

DUSP
FALL 2003

11.401 Introduction to Housing, Community and Economic Development

Second Memo

EMail by attachment AFTER 6:30 PM on FRIDAY, October 31

Choose one of the following two options

Option I

You are the policy advisor to the mayor of your City of Choice who has been asked by his Peers in the National Conference of Mayors for his opinion on a controversy which is raging within the Conference: whether to support a national policy for a new federal subsidized rental production program OR an equivalent financial increase in the federal Section 8 Voucher program.

The strategy of the National Conference is to lobby the Congress and HUD for **only one** of the approaches with the view that it complicates the politics to try for "some of both" (give me poetic license on this one)

Therefore the Mayor must come down on one side or the other of the "production-voucher" debate.

As the (now familiar) trusted, experienced housing policy advisor, you have been asked to recommend to the mayor **which** policy he should support.

You are someone who has had a long experience with both programs, their triumphs and their follies, since their inception.

Which approach would you recommend to the Mayor?

Why? (i.e. what are the pluses and minuses of each and which has more pluses)

How would you frame the policy you choose to avoid the mistakes of the past and to insure its longevity into the future? I.e. what has been the experience in the past that is relevant to the present (and future).

In answering the question think about the housing market(s) in the City of Your Choice as well as the institutional infrastructure at both the city and neighborhood levels

In four(or so) 1 1/2 spaced pages of dynamic, hard-hitting analytic prose tell the Mayor how you think he ought to proceed and why.

Option II Whither America Park?

You work on the development staff of The Community Builders, (TCB) a non-profit provider of technical assistance to community-based sponsors of housing.(as you know). It is 9 o'clock on a Monday morning; the phone rings. On the line is a resident of Lynn, Massachusetts, a small blue-collar city north of Boston. The caller says she is the President of the Tenants Association of the America Park development, a 408 unit public-housing project, and wants TCB's help in dealing with the major problems confronting the development.

The caller has some basic facts about America Park, known locally as "the Park."

It was built in 1950 on a wooded site with a dramatic view of the Boston skyline. A low density, low rise development, its undistinguished two-story buildings hold between four and six units apiece. Its masonry construction was hastily put together, and buildings at the lower end of the site are regularly flooded. Several have been abandoned, and serve as a hang-out for local kids.

According to the caller, "the Park" is perceived as "housing of last resort" not only by Lynn residents but also by other neighboring towns, which encourage people on their waiting lists to apply to the Lynn Housing Authority because they now there are vacancies in the Park. Like the surrounding Lynn community, 85% of the Park's residents are white. Most households are welfare-dependent and headed by single mothers. Although a few residents of the Park linger on from an earlier era, a recent survey shows that 50% of the residents have lived there less than two years. Nonetheless, the tenant organization is a strong one, its president says, and she herself is a long-term resident of the Park.

The caller says that the Park is viewed as a problem by everyone; its occupants, the Lynn Housing Authority, the surrounding residential community, and the political leaders of Lynn. But what exactly "the problem" is varies among the observers. Tenants, some of whom have strong attachments to the Park and their neighbors there, feel stigmatized by the "locals" simply because they live in the project. The tenants see the Lynn Housing Authority as having failed to

manage and maintain the development. For years there has been talk of using federal public housing modernization program to lift the Park out of physical decline. HOPE VI is known to the community but what it might do and how to get funding for it is unclear, as the Housing Authority seems incapable of getting its act together to apply for funds.

Arguing that renovations would provide only short-term relief, others have proposed that the Park be torn down, its tenants relocated to scattered sites, and the spectacular location sold for moderate-income or market rate housing. Tenants are worried about displacement and also concerned about what a mixed income development might mean for them in terms of social relationships.

There is a community development corporation that works in the surrounding neighborhood but, while successful in building rental housing of its own, it has never involved itself with the affairs of the Park. But it has good standing in the community and is looking for opportunities to take on new housing development.

You listen to the caller and indicate that you need to talk to your boss at TCB before getting back to her as to whether or not TCB can help out.

As a veteran of TCB's work in Boston with the HOPE VI'S at Orchard Park and Mission Main you are familiar with the issues of dealing with "problem public housing projects." You have also worked on CDC housing efforts.

The purpose of your memo to your boss is to give a sense of:

1. whether or not you think TCB should proceed with investigating the project and why
2. how to think about the challenge of "doing something" about America Park.

That "thinking about" could be:

1. laying out development options and how to evaluate them
2. focusing in on a specific option .

In either case, consideration should be taken of :

1. the various players and their roles
2. the concerns raised by radically transforming a public housing development with all the relocation and dislocation entailed therein.
3. How TCB ought to think about a planning process that would work from the problem defined above to a solution

It is not assumed that you know any more about TCB than that it is very good at complex housing deals. You are not expected to know about the specific costs

and bottom line options but only how one ought to think about costs and the need to be realistic.

In four double spaced pages of dynamic, hard-hitting analytic prose tell your Boss how you think TCB ought to proceed and why.

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In the case of either memo (at the risk of being repetitious) remember:

1. the differences among analysis, exhortation and recommendation
2. the need to back up general statements with evidence grounded in specifics: who is going to do what
3. the importance of stating up front the route your memo is taking: i.e. a clear introduction and road map as to what follows
4. the value of acknowledging limitations and dangers to your approach-if there are any.
5. clarity of recommendations