

May 12, 1967

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A regular meeting of the Urban Renewal Policy Committee was held on Friday, May 12, 1967, at 10:00 A. M. at the Atlanta Housing Authority, 824 Hurt Building.

All members were present as follows:

Mr. Rodney M. Cook, Chairman  
Mr. Edwin L. Sterne  
Mr. Hugh Pierce  
Mr. E. Gregory Griggs  
Mr. John M. Flanigen  
Mr. George Cotsakis  
Mr. Frank Etheridge

Also present were:

Mr. Collier Gladin, Planning Director, City of Atlanta  
Mr. George Aldridge, Director, Community Improvement Program  
Mr. Jim Kluttz, Atlanta Planning Department  
Mr. Robert Sommerville, Executive Director, Atlanta Transit Company  
Mr. M. B. Satterfield, Executive Director, Atlanta Housing Authority  
Mr. Les Persells, Director of Redevelopment, Atlanta Housing Authority  
Mr. Howard Openshaw, Chief, Planning-Engineering Department, Atlanta Housing Authority  
Mr. James Henley, Atlanta Housing Authority  
Mr. Byron Attridge and Mr. Lynn Hewes, King & Spalding, Attorneys  
Mr. Jack Glenn and Mr. J. B. Blayton, Members, Board of Commissioners, Atlanta Housing Authority

Chairman Cook called the meeting to order and explained the purpose of this meeting is to hear a presentation from Alderman Q. V. Williamson relative to the Rockdale Urban Renewal Project Area. While awaiting his arrival, the committee considered scheduling of dates for the developer's presentations on 7.6 acres in the Rawson-Washington Project Area, scheduled for 221(d)(3) development. It was unanimously decided to hear from all developers who had submitted bids on Wednesday, May 31, 1967, beginning at 3:00 P. M. It was also agreed that each developer would be given a fifteen minute presentation period, with fifteen minutes allowed for questions and answers. Each committee member was presented with a synopsis of each proposal for review. Mr. Persells also reported that developer's presentations had been held on Parcel 73 in the University Center Project Area.

At this time, Alderman Williamson arrived at the meeting along with Senator Leroy R. Johnson and representatives of various Negro organizations.

Chairman Cook stated that a few days ago certain charges were made to him concerning the Rockdale Project which he felt was of a serious nature and should be presented to this committee for consideration and disposition as it sees fit. He then turned the meeting over to Mr. Williamson.

Alderman Williamson stated he had discussed this matter with the Mayor on



Wednesday; that he had also met with members of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference, the NAACP, Operation Breadbasket, Atlanta Voters League and other organizations that are terribly concerned about urban renewal in Atlanta because "Negroes have gotten nothing but the brunt of being kicked off the land"; that they have not been allowed to participate in urban renewal at any level and have not been allowed jobs nor investments in urban renewal property; that the only land Negroes have gotten out of urban renewal was land the colleges bought which "they paid for out of the nose and paid more than anyone else paid for similar urban renewal land"; that the Wheat Street Baptist Church is a prime example - they paid twice what the land was worth for the (d)(3) development they erected on it, to the extent that the project was almost economically unfeasible.

Mr. Cook stated that some statements already made by Alderman Williamson do not coincide with the facts and he asked Mr. Persells if he cared to respond.

Senator Johnson asked that they be allowed to state their position, after which they would be happy to answer any questions or clarify any statements, but to interrupt with questions during the presentation breaks the continuity of thought.

Mr. Williamson continued to state that after analyzing urban renewal in Atlanta for the past ten to twelve years, taking into account "what goes on" at the Atlanta Housing Authority, particularly in public housing, these organizations wonder if Atlanta shouldn't get out of the urban renewal business; that Atlanta must let Negroes participate and become a part of urban renewal if it is to survive. He stated that Negroes also have serious problems with existing public housing and these organizations also wonder if Negroes wouldn't be better off living in slums on their own land than in some of the public housing in Atlanta. He cited the Egan Homes as an example and briefly discussed some of the deplorable conditions existing in this project, such as roach and rodent infestations and the Authority's refusal to exterminate the premises and denying the tenants the right to do so at their own expense. He emphasized the city requires private owners to do this. Other problems he mentioned were that tenants were not allowed to have a telephone extension upstairs and entry ways to the apartments are recessed and do not have adequate lighting; a case of rape was cited as being attributable to this. He stated further that tenants are reluctant to complain for fear of being evicted by the management; that these tenants, in many instances, rather than live in this project under bondage, would be better off in slums with freedom. He went on to say that the case at point is that this is the type of thing urban renewal and public housing is producing in Atlanta and it must be stopped. As to the question of Rockdale, he stated that two years ago a group of Negroes began initial efforts to organize this community and develop support of area residents for a plan for Rockdale; subsequently, a community organization was formed and working with the Atlanta Housing Authority, assembled a proposed plan for Rockdale according to their rules and regulations. He stated that proposals by three other developers were also submitted, two of which were later disqualified because they did not abide by the rules of bidding; however, two weeks later, following a meeting of the Housing Authority's



