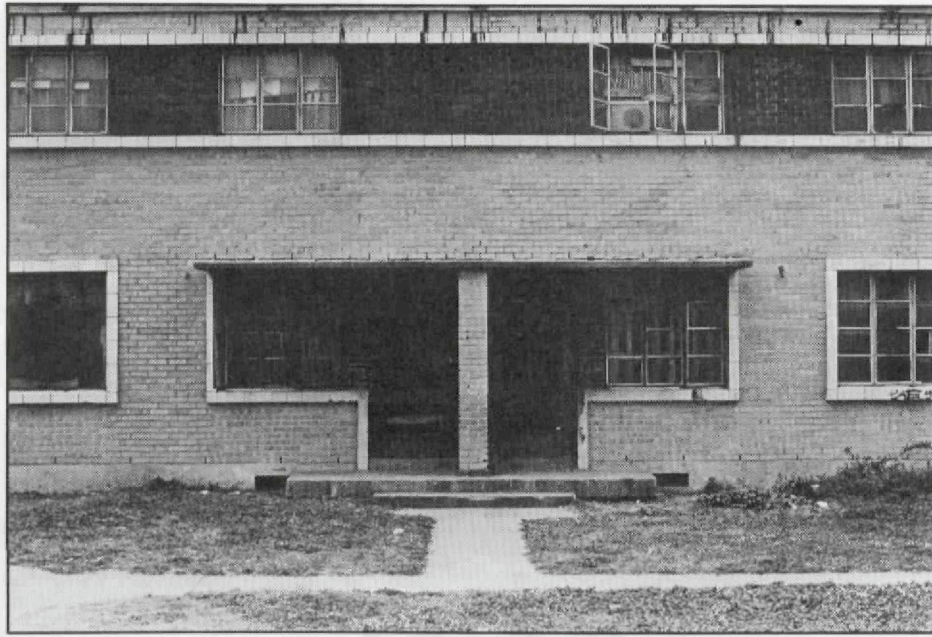


Efraím S. García over control of the area, Phillips had to settle for APV while García retained control of the Fourth Ward.⁵ Having worked closely with the Mexican-American community to accomplish the process for the rehabilitation of the Susan V. Clayton Homes low-cost housing project with the creation of the adjacent El Mercado del Sol on the eastern edge of downtown, García turned his energy toward relocating the blacks from the western edge of downtown rather than contemplating a renewal based on the Clayton/El Mercado example. His plan calls for Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG) to assist Fourth Ward families in their move out of the Fourth Ward, warning that if they fail to cooperate now, there will be no aid at all. For instance, García told me that if owners were to accept an offer from Hong Kong based Allright Inc., which has already acquired property on Heiner Street along the eastern edge of the Fourth Ward, residents stand to receive nothing.⁶

This kind of thinly veiled economic blackmail evades the central issue of whether the residents should be moved at all, who will pick up the tab, and who will reap the profits. García is quick to label opponents of his proposal as "white-dogooders" and "outspoken blacks" who are not Fourth Ward residents.⁷ The implication here (and he is not fully correct anyway) is that neither group has a right to participate in the fate of the Fourth Ward.

Steven V. Jarnigan is a real-estate developer who represents a coalition of Fourth Ward property owners which informally dates back several years but has been most active in the last two years.⁸ Jarnigan believes that recent tax increases in the area, artificially low rents, and the poor condition of the houses leave redevelopment as the only option. He expresses concern about the well-being of the tenants, but finds building new housing the only option for them, and he insists that any development in the area will include 300-500 low-cost units (largely for the elderly, or inoffensive, poor). But although he realizes that this will still leave several thousand people homeless



Detail of row houses, Allen Parkway Village, 1942, Associated Housing Architects of Houston, architects (Photo by Richard Riviere)

The important point, however, is that issues such as the fate of Allen Parkway Village and the Fourth Ward never do come onto the public agenda. One or two city council meetings in which a proposal sails through does not constitute an agenda.

with no low-cost housing elsewhere, he can see no other viable alternatives for Houston.⁹

Against the power and money represented by those who want to destroy APV and the Fourth Ward stand Lenwood Johnson, president of the APV Resident Council; community activist Barry Klein; the Freedman's Town Association; the Fourth

Ward Ministerial Alliance; Rice professor Dana Cuff and other faculty members from Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M; American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawyer Stefan Presser; and a few architects from the area. Their financial and political resources are no match for those of their opponents, but even with meager funds and no staff support, they have managed to chal-

lenge the data and conclusions of the HACH committee charged with evaluating whether APV should be renovated or demolished.¹⁰ Despite the limited resources of this group, HACH has tried to silence opponents in several ways.

