FEDERAL HILL
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

THE EVOLUTION OF A NEIGHBORHOOD AND
A PROPOSAL FOR COMMUNITY BASED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

by

Richard Eric Polton


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FEDERAL HILL
Providence, Rhode Island
The Evolution of a Neighborhood and
A Proposal for Community Based Housing Development

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history and development
of a neighborhood in Providence, Rhode Island, from its
beginnings as a farming community to a street car
suburb to ethnic enclave to "declining neighborhood".
The relationship of urban form and social systems are
discussed for each period. The development of a community
based housing organization in Federal Hill is analyzed,
and several of the major dilemmas facing such organizations
are detailed. The thesis concludes with a proposal for a
neighborhood based housing program.

Thesis Supervisor: Julian Beinart, Professor of Architecture
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Finally, a warm but brief thanks to my wife, Bobbie.
Introduction

One of the most discussed and debated contemporary urban issues is the importance of the neighborhood in the future of American cities. Once maligned as an anachronism with no purpose in modern society, the neighborhood has become increasingly recognized as a fundamental aspect in the livability of cities and potentially an important component in the revitalization process.

This thesis is an attempt to examine the specific conditions in a particular community in Providence, Rhode Island, struggling to deal with the complex issues facing American cities in the 1970s. I have chosen to explore some of the issues related to revitalization by explaining how Federal Hill grew and developed. In addition, I have attempted to explain my involvement in the process to bring about effective and responsive community based change.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first contains an overview of the neighborhood's transformation from a farming community to street car suburb to its emergence as an ethnic enclave. The relationship between physical form and social development is examined and several conflicts are explored in depth. The second chapter describes and analyzes the particular nature of the Italian settlement in Federal Hill, especially the connections between social structure and urban form. Issues such as social stratification, sub-neighborhoods and localism are given special attention. The third chapter discusses the history of a movement for incumbent
revitalization and the battles which helped mold a network of community activists. The chapter closes with a summary of conditions which set the stage for a neighborhood based housing proposal. I begin the fourth chapter with the story of my relationship with New Homes for Federal Hill and describe some of my experiences and activities to help effect change. In many ways this has been the most difficult portion of the thesis to write because it is extremely difficult to characterize succinctly the numerous thoughts, feelings and decisions which I experienced during the last year and a half. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes the thesis with some general observations on the dilemmas facing an environmental designer who chooses to engage in the this type of activity. Many of these issues are not specific to Federal Hill and it is my hope that this discussion will be of assistance to anyone attempting similar activity. The Appendix includes a variety of documents and reports which help clarify what has been accomplished as well as specific conditions in Federal Hill.

As a final note, I would like to add that the opinions expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the organization New Homes for Federal Hill or any other organization or individual.
The Neighborhood Context:
A Brief History of Federal Hill

For people in Rhode Island, Federal Hill is the prototypical urban neighborhood - one of the last remaining urban villages in a state which had once been characterized by ethnic enclaves. During the past few years, a wide variety of redevelopment and revitalization proposals have been undertaken on the premise that its ethnicity can be marketed profitably so that the entire community will benefit. As unlikely as it seems, it just might happen that way. Despite the problems other neighborhoods have faced because of gentrification and a rapid increase of property values, the special history of Federal Hill, both socially and physically, make the area unique. It appears that revitalization now underway will be a genuine improvement with a minimum of negative impacts. To figure out why, we must explore in some detail the peculiar history of the community.

In the late eighteenth century, most of Federal Hill was still a barren plateau. It was a place for cattle to graze and occasional visitors to come to enjoy an exceptional view. In 1788, Amos Maine Atwell (named after an ancestor who owned the entire Province of Maine) and several other businessmen formed a partnership to improve and develop parts of the West Side of the city. The land was subdivided and parcels were auctioned off at $100.00 apiece. Atwell was one of Rhode Island's leading citizens; a dry goods dealer, land speculator, and a Colonel in the Revolutionary War. He was also prominent in local affairs serving in the General
Assembly and acting as a member of the first Providence School Committee. His actions in property subdivision have had a significant impact on the appearance of the neighborhood.

With the eventual development of the agricultural resources of the state's hinterlands and the construction of a network of turnpikes radiating from the center of the city, Providence was becoming primarily a mercantile and industrial city, with the majority of the residents either artisans or small merchants. The War of 1812 hastened the trend toward an industrial economy. A variety of enterprises grew up along the waterways of Rhode Island and several major mills were developed in areas adjacent to Federal Hill. Factories of cotton mills, bleacheries and dye houses were all located in nearby Olneyville or along the Providence River to the north.