Board of Commissioners and passage of a resolution by them, these same two plans were reinstated, notwithstanding their previous disqualifications, and that this is the basis of their complaint. After this, Mr. Williamson stated it is his understanding from sources that he can secure information from that the Housing Authority narrowed the consideration to two top plans - the Douglas-Arlen and Rosen proposals - and he was told by staff members of the Authority that both of them were about equal, but when he receives information that somehow plans can be reinstated that do not meet the bid proposals of the Authority, then the Douglas-Arlen group knows they are at a disadvantage; that it is the same old routine of urban renewal - Negroes aren't allowed to participate because the Douglas-Arlen group has Negro participation, even though Rockdale is a Negro community and will serve Negroes. He stated all they are asking is that the plans be judged on merit and where the Douglas-Arlen plan is as meritorious as any of the others, and Rockdale being a Negro community, it should be given to Negroes; that if Negroes can't participate in urban renewal at all levels, then the City Fathers should leave them in the slums, rather than uproot them and take their property; that the time has come when he felt this needed to be said publicly.

In reply to questioning by Chairman Cook, Mr. Williamson named the Rosen and Chruckrow proposals as being the two which were disqualified and then reinstated. He then called on Senator Johnson to speak.

Mr. Johnson stated he felt this matter was of enough importance and seriousness that he had interrupted a speaking engagement in California to return to Atlanta today for this meeting; that because of his absence from the city he had not had an opportunity to prepare for the meeting as he should have. He then stated "I believe with all my heart and soul that we have been discriminated against because we are Negroes and that if we were not black, we would have been awarded the Rockdale Project". He then explained that he drew the charter of the Rockdale community organization and they began working on a plan for the area long before the bidding was opened; that they were successful in securing a sponsor, builder and architect and eventually a plan was submitted to the Housing Authority according to the bid proposals. He stated further that after so doing and while waiting on a decision, and believing in the operation of democracy, they were informed that political influence was being used to get the Rosen plan approved; that he immediately began to investigate and pose questions, among others, as to why the two proposals which were disqualified were reinstated; that the foremost thought in the Negroes' minds at this time was "you folks happen to be of the wrong hue and you are not going to get it"; that they were told by the Housing Authority, as stated by Alderman Williamson, both proposals were good and assuming this is so, then he felt it incumbent on the City Fathers to "bend over backwards" to award the development to a Negro group, composed of Negro architects, lawyers, real estate brokers and builders, who are locally based and have a vested interest in the heart of a Negro community and will represent Negro people who were moved from the area and will probably move back when housing is available. He also noted that Rockdale is in the heart of his senatorial district and Alderman Williamson's third ward. Senator Johnson stated further that it greatly disturbs them that on the one hand they have been told by members of this committee that no decision has been made and



on the other hand he gets a call in California saying the Rosen plan had already been sent to FHA by the Housing Authority and he submitted this is a serious matter. He further commented that after talking with members of FHA and persons already engaged in 221 programs, it is his understanding that even if their plan was submitted to FHA, it would be altered before being returned; that you never get plans back from FHA exactly like they are submitted. He cited as an example the Allen Temple Project. He went on to say they had also been told Negroes had never built anything this big; that the time wasn't right and there was a question of the ability of the Union Baptist Church to administer the project since they had no previous experience. Senator Johnson stated their position here in the 1960's, whether it is immediately managing or selling, is to do right; that most of the reasons cited against their proposal are not meritorious arguments since the project would be Federally regulated anyway. He again cited Allen Temple as an example. He then concluded by stating that all they are seeking is "a fair shake of the dice and don't deny us because we are black"; that they feel there is rank discrimination somewhere in the Rockdale project and they are asking this committee to right it.

Mr. Cook asked Mr. Johnson who told him they would not get this project because they were Negroes.

