Architecture in Government Housing

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Acknowledgements

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In 1930, FDR's New Deal was in full swing, aiming to provide relief, recovery, and reform. The government played a significant role in these efforts through various programs and initiatives. The image below is a photograph of a document outlining one such initiative, which was designed to support small farmers and homesteaders.

The document highlights the need for federal assistance to aid in the transition from small-scale to larger-scale agriculture. It stresses the importance of supporting farmers who are facing economic challenges and highlights the benefits of collective action, such as cooperative marketing and production, to help these farmers stabilize their incomes and improve their living conditions.

The New Deal program referred to in the image aimed to provide incentives for farmers to adopt new technologies and practices, as well as to encourage the consolidation of small farms into larger, more efficient units. This approach was seen as a way to increase agricultural productivity and boost the nation's economy during a time of economic hardship.
work cannot continue much longer on a temporary opportunist basis. And the U. S. Housing Bill, which would remove many legal uncertainties and set up housing on a permanent basis, will probably fail of enactment at this session of Congress. It is not on the President’s "must" list.

Likewise, although a serious attempt to develop modern planning techniques and standards of neighborhood design has been made by the P.W.A. and Resettlement, certain other Federal agencies are among the bitterest enemies of these experiments. One of the so-called "housing" agencies provides Federal assistance to promote the same old type of speculative subdivision which is responsible in large measure for present slums and blighted areas.

All we have to go on, in short, is a few more or less accidental housing projects. As yet there is no national housing policy or program.

We have achieved one thing in the past four years. We have begun to realize that "housing" is a very complex problem, which cuts across almost as many fields as there are special interests and viewpoints in our society. The economic fact that most families do not have enough income to pay a profitable rental for a decent new dwelling; the industrial fact that unemployment is still high in the building trades, while the housing shortage mounts; the social fact that slum living conditions are prevalent in cities and open country; the technical fact that we know how to build a better human environment; the cultural fact that a housing movement would provide the one great opportunity for a real modern architecture, as it already has done in many European countries; the political fact that an effective housing program can be put through only by organized pressure and vigilance...not one of these facets of the housing problem can be neglected.

But this exhibition is not a presumptuous one. It does not aim to present the problem in toto, or analyse administrative solutions. The emphasis here is entirely on concrete examples of new construction which may be of vast significance in the future not only of our architecture, but of our entire environment. And it may well be worth while to interrupt the abstract arguments and political jockeying with this simple reminder that a housing movement must eventually be judged by its houses and not by its theories.

Catherine Bauer
Correction Page
Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division

The Housing Division of the Public Works Administration was created in July 1930 and $125,000,000 was set aside for slum clearance and low-cost housing. Limited dividend corporation applications were the first projects to be considered. Only a few of the hundreds submitted were found to satisfy the requirements of low rent, good planning and slum clearance, the objectives of the program. The Division then turned to the alternative of public projects.

By the end of 1934 the Division was proceeding with actual plans and commitments totaling $143,728,000 officially allotted to projects when in December $110,000,000 of this amount was impounded to finance direct relief. There remained only $33,728,000 with which to carry out projects already planned to utilize the full amount. Uncertainty about appropriations continued until April 1935 when Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, allocating $450,000,000 to urban housing. As this action did not constitute authority for immediate action, it was not until June that the Division was able to proceed. Again in 1935 its program was cut because of relief policies from 144 projects totaling $380,000,000 to 37 projects totaling $100,200,000 in addition to 7 projects financed by the original PWA funds already under weigh.

After many readjustments and difficulties, the program now is being vigorously pushed ahead. At present a total of 49 projects in 35 cities in the United States and in two of its insular possessions are now in active construction. Approximately 25,000 families of the low income group will be housed and direct employment provided for about 50,000 building workers. Seven housing developments erected by limited dividend corporations and operating on PWA loans and under Division supervision are now occupied.

The information above was drawn from the December 1935 Bulletin of the National Association of Housing Officials and the report of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division, 1936.
The Executive Division of the Public Works Administration was created in July 1933 to administer the
Federal Works Administration, and to coordinate public works
projects and activities. The Executive Division was responsible for
overseeing and coordinating the activities of the various
Federal agencies involved in the administration of public
works programs.

In the early months of 1934, the Division was responsible for
overseeing the establishment of the Federal Emergency
Relief Administration (FERA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA). The FERA was
established to provide relief to unemployed workers, while the PWA was created to finance and
administer public works projects.

The Division was also responsible for the coordination of
Federal and state efforts in the construction of public works projects. This included the
coordination of funding, the issuance of guidelines, and the oversight of project
implementation.

The Executive Division was abolished in 1935, and its functions were
transferred to the Bureau of Public Works Administration.

A project to house 317 Negro families of low income. The site was chosen for its proximity to market, school, recreation facilities and hospital. The buildings will be two story flats, group houses and three story apartments.

Exhibits
Model of development
Perspective view
Typical living units and social rooms
Map showing location of site

2. Cedar Central, Cleveland, Ohio. W. R. McCornack, architect.

A development of three story houses to house 654 low income families. The previous density of population was 67 persons per acre. The new buildings will house 120 persons per acre but by orderly planning will provide increased light, air and recreation grounds.

Exhibits
Site before demolition vs. site as planned
Night view of facade


Foundations are being laid for this low cost housing development which will cover an area of approximately 10 city blocks. The development will consist of 4 super-blocks, each of which will be surrounded by a park area. Each super-block will include a social room, nursery school and two play grounds. Neighborhood stores are also included in the plan. 1614 families will be housed in two, three, four and five room apartments.

