[MS-0087.008.002.009]

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RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOLVING THE HOUSING PROBLEM

I. From the American Builder, Centennial Issue, November, 1968

"If we were really serious about housing, this is what we'd do...."

1. Get a national land policy that can be enforced. It is necessary that the state and federal governments establish general outlines for land use, particularly for the large areas of the nation which are not yet urbanized.

2. Stop choking cities with free highways. A transportation policy is closely linked with a land use policy. It is the duty of the state and federal governments to see these two as part of a whole and to come up with coherent plans for both. Rather than more roads, which congest, why can't mass transit be built? Mass transit is crucial for a well planned city.

3. Take zoning powers away from the suburbs. The states, rather than small or large numicipal areas, should have the zoning powers. Zoning decisions would then be made with consideration for the larger picture and therefore be of benefit to more of the state's residents.

4. Abolish all local building codes. To avoid the current multiplicity of codes, state building codes should be adopted. These could be based upon model codes already devised by the federal government.

5. Repeal local property tax. The present taxes fine the homeowner for making improvements and are a factor in the inflation of land values. These taxes should be replaced by separate taxes upon land and improvements (site-value tax) administered by the state.

6. Write new loopholes in the Internal Revenue Code. Have investment credit for housing of up to 21% to encourage industry to build. Allow rapid depreciation on housing, particularly that for low-income families, which has amenities like day nurseries. Provide a tax write-off on purchased land which has substandard use, and require that land to be brought to standard.

7. Nationalize apprentice training. There should be a national training program in the construction trades, directed particularly at the hard-core unemployed and subsidized by the government. The builders could pay the government a fee for each trainee they retain, and the unions would be required to allow the apprentices to join.

8. Organize an industrial union for housing. The federal government should offer incentives to unions to unite,

therefore ending jurisdictional disputes among craft unions and causing more stability in employment. This might eventually make the construction of low-income housing by composite crews a reality.

9. Stop subsidizing union discrimination. The responsibility for integrating unions in the housing industry should not be with the builders (where it presently is) but with the federal government which can use economic sanctions to force unions to integrate. If a union can't provide craftsmen from minority groups, it shouldn't be allowed to work on a federally subsidized program.

10. Congress cannot run housing programs...keep hands off. Congress creates red tape for housing programs and sometimes blocks the building of housing this country needs most, such as large housing units for large families. HUD should be given more leaway; it should be allowed to be flexible and to take risks.

11. Organize multi-builder corporations to spread risks. These could be created by local builders organizations and would insure more building of low-income home units with less exposure for the individual builder.

12. Take the lid off the Farmers Home Administration. Allow the funds from this federal agency to be used in home building in rural areas.

13. Concentrate on priorities...not projections. Congress should give housing high priority and allocate adequate money to finance it.

14. HUD is failing...fix it or forget it. Instead of a new department, HUD is a conglomeration of old government agencies with so much red tape that private contractors are unwilling to accept some of its programs. HUD should consolidate, allow its field men to make most decisions necessary on the local level. A group of contractors, HUD members and union officials should act on the local and national levels as watchdogs and help to guide housing progress.

II. From Agenda for Positive Action: State Programs in Housing and Community Development, prepared by the Urban Coalition

1. The state should develop public housing or moderate-income housing in areas that do not have housing authorities or moderate-income housing developers.

2. The state should have a BMIR loan program. It could be more flexible, less complex and time consuming than the federal programs and permit some experimentation such as

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"rent skewing" (raising rents in a majority of apartments to permit greater reductions in the remaining apartments in a project).

3. States should reimburse communities for abatement of normal property taxes on low or moderate-income housing and make payments to cover the extra public service costs incurred by localities because of this housing. These state payments would serve as an inducement to communities to accept low-income housing, helping to scatter such projects.

4. Since racial integration of housing projects rarely occurs without deliberate measures by developers, those who have affirmative plans to locate, promote and manage their developments to achieve integration should receive priority assistance.

5. The state should provide financial assistance to non-profit metropolitan area housing information centers to list available housing, introduce low and moderate-income families into areas with which they may be unfamiliar, escort them on inspection of houses, educate the community on the need for providing more low-income housing, etc.

6. State law should permit a tenant to institute a housing code enforcement proceeding, to obtain specific relief for inadequately maintained premises and to withhold rent to secure code compliance.

7. Require that every lease pledge that the premises are fit to live in when the tenant moves in and that the landlord will keep them in good repair.

8. Require local housing authorities to give reasons for evicting tenants and establish a "Board of Tenants Affairs" for public housing.

9. Establish a commission to assess modern techniques of zoning and land use regulation and to recommend legislation to modernize the states zoning enabling act to introduce greater flexibility and eliminate the use of zoning powers to undergird economic segregation in residential development.

III. Proposals from the President's Committee on Urban Housing (the Kaiser Committee) include: 1) an experiment in which poor families would be given a federal allowance to spend for housing anywhere they like, 2) a recommendation that would empower the federal government to pre-empt local zoning ordinances or state laws which exclude the development of subsidized housing, 3) federal government or appropriate local agencies be allowed to acquire land by purchase, lease or condemnation for subsequent resale or lease as sites for

subsidized housing, 4) greatly expanded federal sponsorship of research in the housing industry as a means for all possible cost reductions in the next ten years.

IV. Recommendations from the National Commission on Urban Problems (the Douglas Commission) include: 1) a system of federal revenue sharing with states and cities that would encourage consolidation of local governments within a metropolitan area (proliferation of local governments, each with its own zoning authority and building codes was found to be a major cause of the confinement of the poor in slums), 2) tax revision that would remove features that discourage rental property owners from making improvements, 3) tax incentives should not be used as a means of encouraging private enterprise to rebuild the slums.

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