The neighborhood began to become an important residential area for the new working class—the painters, joiners, carpenters, cobblers, laborers, mariners, teamsters, and draymen who manned maritime and mercantile pursuits. Although the shipping industry never fully recovered from the 1807 Embargo and the War of 1812, as well as the growing prominence of ports such as New York and Boston, the area's manufacturing capabilities led to new sources of wealth. Providence industrialists found that the arrival of new Irish immigrants, reaching Rhode Island in record numbers, was a fortuitous circumstance, providing much needed labor at low rates. Spurred by long-standing poverty and political repression in their own country and finally by the famine of the 1840's,
many Irish came to New England to seek a better life. A common
culture, poverty, and dependence on proximity to industrial
employment, combined to force the Irish into concentrated areas,
largely on the West Side of Providence, in areas adjacent to
the sparsely settled Federal Hill. The 1854 census showed that
of Providence's 41,513 residents, 8,333 had been born in Ireland.
By the time Irish immigration had slowed in the 1860's, the
entire western and portions of the southern part of Providence
were largely Irish. The work the Irish found was mostly menial
industrial occupations in metal and textile factories, as well as
domestic service.

One of the first Irish churches in Providence was constructed in
an area which is today considered part of Federal Hill. In
1853, St. Mary's Church was founded and in 1864 the parish built
an imposing granite church, later adding primary and secondary
schools, a rectory and a parish house. Although the Irish and
the Catholic Church were often harassed by native Rhode Islanders,
they were never subjected to the widespread violence and persecu-
tion of their compatriots in other American cities.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the basic street grid
of the entire West Side of the city had been laid out. The
Statewide Preservation Report of the Rhode Island Historic
Preservation Commission notes, "The 1853 map by Cushing and
Walling shows the awkward development of the West Side well
underway, for owners seldom attempted to coordinate the highway
lines of their plats. As farms were sold for development, owners
platted their holding individually. There were no civic regulations such as zoning or prescribed lot sizes to control this process of development, and today the many staggered and dead-end streets can be attributed to this break up of the original eighteenth century farm lots."

Other important developments were shaping the patterns of the city. The Stonington and Worcester Railroad Lines were given permission in 1847 to build their beds along the Woonasquatucket Valley, the northern boundary of Federal Hill. The growth of the railroad formed a "hard edge" and anticipated further industrial development of the Federal Hill area in later years.

These mid-century years saw continued architectural development in the area. Much of the housing built during this period was in the Greek Revival style, which had "ideological associations with democracy and the Greek War for Independence, going beyond the Roman republicanism of earlier Federal architecture." The style was appropriate to the nationalist cultural identity of the Jacksonian era. Most of the detailing seen in the Federal Hill neighborhood was derived from pattern books which became widely available to builders. Asher Benjamin's *Practice of Architecture*, published in 1836, was especially important. Many older buildings were updated with new detailing, while new houses were built with Ionic and Doric details. Several new temple-form houses were built in newer subdivisions. However, by the end of the Civil War years, the density of development was still quite low and many small farms and estates dotted the area.
The years following the Civil War were important growth years of a different character. First, the Irish in the neighborhood had become more or less assimilated into the mainstream of Rhode Island society. The Civil War itself played an important role in Americanizing the Irish; the shared experience of military service had helped to defuse anti-Irish sentiment and to integrate the community into the larger life of the state. Also, the Providence Irish found that active participation in Rhode Island politics offered significant opportunities for advancement. Although the Irish were conspicuously under-represented in the city government during the 1880's, Irish control of more than one third of the positions of the Democratic Party ward committees indicated growing strength. The general prosperity and growth of Rhode Island during the post Civil War years meant expanded economic opportunities for the Irish, and many moved into skilled labor positions as well as the merchant and professional classes. The Irish excelled in Providence (as elsewhere) at understanding and perfecting the political machine and remain to the present important political leaders, despite relatively low numbers. The repeal in 1888 of constitutional provisions requiring property ownership in order to vote in state and national elections marked an important breakthrough for emerging political leaders. However, property requirements were maintained for voting in City Council elections until 1928, when they were removed by constitutional amendment.