Lenwood Johnson is a soft-spoken, disabled, single parent who has lived in APV for only a few years, but it did not take him long to realize that the black community in the Fourth Ward was in serious danger. Soon after being elected president of the APV Resident Council, Johnson initiated a broad-based attempt to learn about the planned demolition of APV. He sought help from Fourth Ward ministers and residents, but found little support for his view that "as APV goes, so goes the Fourth Ward." Events have proven the wisdom of Johnson's perception, and Fourth Ward activists are beginning to rally around the cause of the entire area. Raising some of the central concerns of APV residents and the larger black community, he began to attend HACH and city council meetings. His efforts did not go unnoticed by HACH, which undertook a variety of objectionable actions designed to make it difficult for him to carry out his duties as president of the resident council and perhaps to intimidate him into silence.

HACH denied him use of the photocopying services available to all other resident council presidents on the grounds that he used it too much (never mind that he represented one-fourth of HACH's public-housing stock). The lock in the APV community center was changed and he was denied a key, making it difficult to hold meetings.

At an APV resident meeting which he was chairing, HACH Director of Housing Management Karen Moone instructed police to remove Johnson - they threw him to the floor - despite the fact that HACH had no right to intervene in tenant meetings. U.S. District Court Judge Norman Black affirmed this in a hearing on 26 June 1984.¹¹

