

STATEMENT BY THE CITIZENS LEAGUE  
TO THE HEARING BY THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL  
ON THE REVISED DEVELOPMENT GUIDE  
SECTION ON HOUSING, DECEMBER 7, 1972

We appreciate the opportunity to appear.

The Citizens League has conducted two studies of the area's housing problem, culminating in reports in 1969 and 1971.

The first emphasized -- as its title said -- that "adequate housing is now everybody's problem." The principal thrust of the second is also reflected in its title: "Better use of Land and Housing."

In both, the League strongly urged -- as does your Development Guide -- the creation, under the Metropolitan Council, of a regional agency with certain responsibilities for the volume, distribution, price and quality of the area's housing stock . . . recognizing, of course, that the providers, here, are, and are likely to remain, primarily private. We also urged what we saw as a necessary prerequisite for such a program: namely, a much-expanded program for the collection, analysis and distribution of information about this area's population, and its housing stock.

The Metropolitan Council itself deserves credit for what the Guide represents . . . a major policy decision to work affirmatively against the kind of racial and socio-economic segregation that is tearing apart so many urban areas, and a commitment to a dispersal strategy, to develop meaningful housing opportunities for every family in the Twin Cities area.

The credit is due the Council, of course, not simply for having proposed this, but for having negotiated its acceptance . . . through a combination of good sense and patience -- and, when necessary, firmness . . . with the municipalities in the Twin Cities area. This means, of course, that great credit is due them, as well, for accepting the reality of the problem and for being willing to take some risks, in their own jurisdictions, to carry their share of the responsibility for its solution.

In commenting on this Guide we are equally struck, however, by the size of the job that remains un-done. That is, by the gaps that remain in our data and in our understanding of the problem; by the urgency of the need for additional programs and proposals; by the complexity of the policy issues these will raise; and by the difficulty of the political problems that remain to be encountered.

This has to do, of course, with the whole matter of the existing housing stock . . . which has been given relatively less attention in this version of the housing guide. We understand why the issues about subsidized construction had to be treated first. But we recognize -- as does your staff -- that this focus on housing as a problem of construction . . . more specifically, as a problem in the construction of low- and moderate-income units in the suburbs . . . has left aside what is, in several important senses, the largest part of the housing problem: the maintenance and utilization of the existing inventory; the relationship of this to the new construction; and the whole immensely difficult problem of the way in which -- and the rate at which -- housing units, once physically or functionally obsolete, are withdrawn from the stock.

We are only now exploring these questions ourselves, in a new committee. We have no recommendations, or even conclusions, at this time. The resource people talking with our committee are, however, raising questions . . . which suggest both the importance

and the essentially metropolitan dimensions of this side of the housing problem. Let me list just a few of them:

- \* What is the likely rate of new household formation for the Twin Cities area? What size will the households be? Of what income? (Your Guide addresses this question.)
- \* What is our capacity to build new units . . . satisfying the physical, financial and locational requirements?
- \* What is our existing inventory? How many units . . . of what size . . . of what price . . . in what condition . . . at what location?
- \* What is the capacity of this existing housing to absorb additional population?
- \* How many of these units are likely to come on the market in the next five years? The next ten years? Of what size? At what price range? At what location?
- \* What is the rate of loss of units from the existing stock -- due to public works construction, to demolition by owners, or simply to abandonment? (Some experts believe this loss of units is a larger determinant of the need for new construction than is the growth of the population.)
- \* What is the vacancy rate? What should the vacancy rate be?
- \* If housing construction runs ahead of new-family formation, and the utilization of the existing stock remains at the present level, additional units are likely to become vacant. Where will these be? What kind of units will they be? What will be done with them?
- \* To what extent do existing units in the central portions of the metropolitan area, as they become vacant, represent . . . or to what extent can they be made . . . an attractive housing opportunity -- as a house, and as a neighborhood?

The Development Guide -- its housing section, as well as its other sections -- is, of course, meant to evolve. What is important is that these next stages in your research and discussion about housing begin, now, with all possible speed.

It is because of the existence and the importance of these housing policy issues that we must again emphasize our conclusion that the job of operating the new renewal program proposed in this Guide, and in the report of your advisory committee, not be assumed by the Metropolitan Council itself; but that it should be delegated under your appropriate supervision to a subordinate regional agency working as your executive arm.

We will not attempt to restate again here all the arguments for this basic approach to metropolitan structure. But the two central facts are worth noting again: first, that full and extensive debate by the Metropolitan Council is absolutely required in order to give political validity to the plans and proposals which come to you from your staff and advisory committees; and, second, that very severe constraints exist on the time you have available for these policy discussions.

If you add to your already overcrowded agenda the issues of policy and administration

that will inevitably accompany the operation of the proposed -- and needed -- housing and redevelopment program, you are likely either (1) to address these issues at the expense of other and more important general policy issues; or (2) to defer them in such a way that they receive virtually no policy-type discussion at all.

Either would, in our opinion, be unfortunate . . . and unnecessary. A workable arrangement exists for the delegation of issues of program policy and administration. It represents, still, the legislative determination about the way in which the regional structure should evolve. The burden is, we believe, on those who propose the alternative, to demonstrate clearly that the Metropolitan Council has, and can properly spend, the time the new program will require. We do not believe such a case has been made -- sufficient, in our judgment, to outweigh the consequences this would inevitably have for the Metropolitan Council's primary job of regional policy-making.