILLE	COLLEGE COURT	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$758,000	125	V	E. T. HUTCHINGS
KY	LOUISVILLE	LA SALLE PLACE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,350,000	210	V	E. T. HUTCHINGS
MA	BOSTON	OLD HARBOR VILLAGE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$6,636,000	1,016	V	JOSEPH D. LELAND
MA	CAMBRIDGE	NEW TOWNE COURT	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,500,000	294	S	HENRY C. ROBBINS
MI	DETROIT	BREWSTER	AA	DEMOLISHED 1988	\$5,200,000	701	S	GEORGE D. MASON
MI	DETROIT	PARKSIDE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$4,500,000	775	V	GEORGE D. MASON
MN	MINNEAPOLIS	SUMNER FIELD HOMES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,632,000	464	S	W. H. TUSLER
NE	OMAHA	LOGAN FONTENELLE HOMES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,955,000	284	S	WILLIAM L. STEELE
NJ	ATLANTIC CITY	STANLEY S. HOLMES VILLAGE	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,550,000	277	S	J. VAUGHAN MATHIS
NJ	CAMDEN	WESTFIELD ACRES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,116,160	515	V	JOSEPH N. HETTEL
NY	BUFFALO	KENFIELD	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$4,755,000	658	V	CHESTER OAKLEY
NY	LACKAWANNA	BAKER HOMES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,610,000	271	V	
NY	NEW YORK CITY	HARLEM RIVER HOUSES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$4,219,000	574	V	ARCHIBALD M. BROWN
NY	NEW YORK CITY	WILLAMSBURG	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$13,459,000	1,622	S	RICHMOND H. SHREVE
NY	SCHENECTADY	SCHIONOWEE VILLAGE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,435,000	219	S	R. L. BOWEN
OH	CINCINNATI	LAUREL HOMES	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$7,086,000	1,039	S	FREDERICK W. GARBER
OH	CLEVELAND	CEDAR-CENTRAL APARTMENTS	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,384,000	650	S	WALTER R. MCCORNACK
OH	CLEVELAND	LAKE VIEW TERRACE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,800,000	620	S	JOSEPH L. WEINBERG
OH	CLEVELAND	OUTHWAITE HOMES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,564,000	579	S	MAIER, WALSH & BARRETT
OH	TOLEDO	BRAND WHITLOCK HOMES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,000,000	264	S	HAROLD H. MUNGER
OK	ENID	CHEROKEE TERRACE	W	PRIVATELY-OWNED SECTION 8 RENTAL HOUSING	\$557,100	80	S	GEORGE BLUMENAUER
OK	OKLAHOMA CIT	WILL ROGERS COURTS	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,000,000	354	V	J. O. PARR
PA	PHILADELPHIA	HILL CREEK	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,110,000	258	V	WALTER H. THOMAS
PA	WAYNE	HIGHLAND HOMES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$344,000	50	S	H. BARTOL REGISTER
PR	CAGUAS	CASERIO LAGRANJA	N/A	TRANSFERRED TO PR REDEV. AUTH. 1938	\$275,000	78	V	PWA HOUSING DIVISION
PR	SAN JUAN	CASERIO MIRAPALMERAS	N/A	TRANSFERRED TO PR REDEV. AUTH. 1938	\$500,000	131	V	PWA HOUSING DIVISION
SC	CHARLESTON	MEETING STREET MANOR / COOPER	MX	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,305,000	212	V	SAMUEL LAPHAM, JR.
SC	COLUMBIA	UNIVERSITY TERRACE	W	SOLD TO USC BY PHA 1950S; DEMOLISHED 1995	\$706,000	122	S	JAMES B. URQUHART

