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Atlanta is considered a model city in more than one respect. Standing at the gateway to the Southeast, it is one of the faster developing cities in the country. The skyline is punctuated by new skyscraper office buildings, and the central business district crackles with construction activity. The Regency-Hyatt House, a 21-story hotel with glass elevators, is a tourist attraction in itself. A new sports stadium stands in the foreground of those pictures used by the Chamber of Commerce-type groups boosting their city. Professional baseball, football, and soccer have all come to the city in the past few years.

The mayor, Ivan Allen Jr., has a national reputation for an enlightened attitude toward race relations and an aggressive administration intent on solving the city's problems. "When you think of good housing for souls in the South, you think of Atlanta," says a Negro writer. The police chief, Herbert Jenkins, was appointed by President Johnson to the National Commission on Civil Disorders ("Atlanta is probably the best place to be arrested," a civil rights leader once told Allen.)

When Congress passed the model cities legislation, Allen decided Atlanta would be the first to submit an application for a planning grant. It was, and the application is regarded by HUD officials as the best model cities plan submitted. Atlanta also was among the first cities to build public housing and use the urban renewal program (11 urban renewal projects in execution or completed).

In Allen's office is a man with no staff, budget, or title who is responsible for much of the action which gives

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Atlanta its favorable image. The man is Dan Sweat, and when he joined the city government his job was to see that Atlanta got its share of federal funds. The job has since been expanded; Sweat is an example of a new breed of urban official, the city ramrod. His office is where problems get solved, programs get started; where government officials and businessmen come to get things done.

Sweat was responsible for Atlanta's model cities application. "The mayor told me to put together an application and submit it before any other city. I asked him what the budget would be. He said there would be no budget. I asked him how much staff I would have. He said none. No staff, no budget."

Sweat started making telephone calls to city and county agencies. "I asked them for the best man they had for this job. I knew the man I wanted from each agency and I took those men and locked them in a room upstairs. Two weeks later, we had a model cities application."

Atlanta is not without its problems. In fact, the city may typify the crisis that grips the urban centers of the country. The city has had its riot. It is still a segregated city. 95% segregated, according to one index, and thousands of the city's poor, many of them Negro, are living in substandard units. The success of the urban renewal projects has aggravated the housing problem. By Allen's estimate, ~~17,000~~ 16,800 units are needed by 1972 just to relocate the families displaced by government action.

The rate of construction of public housing and 221(d)(3) units has not been adequate to the need. The city is still seeking a way to get rents below $55 a month, where the

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need is greatest.

On Nov. 15, 1966, Allen convened a conference on housing, attended by the power structure of the city. "The problem," he told the group, "is simply this: Atlanta does not have the housing to meet the needs of persons to be relocated by present or future governmental action which will be necessary for the continued progress of Atlanta." In the previous decade, he said, government action—urban renewal, highway construction, code enforcement—had resulted in the displacement of 21,000 families, or 67,000 people.

"The majority of the families and individuals forced to move were Negro. Most were poor. Approximately 50% of these people had incomes under $3,000 a year and about 75% had incomes under $5,000 a year....about 15% were large families with six or more members."

Allen announced the formation of a citizens committee which would give direction to a new program. The goal: ~~17,000~~ 16,800 units by 1972, ~~10,000~~ 9,800 units by the end of this year.

Atlanta's builders, for the most part, are not interested in participating in the city's housing program. Explanations of why they are not interested vary, but the consensus seems to be that several years ago the home builders' association approached the city with a proposal to give builders quotas of low- and moderate-income housing, spreading the risk and dividing the time required to be spent away from the more profitable custom building which predominates in the metropolitan area. The city, for its part, would form a nonprofit corporation and serve as developer of the projects. The proposal was rejected.

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Now, much of the turnkey and 221(d)(3) housing is being built by contractors based in other cities—HLC Corp. of Greensboro, Marvin Warner of Cincinnati—and the home builders have infrequent contact with city hall.

The goal of 9,800 units by the end of this year won't be reached. Allen is confident, though, that the larger goal of ~~17,000~~ 16,800 units by 1972 can be attained. "There is every indication that we can pull this thing out of the hole in a reasonable amount of time," he says. "We filled up the pipeline in the first 18 months. We'll easily get the ~~17,000~~ 16,800 units. We've got the support of the business community, the Chamber of Commerce, the news media. The magnitude of the whole effort is expanding."

Allen is realistic enough to know that the word is not the deed. He is mayor of a city with a weak-mayor form of government and he needs the cooperation of the Board of Aldermen. About a week before he was interviewed, a turnkey project was ready to go to contract when the Board of Aldermen balked. Someone had come to the city with an idea for producing prefabricated concrete houses with an on-site plant. "He had no prototype and no plant," Allen says, but he came here with that idea and succeeded in panicking some aldermen." Allen prevailed in that situation, but merely raising the question of a technological breakthrough or the possibility of finding a program that will solve the urban housing problem brings a forceful and angry answer:

"The only problem is to make people believe there is no easy way. Looking for the instant solution to all of our problems only delays the issue. The housing problem has got

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to be settled now. It's not going to wait for a change in the form of government or a new construction method or a new program. Trying to find the magic button causes delays. The hell with delays."