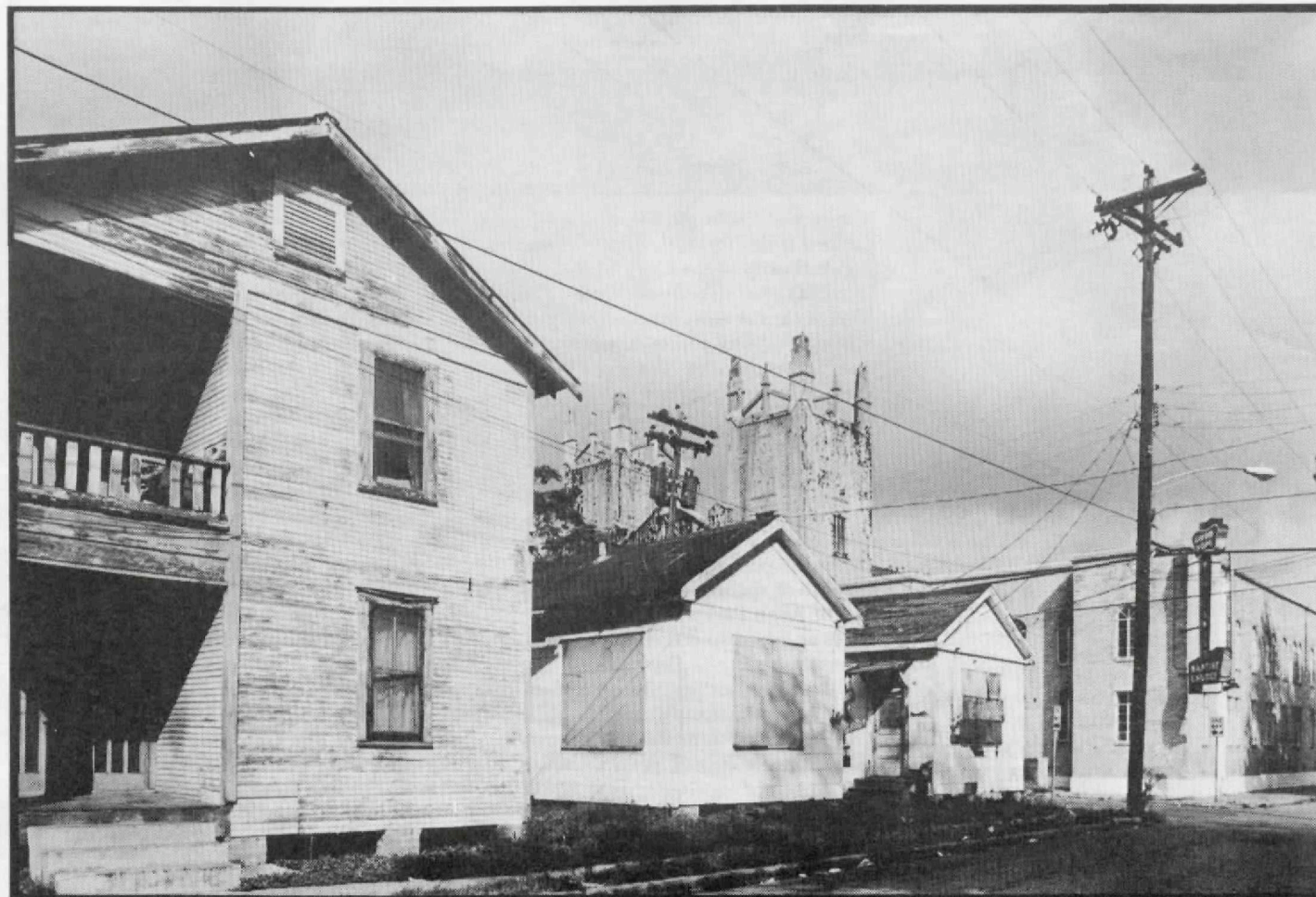
An Update From Freedman's Town

Dana Cuff

This summer, two contradictory decisions were made about Houston's Fourth Ward: the Texas Historical Commission nominated some 40 blocks for historic-district status, while the Houston City Council voted in favor of Allen Parkway Village's (APV) demolition. The response from the residents of the area is telling. Both the APV residents and the organizations within the proposed historic district continue their efforts to save their neighborhoods.

The story of what's going on in the Fourth Ward should begin with the Freedman's Town Association (FTA), a relatively young organization in the community that is extremely active. Significant undertakings by the organization include monthly community meetings with local, state, and federal representatives for the area. Their purpose is to introduce politicians to the community, to get them to work with residents, and to assure them that they will be held accountable for their actions by community members. Thus far, meetings have been held with councilmembers George Grenias and Jim Greenwood, and State Representative Larry Evans. State Senator Craig Washington is slated next and Congressman Mickey Leeland has been invited.

According to community leaders and others, a great deal of misinformation has been spread both by the city and by non-



Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, 1929, J.J. Hawkins, architect; view of towers from Wilson Street (Photo by Paul Hester)

resident landowners. In response to this, Ken Breisch, president of the Texas Historical Commission, says his organization is working with landowners, neighborhood organizations, and the city to disentangle conflicting reports about the implications of the historic-district status. The nomination for historical designation will soon be sent to the National Park Service in Washington, and their decision can be expected within a year.

The FTA has been active in many other developments within Freedman's Town. A new parent-teacher association is being formed to support and improve the area's educational system. Tutoring programs are

beginning at two sites in Freedman's Town and at one site in Allen Parkway Village. A food cooperative will begin in late October making available fresh vegetables, meats, and dairy products at a reduced rate. A clothes and shoes co-op is planned.

The FTA along with the Fourth Ward Neighborhood Council continue to push for the renovation of Gregory Elementary School as a multi-service center. The center would be an important addition to the area as a community center (with special programs for the elderly) and as headquarters for a variety of community services.

Freedman's Town includes Allen Parkway Village, yet because APV is public housing, some issues confronting the development are unique. According to Lenwood Johnson, president of Allen Parkway Village Resident Council, residents are looking into alternative means of housing management, such as the cooperative arrangement successfully applied in other public housing developments. The APV community is also making connections to the larger neighborhood by participating in the FTA, by gathering support from Harris County Council of Organizations (a collection of black organizations), and by working with the American Civil Liberties

At a resident council election in June 1984, HACH Director Moone first invalidated a number of ballots, and then, when Johnson won anyway, invalidated the entire election. Such intervention is not only unprecedented elsewhere, it threatens the rights of the tenants.