PWA HOUSING PROJECTS

State	City	Project Name	Race	Current Status	Appropriation	Units	Slum/Vacan	Architect
TN	MEMPHIS	DIXIE HOMES	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,400,000	633	S	G. FRAZIER SMITH
TN	MEMPHIS	LAUDERDALE COURTS	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$3,128,000	449	S	G. FRAZIER SMITH
TN	NASHVILLE	ANDREW JACKSON COURTS	AA	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,890,000	398	S	RICHARD R. CLARK
TN	NASHVILLE	CHEATHAM PLACE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,000,000	314	S	RICHARD R. CLARK
TX	DALLAS	CEDAR SPRINGS PLACE	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$1,020,000	181	S	WALTER C. SHARP
VI	ST. CROIX	BASSIN TRIANGLE	N/A	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$41,800	30	V	PWA HOUSING DIVISION
VI	ST. CROIX	MARLEY HOMES	N/A	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$56,900	38	V	PWA HOUSING DIVISION
VI	ST. THOMAS	H. H. BERG HOMES	N/A	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$98,500	58	S	PWA HOUSING DIVISION
WI	MILWAUKEE	PARKLAWN	W	CONVENTIONAL PUBIC HOUSING	\$2,600,000	518	V	GERRITT J. DEGELEKE

APPENDIX IV

FEDERAL PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS 1933-1949

ST	HOUSING AUTHORITY (Locality)	PROJECT NU	PROJECT NAME (Original Name)	PROGRAM	UNITS	BLDG	CONSTRU	OCCUPA	TERMI	COST \$000
AL	ANNISTON	AL09P004001	GLENNADIE HOMES	USHA	164	RW	04/43	08/43		\$596
AL	BIRMINGHAM	AL09P001001	ELYTON VILLAGE	USHA	863	MX	10/39	10/40		\$3,953
AL	BIRMINGHAM	AL09P001003R	METROPOLITAN GARDENS (Central City)	USHA	913	MX	06/40	07/41		\$4,133
AL	BIRMINGHAM	AL09P001004R	SOUTHTOWN	USHA	480	MX	07/40	08/41		\$2,060
AL	BIRMINGHAM	AL09P001009	SMITHFIELD COURT	PWA	512	MX	04/36	02/38		\$2,421
AL	DOTHAN	AL09P007001	HENRY GREEN APTS.	DEFENSE	102	RW	01/42	09/42		\$446
AL	FAIRFIELD	AL09P010001	FAIRFIELD COURTS	USHA	90	RW	03/43	12/43		\$378
AL	GADSDEN	AL09P049005	CAMPBELL COURT	LANHAM	150	SD	04/41	10/41		\$479
AL	GADSDEN	AL09P049006	STARNES PARK	LANHAM	100	SD	07/41	07/42		\$342
AL	MOBILE	AL09P002001	OAKLAWN HOMES	USHA	100	RW	01/40	10/40		\$436
AL	MOBILE	AL09P002002	ORANGE GROVE HOMES	USHA	298	RW	09/39	09/40		\$1,363
AL	MOBILE	AL09P002005	THOMAS JAMES PLACE	LANHAM	255	SD		12/43		
AL	MOBILE	AL09P002011	THOMAS JAMES PLACE	LANHAM	412	SD		12/43		
AL	MOBILE	AL09P002014	THOMAS JAMES PLACE	LANHAM	115	SD		12/43		
AL	MOBILE (Prichard)	AL09P002006	GULF VILLAGE	LANHAM	199	SD		12/42		