It was during those post Civil War years of general prosperity and growth that the grandest architectural developments of all
were to take place in Federal Hill. A street railway system was incorporated in 1865 connecting the downtown with Olneyville, an important manufacturing district. The Broadway line of the street railway, along with similar routes along Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue, opened up whole new areas for new and rather elaborate housing development. Broadway became a highly fashionable and desirable residential boulevard with elaborate estates of Providence's downtown merchants and professional nouveau riche.

The Preservation Commission report notes, "The business life of the nineteenth century still depended upon proximity of residences to work centers so that, while Providence remained a pedestrian city, the area of dense settlement remained limited. The new fixed lines of the streetcars which plied the major thoroughfares of the West Side gave a relatively easy and inexpensive access to downtown and, as in many other cities, encouraged the outward thrust of the residential areas of Providence." The subsequent development of the area gives a fascinating glimpse of the social hierarchy in Victorian Providence. Along Broadway, the widest and grandest boulevard in the city, the showiest mansions were built in elaborate style. Here the merchants and industrialists could walk out of their carriages into their homes and could compete with one another for the costliest, most elaborate decoration. But because Providence was still largely a compact, pedestrian city, the middle classes were also anxious to take advantage of the new streetcar lines and more modest homes were built on narrow lots on the side streets.
These houses lacked the pretentions of the mansions, but shared some decorative motifs and styles. Then, further off the boulevard, closer to the "fringe areas" and factories, were the better paid artisans and workers. The system was clearly stratified but compared with later developments is remarkably integrated.

Although much of the land unplatted in 1850 was still undeveloped in 1870, this open land was now too valuable to remain as farms. In the coming years, the last of the remaining landed estates were broken up. Land companies such as the Rawson Fountain Society, the Jones Estate Company and the Messer heirs operated without coordination, planning, or legal regulation. Each developer divided their land in grid patterned streets in order to maximize the salable portion of their property and minimize their investment in roads and infrastructure. Most of these interior subdivisions are deep narrow lots so that valuable frontage could be exploited. Houses were set close to the street and there were only slight variation in size, pattern and detail. Mayor Thomas Doyle pointed out in 1872:

> each developer is platting his own land with reference to the number of building lots he could make on his own tract, and without the slightest reference to the direction which his streets were laid, or whether they led into other streets.

Although the main arteries, such as Atwells Avenue and Broadway flowed out from the downtown, the interior streets follow their own infill pattern, uncontrolled, haphazard and highly profitable.
The Federal Hill area developed along many of the patterns outlined in *Streetcar Suburbs*, Sam Bass Warner's definitive work on Boston. Physically, Broadway was an undifferentiated, linear development without a visual center. Rather, the boulevard was meant to be viewed from a passing vehicle where the impressive massing, detailing and use of color could best be appreciated. The area had no public square or center; schools and other buildings were located on side streets off the axis and integrated into the neighborhood grid. The center for the area were the two commercial districts at either end, in Olneyville and downtown Providence.

Socially, the significance of Broadway was that it symbolized the arrival of a new class. The residents were all newly "arrived" and there was little concern for social background. It was a time of enormous economic growth in Providence as well as growing confidence that society could solve any problem and meet any new challenge. The new suburbs were physical expressions of success and self-satisfaction. As Warner points out, the suburbs indicate that the basis of nineteenth century capitalism, including residential development, was individual activity. He calls it an age of "privatism" and, in fact, this privatism pervades even residential patterns. There is little that is shared by any of the individual residences; there are no parks, no squares, no public or semi-public open spaces. Each home is the reflection of the individual success of its owner and the district as an entity takes on the vitality of its individual residents. A
community sense, however, is not part of the scene.

Socially, Broadway was not an area for aristocrats or snobs. Anyone, regardless of social background or religion was welcome to purchase a home, if they could afford it. Early homeowners were of various ethnic and denominational backgrounds. But, as a consequence, it was also a neighborhood with little cohesiveness. Social relationships were polite, but not terribly deep, and one's commitment to the area, in terms of institutional or familiar relationships, was minimal. As problems in the neighborhood emerged, the question of neighborhood cohesiveness would prove a serious one for the area. Despite economic commitment to particular homes, there was little in the neighborhood that homeowners were particularly committed to maintain.
NOTES

1. Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission, Antoinette Downing, Chairman, West Side, Providence, James H. Gibbs, Pamela Kennedy, authors, Statewide Preservation Report P-P-1, May, 1976, p. 6