Mr. Johnson replied "Mr. Cook you know that I cannot reveal my source of information anymore than you could, but as surely as there is a God in Heaven I, and we, have been told we would not get this project because we are black". Mr. Johnson did say that his source of information had the contacts to know whereof he speaks.

At this time, Chairman Cook and Mr. Gladin excused themselves from the meeting to keep a previous appointment in the Mayor's office. They did not return during the remainder of the meeting, although they had hoped to. Mr. Griggs presided as Chairman during the rest of the meeting.

Reverend Sam Williams then addressed the committee briefly on three points: (1) that so much time has to be spent by Negroes keeping vigil to see that even token justice is done; (2) the cruelty of denying Negroes because of historic disabilities imposed upon them which they themselves did not place upon their shoulders; and (3) the fact that Negroes should be allowed to share in the financial rewards flowing from urban renewal. Reverend Williams also stated he was personally familiar with the Eagan Homes situation because a member of his congregation lived there and he agreed these things must be corrected.

Reverend Grier, representing Operation Breadbasket and a group of ministers, and Reverend Dorsey of Operation Breadbasket, both endorsed the remarks of Alderman Williamson, Senator Johnson and Reverend Williams.

Mr. Griggs assured Messrs. Williamson and Johnson that it is of great concern to members of this committee that the charge of racial discrimination in Rockdale has been made.

Mr. Cotsakis then stated he had to leave the meeting on a previous commitment, but before departing he stated for the record that in all the meetings of the



Policy Committee he had participated in he had never heard the word Negro mentioned, nor had he received any indication of racial discrimination as far as any particular project is concerned.

Senator Johnson commented "you don't have to say the word to do the act".

Mr. Persells then responded to the charges as follows:

As to no participation on the part of Negroes in planning, he stated there was a considerable period of time when there was little, if any, participation in urban renewal planning by whites or Negroes; that the planning and action that went on took place at the official level and the participation of the community at large was extremely limited; that only within the last two to four years were people outside of officials really brought into planning in urban renewal to the extent of actual participation. The first effort at involving participation on the part of persons living in the project area took place in the West End Project through a Citizens Advisory Committee, which still functions. The second effort took place when the Buttermilk Bottoms - North Avenue Project (which was combined with Bedford-Pine) was initiated; the citizens residing in the project area formed an organization called "URESCUE" which, from that day forward, actively and fully participated in every planning decision affecting the area; that this organization has had a profound effect on the urban renewal plan for this area and he expected it to continue to do so.

Mr. Persells commented further that at some point you have to develop a basis for discussion; in the case of Rockdale the people were moved, the land cleared and then came the question of utilization of the land; that it was determined many years ago that Rockdale would be used for schools, playgrounds and residences, with an incidental possibility of furnishing a service shopping area for the 1500 families that would live in the area. The allocation of 1500 units was based on a limitation on sewers, documented by the Sewer Department. Mr. Persells stated further the initial concept was for single family residences, however, this was never possible, topographically or financially.

Mr. Persells said further that for a long time prior to this there was, in Atlanta, a growing consciousness of the importance of good urban design, one reason being there had been several illustrations of awards made on a flat dollar system where the redevelopments had not been too good, so it was ultimately determined that in multi-family developments it would be desirable to make the offerings at a fixed land price and award the bid based on competitive design criteria; that a prime reason for this change in policy was to avoid the type of problem mentioned by Mr. Williamson where Wheat Street Baptist Church overbid on the land. He stated this was a very unfortunate situation but could not have been avoided at that time with the existing laws. In adopting the fixed land price system, Mr. Persells stated an elaborate procedure was established to insure that awards would be on the basis of design criteria and not political or other factors. This procedure involved staff reviews and recommendations, oral presentations by developers and recommendations from experts in the field of planning, architecture and housing.



This procedure was followed in the case of Rockdale. These recommendations were then presented to the Urban Renewal Policy Committee who spent in excess of five hours evaluating the four proposals. The proposals were then presented to the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority and they discussed them very carefully, however, no decision has been made by them.

At this point, Mr. Persells commented that no one had attempted to influence him in this matter or contacted him about it except Mr. Williamson and Mr. Johnson; that when they visited his office he advised them at that time that he was a staff member, not a decision or policy maker, and he would be remiss in his duty if the staff had influence on policy to the extent that it was an overriding factor, rather than a recommendation, and such was not the case with Rockdale.

