

**REPORT ON THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING
COLLOQUIUM CONFERENCE ON DEVELOPING
A RESEARCH AGENDA TO MOVE THE NATION
TOWARDS A RIGHT TO DECENT,
AFFORDABLE HOUSING HELD AT
SETON HALL LAW SCHOOL
ON OCTOBER 24, 1997.**

*Chester Hartman**

Following the Affordable Housing Colloquium Conference—*“Mount Laurel: What Lessons Have We Learned?”*, the Colloquium called together housing researchers for a conference to develop a national housing research agenda that would advance the nation to the goal of decent, affordable housing for all.

In attendance: Rachel Bratt (Tufts), David Bryson (Natl. Hsng. Law Proj.), Dennis Culhane (Univ. Penn.), Nancy Denton (SUNY-Albany), Peter Dreier (Occidental College), Stephen Eisdorfer (Hill Wallack), Charles Field (NAHB), Bernard Freamon (Seton Hall University School of Law), David Furman (Seton Hall University School of Law), Chester Hartman (PRRAC), Tracy Kaufman (Natl. Low Inc. Hsng. Coal.), Tracy Kaye (Seton Hall University School of Law), Gavin Kearney (Univ. MN Inst. on Race & Poverty), Jill Khadduri (HUD), Robert Lang (Fannie Mae Fdn.), Vivian Lopez (NJ Dept. Comm. Affairs), Alan Mallach (Trenton Dept. Hsng. & Dev.), Galen Martin (KY Fair Housing Comm.), Arnold Mytelka (Fraemer, Burns, Mytelka & Lovell), John Payne (Rutgers Law School), Susan Saegert (CUNY Grad. Ctr.), Leslie Strauss (Hsng. Asst. Council), and Margery Turner (Urban Inst.)

The meeting opened with attendees briefly describing current housing research they and/or the organizations they work for are undertaking. Some of the points made and the ensuing discussion that seemed particularly relevant include:

HUD PDR has a \$34 million research budget (by far the largest single pot of such money); but half is for AHS and related data collection and much must be devoted to studies mandated by Con-

* Poverty & Race Research Action Council

gress. HUD's research has focused mainly on public housing and Sec. 8; need to adapt to reality that much (most) housing activity now is non-HUD. More persuasive data on housing needs ought to be collected and existing data sets ought to be mined better as an advocacy tool for program improvement.

- The Fannie Mae Foundation's research budget is \$7 million, likely the second largest.

- The Urban Institute's housing research has historically been largely driven by HUD's research agenda, but change is under way to make it more pro-active, looking at ways in which housing must be linked to private/public ladders of opportunity.

- There is need to focus on the issue of why housing is so politically isolated, with a narrow, weak constituency: if it is so big a problem, why is it not that big an issue? Media coverage is a key factor.

- *Mount Laurel*, so well researched and monitored, yet it travels so poorly beyond New Jersey — why? Can we recast the remedy so it reaches the truly poor?

- Research is useful in attaining a right to decent, affordable housing only if there is a constituency to use it (which happens rarely: HMDA data one of the exceptions). The housing research community is isolated from users, and users are weak/disorganized.

- State and local housing policy tends to be devoid of research and information. With devolution, this becomes an increasingly serious defect.

- Research funding/budgets need to have a component that deals with building relationships, local meetings, and constituency building.

- The traditional model of academic research is outmoded: it takes too long, and researchers pay too little attention to how it gets out and is used.

- Research must focus on the big systemic questions — the delivery system, financing, etc. — not narrow issues that most practitioners ask about.

- Practitioners do too little writing. Grants would be useful to give practitioners time to write up their work.
- Joint Center for Housing Studies' annual "State of Nation's Housing" should be broader in scope.
- Housing research should be broadened to include community development.