AL	MONTGOMERY	AL09P006001	RIVERSIDE HEIGHTS	USHA	137	RW	08/40	02/41		\$538
AL	MONTGOMERY	AL09P006002	CLEVELAND COURT	USHA	150	RW	07/40	02/41		\$538
AL	MONTGOMERY	AL09P006005	PATERSON COURT	USHA	44	RW	06/45	02/46		
AL	MONTGOMERY	AL09P006007	RIVERSIDE HEIGHTS	PWA	100	RW	10/35	06/37		\$408
AL	MONTGOMERY	AL09P006008	WILLIAM B. PATERSON COURT	PWA	156	RW	07/35	02/37		\$503
AL	PHENIX CITY	AL09P005001R	RIVERVIEW	USHA	216	RW	10/39	11/40		\$836
AL	PHENIX CITY	AL09P005002	DOUGLAS	USHA	206	RW	09/40	09/41		\$724
AL	SYLACAUGA	AL09P057003	SYLAVON COURT	LANHAM	150	MX	09/41	02/42		\$534
AL	TALLADEGA	AL09P105001	CURRY COURT	LANHAM	150	MX	09/41	02/42		\$520
AL	TARRANT	AL09P013001	NESTLEWOOD	DEFENSE	52	RW	03/42	11/42		\$207
AR	CONWAY	AR37P006001	VICTORY COURTS	DEFENSE	30		03/42	06/42	06/82	\$120
AR	CONWAY	AR37P006002	CONARK	DEFENSE	20		03/42	06/42	06/82	\$80
AR	FORT SMITH	AR37P003001	RAGON HOMES	DEFENSE	170	RW	05/42	06/43		\$761
AR	LITTLE ROCK	AR37P004001	SUNSET TERRACE	DEFENSE	74	SD	10/41	05/42		\$316
AR	LITTLE ROCK	AR37P004002	HIGHLAND PARK	DEFENSE	74	SD	10/41	05/42		\$295
AR	LITTLE ROCK	AR37P004003	AMELIA B. IVES (Tuxedo Courts)	DEFENSE	100	SD	10/41	04/42		\$401
AR	NORTH LITTLE ROCK	AR37P002001	SILVER CITY COURTS	USHA	148	MX	01/41	01/42		\$599
AZ	GLENDALE	AZ20P003001	FREY FRANCISCO PORRAS	DEFENSE	51	MX	10/42	06/43		\$222
AZ	MESA	AZ20P005001	ESCOBEDO HOUSING	DEFENSE	53	RW	10/42	06/43		\$240
AZ	PHOENIX	AZ20P001001	MARCOS DE NIZA	USHA	224	MX	09/40	01/42		\$728
AZ	PHOENIX	AZ20P001002	FRANK LUKE, JR.	USHA	230	MX	09/40	01/42		\$683
AZ	PHOENIX	AZ20P001003	MATTHEW HENSON	USHA	150	MX	07/40	10/41		\$513
AZ	TUCSON	AZ20P004001	LA REFORMA	DEFENSE	162		04/42	03/43	11/83	\$788
CA	CONTRA COSTA COUNTY	CA39P011002	LOS MEDANOS PUEBLO	DEFENSE	86	SD	02/42	08/42		\$370
CA	CONTRA COSTA COUNTY (Anitoch)	CA39P011003	BRIDGEMONT	DEFENSE	36	SD	02/42	07/42		\$175
CA	CONTRA COSTA COUNTY (Brentwood)	CA39P011004	LOS NOGALES	DEFENSE	44	SD	09/42	03/43		\$195
CA	CONTRA COSTA COUNTY (Martinez)	CA39P011001	ALHAMBRA TERRACE	DEFENSE	243	SD	02/42	07/42		\$243
CA	FRESNO CITY	CA39P006001	(Fairview Heights)	USHA	86		11/41	09/42	12/87	\$312
CA	FRESNO CITY	CA39P006002	SEQUOIA COURTS	USHA	60	MX	11/41	07/42		\$242
CA	FRESNO CITY	CA39P006003	SIERRA PLAZA	USHA	70	MX	11/41	08/42		\$253
CA	FRESNO CITY	CA39P006011	FUNSTON PLACE	LANHAM	149	MX	05/41	10/41		\$484
CA	KERN COUNTY (Bakersfield)	CA16P008001	RIO VISTA	DEFENSE	60	SD	03/42	07/42		\$236