Mr. Persells commented on the statement that Negroes do not hold responsible jobs in urban renewal, or they hold low type jobs. He stated this is simply not an accurate statement; that there are a number of Negro people involved in urban renewal at high and low levels and their jobs are open for inspection; that there are vacant jobs which are yet to be filled and when qualified Negro people can be found, who are willing to accept the job at the salary it carries, he would personally recommend them for employment.

As to the allegation, by implication or direct statement, that there had been no previous land purchases involving Negroes and the question of the Negro colleges paying more for urban renewal land than anyone else, Mr. Persells said that prior to Rockdale, awards were strictly on the basis of the highest bidder, with some consideration given to design factors, and he could recall only two instances when awards were made other than to the high bidder and these had clear-cut reasons which had nothing to do with the question of race; that there have been several instances where Negroes have been successful bidders, for example, Citizens Trust Company; further, at the time the University Center Urban Renewal Project was being planned, it appeared that it would be impossible to finance a project of the size desired by the colleges and so the colleges, in order to make the project feasible and secure the land, agreed to pay \$40,000 an acre; that he had never heard them complain about this; that Wheat Street Gardens, again, was an unfortunate set of circumstances, but they related to the time and situation as it was then; that based on his experience, the Negro colleges would have paid more for the land without the benefit of the urban renewal project. Mr. Persells did not comment on the public housing, except to say the things mentioned in regard to Eagan Homes are not wholly accurate and do not fairly represent the situation as it is.

He then made brief concluding comments on several other points raised by Messrs. Williamson and Johnson. He stated there had been an assumption made that the two proposals mentioned (Douglas-Arlen and Rosen) were equal, but he could assure everyone that when a decision is reached, it will be because the two were not equal. They had also assumed that the Rosen proposal does not involve Negro participation, but Mr. Persells stated they might well include local Negro participation, just as Douglas-Arlen does; that the Rosen group has agreed to "spin off" portions of the total development, in the same manner as



the Douglas-Arlen group anticipated spinning off the whole of the project, to a non-profit organization, however, Rosen was explicit in his desire to retain control of the development. As to the capability of the Union Baptist Church to carry out a project of this magnitude, Mr. Persells stated that to let this be the governing factor in the decision would be wrong; that the assumption has to be made that such an organization would employ professionally skilled people who could assist them in management activities. As to the Rosen proposal being submitted to FHA, Mr. Persells stated it was submitted to FHA for a preliminary review to determine if it was acceptable to FHA without having to make major changes; if it had been returned, another proposal would have been submitted to them; further, it is not accurate to say that plans will not be developed as submitted to FHA because they will change them; that if this were true, competitions would not be held; that while minor changes might be suggested because of topographic conditions or other reasons, it does not mean the basic concept or layout of the development would be altered.

As to Negroes sharing in the financial rewards of urban renewal, Mr. Persells stated the bulk of the financial rewards which would accrue to Negroes or whites would be in the development stage; after the structures are built, it lies with the continuing management.

Mr. Persells concluded by saying that he hoped they could continue to operate without regard to race, creed or color and involve the community as a whole in planning activities oriented to urban renewal projects; that we should not condemn ourselves by past mistakes, but profit from them and move forward.

There were then questions and answers.

Mr. Glenn stated he was the newest member of the Board of Commissioners and in the meetings he had attended race had never been mentioned and to his knowledge no decision had been made on Rockdale. He pointedly asked "has a decision been made and was race an issue?"

Mr. Griggs stated the Policy Committee had made a recommendation to the Atlanta Housing Authority and race was not an issue; that no decision has been made yet by the Authority.

Mr. Pierce stated he would like it clarified about the charge of reinstating disqualified plans.

Mr. Persells explained that at no time were any of the four proposals set aside; that in their initial review of the proposals, which is to determine if they are in proper order to be accepted, they did discover minor technicalities in the Rosen and Chruckrow proposals. The Rosen proposal did not submit a bid bond, nor a total development cost, although sufficient information was available to arrive at this figure. The Chruckrow proposal failed to meet the exact specifications with respect to their drawings, however, after consultations with the Authority's legal counsel, it was felt these were merely minor irregularities and not sufficient reasons for rejecting the proposals since these irregularities did not affect any of the design criteria; consequently, the Board of Commissioners,



under the provisions of the offering, waived these irregularities, but up to this point there was no consideration given to the proposals on the basis of merit and they were under constant review and still are. As a result of this situation Mr. Persells stated it was determined that the wording in the offering was too ambiguous and subsequently an addendum to the offering was made, setting forth in greater detail the specifications for bidding.