2. ibid., p. 8

3. ibid., p. 9

4. ibid., p. 14

5. ibid., p. 20
The Arrival of the Italians

The impact of Italian immigrants on Federal Hill and, for that matter, the State of Rhode Island is an important and complicated history. In order to make some sense out of the impact of immigration on Federal Hill, it is essential to examine the nature of this phenomena. In an excellent thesis on the development of Italian-American neighborhoods, Antonio DiMambro has outlined some major characteristics of Italian immigration. Perhaps most important is the class background of the Southern Italians who came to the United States. Southern Italy was a feudal society with archaic agricultural methods and poor land. Peasants, the lowest of the economic strata, were raised in a culture which taught fatalism, distrust, class differentiation, and disenfranchisement. DiMambro points out that the major element for advancement in this society was the family—"a large extended family seen as an inclusive social world."

Members of the family were "bound by traditions and codes such as male domination and leadership, family solidarity, exclusion of outsiders, pursuit of family and not community interests." The peasant background of the Italian immigrants had been preserved through the denial of education and illiteracy was widespread. This served the interests of the upper class and clergy who believed that the education of the peasantry would provide a threat to the existing order and stability. And the peasant, with his short-term perspective and threatened existence, felt that education might mean that children would question their place in the family
structure. The home was the important social institution for the children and transmitted cultural, social and moral values, maintaining stability through the various generations.

Other characteristics of the Italian immigrant was a distrust of the church because of the class role that the church played within Italian economic order. Alliances between the wealthy landowners and priests were frequent and led to political hardships for the peasants. As a response, the peasants' relation to the church consisted of an adherence to the Catholic faith supplemented by pagan rituals and celebrations.

Answering the question of why such a poor, down-trodden, and in many ways, resigned class would find their way to America, DiMambro describes a variety of factors. First of all, the Southern Italian peasant frequently rebelled against their oppression, through insurrection and crime against the rich; there was a history of resistance and discontent. But more importantly, several "pull" factors grew which attracted those extremely dissatisfied with their lives in Italy. A group of intermediaries or immigration agents came to Italy from America in search of cheap labor for American contractors and railroad companies. They found a peasant audience that was very receptive to their offers and willing to leave Italy. This process attracted a "temporary" type of migration. Usually the men left alone, thereby maintaining definite ties with their homeland and seeing in this flight a temporary one which would permit them to eventually return to Italy with enough money
to buy land and lead a better life. The dream of return prevailed even among those who had left with their families. Their stay in America thus become sort of limbo—an attempt to build up one's resources and await one's return to the homeland.

Despite the severe hardships of the immigrant's life in America, it was still far more satisfactory than the peasant's existence in Italy. It was only after several years of work and settling in that many Italians recognized that they had come to stay. But the lack of original permanent commitment to America was to have serious consequences in the pattern of urban development.

These were the circumstances under which thousands of immigrants arrived in Providence. The Fabre Line, a steamship company based in Marseille and operating between the southern European ports and New York, opened a shipping terminal in Providence in 1911. The company and its passengers were ill-equipped to handle the difficulties of an arduous journey. A contemporary business magazine described some of the problems:

The Fabre Line was handicapped from the beginning of its service...it brought immigrants from sunny climes, sparsely clad in the habilments of their country, and was forced to land them in the open, cold, cheerless, freight shed, where they were really miserable and made to feel that their welcome to the country was a niggardly one.

Although the conditions were later modified somewhat, the welcome granted the new arrivals must have been harsh at best.

Statistics indicate that almost all the new immigrants to Providence had come from agricultural districts and over half had
been farmers. Frequently, several families from the same town made the journey together and settled on the same street upon arrival in Providence. And, the new arrivals were afforded little protection against exploitation. The Italian Government cared little about the welfare of its citizens in America. "Emigration is a fact which we don't have the right to surpress or the means to prevent" was their only statement on the matter. Clearly, the Italians were glad to see a potential source of discontent leave the country in order to maintain the existing social order with minimal problems. "Emigrants therefore left Italy without legal protection against exploitation in foreign countries and without minimal preparation."

The growth of the Italian community in Providence was rapid. In 1885, there were only a few hundred Italian born residents; twenty years later there were 18,014, and by 1920, there were 42,044. By 1930, approximately twenty percent of the city's population was of Italian extraction--more than 50,000 people. The original settlement of Italians along Spruce Street and Atwells Avenue, the "downhill side" of the neighborhood, eventually grew to include greater and greater portions of the neighborhood. The Italian community had arrived and Federal Hill was never going to be the same.