On another occasion, according to Johnson, when Houston's resident council presidents met with Phillips at a dinner meeting in 1983, only Johnson did not receive a meal.

As petty as these actions seem, they are the strategies HACH is employing to humiliate and silence Johnson. Such behavior by HACH is more reminiscent of some two-bit totalitarian state than it is of a democratic institution in the United States; tactics which aim to stifle dissent threaten not just Johnson, but anyone who attempts to voice principled opposition to the policies of appointed or elected officials.

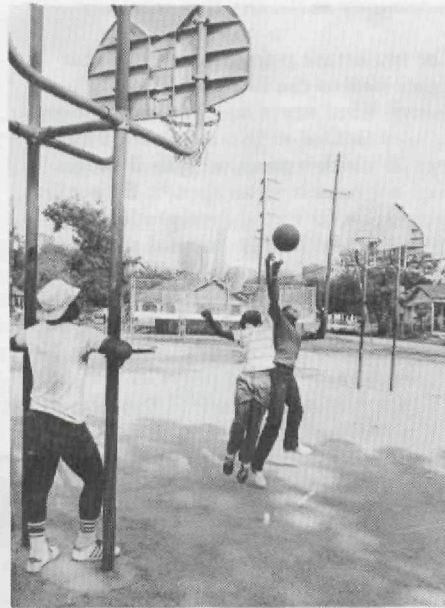
Maintenance and Inflated Rehabilitation Costs

As any homeowner knows, if you undertake no repairs on a structure for a decade, it will become dilapidated. Nothing has been done to APV for nearly a decade, and not surprisingly, it has become dilapidated. Beginning at least in 1977, HACH authorities failed to maintain APV in order to enhance the argument that it ought to be torn down; once they had made the proposal to Housing and Urban Development, HUD promptly denied HACH federal funds to repair a project which might be torn down at any time. HUD's grounds were, not unreasonably, that it would be a waste of taxpayer money.¹² Even by HACH's own wildly inflated figures, tearing down APV and moving the tenants is going to be more than twice as costly as rehabilitating it. The cost of rehabilitating APV is a very troubling issue in the whole matter, and cuts right to the heart of what is being hidden.

In the September 1983 HACH report, the total estimated cost of rehabilitation is set

at \$36.2 million, or \$36,200 per unit. At the very same time, renovation of Clayton Homes is set at \$14,546 per unit: units in much the same condition as APV. Elsewhere the job has been done for considerably less than \$20,000 per unit. In San Antonio, for example, projects were modernized for between \$15,358 and \$18,181 per unit.¹³ At Clayton Homes, HACH plans to do site work, modernize exteriors, and do interior remodeling; these are precisely the changes that are necessary at APV. Robert S. Means's annual publication, *Building Construction Cost Data*, the standard reference manual for cost estimators, lists the cost of brand new public housing (low-rise) at \$42,900 per unit. In the HACH report of 1983, HACH lists the costs of utilities site work at \$8.70 per square foot; Means gives a figure for this kind of project of \$6.56 per square foot.¹⁴ Amount the other expenses, HACH lists \$780,000 for security lighting. This will include, the report says, 10 high-pressure sodium fixtures per acre, plus building flood lamps and pavilion flood lamps. Given the amount of the site occupied by buildings, this figure appears ludicrous: lighting of this wattage (more appropriate for a parking lot) will light the project to a level comparable to high noon on the Fourth of July. HACH also claims that the facades need to be removed due to moisture penetration; close examination by architects reveals cleaning and repointing the brick would be sufficient - and substantially cheaper.

Part of the cost for renovation derives directly from the HACH policy of not replacing tenants when they move; when an apartment is left unoccupied, sooner or later it will be vandalized. Initially, Phillips claimed that vacant units were not being filled because no one wanted to move into APV, and he denied that there was a waiting list.¹⁵ When HACH decided to evict Indochinese tenants who had bribed a housing official to find apartments at APV, however, Phillips based his action on the grounds that they had moved ahead of others on the waiting list.¹⁶ A waiting list finally emerged, but only after legal action was initiated by the



Fourth Ward youngsters play basketball on a neighborhood court (Photo by Phyllis Moore)

ACLU. The size of the list made it clear that, even with APV, Houston's need for low-cost housing is enormous.

