

SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT

**REBUILDING
PROVIDENCE
1953**

PROVIDENCE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

TO THE CITY COUNCIL
AND THE CITIZENS OF PROVIDENCE . . .

This report describes the continuing emphasis being placed on slum prevention measures by the Redevelopment Agency, for the problems of blight must be met by positive steps to prevent blight and to improve entire neighborhoods as well as by the clearance of areas already blighted.

This report also outlines the progress made during 1953 in three redevelopment project areas that have been approved by the City Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Chester R. Martin
Morris S. Waldman
Albert Harkness
Edmund M. Mauro
Timothy A. Purcell

IN CITY COUNCIL

JUL 1 - 1954

READ:

WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

D. Everett Whelan
CLERK

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The Providence Redevelopment Agency is a relatively new agency of city government. The Providence City Council established it in December 1946 under a State Act, the Community Redevelopment Act of 1946, to help carry out a policy of the State of Rhode Island. That policy, as stated in the law, is to protect and promote the health, safety, and welfare of the people of the state and particularly of the people of the communities of the state in which slum blighted areas and arrested blighted areas are found to exist. The City Council found these conditions to exist in Providence.

The Redevelopment Agency consists of five residents of the City of Providence, one appointed each year by the Mayor for a five-year term, all to serve without pay:

Chester R. Martin, Chairman, is Assistant Director for Business Services, Rhode Island Department of Social Welfare, and was formerly a Vice-President of the Industrial Trust Co.;

Morris S. Waldman, Vice-Chairman, is an attorney;

Albert Harkness, member, is an architect of the firm of Harkness and Geddes;

Edmund M. Mauro, member, is Vice-President and Treasurer of the International Supply Co.;

Timothy A. Purcell, member, is manager of the Providence district office, Graybar Electric Co.

The Agency is empowered to employ a staff and at the close of 1953, its staff consisted of nine persons, jointly financed by an appropriation by the Providence City Council and by loans from the United States government.

The Redevelopment Agency is currently operating under the provisions of the Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Act of 1950. It is carrying out its assigned task by a two-fold attack on blight: it seeks to eliminate existing blight and it seeks to prevent future blight.

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THE ELIMINATION OF EXISTING BLIGHT

The Redevelopment Agency's attack on existing blight has been concentrated in Upper South Providence.

POINT STREET PROJECT AREA D2-R: The official Redevelopment Plan for Point Street provides for the removal of 8 acres of substandard housing located north and east of Point and Plain Streets and the development there of a planned site to be used primarily for light industrial uses. This site provides "in-place" utilities, good transportation, accessibility to skilled labor, and well-developed community facilities. Planned industrial districts such as this will encourage the development of stable and diversified industries which can strengthen the city's basic economy.

A loan and capital grant of Federal funds for the redevelopment of this area was allocated to the Providence Redevelopment Agency by the execution of a contract with the U. S. Housing and Home Finance Agency's Division of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment. The execution of this contract made this project area the first one in New England to receive assurance of Federal financial assistance.

With this assurance of Federal aid, made possible by the United States Housing Act of 1949, the start of development work in the project area now depends only upon the outcome of the pending case of Pasqua Balsamo et al vs. Providence Redevelopment Agency and City of Providence, now in the Superior Court for Providence County. This prolonged case questions whether the area is in fact a "slum blighted" area, as defined by the Rhode Island "Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Act," and as designed by the Providence City Council.

WILLARD CENTER UNIT ONE PROJECT AREA D2-A1: Tentative and redevelopment plans for the rebuilding of the first part of the Willard Center area, in the vicinity of Willard Avenue and Gay Street, received City Council approval after public hearings. At the end of 1953, a Federal loan and grant for project area development was allocated, thus making the area the second in New England to receive Federal approval. As the year ended, final plans for the purchase of the land, relocation of families, and demolition of the structures, were being completed in anticipation of land acquisition early in 1954.

Proposals for the area provide for 4 acres of blighted land to be cleared of poor housing and obsolete commercial facilities and to be developed as the site of a modern public elementary school. This school would replace four existing school buildings in other locations which have become unsuitable because of size, location, and facilities for an adequate school program.

WILLARD CENTER UNIT TWO PROJECT AREA D2-A2: A tentative plan for the redevelopment of an area adjacent to Willard Center Unit One was approved by the City Council after a public hearing; and the preparation of a redevelopment plan was begun during 1953.

