

The housing story

For more than 35 years, national housing policy has been based on the belief that every American deserves adequate, safe and sanitary housing.

Since the 1934 National Housing Act, Congress has reated program after program seeking to help communities provide such housing. But something must have gone wrong.

Even in a relatively small community like Lincoln, a casual drive through the city reveals tenements as well as townhouses, deteriorating dwellings as well as modern splitlevel homes. This report focuses on Lincoln housing those who affect and are affected by it.

In recent years Lincolnites have witnessed a housing authority's establishment, a minimum housing code's adoption and tenants groups' formations.

It's all part of increased public and governmental concern over housing conditions, according to Carl Kopines, Lincoln housing administrator.

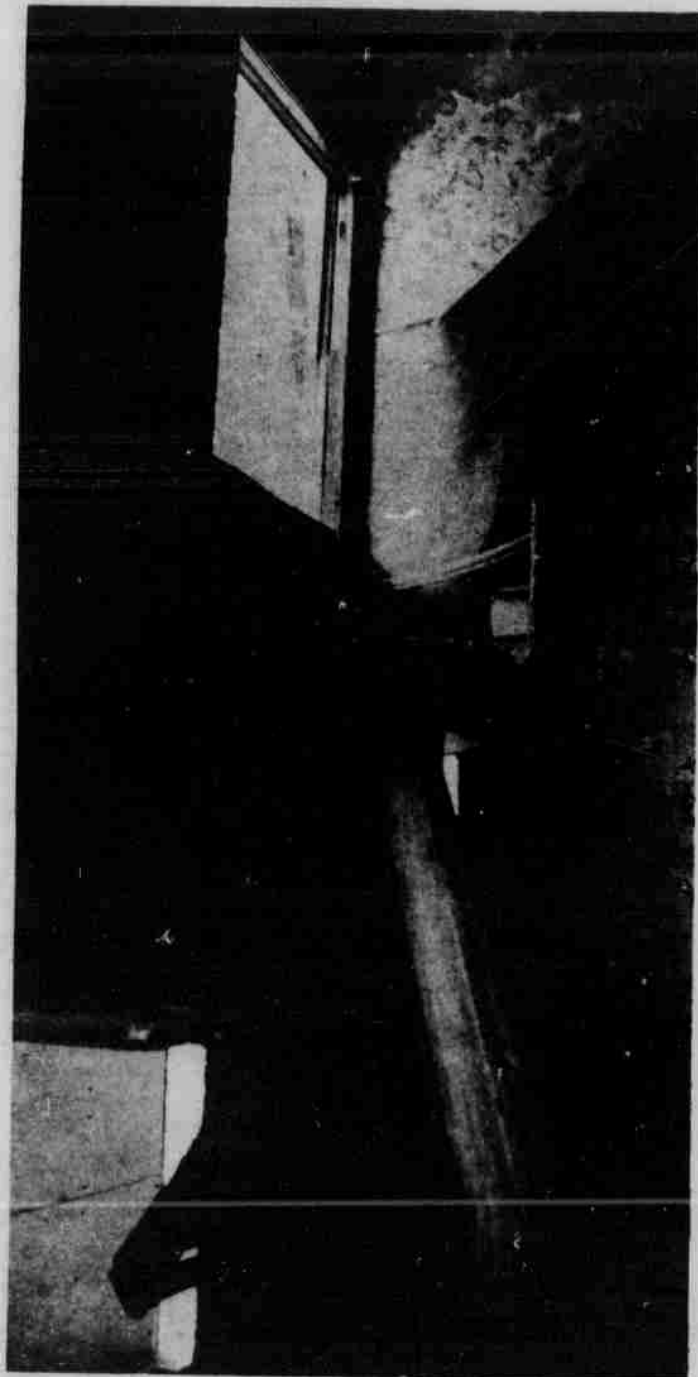
"At one time it was perfectly socially acceptable to buy property on tax sales and rent them for whatever you were able to get," he said. "Many people felt that the tenant who rented from a slumlord was getting what he deserved."

But through a gradual education process, beginning in the 1960's, attitudes and views started to change, Kopines said. He attributed this change partially to the league of Women Voters educational programs and the development of Lincoln Action Program and Housing and Neighborhood Development.

