

SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT

**REBUILDING
PROVIDENCE
1954**

PROVIDENCE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

TO THE CITY COUNCIL
AND THE CITIZENS OF PROVIDENCE

1954 witnessed the on-the-ground beginning of slum clearance and redevelopment action in Providence. In March 1954, the first land was acquired by the Agency and by June the demolition of a slum-blighted area was underway, marking the first step toward stabilizing neighborhoods of Providence through redevelopment. Redevelopment progress across the nation was highlighted in November 1954 by a brief but forceful opinion of the U. S. Supreme Court which leaves little doubt as to the constitutionality of urban redevelopment under the Federal constitution and its important role in reshaping our cities.

We take pleasure in reporting to you at this time on these significant accomplishments together with the day-to-day progress of six Providence redevelopment projects in various stages of planning and development.

Respectfully submitted,

Chester R. Martin

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

IN CITY COUNCIL

JUL 7 1955

READ:
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

D. Everett Whelan
CLERK

THE PROVIDENCE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

The Providence Redevelopment Agency is now a well-established agency of city government. It was brought into being originally by the City Council in December 1946 under terms of the Community Redevelopment Act of 1946. This act was amended in 1950 by the Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Act, under which the Agency is presently operating.

The purpose of the Redevelopment Agency is to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Providence by the clearance of slum areas, and by the elimination and prevention of urban blight and substandard conditions within the city's older neighborhoods. Through slum clearance, the Agency makes land available for new housing developments, new industrial districts, new shopping centers, and new public facilities such as schools, playgrounds, parks, and off-street parking areas.

The Redevelopment Agency consists of five residents of the City of Providence appointed by the Mayor. One member is appointed each year for a five-year term and serves without pay.

The Agency is empowered to maintain a full-time staff, and on February 1, 1955, its staff consisted of seventeen persons, with its payroll being financed in part by an appropriation from the Providence City Council and in part by loans from the Federal government.

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LEGISLATION AND LAW

The activities of the Redevelopment Agency are shaped largely by legislation which is enacted at the City, State, and Federal levels, and by the results of judicial decision in slum clearance and redevelopment litigation. The year 1954 continued to bring significant legal developments.

THE FEDERAL HOUSING ACT OF 1954

Early in August 1954, Congress and the President passed and approved the Housing Act of 1954. This Act gives additional assistance to the blight elimination and slum prevention programs of local communities. The most important of the Federal aids included in the Act are designed to encourage the rehabilitation of salvageable housing; and to provide for the construction and improvement of neighborhood facilities such as play areas, streets, and utilities. These measures are designed to up-grade whole neighborhoods within the older areas of the city where buildings and improvements are subject to accelerate deterioration and obsolescence, and where the neighborhood environment is subject to gradually changing patterns of land use and a persistent decline of residential values.

THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF URBAN REDEVELOPMENT

In November 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court affirmed the Federal constitutionality of urban redevelopment and slum clearance on an area basis in a brief but far-reaching opinion.

The right of communities to regulate their affairs through the exercise of the police power, was outlined by the Court in the broadest terms:

"Public safety, public health, morality, peace and quiet, law and order -- these are some of the more conspicuous examples of the traditional application of the police powers to Municipal affairs. Yet they merely illustrate the scope of power and do not delineate it. Miserable and disreputable housing conditions may do more than spread disease and crime and immorality. They may also suffocate the spirit by reducing the people who live there to the status of cattle. They may indeed make living an almost insufferable burden. They may also be an ugly sore, a blight on the community which robs it of charm, which makes it a place from which men turn. The misery of housing may despoil a community as an open sewer may ruin a river.

"The concept of the public welfare is broad and inclusive. The values it represents are spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as monetary. It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community should be beautiful as well as healthy, spacious as well as clean, well-balanced as well as carefully patrolled."

Once the object of community betterment and rebuilding is within the authority of the legislature under the police power, the right to realize that objective through the exercise of eminent domain is clear for the acquisition of land though eminent domain is merely the means to the end.

"Subject to specific constitutional limitations, when the legislature has spoken, the public interest has been declared in terms well-nigh conclusive."

SUPERIOR COURT DECISION: Point Street Project Area

On January 12, 1955, the Superior Court for Providence

County completed its consideration of the case of Pasqua Balsamo et al vs. Providence Redevelopment Agency in a rescript handed down by Judge Frost.

The Court affirmed the constitutionality of redevelopment established by the Rhode Island Supreme Court in 1952, and held that the Point Street Project Area was in fact a slum-blighted area properly approved as an official redevelopment project area through due process of law. In the case of a single property the Court denied the proposed taking for redevelopment purposes, noting that the chief use of the property as a restaurant was in conformance with the uses of land permitted under the Agency's Redevelopment Plan even though the structure was built originally for residential purposes, a use prohibited under the Redevelopment Plan. The decision is being appealed to the Rhode Island Supreme Court by the Agency.