Exhibits
Perspective rendering
Facade
Details
Plan of typical building: basement, first floor and typical floor
Site plan
Photographs of site before and after
Map showing Williamsburg in relation to New York

The first project started by the Housing Division, it houses 284 families in two and one half, four and five room apartments. It is a limited dividend corporation organized by the American Federation of Hosiery Workers. Rentals are not, however, limited to hosiery workers only and the aim of the management is that the majority of tenants form a cross section of the industrial population of Northeast Philadelphia. Rental includes electric light and refrigeration, heat and use of laundry. For the kindergarten and swimming pool nominal fees of 5¢ are charged. The average rental is $9.35 per room per month. It was ready for occupancy January 1, 1935.

Exhibits
View from swimming pool
Detail of houses
View toward pool
General view
Bath house
Site plan
Plans


Westfield Acres is a Federal Housing Development financed entirely by the Federal Government. It is sponsored by the Camden Labor Housing Committee, a committee in which all organized labor, i.e. the American Federation of Labor and Industrial Unions are represented. It will house 598 families in three, four and five room apartments.

Exhibits
Facade renderings
Plans
Model of development
Suburban Resettlement is a division of the Resettlement Administration. This Administration, like the Public Works Administration, was created under the Emergency Relief Act. Unlike the Housing Division, however, Resettlement is set up to do its own building and has a construction division. Its objectives, as stated by J. S. Lansill, Director, are:

(a) to secure a large tract of land and thus avoid the complications ordinarily due to diverse ownerships;

(b) in this tract to create a community, protected by an encircling green belt upon which there will be no building;

(c) to design a community for people of predominantly low income, and so arranged and administered as to encourage that kind of community and family life which will be better than they now enjoy;

(d) the dwellings and the land upon which they are located to be held in one ownership, preferably a corporation to which the Federal Government will transfer title, which corporation will rent the dwellings and not sell them;

(e) to set up a municipal government in character with such governments now existing or possible in that region;

(f) to provide those public services of educational and other character which the community will require;

(g) to accomplish these purposes in such a way that the community may be a tax paying participant in the region, that extravagant outlays from the individual family income will not be necessary, and that the rents will be suitable to families of modest income; and,

(h) concurrently with these efforts to develop a land use plan for the entire tract, and under the direction of the Administrator, to devise a system of rural economy coordinated with the land use plan for the rural portions of the tract surrounding the Suburban community, and to integrate both the physical plans and the economies of the rural area and the Suburban community.

Four complete towns, each with its protective greenbelt of small farms, parks and gardens, are being built with relief labor by the Resettlement Administration. They are near Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and Bound Brook, New Jersey.
To become a true force of land and fur farmers:

(a) To create a farmstead and to acquire farmland.

(b) To establish a community to ensure a cooperative process.

(c) To form a community for people of the neighborhood, to

(d) To create a community for people of the neighborhood, to ensure

(e) To ensure a community for people of the neighborhood, to ensure

(f) To ensure a community for people of the neighborhood, to ensure

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A town for garment workers to be completed September 1, 1936. A cooperative holding corporation will purchase the project from the Government and through supervised management will operate the community until the full amount is amortized. Several subsidiary cooperatives are already being organized.

Exhibits
Map showing location of project in relation to marketing centers and transportation facilities
Map of town site, farm area and woodland
Town plan
Rendering: one story house, foreground study
Rendering: one story house, background study
Rendering: two story house, in perspective
Rendering: Swimming pool
Rendering: Community Center
Plans
Model of development


The total area contemplated for this project was 3,900 acres for the town site and agricultural belt. Of this 125 acres was the approximate area of the first unit to be built for 750 families, but planned for an ultimate population of 5,000. The dwelling units are one, two, three and four bedroom houses in groups of two to six, a few single family one story houses, a small percentage of flats and one three story apartment house. Orientation was given great consideration so that in general all major bedrooms and living rooms face park areas rather than streets and receive as much sunlight as possible. The population was to be drawn from the surrounding industrial towns, the income range being probably between $900 and $1500 a year. A town center for the first unit was planned to take care of eventual growth. The final use of the agricultural belt would probably have included a cooperative farming system.

Exhibits
Map showing relation to adjacent centers
Map showing relation to New York
Panorama
Business center
Renderings and plans of one story house
Model of double house by Henry Churchill
Plans
Model of double house by Albert Mayer
Plans
EXPERIENCE

The need for increased attention to the welfare of the rural community and the need for more efficient and effective methods of community organization and the need for a more comprehensive approach to the rural community problems have led to the development of the Rural Community Organization Program. The purpose of this program is to provide a framework for the development of a comprehensive rural community organization that will be able to deal effectively with the problems of rural communities. The program is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the specific needs of each community, and it is intended to be a cooperative effort involving the participation of local residents, community organizations, and government agencies.

G. Organization, New York State, New Jersey, and Other States

The Rural Community Organization Program is being developed in collaboration with organizations in New York State, New Jersey, and other states. The goals of these organizations are to promote the development of rural community organizations that will be able to address the needs of rural communities in their respective states. The program is intended to be a model for similar efforts in other states, and it is hoped that other states will be able to adopt the principles and practices of the Rural Community Organization Program in their own communities.

Conclusion

The Rural Community Organization Program is an exciting and important development in the field of rural community organization. It is designed to provide a comprehensive approach to the problems of rural communities, and it is intended to be a cooperative effort involving the participation of local residents, community organizations, and government agencies. The program is intended to be a model for similar efforts in other states, and it is hoped that other states will be able to adopt the principles and practices of the Rural Community Organization Program in their own communities.