The Decision-Making Process in Houston

Houstonians ought to be upset about the way decisions are made in their community - especially when they have to pay the bill. The cards regarding APV have never been laid on the table by Houston officials. As the record shows, the entire campaign against APV and the Fourth Ward consists of misinformation, no information, crucial information withheld, concealed, or distorted, and opponents threatened and intimidated. Clearly a great deal of money for someone is riding on the fate of APV - which no doubt explains why it could not be placed fully on the public agenda.

Looked at in the cold light of day, Houston's largest and most solidly constructed public housing complex - paid for by taxpayers, structurally sound and not a nest of crime and vice - will be demolished in order

- to allow potential developers full use of

a site between River Oaks and the CBD, overlooking Buffalo Bayou, for expensive housing or office towers, and a few hundred units of public housing for the low-income elderly; and

- to force taxpayers to subsidize a complete revamping of the road, sanitation, water and lighting systems to "make the site attractive to developers."¹⁷

One proposal on the agenda is to create a tax-increment zone whereby taxes on Fourth Ward land would be frozen for up to 40 years so that as development occurred, tax revenues over the base would be used for infrastructure improvements *only in the zone itself*. Thus not only would new Fourth Ward development *not* increase the tax base for Houston as a whole, it would ensure that taxpayers pick up increased general costs - even those generated by the zone itself (police, fire, administration) - in addition to the normal increases generated by inflation. Another problem with this kind of financing is that, unlike other bonds, voters need not be asked to approve it: it can be done by fiat. Developers cannot lose under the current "redevelopment" plans for the Fourth Ward and APV.

The Cost to Taxpayers

At minimum, then, through various levels of taxation, taxpayers will be paying for storm systems, sanitary systems, water systems, gas systems, underground electric systems, demolition of APV and the Fourth Ward, relocation costs for up to 12,000 people, and new low-cost housing and Section 8 housing subsidies for an indefinite period of time. Taxpayer dollars are being used to alleviate costs to developers and to help current owners sell their property. Do Houston's taxpayers really want to subsidize the enrichment of developers - and then also bear the cost (through federal tax subsidies) of relocating and housing several thousand residents?

Placing this issue on the public agenda hardly guarantees a just solution. As John Kenneth Galbraith noted in a recent article, prosperity and the achievement of

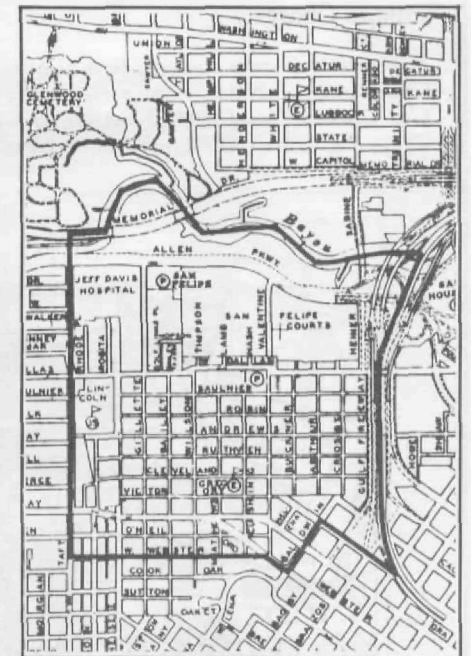


House on Robin Street. Preservation consultant Ellen Beasley believes that this may be the oldest house in Freedman's Town (Photo by Paul Hester)

Union and Gulf Coast Legal Services to gain legal assistance. The ACLU, representing the residents of APV on constitutional grounds, has prepared a brief opposing the application to demolish. Stephen Presser, ACLU's lawyer, states that two class-action suits have been filed on behalf of applicants for public housing. In one case, racial steering is charged on behalf of black applicants who specifically requested residence at APV. In the other case, it appears that the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH) has no record of some blacks who applied for public housing.