A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT FOR RHODE ISLAND

The people of Rhode Island may elect to incorporate redevelopment powers into the Rhode Island Constitution during 1955. Although constitutionality has been established by Court decision, such an amendment would be desirable, for it would make clear the people's wish to see the deteriorated sections of the communities of the state restored to more vigorous, healthful, and economically sound condition through the application of redevelopment powers.

PROPOSED HOUSING CODE

Coupled with the redevelopment of blighted and substandard areas, there is a critical need for more adequate housing laws to prevent the further deterioration of existing housing.

The Agency continued to provide staff services for the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Housing during 1954 in its task of preparing a minimum-standards housing ordinance for the City of Providence. Substantial progress was made in this program during the year, and the Committee was able to formulate a series of forty-three basic requirements to govern the minimum conditions of sanitation, safety, maintenance, and occupancy of all dwelling units in the city. The committee also prepared material to govern the uniform and systematic administration and enforcement of such requirements.

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P R O J E C T P L A N N I N G A N D D E V E L O P M E N T . . .

The Redevelopment Agency's slum clearance activities were expanded during the year from its initial projects in South Providence. As project development operations progressed in that area, the Agency began planning for large-scale redevelopment and urban renewal programs in the Mount Hope and West River areas to the north of downtown Providence. In all, six redevelopment project areas are now in active planning or development with Federal participation.

SOUTH PROVIDENCE: Point Street

Although the redevelopment plans for the Point Street area were approved locally more than three years ago, and by the Federal government more than a year ago, action on the ground has not begun because of the pending litigation. If the Agency's proposals are upheld in the courts, this 8 acre area of predominantly substandard structures located north and east of Point and Plain Streets will be cleared. The cleared land in the area will provide a planned site for light industrial uses adjacent to the proposed Metropolitan Expressway. The site provides utilities, good transportation, accessibility to skilled labor, and well-developed community facilities.

SOUTH PROVIDENCE: Willard Center Unit One

On March 4, 1954, the Agency acquired some 4 acres of land in the vicinity of Willard Avenue and Gay Streets in accordance with the official redevelopment plan for the area. The demolition of buildings was begun in June, and except for buildings along Willard Avenue, had been completed by the end of October.

Land in the project area is now available to the City of Providence for the construction of a new elementary school to replace four existing school buildings in South Providence which have

become unsuitable for present-day school needs because of inadequate size, location, and condition.

The relocation of families and businesses occupying quarters in the project area has been carried out by the Agency's Family Relocation Service. Decent, safe, and sanitary rehousing accommodations have been offered to each of the 76 families and 11 single persons on the site. Each house listed with the Service was examined as to condition by a trained housing inspector. Before it was referred to a family, it was determined whether it met the particular needs of that family. At the end of the year only two families and two single persons remain on the site, above the Willard Avenue stores.

SOUTH PROVIDENCE: Willard Center Unit Two

The redevelopment plan for the rebuilding of Unit Two of Willard Center was approved by the City Council after public hearings in May 1954. A great deal of project planning activity was devoted to the working out of satisfactory agreements for the disposition of project land. It was the aim of the Agency to permit those businessmen presently occupying shops in the project area to build and operate a modern shopping center on some of the 15 acres of cleared land to be made available in the project area.

On January 21, 1955, the land in the project area was acquired for redevelopment. The way is now open for the elimination of some of the most inadequate housing in South Providence as well as the blighting influence of a substantial junkyard concentration. Cleared land will be made available for a critically needed playfield and playground, in addition to the proposed shopping center and off-street parking area.

By the end of 1954, slum clearance and redevelopment had become a reality for the South Providence community, and the new facilities about to rise on cleared land could be counted on to provide a focal point for future urban renewal efforts designed to prevent the growth of slum conditions, and increase the livability and residential values of that large and important section of the city.

WEST RIVER: A Planned Industrial Park

By the end of 1954, the Redevelopment Agency in cooperation with the City Plan Commission had made substantial progress in planning for industrial redevelopment in the Moshassuck Valley, from Smith Street to the North Burial Ground. Historically this area of the city has been associated with the growth of some of its oldest and most important industrial concerns such as the old Corliss Engine Works and American Screw Company. The importance of this area to the city's continued industrial growth and expansion has long been recognized, and its future development as a major industrial area along the main line of the New Haven Railroad has been established as an essential feature of the Plan Commission's Master Plan for Land Use and Population Distribution.

