

THE HOUSING CODE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM  
BACKGROUND AND PRESENT SITUATION  
(PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION)

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Following is a brief outline of what has happened thus far in the development process of the Housing Code Compliance Program:

1. The Housing Code Compliance Program, as a requirement of the Workable Program, was first developed in Atlanta in 1963 and approved by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen before submission to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.
2. The Housing Code Compliance Program of 1963 was based on the conditions of housing as set forth in the United States Census of Housing, 1960. The initial program, which was designed to cover the period from 1963 through 1968, has been amended at least twice by the Housing Code Division of the Building Inspector's Office to accommodate changing conditions.
3. The 1963 Housing Code Compliance Program, designed to cover a five-year period, has been completed.
4. In retrospect, the initial Housing Code Compliance Program contained deficiencies, primarily because it represented a first attempt at developing and implementing such a program; secondly, it was based on unreliable secondary information (U. S. Census data); and thirdly, the absence of management information and control systems has inhibited the program's effectiveness.
5. In submitting the Workable Program for 1968, the city realized a new Housing Code Compliance Program would have to be developed. The Workable Program text conceded this necessity.
6. In October, 1968, the Department of Housing and Urban Development recertified the city's Workable Program. However, this recertification expires October 1, 1969, and, in its letter of review comments, HUD said it would expect the city to submit a new Housing Code Compliance Program with the submission of the 1969 Workable Program. HUD also made comments relative to the administration and enforcement of the Housing Code Compliance Program.
7. Since the summer of 1968, the Planning Department, the Housing Code Division of the Building Inspector's Office and the Mayor's Office have worked toward developing a new Housing Code Compliance Program. The new program is based on the 1965 city-wide housing conditions survey undertaken as part of the Community Improvement Program. The priority areas for concentrated inspections in the new program coincide with the priority areas established in the Community Improvement Program.
8. The approach of the new program has created problems. The Housing Code Division points out that the Community Improvement Program priorities, if adopted will send inspection teams back into areas in which inspections have just been made. The Planning Department points out the absence of any yardstick with which to measure qualitative levels of accomplishment in various areas inspected.



9. The present dilemma is that an acceptable new Housing Code Compliance Program must be developed and adopted by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen prerequisite to recertification of the city's 1969 Workable Program.

At question is the desirability of developing a new Housing Code Compliance Program and, thereby, continuing the city's Workable Program. Although this question may appear facetious, it is not intended to be. Should the city's Workable Program be continued? Should a new Housing Code Compliance Program be developed? If the decision is to continue the Workable Program and to create a new Housing Code Compliance Program, certain problems must be dealt with:

1. Classification of substandard dwelling units must be standardized and accepted by all agencies involved with the program, including local, state, and federal governmental agencies. Examples of terms that must have standardized and acceptable definitions are: structure, housing unit, standard, and substandard, and these classifications of substandard: minor deterioration, major deterioration, and dilapidated. Standardizing these terms will eliminate conflict and misunderstanding among the Housing Code Division, the Building Inspector's Office, the Planning Department, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Atlanta Housing Authority, and the Mayor and Board of Aldermen.
2. Up-to-date, comprehensive data on the conditions of structures throughout the city must be obtained. This information must adequately define current housing conditions.
3. A qualitative means of measuring the effectiveness of the Housing Code Compliance Program must be devised. Currently, after the Housing Code Inspectors have allegedly completed work in a neighborhood, there is no way to judge improved housing conditions compared to the original condition of housing. A "before-and-after" comparison needs to be made in each neighborhood.
4. Priority determinations concerning areas to be inspected must be made, and must complement and support other public programs in the area.

Possible approaches to the above problems are set forth below. Decisions in each area must be made in order to develop the new Housing Code Compliance Program:

1. Standardization of terms and definitions. This can be achieved through close cooperation among the individuals and groups involved. A series of meetings involving the Housing Code Division, the Building Inspector's Office, the Planning Department, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Atlanta Housing Authority should be established in which terminology is standardized, defined, and agreed upon. A means of expediting the meetings is for one group, probably the Planning Department, to work up a series of definitions and present them to the collected departments and agencies. Additions, corrections, and deletions to these definitions can be discussed at the meeting, after which, the Planning Department can revise the definitions according to the suggestions offered. A two to three week time limit should be set for accomplishing this work task.



The Planning Department is willing to prepare the initial draft to present to the assemblage.

2. Up-to-date, comprehensive data on the conditions of structures throughout the city. This data is absolutely essential and can best be obtained by conducting a city-wide survey of housing conditions along the line of the 1965 survey conducted by the 1965 Community Improvement Program. This survey must be undertaken because (1) U. S. Census of Housing data on building conditions will no longer be available, and (2) the 1965 CIP field survey information has not been kept current. Procedures for undertaking a new survey are readily available, but a problem exists in selecting personnel to carry out the survey. There are three separate possibilities for selecting personnel:

- a. Use college students as was done in the 1965 CIP survey.
- b. Use the Housing Code Compliance Program inspectors themselves.
- c. Use a combination of the first two.

The Planning Department feels that the second alternative, using inspectors to make the survey, is best because of the lack of available college students at this time of year, and further because the inspectors are most familiar with the city and with building conditions.

Once the data is gathered, keeping it up-to-date and usable is a related problem. The Data Processing Division of the city can be of value in solving this problem, if this item is given a higher priority than in the past. The information can be kept on file in the computer and updated periodically. Until this is accomplished, it will be necessary for the city to undertake periodic city-wide surveys of building conditions.

3. Establishing a qualitative means of measuring the effectiveness of the program. This may be the most difficult of the problems to overcome. The Management and Systems Division of the Finance Department can possibly be of assistance in this area. A system should be devised to determine:

- a. the effectiveness of the inspections and
- b. the overall achievements of the program.

To devise such a system, the successes must be quantified so that they can be measured in some meaningful manner. At present, the only people who profess to understand the system in use are Housing Code Division personnel. An efficient system will determine program effectiveness, personnel performance, and management needs.



4. Determining priorities. Areas to receive priority can be determined in several ways:

- a. The areas with the most substandard dwelling units, or with the highest percentage of substandard units, can be inspected first.
- b. The areas without appreciable blight or deterioration, but which are located on the edge of slum areas can be inspected first, hoping to contain the blight.
- c. A combination of the first two: inspecting, at the same time, the city's worst slums and the fringe areas around them, which are presently standard.
- d. Follow the guidelines as used in the Community Improvement Program, taking into account the following factors:
  - (1) Social Implications - areas in which programs for improvement are presently needed to supplement social action agency programs.
  - (2) Resource Areas - where better utilization of land might relieve present pressure for land resources.
  - (3) Relationship to Public Programs - where the potential extended public benefits from these programs may be lost if not early housing rehabilitation action is taken.
  - (4) Planning Objectives - where the existing pattern of development is such that, without early action, implementation of housing recommendations at a later date would be difficult or impossible.
  - (5) Areas Characterized by Change - where early action is needed to stabilize sound housing which may suffer rapid deterioration without such action.

There are, perhaps, other alternatives for devising priorities which have additional merit, but of the alternatives listed, the Planning Department feels that the fourth (following CIP guidelines) is preferable.