Following the lunch break, the discussion turned to specific proposals for a research agenda that will assist in moving the nation towards a right to decent, affordable housing. A listing of categories into which research work can be placed was developed, as follows:

- Analysis/impact of existing programs
- Devolution/welfare reform
- Data collection
- Relation to other systems (jobs, schools, etc.)
- Race and concentrated poverty
- Homelessness
- Sprawl
- Organizing
- Delivery systems
- Location and neighborhood
- Politics/public opinion/media
- Governance
- Capacity building
- Decision-making
- Costs
- Suitable living environment
- Design
- Finance

There is need for a central forum for disseminating housing research results and for research to keep pace with information technology. The Urban Institute might serve this role as an information clearinghouse on housing research — it developed a list-serve on housing mobility issues following the recent national conference on that subject (although it has not been greatly used to date). Other possibilities are HUD USER and HUD's new Urban Research Monitor on HUD's new webpage (which might be ex-

panded to include non-HUD research).¹

The central issue is not enough money for housing — other research issues should not ignore or obscure that underlying problem. Also, do we really know enough to assert confidently that housing can be a good platform to improve the lives of low-income and minority households?

Specific ideas for research projects:

Media and public attitudes: how the media covers housing; what issues are emphasized; and what research is reported? Fannie Mae might give media awards for good coverage. The National Low Income Housing Coalition's "Media Advocacy Project," currently under way, is designed to improve the "messages" delivered about housing.

- What would a program to meet the National Housing Goal actually cost, based on different program assumptions? How could it be financed? What would be sources of funding?

- Production of yearly data on: distribution of housing subsidies; race and mortgage lending; how much each state spends on housing; children and housing; schools and housing; and housing segregation trends.

- What is a "suitable living environment"?
- Impacts of housing code enforcement.
- Filtering impacts.
- Impact of devolution on housing.
- Attitudinal studies.

Why should the approximately 210 million Americans without housing problems care about the others? What are the housing

¹ The Urban Research Monitor is a new bimonthly item from HUD USER, \$15 for a one-year subscription, \$2.50 for a single issue. Each issue features a thoughtful essay exploring a cutting edge issue or current policy debate in the field. The September/October issue reviews new research on racially mixed neighborhoods. The following website contains additional information: <http://www.huduser.org/publications/periodicals/urmad.html>. Other HUD resources: HUD USER publications: Order their publications by accessing <<http://www.huduser.org>>. The mailing address P.O. Box 6091, Rockville, MD 20850, (800)245-2691. For HUD PD&R research and resources, there's a free listserve service, HUDUSERNEWS, which automatically sends to your e-mail address publication announcements and other notices from PD&R. To subscribe, send a message to: <listproc@aspensys.com>. In the body of the message, type <subscribe hudusernews> and your e-mail address.

problems of the non-poor? Quantification of the costs of bad housing to society as a whole. What are the strategies for political mobilization?

What orders of magnitude are needed to deconcentrate the poor?

- What would provide the biggest impact if a small amount of money was injected into a local housing market?

- What models of home ownership foster good and bad outcomes?

- What will it take to improve the performance of CDCs?

- How to link housing strategies to job strategies? (AFL-CIO, which has a big research operation, does not focus on housing at all.)

- Assemble a group of practitioners to learn of their research needs.

- Assemble key representatives of housing advocacy groups to learn of their research needs.

- What are the “best case” housing scenarios?

- What are the best state-level housing initiatives?

This is the laundry list we compiled. The question is what to do with this? The idea underlying our meeting was to try and influence the research agendas of individual researchers, research institutes and funders. How can the results of our conference move things in that direction?

We encourage readers to submit their ideas on what we ought to do (if anything) with the results of this meeting so that it has some follow-up impact (including some sense of priority among the many specific ideas listed above — adding any new ideas). Readers should reply to Chester Hartman, PRRAC, 1711 Connecticut Avenue N.W., Suite 207, Washington DC, 20009 or fax (202) 387-0764 or e-mail PRRAC@AOL.com.

We will try to consolidate the responses into a specific set of recommendations that then might be issued over the names of meeting attendees — in a way that will give it the greatest impact. Thus, your dissemination of ideas should be included as well.