

HOUSING RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report Required by Mayor's Directive of March 19, 1968
on "U.S. Riot Commission Report

HOUSING

The entire report is quite comprehensive and well done. The Committee deserves credit for so thoroughly analyzing and developing such a comprehensive report on such an involved and explosive matter.

In general the report has signaled out and effectively treated many of the major issues involved. Little fault can be found with its principal findings and recommendations.

However, the report basically places all responsibility for the riots on the White Community and fails to place any responsibility on the participants in the Riots for the wanton destruction and other crimes which they committed. This omission is unfortunate as it could result in a feeling among future potential rioters that such procedure is condoned. This possibility should not be overlooked Nationally and locally in attempting to deal with this explosive situation and prevent future riots.

The report recommends and calls for drastic actions on the part of Federal, State, and Local governments as well as White Communities for specific actions to correct unsatisfactory conditions as a deterrent in preventing future riots. It fails however to call for or place upon the dissident occupants of slum areas any constructive efforts which they themselves should take to improve their conditions.

Of the special recommendations contained in Chapter 10 of the report, it appears that corrective measures for all of them are adequately dealt with in the Mayor's March 19 Directive, with the possible exception of "Expanded Legal Service to the Poor". Additional corrective responsibility in this field might be assigned to the local Bar Associations.

The need for correcting or improving unsatisfactory conditions in the slums of our cities, one of the foremost of which is housing, is well documented and in general the remedies proposed and recommendations made are sound and appear adequate, if carried out on the local level.

With respect to Chapter 17 which deals specifically with proposed corrective measures, some basic considerations in the housing field appear to have been overlooked or at least they are not specifically brought out in the report. Brief comment on some of these, as they affect the local housing situation in Atlanta, follows.

Three basic factors are currently demoralizing future progress in local low-income housing construction in Atlanta:

First, is the local opposition to multi-family housing, particularly Public Housing. Progress must be made in facilitating rezoning of necessary sites to meet Atlanta's low-income housing needs, if adequate progress is to be continued in this important field.

Second, the existing Federal policy of discouraging approval on sites for Public Housing in racially identifiable areas is hindering progress of the program and preventing the construction of many units that are badly needed for the lowest income families.

Third, the legal prohibition against 221 d (3) Federally assisted projects being built in governmental entities (such as neighboring counties which do not have approved Workable Programs) is defeating the purpose of the Low-income Housing Program and is placing undue hardship for providing such housing on communities which do have Workable Programs. The current policy automatically excludes those areas which have the most available land and where the housing is most needed (near newly located industrial establishments where the occupants could be profitably employed). This Committee recommends that special effort be made to overcome each of the above indicated obstacles.

The recommendation contained in the report that Public Housing be more flexible in both design and types of units (including townhouses, duplexes and even single family houses) as well as distribution on smaller scattered sites, is very worthy of encouragement, in order to get away from the institutional image of Public Housing. In fact it would be very helpful if the Housing Authority would eliminate all of its signs at the entrances to projects advertizing to the public in effect that "this is a low rent Federally subsidized housing project".

Emphasis in the report on application of the Housing Code in substandard and depressed areas is very appropriate, however the feature that could be most effective, and which has been most neglected in Atlanta, is not mentioned; that is tenant responsibility. This should and must be stressed continuously, in order to get more effective results from the Housing Code.

All BOA Neighborhood Centers should promote classes in housekeeping and property maintenance by occupants of rental housing. Instruction in this field should be instituted, perhaps at night, to which classes the Housing Court could sentence minor offenders to attend a prescribed number of sessions, in lieu of monetary fines or jail sentences for code violations, in a similar manner to the procedure now being practiced in Traffic Court of sentencing minor offenders to attend sessions in Traffic School.

The cleanup of premises, effecting commercial and industrial, as well as residential properties, is another important factor in improving the ghettos. The condition of premises should go hand in hand with Housing Code enforcement, whether it is directed by the Sanitary Department or the Housing Code Inspectors. It is quite futile to improve the living conditions of a dwelling unit and not require the immediate premises and surrounding areas to be cleaned up and kept clean, especially in the ghettos. Similarly, it is useless to improve a residential property and leave the commercial or industrial properties in the same vicinity in a disgraceful and disreputable condition.

Atlanta needs badly a Commercial and Industrial Code, just as it has a Housing Code. Some of the more progressive cities have such codes today. The enabling legislation recently adopted which authorized Atlanta's "In Rem" Ordinance providing for moving directly against dilapidated residential properties instead of, in the traditional manner, against the owners, for violation of the Housing Code, also authorizes such action against poorly maintained commercial and industrial establishments as well. All that is needed is a local implementing Ordinance.

In order to provide and encourage much desired home ownership among low-income families, a special single family zoning district should be adopted which would permit construction of single family homes of 720 square feet or larger on lots having a maximum area of 5,000 square feet, with a minimum frontage of 50'. This would provide ample area for low-income single family houses and would provide increase in the density by 50% and reduce the cost of lots by 33 1/3% from that now authorized by the current applicable R-5 single family residential zoning district.

It is recommended that some new low-income development be initiated as soon as possible this summer in the Model Cities area, by selecting at least one limited area (perhaps four city blocks) in the heart of the most dilapidated portion of the area and obtaining authority from the Federal government to acquire the land through an advance acquisition process, similar to the manner in which land for the Auditorium and Civic Center was acquired, and turning it over to the Housing Authority, or through expedited sale to private enterprise to develop.

It is also recommended that initiation of development of at least a portion of the Federal Prison site be expedited for starting construction this summer of low-income housing by private enterprise.