Not all Atlantans in or out of government share Allen's sense of urgency. National Homes brought in prefabricated low-cost ~~single-family~~ houses for the Thomasville urban renewal area and found codes to be a problem. National installed the plumbing and wiring in its factory, thinking the permit ~~it had~~ obtained from the Building Department was sufficient. But the plumbing and electrical inspectors denied permits for the houses. National was forced to rip out the plumbing and wiring from its models and ship the rest of its ~~packages~~ houses without the plumbing trees, plastic pipe, glass fiber bathtub, and prefab electrical system. It responded by raising prices $500 a house.

The city planning department and the Housing Resources Committee stated in a subsequent report that "City codes discriminate against mass-produced, prefabricated housing. The Plumbing and Electrical Advisory Boards are composed predominantly of representatives of labor and trade unions. These boards strongly influence changes and interpretations of the City's Electrical and Plumbing Codes. Their concern is maintenance of the status quo of their trade rather than new time- and labor-saving materials and technology."

Another problem is zoning. Under present conditions, most of Atlanta's low-cost housing must be multifamily units. But only 68 acres of available land in the city is zoned multifamily. As a result, almost every proposed housing

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project has to be preceded by rezoning. Since Allen is determined to comply with the federal policy requiring integration of government-assisted housing, the rezoning amounts to a request to integrate formerly all-white neighborhoods. Two obstacles have been raised, one by the federal government. HUD regulations state that public housing cannot be built in racially identifiable areas. The presumption is that the housing is to be built outside the Negro ghetto. But HUD officials objected to building public housing in all-white neighborhoods because they were racially identifiable as all-white. The city, then, could place public housing in neither all-white nor all-Negro neighborhoods.

There was evidence earlier this year that HUD was changing that policy, just as FHA was changing a policy of ~~not approving~~ refusing mortgage insurance for a project in an area where there might be competition with other FHA-insured housing until the other housing was sold or rented. "The program," says Malcolm Jones, director of the Housing Resources Committee, "can't wait that long."

The program can't afford the time required for rezoning, either, and the city this year was rallying support for a city-wide rezoning. The alternative was to fight the zoning battles one at a time. "There's not enough low-income housing to make an equitable distribution throughout the city," says Allen, "so the guy on the block where the housing is going to be built says, 'why me?' The middle-class attitude hasn't changed. There's still resistance."

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Low-cost single-family housing isn't feasible in Atlanta presently. "We need single-family houses very badly," says Jones, "but there's not enough profit in them." The city requires a minimum lot size of 7,500 sq. ft., a minimum frontage of 60', and a minimum house size of 810 sq. ft. Jones wants the minimums reduced to 5,000 sq. ft. for the lot, 50' frontage, and 720 sq. ft. for the house. "I've proposed that three times in writing over the last year," he says. "We're not going to get interest in single-family housing until this is done."

Jones also tried unsuccessfully to get the plumbing and electrical codes changed for National Homes. "I've proposed to waive codes in locations where experimental housing is being built. But unions and manufacturers team up to oppose code changes."

Jones thinks the code issue will be forced in the model cities program. Indeed, one of the proposals in Atlanta's application which drew praise from HUD officials implied the city was willing to suspend codes to permit experimentation with new techniques and materials.

The planning phase of the model cities program was to be completed this fall. Ed Logue, one of the best practitioners of urban renewal and the man who gets credit for knowing how to make federal bureaucrats expedite projects, says the model cities program "promises much more than it has the capacity to produce." Allen doesn't regard the program as the salvation of the city, either. "It will take five years to execute, assuming Congress provides the money that is needed," he says.

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Allen does not deprecate urban renewal. "Urban renewal is like most government programs," he says with a trace of annoyance. "The vast amount of good has been forgotten by the public and the small amount of bad has been heralded. The urban renewal areas in Atlanta constituted the worst slums, unfit for anyone to live in at any time. They are now business areas, expressways, public improvements. Not a single person moved out of an urban renewal area who didn't improve his housing. The success of urban renewal has been phenomenal. The nature of the model cities area is nowhere near as bad as the urban renewal areas were."

The housing program and the establishment of the Housing Resources Committee are, nonetheless, tacit admission that the rehousing phase of urban renewal might have been handled better in Atlanta as in other cities.

"Some say our past record on relocation has been satisfactory," Allen told his conference on housing in 1966. "But I feel that we must do better than just satisfactory."

A year later, the Housing Resources Committee and the Planning Department reported that the building of relocation housing which meets the need of displaced families when they need it "has not been tried, much less successfully achieved, in Atlanta."

The same report concluded that "only about 11% of the displacees from urban renewal who apparently qualified for public housing were relocated in public housing; Section 221 housing has not effectively met the needs of the large number of low-income families displaced. Rents and costs, while moderate, have been too high for these families."