Today more and more citizens are being converted to the opinion that society cannot "continue its practice of allowing people to rent unfit properties," the housing administrator said.

As people realize that factors beyond the control of the low-income and the fixed-income contribute to their plight, attitudes toward these groups change, Kopines said. He added that people begin to see the two groups are not poor only because they are lazy or want to be on welfare.

The age of decent housing for all is yet to come. It is hoped that this report will educate and will foster discussion within the University which might lead to the dawning of this age.



Low income housing: 'there's nowhere to move'

By MARSHA BANGERT

The gap between what housing costs and what low-income families can pay is alive—and growing wider.

There's the case of an ADC family that receives \$140 a month. It pays \$85 rent. That makes the budget for food and clothing a little tight.

And there's the family recently evicted from their home. Ten members have been living in a two-bedroom unit.

Or there's the low-income family that paid a \$60 a month heating bill last winter because of the condition of its house. The family's utility payments exceeded its rent, they hesitated to move, fearing there wasn't any better housing available at a comparable cost.

Fear—that's a key word. "Low-income people are afraid to talk or do anything about their housing problems," said Bea Richmond, City-Wide Tenants Association president. "They're afraid there's no where to move."

Lincoln has too few rental units for low-income people. In a September 1969 report, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) listed Lincoln's vacancy rate, or percentage of rental units available, at six per cent. This contrasts with the 1.6 per cent vacancy rate for low-income housing quoted by Gerald E. Henderson, the city's relocation officer. A three per cent rate is considered a minimum to accommodate a normally mobile population.

Henderson's relocation office first assists families who must move because the city purchased their home or because of the enforcement of the minimum housing code. Other families are assisted when there are no such cases pending.

On May 14 Henderson said he had 36 families on file waiting to be relocated. Approximately two weeks earlier he told a Lincoln Action Program (LAP) meeting that he was trying to place 280 families, Richmond reported.

"The problem is finding an adequate unit at a price the low-income family can afford," Henderson said. He added that the larger the family, the more difficult it is to find low-rent housing.

A family with ten children requiring a three-to-five-bedroom unit might take as long as three months to relocate, he commented.

The Lincoln Housing Authority (LHA) has a waiting list of 500 for its leased housing program. This program provides rent-supplements for the poor.

The construction of Lincoln multi-family units tends toward large projects offering luxuries like carpeting, dishwashers and laundry facilities, according to the 1969 HUD report. Recent projects are mostly one and two-bedroom units renting at an average \$140 and \$170 a month respectively. This is hardly the housing sought by the poor.

A comparison of the 1960 and 1970 Censuses of Housing also indicates this trend. The median rent increased 21 per cent from \$73 to \$88 a month.

The decrease in low-rent units also is notable. Those renting for under \$40 a month decreased 50 per cent, \$40 to \$59-a-month units decreased 24 per cent, \$60 to \$79-a-month units increased 10 per cent and \$80 to \$99-a-month units decreased 33 per cent. On the other end of the scale, units renting at \$150 to \$199 a month increased 478 per cent.

A family should not pay over 25 per cent of its net income for rent, according to an amendment to the 1970 Housing Act. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) lists a family of four making less than \$3,800 as low-income. Each dependent adds \$600 (LHA considers a family of four earning under \$4,400 eligible for its leased housing program.) Each dependent adds \$200 to \$400 to the total.

Using these guidelines, a low-income family of four should be able to pay \$79 to \$92 a month for housing.

But how many Lincolnites fall into the low-income bracket can only be suggested.

The Lancaster County Welfare Department reports 994 cases of Aid to the Aged, 36 cases of Aid to the Blind and 1,563 cases of Aid to Dependent Children. Marvin J. Wilson, research analyst at the State Public Welfare Office, estimated that at least 90 per cent of the Lancaster recipients are from Lincoln.

Ronald Jensen, head of the Advisory Committee on Aging, said 6,000 elderly fall below the OEO poverty guidelines. Yet Lincoln has no public housing for the elderly in a state which has more public housing for elderly people than any other in the union, he added.

Jensen noted that in conferences around the state, old people rated housing among the top nine need