

Report of the Housing Task Force

CHANGING THE SUBSIDIZED HOUSING-SYSTEM AND "BANKING LAND"

TO MEET NATIONAL HOUSING NEEDS.

The nation's metropolitan areas consist, generally speaking, of land-poor central cities containing poor families living in substandard, overcrowded housing and land-rich suburbs which exclude housing for these families. The nation's need for at least six million houses for low- and moderate-income families in the next decade will not be met unless major steps are taken to break this impasse -- to build substantial amounts of housing where the vacant land is available.

Suburban enclaves could perhaps be tolerated when they were few in number, when urban population pressures were less, and when urban land was more plentiful. But the rapid increase in restrictive zoning regulations in recent years and the growing scarcity of urban land now greatly reduce the opportunities of low- and moderate-income city dwellers to leave the city for decent shelter and better public and commercial facilities near expanding job opportunities in the suburbs.

Restrictive zoning, high land prices, and the inability of federal programs to operate effectively in suburban areas are major constraints to increasing the supply of low- and moderate-income housing to meet our national needs.

As helpful as the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act may prove to be, it makes no important changes in a system that we know cannot meet our national needs.

The power to place limits on zoning and building code powers of localities rests with the states. Yet there is little pressure within the states to make the necessary changes. Federal block grants to the States, should they be enacted, could be premised on basic reforms by state governments in regard to zoning, building codes and other archaic features of local government. However, our housing situation grows increasingly severe, and action to meet our housing needs cannot wait upon all these desirable reforms.

Accordingly, the Task Force on Housing, Reconstruction and Investment met on July 28, 1969, and resolved that The Urban Coalition move immediately to urge upon the nation and the Federal Government immediate steps to meet this problem.

With the approval of the Executive Committee, the Housing Task Force will draft a program indicating that the Federal Government must exercise a far greater degree of leadership than it has in the past by:

1) Restructuring the upside-down housing subsidies system whereby many localities may ignore the national housing need for low-income families, on the one hand, while those which want to act are entangled in self-defeating regulations, on the other. This system combines the worst disadvantages of decentralization with the worst disadvantages of centralization.

2) Reorganizing the low-rent public housing program to remove the stigma attached to it, and to enable it to perform in a state-wide and regional context in accordance with regional and state-wide housing goals.

3) Empowering the Federal Government to cut through the restraints of restrictive zoning and building codes and inadequate sites by meeting housing needs directly when the states or localities decline to do so.

4) Adopting a massive "land banking" program financed on a revolving-fund basis to enable localities to acquire land in advance of need for public purposes, including low-income housing, in the face of spiraling land costs.