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Low- and moderate-income housing has not been built at a rate sufficient to replace housing demolished over the past decade, according to the report. "Due to decreases in the low-cost rental supply for both white and Negro families, the need in number of units today is greater than it was in 1959. Regardless of structural conditions, there appears to be a shortage of about 5,300 housing units available to Negroes and 2,100 housing units available to white families renting for $55 a month or less in Atlanta."

If there is anything which distinguishes Atlanta from other cities, it is the willingness to define its problems and initiate action to solve them. It is a measure of the nation's condition that Atlanta and its mayor are accorded national acclaim for doing something—anything—however short of solution the action falls.

No one is rushing in from the state capitol or Washington to help Allen solve the city's problems. Yet, in Atlanta, as in Pittsburgh and New York and Chicago, the rural poor continue to seek the better life in the city. The migration continues, and there is the suspicion among city officials that should Atlanta succeed in improving the plight of those already in its slums, the city would become an even bigger magnet for the state's rural poor. With few exceptions—and Georgia is not one of them—the states have shown little interest in helping their cities, even if only by sufficiently serving rural areas to stem the migration to the cities. Ask any big-city mayor if he wants to work through his state government rather than directly with the federal government, and the answer is almost always the same.

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"The states have done nothing to stem the migration," says Allen, "they've probably been a party to it. Anyone can move into a rooming house and wait until the housing code catches up with them. The states couldn't have played a lesser role. I'm deeply disappointed they didn't move in this area."

John Collins, former mayor of Boston and now a member of the faculty of MIT, told a meeting of the Urban Land Institute that "the states, by and large, with a few exceptions, have displayed all of the dynamism, all of the desire for innovation, of the dinosauer."

Says Pittsburgh Mayor Joe Barr: "Work with the states? I was in Harrisburg (in the state legislature) for 20 years and I know what happens to urban legislation. You can't get it out of there. It sticks like glue."

Allen says publicly that the federal government has given Atlanta full cooperation. Is there too much red tape? "Red tape—that's always the cry. How can we get government financing without some red tape." Is FHA slow? "Not as slow as some architects. We've waited as long as six months for an architect to come up with plans."

It is probably true that Atlanta has fewer problems with HUD than do most cities. But the problems are there. FHA was making market analyses in Atlanta without consulting the city, and its estimate of the demand for moderate-income housing was considerably less than the city's estimate of the need. Yet the city can't fulfill the need unless FHA is willing to issue the mortgage commitments.

Citizen support of Allen's programs surpasses the support most mayors receive. Sometimes, it is more vigorous

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than Allen would like.

The city-wide rezoning proposal was being supported by several groups, the Chamber of Commerce among them. Real estate brokers, usually a conservative group when approaching urban problems, helped fill the void left by the city's builders. The Housing Resources Committee, a citizen's group which has no legal power, asked landowners interested in selling to list their properties with the HRC. Real estate brokers looked the list over and made contact with large out-of-town contractors who might be interested in acquiring the land and developing low-income housing on it. "The brokers," says HRC director Jones, "are responsible for getting developers into the program."

Other groups combined efforts to push for a local fair housing law. Allen didn't oppose it but wondered how anyone could determine the need for a local ordinance when "we haven't had time to try the national law yet."

Builders in the city are more than cautious about proposals to build integrated housing. They contend the market requires segregation in housing; two markets, black and white, exist, they say, and one is as prejudiced as the other. They are supported, to a degree, by a report of the Georgia State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which found that segregation in Atlanta is greater than in most other southern cities. But the report was no brief for builders: "The attitude of builders that they can do nothing to aid the establishment of an open housing market until the community eliminates prejudice seemed to the Committee a denial of basic responsi-

bility and further underscored the need for effective federal and local guarantees against discrimination by the housing industry."

Atlanta may be the testing ground for the national fair housing law, according to some builders. It seemed as though the housing industry was being put to the test one day last spring when a large number of church and civic groups sponsored a conference on equality of opportunity in housing at the Dinkler Plaza Hotel. The turnout was large. The entire spectrum of the housing industry was represented. Dr. Sam Williams, chairman of the Community Relations Commission of Atlanta, asked the president of the Atlanta Real Estate Board, Marion Crane, if there were any Negroes on the board.

"No," said Crane, "no Negro has ever applied."

"Would you accept a Negro if he did apply?" asked Williams.

"After January 1," Crane replied.

"Then you do discriminate against Negroes now?"

"That is correct."

Williams was equally direct in questioning Otis Thorpe, president of the all-Negro Empire Real Estate Board: "Sometimes it seems that even though you do segregate your boards [laughter from the audience], you get together when a neighborhood is in transition and set prices higher than they normally would be [applause]. Is that right?"

Thorpe and Crane denied the charge, but the reaction of the audience indicated they thought Williams had touched a nerve. Williams was cautioned to avoid emotion and advised to stay with facts.

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"If you want facts," he replied, "Negroes can deliver them to you in boxcars. We all know the facts. What are we going to do about them? America is long on rhetoric and short as hell on doing what it ought to do."

That speech, too, brought applause, and it was obvious that however far ahead of other cities Atlanta is in solving its housing problems, it is not far enough ahead to satisfy the people it is trying to help.

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