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POOR QUALITY
ORIGINAL *Light*

Pgs 1-2

NCSHPO

National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers

SUITE 342 HALL OF THE STATES
444 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001-1512
202/624-5465 FAX 202/624-5419

2 November 1994

To the State Historic Preservation Officers:

Re: **Questionnaire for Public Housing Historic Context**

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers is cooperating with the National Park Service and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to prepare a historic context for the Department of Housing and Urban Development on federally-subsidized public housing in the United States. Your answers to the following questions will be of assistance to us in gathering information for this study.

Please return this completed questionnaire and any supplemental documentation to Jeffrey Shrimpton at the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. We will keep you up-to-date on all major developments concerning this project. **Thank you for your cooperation.**

Elisa Gilbertson VT 802-828-3046 11/28/94
(Your name) (State) (Telephone number) (Date)

1. Have historic contexts been written or have surveys been undertaken for public housing in your state?
 Yes No

If yes, we would appreciate your sending us copies of the contexts or the survey documentation.

2. Are there public housing projects in your state listed in the National Register, or in state or local registers?
 Yes No (Not that we know of; do not have enough on computer database to easily find out)

Please list the name of each project, the city in which it is located, and in which type of register it is listed. Please send any available documentation for those projects listed in state or local registers that are not also listed in the National Register.

3. Have determinations of eligibility for the National Register been made on public housing projects in your state?
 Yes No - no NPS DOES, but have made a few DOES in house.

Please list the name of each project for which a determination has been made and the city in which it is located. Indicate whether the project was determined eligible or not eligible and give the date of the determination. We would appreciate your sending us any pertinent documentation concerning these DOES.

Southview, Springfield (information enclosed)
1/91 by VT State Review Board, NR eligible.

Westview, Springfield - in house NR determination 10/94
- this is across the road from Southview,
not much info on it yet. Also WWII
era housing for war effort.

4. Are there public housing projects in your state located in listed or eligible historic districts?
___ Yes ___ No ?

If yes, please list the name of each project and the city and historic district in which it is located. Also indicate whether or not the project contributes to the significance of the district.

5. In your opinion are there public housing projects in your state that are less than fifty years old but are eligible for listing in the National Register?
___ Yes ___ No ?

If yes, please list the name of each project, the city in which it is located, and the year of its construction.

6. Do you know of individuals who are knowledgeable about the history of public housing who could contribute to a historic context study prepared according to National Register Bulletin 16B? If so, we would appreciate receiving their names and addresses so that we can send them an announcement of this project.

7. Please list any other unpublished research of which you may be aware, such as theses, dissertations, or reports, concerning the history of public housing.

8. Please indicate any specific concerns that you would like to see addressed by this study.

Integrity issues

How do you deal w/ 10b issues on temporary housing?



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

P.O. Box 37127

Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H32(413)

NOV 10 1994

Dear Colleague:

The National Park Service and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are pleased to announce that they have entered into an agreement to produce a historic context study on the history of public housing in the United States for the purpose of assisting housing and Federal, State, and local government staff in determining whether or not a public housing project is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The project will be carried out in cooperation with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, which will administer the project under a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The enclosed project summary provides additional information on this endeavor.

The project's sponsors are seeking information, sources, and expertise on the history of public housing in the United States in 20th century. We are interested in identifying the following:

1. ■ Published books or reports; ■ unpublished reports, dissertations, theses, or papers; ■ nomination documentation for Federal, State, or local designation; ■ determination of eligibility documentation ■ bibliographies; or ■ existing historic context studies--all related to 20th century public housing in the United States. We would appreciate receiving the citation or the printed document.
2. Individuals knowledgeable about the history of public housing in the United States during the 20th century and the preparation of historic context studies. We would appreciate receiving resumes and examples of work.

Please send the above information to: Jeffrey Shrimpton, National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, Suite 342, Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-1512, (202) 624-5465, FAX (202) 624-5419. **Please send this information within 30 days from the date of this letter.**

Sincerely,

Carol D. Shull
Chief of Registration
National Register of Historic Places
Interagency Resources Division

Enclosure





IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

P.O. Box 37127

Washington, D.C. 20013-7127



PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES

Historic Context Project

In September 1994, the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development entered into an agreement to produce a historic context study that will assist housing authorities throughout the United States with the evaluation of public housing projects for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This project will be carried out in cooperation with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, which will administer the project under a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The project will produce a historic context document that will outline the evolution of the Federal government's involvement in public housing programs, focusing on the post-1930 period. This historic context will provide an understanding of the major phases in the development of public housing that represent coherent periods defined by specific housing objectives and philosophies. The historic context will examine public housing from several perspectives, including architecture, community planning and development, ethnic heritage, politics and government, and social history. It will include a property type discussion and registration requirements for public housing projects. This document will assist housing and Federal, State, and local government staff in determining whether or not a public housing project is eligible for listing in the National Register.

The project will include a users guide to applying the historic context document to evaluating specific housing projects. It also will result in a popular brochure, which will summarize the history of public housing in the post-1930 period and appeal to the broad sector of the public. This project is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 1996.

For additional information, contact Antoinette J. Lee or Paul Lusignan, National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127, (202) 343-9536, or Jeffrey P. Shrimpton, National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Suite 342, Washington, DC 20001-1512, (202) 624-5465.