Redevelopment proposals for this blighted 14-acre area include the elimination of some of the most inadequate housing in Upper South Providence as well as the blighting influence of one of the city's largest junkyard concentrations. Cleared land in the area will be made available for some of the recreational uses critically needed in the South Providence Area. In addition to sites for a playground and playfield, land will also be made available for a neighborhood shopping center. This center will provide an opportunity for the present merchants of the Willard Center area to relocate in well-planned and newly-equipped stores provided with adequate off-street parking facilities.

Recognition of proposals for this area has been made in several publications. In December, Skylines, the publication of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, in one of its lead articles entitled, "Willard Avenue Proposal" noted that the project will meet a critical need for shopping centers in an existing residential neighborhood. "Such a project would surely be a boon to the general welfare of the city . . . , and of course primarily beneficent to those people living in the Willard Avenue area."

Writing in the Savings Bank Journal, Charles A. RossKam, real estate editor of the Providence Journal characterized the Willard Avenue development as one of the city's most outstanding efforts to combat the neglect of intown areas which depresses real estate values and menaces the heart of the city.

All of the redevelopment proposals for South Providence are designed to improve living and working conditions and to stabilize property values in that large and important section of the city.

THE PREVENTION OF FUTURE BLIGHT.

The blight and slum prevention problem is a problem of both poor dwellings and poor neighborhood environment. It is a problem which touches the substantial majority of the families of Providence. Staff estimates indicate that more than 60,000 of the city's 74,000 dwelling units are located in areas which require some form of organized neighborhood improvement activity.

There are 25,000 dwelling units in eight residential areas where blight is so pronounced that the City Council found it necessary in 1948 to designate them upon recommendation of the City Plan Commission as official Redevelopment Areas. Of course, not all of these dwellings are in need of clearance. It is estimated on the basis of planning studies that some 7,000 dwelling units within the Redevelopment Areas are located in clearance areas, because of their present irretrievably poor condition.

Approximately 18,000 dwelling units can be considered to be in areas which are in need of rehabilitation. The removal of a small number of substandard structures through selective acquisition and clearance will be required in these areas, and the extent of the rehabilitation required in the remaining structures to return them to standard condition may vary from almost complete reconstruction, if and when feasible, to relatively minor reconditioning. As each year goes by without an effective housing improvement program, however, additional areas in need of rehabilitation will probably slip into the clearance area classification.

The remaining sections of the City in which housing conditions are somewhat inadequate and in which neighborhood conditions are such as to require some organized improvement efforts are the conservation areas. The conservation areas contain approximately 35,000 dwelling units.

The clearance and reconstruction of slum blighted areas will not alone solve the problem of deteriorating neighborhoods and substandard housing. A program for housing and neighborhood improvement short of clearance are required. Such a program can extend the useful life of those dwellings which can be rehabilitated to at least minimum standards of health and safety, and such a program can increase the livability of the older neighborhoods of the city.

A JOINT PROGRAM FOR NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

Although the Agency has been making studies for neighborhood improvement, such a program is far broader than can be conducted by the Agency alone. Other groups were participating during 1953 and many more must join in the effort in the future.

MAYOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING: This Committee was appointed by Mayor Reynolds in May. The Committee's assignment is to help find means to halt the decline of residential values, and to prevent the spread of blighted conditions in the city's older neighborhoods.

The Redevelopment Agency has provided staff services for this Committee in its studies. After reviewing the ways in which other cities have undertaken similar work, the Committee began the preparation of a strong housing ordinance which is designed to set minimum standards for dwelling facilities, maintenance, and occupancy conditions as legal requirements for all existing dwellings.

It is anticipated that Committee recommendations will provide for a vigorous and systematic program of housing law enforcement. These recommendations should also help to establish the framework for the improvement program in the Mount Hope Neighborhood, and should suggest ways of effectively administering a broad, continuing program of neighborhood conservation based upon the improvement of municipal services, the expansion of home financing and home remodeling aids, and the organized participation of owner-tenant improvement groups.

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING STUDY: In order to prepare the way for improvement work in Mount Hope and other neighborhoods and to put the recommendations of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Housing to greatest usefulness in the city's older residential areas, the City Plan Commission and the Agency jointly have underway a study to identify the neighborhoods in which conservation action can be most effective.

MOUNT HOPE NEIGHBORHOOD: A thorough study of this neighborhood, closely corresponding to the area of Census Tract 31, was begun during the year. The Agency staff participated in a Council of Community Services survey of Census Tract 31 problems and resources. Toward the end of the year, the Agency began the preparation of comprehensive plans for the improvement of this Mount Hope neighborhood. Such an improvement program would be designed to encourage public and private organizations to work simultaneously in order to renew the area in such a manner as to make the area more livable, to sustain improved residential values, to provide better residential services, and to increase the useful life of residential facilities throughout the neighborhood.