Meanwhile, a pro-Fourth Ward petition is being circulated across the country which will be used to confront the city council on their decision to demolish APV. Last April, teams of students from Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M University gathered for a one-day charette to develop rehabilitation proposals for Allen Parkway Village (see "Allen Parkway Village Charette," *Cite*, Fall 1984, 4). The design problem was to save and rehabilitate APV, and thereby also protect the Fourth Ward from large-scale redevelopment. (See page 16.) Rice University's School of Architecture continues its involvement in the Fourth Ward.

Further work on the feasibility of APV's rehabilitation is being done and 21 students and three faculty members are working with the residents of Freedman's Town and the FTA to develop a revitalization plan based on the historic-district status. In the ACLU response to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, two leading local architects - Karl Kamrath, the original architect of APV, and Thomas McKittrick, president of the Texas Society of Architects - have stepped forward to support the residents' cause by stating that the buildings at APV, contrary to HACH's contention, are in sound condition.



Map showing boundaries of the Fourth Ward-Allen Parkway Village area (courtesy Houston City Planning Commission)

It is a sign of the community's strength that services and activities continue in the face of repeated efforts by the city and state and now, potentially, the federal government to demolish the area for redevelopment. For the residents of Freedman's Town and Allen Parkway Village, as well as for those involved in efforts to revitalize the existing community, reports of "inevitable" development are unfounded political statements which only encourage unnecessary physical destruction and human dislocation. ■

middle-class status following the Depression and World War II seem to have led to less, rather than greater, concern for the well being of the poor and disadvantaged. Although exactly what has fueled this tendency is not clear, that it is a real force in contemporary politics is increasingly apparent.¹⁸ Nothing seems to have aroused Houston citizens as much as the prospect of having a low-cost project in their neighborhood, and in fact, for the past few years, they have successfully resisted such proposals.¹⁹ This is known as the NIMBY effect: "not in my backyard," and that is about the only answer that Houston's neighborhoods have to the problem of where to house low-income families. By contrast, the Fourth Ward

welcomes APV, and is no doubt the only community in the city that would.

The important point, however, is that issues such as the fate of APV and the Fourth Ward never do come onto the public agenda. One or two city council meetings in which a proposal sails through does not constitute an agenda. By public agenda, I refer to the presentation of diverse points of view, careful study of the long-term consequences of a decision, not only in that section of the community immediately affected but on the entire community in future years.

Placing matters on the public agenda demands *real* debate, not attempts to silence different points of view; it demands a press which resists mindlessly repeating official pronouncements; it demands committees to study the proposal which are not hand-picked to ensure a certain kind of response. And finally, it demands a community which perceives itself as a community and is willing to become involved in deciding issues which affect the community.

For a democracy to exist, citizens must participate in the decision-making process,

but this cannot happen if they are ill-informed about issues. HACH's deceptive report, its attempts to silence opponents, its failure to maintain APV, and its wildly lopsided distortion of renovation costs make it impossible for Houston's citizens to make responsible decisions now. Placing APV on the public agenda is the first of many steps that Houston must take toward the creation of a community which serves the interests of more than a few wealthy developers.

If we assess Houston by the way it treats its minorities in APV, the community emerges as seriously deficient. Blacks and Indochinese in APV and the Fourth Ward will be forced out of their homes as well as their communities, with all that that implies: displacement anxieties, increased death rate among the elderly, and increased community problems. If APV were like Nickerson Gardens in Los Angeles, where 5,000 people live in a project which has a crime rate 12 times higher than other places in Los Angeles, then there might be reason to tear it down. But it is not.