Mr. Pierce asked if any of these exceptions were ever mentioned at the Policy meetings, to which Mr. Persells answered negatively, explaining that it was felt this was a responsibility of the Board of Commissioners, whose meetings are a matter of public record.

Mr. Williamson contended that if the Douglas-Arlen group had not "dotted every 'i' and crossed every 't' they would be out of the ball game".

Mr. Johnson stated it was their understanding the Policy Committee would make a recommendation to the Housing Authority, who would be responsible for making the final decision, but since a recommendation from the Policy Committee is tantamount to approval by the Authority, they felt it was their responsibility to discuss the matter with the Policy Committee and they are here today because they thought no decision had been made. Mr. Johnson stated further that he and Mr. Williamson visited Mr. Cook in his office and were told that a decision had been made by the Policy Committee and Mr. Cook suggested they see Mr. Persells; that they did visit with Mr. Persells who, in turn, suggested they take the matter up with the other members of the Policy Committee, resulting in today's meeting. He also mentioned that when Alderman Cotsakis left the meeting, he said he would not return to the meeting to vote because this Committee had already made a recommendation; that if this is the case, then everything said today has been to no avail. He said further that the Housing Authority permits a laxity of rules for some and requires others to "toe the mark" and this is where discrimination begins. He submitted that if the Douglas-Arlen group had not submitted a performance bond, they would have been eliminated.

Mr. Williamson asked when must the Housing Authority publicize its decision.

Mr. Persells stated not later than Monday.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Griggs thanked everyone for appearing and the Committee then went into Executive Session.

In Executive Session, Mr. Sterne commented that the Policy Committee, after studying the four proposals very carefully, and after having the benefit of written recommendations from the experts, did make a recommendation and the final decision rests with the Housing Authority; that there is some merit to the statement that generally speaking the Board of Commissioners tends to follow the recommendation of the Policy Committee; that while he is aware of the Senator's explanation of the insidious way the race issue comes up, he could truthfully say it never entered his mind at any of the briefings or meetings he attended.



BOORUM & PEASE "NO"

BOORUM & PEASE "NOTAR" ®

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Mr. Griggs stated he was "dumfounded" when Mr. Williamson and Senator Johnson came to his office and made the charges they did; that he was completely unaware of any racial prejudice connected with Rockdale.

Mr. Persells stated the bids were opened legally on March 15 and the Housing Authority is obligated to reach a decision and notify the successful bidder within 60 days, after which they have 10 days to sign the contract documents.

In answer to questioning by Mr. Griggs, Mr. Persells stated the Board of Commissioners will have all four proposals before them at the meeting, with a favorable recommendation from the Policy Committee on the Rosen proposal.

Mr. Pierce recalled that he had to leave the meeting of April 25, 1967, at which the four proposals were discussed, prior to its conclusion and at the time of his departure, advised the Chairman that up to that point, he favored the Rosen plan, based on the plans he had seen and the recommendations that had been given it by the various experts; however, he stated that at that time he was not aware of the exceptions which were made, or the question of the race issue, and he requested that if the Chairman did vote favorable for him, that it be stricken from the record.

Mr. Sterne, also being a member of the Board of Commissioners, stated he wanted to make it clear that the waivers which were granted took place prior to any hearings and it was afterwards that the detailed presentations were made on all four proposals.

After other brief discussion, the Acting Chairman stated that if today's presentations had altered the position of any committee member, he would entertain a motion to reconsider the matter.

Mr. Pierce so moved and simultaneously moved that the Douglas-Arlen proposal be approved. These motions died for the lack of a second.

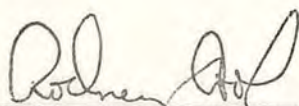
The Acting Chairman then entertained a motion to reaffirm the previous decision of the committee.

Motion was made and seconded by Messrs. Sterne and Flanigen that acceptance of the Rosen proposal be reaffirmed, said motion being adopted by majority vote, with Alderman Pierce voting adversely.

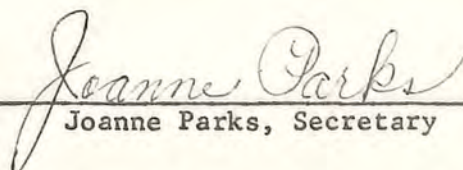
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Approved:

Respectfully submitted:



Rodney Cook, Chairman



Joanne Parks, Secretary