Very poor housing conditions are found in only small sections of the total neighborhood. Most of the existing housing can probably be preserved by conservation and rehabilitation action. Any redevelopment clearance operations required would therefore be of relatively small scale, but because of favorable location, land made available through clearance will provide a desirable in-town site for new housing in conformity with the city's general plan.

FEDERAL AID FOR NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT: A bi-partisan concern for devising more effective housing improvement tools than have existed heretofore is culminating, in the United States Congress, in the proposed Housing Act of 1954. It is anticipated that Federal assistance for neighborhood improvement programs would be available under this proposed legislation.

In his article in the Savings Bank Journal, quoted earlier, Mr. Rosskam reported that "in Providence, one of the few cities with an integrated program of slum clearance and slum prevention through housing conservation and rehabilitation, civic errors of the past are being wiped out and their repetition in future years avoided."

Because of this kind of recognition that Providence was obtaining across the nation, the Redevelopment Agency and Plan Commission were requested to submit statements describing the extent of the local housing problem in Providence and local approaches to its solution to President Eisenhower's Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs. Much of the material submitted by Providence was used to document the report of the Subcommittee on Urban Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, and Conservation of that Committee. The report of the President's Committee has provided the basis for President Eisenhower's proposals for aids for local housing improvement work through the proposed Housing Act.

City of Providence Funds . Fiscal Year 1952 - 1953

F I N A N C I A L S T A T E M E N T

	APPROPRIATION	EXPENDITURES	SURPLUS
	By City Council	Local Cash Grants-in-Aid	Returned to General Fund
Salaries	\$26,893.20	\$21,198.08	\$ 1,166.47
Contract Services	3,275.00	1,165.17	1,751.46
Materials and Supplies	625.00	358.80	14.86
Equipment and Furniture	325.00	116.71	21.89
TOTAL	\$31,118.20	\$22,838.76	\$ 2,954.68
		\$ 4,528.65	
		358.37	
		251.34	
		186.40	
		\$ 5,324.76	

* Conservation and rehabilitation studies, other special studies, and staffing of Mayor's Advisory Committee on Housing.

Federally Aided Program of Redevelopment Projects
As Of September 30, 1953

B A L A N C E S H E E T

ASSETS

Cash in Survey and Planning Funds:

Preliminary Advance	\$ 97.54	
Final Advance, D2-A1	5,073.51	
Final Advance, D2-A2	10,112.43	
Revolving Fund	40.50	
Current Assets		\$ 15,323.98

Development Costs:

Preliminary Advance	\$165,693.78	
Willard Center Unit One, Project Area D2-A1	7,470.22	
Willard Center Unit Two, Project Area D2-A2	3,644.45	
Net Development Costs		176,808.45*

TOTAL ASSETS

\$192,132.43

LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL

Accrued Interest Payable:

Preliminary Advance	\$ 5,340.05	
Final Advance, D2-A1	119.75	
Final Advance, D2-A2	121.36	
Accrued Interest Payable		\$ 5,581.16

Advances and Loans Payable:

Preliminary Advance	\$ 78,195.39	
Final Advance, D2-A1	12,470.00	
Final Advance, D2-A2	13,630.00	
Advances and Loans Payable		\$104,295.39

Capital: Local Cash Grants-in-Aid

82,255.88

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL

\$192,132.43

* Includes \$170.23 for Preliminary Advance studies, \$7,350.47 for Unit One, and \$3,523.09 for Unit Two, excluding accrued interest, expended during the city's fiscal year 1952 - 1953.

THE HONORABLE WALTER H. REYNOLDS
Mayor, City of Providence

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THE PROVIDENCE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Chester R. Martin, Chairman Morris S. Waldman, Vice-Chairman
 Albert Harkness
 Edmund M. Mauro
 Timothy A. Purcell
Charles R. Wood, Secretary Matthew E. Ward, Legal Counsel

Mr. Waldman succeeded Mr. Harkness as Vice-Chairman on
January 7, 1954.

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Donald M. Graham, Executive Director
John R. Kellam, Senior Planner
Robert F. Rowland, Associate Planner
Miles W. Weaver, Associate Planner
Stanley Bernstein, Accountant
Melvin St. John Susi, Planning Technician**
Robert C. Smith, Planning Technician
Marian L. Stickney, Assistant Planning Technician
Angela M. Terenzi, Clerk-Stenographer
Florence Buonaiuto, Clerk-Stenographer

** Resigned

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