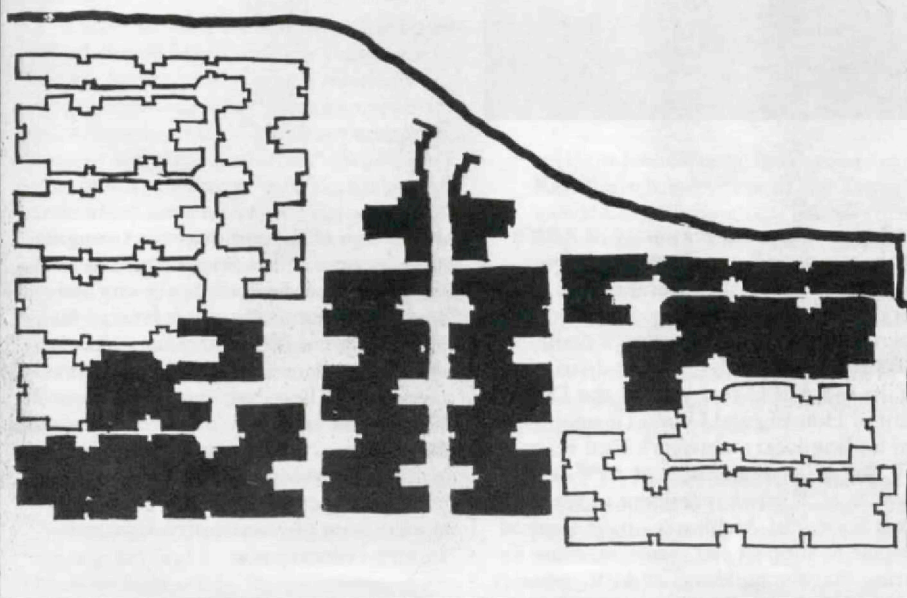
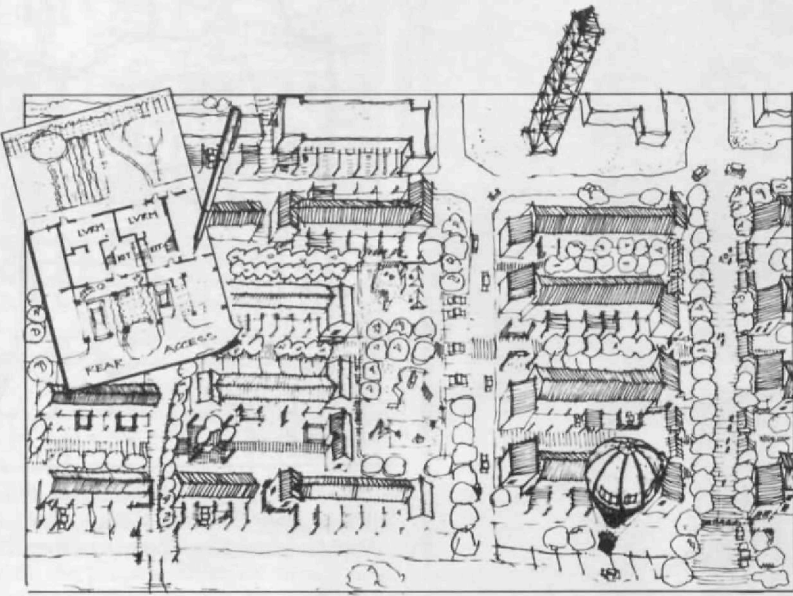
There *are* other possibilities which would maintain the low-cost housing, permit tenants to become owners and to improve their property, ensure a fair return on their property to landlords (who have taken tax benefits for depreciation over the years, too), and spare the community. Among these are cooperative ownership with tenants allowed to share ownership with a public body, as has happened in St. Louis. Such programs gradually reduce public monies, allow tenants a stake in the community, and enable them to work to make their housing better. Jarnigan believes such programs are too advanced for Houston, but in fact, there are no reasons why the city could not explore them and begin to blaze some trails. A community disrupted and dispersed is likely to have far more - and far more expensive - problems than one that is nurtured and helped to improve. Unless taxpayers blindly are willing to take on this enormous cost burden, someone will have to talk publically about who pays and who reaps the profits in the Fourth Ward. ■



View of Allen Parkway Village and downtown skyline (Photo by Richard Riviere)

Allen Parkway Village Charette

Two solutions were awarded first place in the weekend design competition to rehabilitate Allen Parkway Village. Below: By Rice students Martin Murray, Bea Stern, Jane Tannehill, and Torin Thurston. Bottom: By University of Houston students Thomas S. Chung, William Fischer, Elizabeth Kragas, and Cecile Zequeira.