Ultimate development of this 175-acre area for industrial purposes is closely associated with plans for the construction of the Metropolitan Expressway and the Louisquisset Pike which will join in the vicinity of Randall Square.

Immediate redevelopment plans are being pushed for the West River project area in the Moshassuck Valley bounded by the West River, the Moshassuck River, Nichols Street, Conanicut Street, Chalkstone Avenue, and the railroad. This is a predominantly slum-blighted residential neighborhood ringed and isolated by industries,

major traffic routes, and natural barriers. It is isolated from residential services such as public schools and shopping facilities located in adjacent areas.

Plans for the 80-acre West River project call for its conversion from a substandard housing area to a new industrial park, providing sites for modern industrial plants on wide and landscaped streets, with adequate off-street parking, and with rail facilities available. Such sites are essential if existing plants looking for new or larger locations and new plants seeking to locate in Providence are to be accommodated.

MOUNT HOPE: Lippitt Hill

The Lippitt Hill project area comprises some 60 acres of land located on the slope of the city's East Side fringe just north of Hope High School and adjacent to the Constitution Hill area along Olney Street. It is bounded by Olney Street, Hope Street, Doyle Avenue, and Davis Boulevard. Poor land development in this area has encouraged the growth of small sections of blighted housing which threaten the residential values and amenities of a basically healthy neighborhood.

MOUNT HOPE: Constitution Hill

The Constitution Hill project area comprises some 30 acres of land located in the vicinity of the junction of Benefit Street and North Main Street. It extends from Olney Street on the north to Jenckes and Star Streets on the south. The area is a part of the historic Benefit Street Section of the city, and possibilities for the restoration of important historic sites and buildings are being explored as a part of the Agency's preliminary planning program.

Preliminary planning studies of these two areas indicate that small pockets of the poorest housing can be cleared and replaced with new housing units and new neighborhood facilities designed to improve the livability of the areas and to stimulate the voluntary rehabilitation of those dwellings whose substandard characteristics can be eliminated by measures short of clearance. New housing investment in these areas could enlarge the presently inadequate housing supply available to the city's minority families, and new accommodations could provide decent, safe, and sanitary living conditions for many of the families now living in the area.

MOUNT HOPE: Urban Renewal

Both the Lippitt Hill and Constitution Hill project areas are major parts of the larger 200-acre Mount Hope urban renewal area. This area is bounded by North Main, Cypress, Hope, Olney, Prospect, Hidden, Congdon, Angell, Thomas and Canal Streets, Constitution Hill, and Davis Boulevard. The urban renewal program being developed for the larger Mount Hope area will make use of the new federal housing aids for dwelling rehabilitation and the improvement of community facilities authorized in the Housing Act of 1954.

Redevelopment plans for the Lippitt and Constitution Hill areas will constitute only a single element of a broad neighborhood improvement program. Many dwelling units in the larger Mount Hope area are in excellent condition and can be protected from blight. Many of the area's dwellings, while presently substandard are in basically sound condition and can be restored to acceptable standards of health and safety through the active interest of property owners and tenants. Rehabilitation activities can be stimulated by the uniform enforcement of minimum housing standards now being prepared by the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Housing.

City of Providence Funds - Fiscal Year 1953-1954

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

	APPROPRIATION By City Council	EXPENDITURES	SURPLUS Returned to General Fund
Salaries	\$33,743.00	\$18,755.60*	\$14,987.40
Contract Services	4,560.00	3,638.59	921.41
Materials and Supplies	775.00	674.73	100.27
Equipment and Furniture	765.00	679.72	85.28
TOTAL	\$39,843.00	\$23,748.64	\$16,094.36

* Includes Local Cash Grant-in-aid of \$352.83

Federally Aided Program of Redevelopment Projects
As of September 30, 1954

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

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LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL

Current Liabilities

Accounts Payable \$ 40.66

TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES \$ 40.66

Accrued Interest Payable

Willard Center Unit One \$ 9,202.75
Willard Center Unit Two 907.11
Constitution Hill 5.48
Lippitt Hill 6.09

TOTAL ACCRUED INTEREST PAYABLE \$ 10,121.43

Advances and Loans Payable

Willard Center Unit One \$597,450.00
Willard Center Unit Two 31,255.00
Constitution Hill 2,655.00
Lippitt Hill 2,865.00

TOTAL ADVANCES AND LOANS PAYABLE 634,235.00

Capital

Local Cash Grant-in-Aid (Willard Center Unit One) 82,659.57

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL \$727,056.66
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Chester R. Martin, Chairman Morris S. Waldman, Vice-Chairman
 Albert Harkness
 Edmund M. Mauro
 Timothy A. Purcell
 Charles R. Wood, Secretary

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Director of the Portland, Maine, Seaport Clearance and Redevelopment Authority.