Notes

- 1 Robert L. Moore to Nancy Chisholm, letter of 4 November 1977. The name of the prospective buyer never appeared in correspondence between HACH and HUD, and remains secret today. Documents do attest to the fact that there was such an individual, however. City Councilman Lance Lalor charged in 1981 that former Mayor Jim McConn was "in league with developers" to clear out the Fourth Ward, and that he refused to spend funds for normal upkeep and improvements in the ward. *Houston Forward Times*, 21 March 1981. At the time of HACH's original proposal to HUD in 1977, APV was 95 percent occupied.
- 2 Karen M. Moore to Earl Phillips, "Occupancy Report for January 1984." Total units occupied numbered 608.
- 3 Public housing activists and HUD officials have found the same strategy pursued elsewhere as well.
- 4 HACH Director William A. McClellan and his financial director were both fired in April 1982 for financial irregularities.
- 5 In September 1983, HACH submitted a proposal to redevelop both APV and the Fourth Ward, and to keep both projects under HACH control. In the meantime, Garcia and been pursuing his own strategy with Fourth Ward landowners and developers. See Leigh Hermance, *Houston City Magazine*, vol. 8, "Fourth Ward: A \$100 Million Ghetto," May 1984, 106-111, 118-30, 137-45.
- 6 Steven V. Jarnigan of the Fourth Ward Property Owners Association expressed surprise when I related Garcia's account of an offer from Allright Inc. some three or four months earlier: he said he had never heard of such an offer.
- 7 Hermance, "Fourth Ward," 119.
- 8 While some landlords pressured the HACH board to demolish APV and worked out the sweetheart deal with Garcia that has the city and the federal government (read taxpayers) paying a hefty sum of money to clear and improve the land, Garcia has figured out a way to use federal and local tax dollars to facilitate sale of the property. Garcia has been working closely with the property owners group, and when I asked him who would be picking up the tab and who would be making the profits, he flew into a rage and hung up on me.
- 9 Historically, new low-cost housing has proven too expensive for the former residents to return to, and there is no guarantee that things would be any different in the Fourth Ward. Property which currently sells for \$5-\$6 per square foot but has been revalued at \$10-\$12 will be sold at \$20 per square foot - while adjacent areas sell for \$39 per square foot, and just across the freeway, the figure often exceeds \$700 per square foot. The best guess is that the eventual sales price will be a good deal higher, but still lower, than adjacent areas. Despite the current economics of the situation, there is no question that things have arrived at this point because of the concerted efforts of a group of investors who have targeted the area for the next big development. Without this predatory kind of activity, the Fourth Ward and APV would not be in their current difficulties. If the argument is that current rents are "artificially low," it is equally true that current property taxes and values are "artificially high" because of speculative activity.
- 10 Johnson and Klein prepared a detailed critique and response to the September 1983 HACH report on APV and the Fourth Ward. Their November 1983 report challenged some of the fundamental premises and facts of the HACH report, and proposed viable alternatives which would spare APV and the Fourth Ward.
- 11 Johnson v. Housing Authority of the City of Houston, Civil Action No. H-84-2682 (S.D. Tx., 31 July 1984). See also Janet Elliott, "Housing Authority Told Not to Meddle," *Houston Post*, 27 June 1984, 8B.
- 12 See, for example, the letter from Rogelio R. Santos of the HUD office to Earl Phillips on 27 January 1983, denying again a request to use funds allocated in 1979 for APV repairs.
- 13 Janet Elliott, "S. A. chooses facelifts for housing projects," *Houston Post*, 14 November 1983.
- 14 HACH figures for total costs, for utilities site work costs, for security lighting, and for all costs are found in Housing Authority of the City of Houston, "Technical Report: Allen Parkway Village/Fourth Ward," September 1983, 6-10. For the Means figures, see Robert Snow Means, *Building Construction Cost Data 1984*, vol. 42, Kingston, Maine, 1984, under the relevant headings.
- 15 Janet Elliott, "Vacancies Are Plentiful, But Renters Are Few for Allen Parkway," *Houston Post*, 24 November 1983.
- 16 Ira Perry, "Village Residents Staying," *Houston Post*, 1 January 1984. In both cases, information came from HACH spokesperson Esther delpolyi.
- 17 Garcia, interview, 21 September 1984.
- 18 John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Affluent Society Reconsidered," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1984, Section G, 1 and 4.
- 19 Residents of Spring Branch, Westbury, and even Pasadena have stopped Houston low-income projects in recent years.

I would like to thank my research assistant at Texas A&M University, Richard Riviere, for his help.