DiMambro identified three general periods in the evolution of Little Italies in New York and Boston corresponding to the years 1880-1920, 1920-1950, and 1950-present. Each period relates to major changes in both social and physical environments. The first period is the phase during which the area is transformed to
meet the needs of new residents. The second, which begins with the termination of mass immigration, is a time of consolidation with the neighborhood functioning as a socially and physically isolated community. In the third, which takes us to the present, the neighborhood faces increased out-migration, decay of the social structure and, in some cases, a restructuring based on a new set of social and economic arrangements. In other cases, the neighborhood loses its ethnic character completely.

Although the particular history of Federal Hill is rather different than the Little Italies of other big cities, the framework which DiMambro outlines provides an important and useful social and cultural diagram for understanding Federal Hill.
The First Period: 1880-1920

The earliest Italian settlement was confined to the area north of Broadway. At first, the oldest housing in the neighborhood was divided to re-house large numbers of recent arrivals, but the rapid influx of immigrants, desperate for minimal shelter, led to a new wave of housing construction. Every available lot was built upon, often with two triple decker tenements on a 60 x 100 ft. lot. Rooming houses flourished. As was true of the Italian experience in other American cities, city officials had little contact with the new community, and without codes or regulations, the congestion and overcrowding became serious problems.

Conditions deteriorated to the point that in 1917, the General Committee on "Improved Housing in Providence" was formed by the Providence Chamber of Commerce to investigate the long-term implications of current housing practices. Although the report is written in a patronizing style for the city's elite, it offers an interesting picture of how the growing ethnic communities appeared to a native American. What is especially interesting is the way in which the new Italian immigrants, in Providence for only ten years when the report was written, had already transformed Federal Hill neighborhood in a way still evident. Because the Italian immigrants were numerically the largest to arrive in the city, John Ihlder, the expert hired to examine housing conditions, gives Federal Hill extremely close scrutiny. Here, he decides, is the future of Providence...and what kind of city will Providence be?
Here are Ihlder's comments:

In many ways, the Italian immigrant measures up to what we believe is requisite in good citizenship. Comparing, from the American point of view, his virtues with his vices, the former far outweigh the latter. And even some of what we might call his vices are but virtues pushed to excess, though contrariwise, some qualities which we are wont to laud have also crossed the border line. His clannishness, his fondness for living among his own people, which increases so greatly the difficulty of Americanization, is but an expression of the same feeling that makes the Italian family the kind upon which a city and a nation can be built. His quick temper, like his demonstrativeness, his love of color and gaiety, may prove a valuable element when mixed with the slower and more subdued temperaments (sic) of the north in the future American... But those two great virtues of his, of which one hears constantly from Americans with whom he has financial dealings, his thrift and his desire to own real estate, are of more lasting concern.

Of course, these qualities, like his others, will be modified in the future when the Italian in America has lost his identity. But they are of greater concern not only to the present but the future, because they are now finding expression in ways which will be permanent. We are told by his spokesmen that he lives in congested neighborhoods, in overcrowded dwellings, not because he desires to do so, but because he must. The poor take what they can get, and the great majority of Italians in Providence are poor. Given his choice, the Italian would live in a cottage surrounded by a garden... It is excessive thrift that has made the Federal Hill district what it is. And when this excessive thrift passes, as it probably will in the course of two or three generations, it will leave Providence permanently an overcrowded tenament-house city. That is, it will unless Providence now foresees the danger and prevents it.

After going on to state that the Italian is simply doing what the law allows because of the precedents set by American builders, Ihlder continues with his prediction of the future of the Federal Hill area:

Already the Americans are beginning to reap what they have sown. Such land overcrowding as now obtains in
the Atwells Avenue district on Federal Hill increases revenues, but it lowers standards. Paradoxically, it lowers property values. The Italian tenements are creeping rapidly along the cross streets toward Broadway. And before them go consternation and depreciation. One of the most beautiful and dignified streets in the city seems doomed. This is not because a new people are moving in. If the new people would live as did the old, the tragedy would be one of individuals, rather than one of the community; of the present only, rather than of the present and the future. But the new people will not live as do the old.

Ihlder concludes that the appropriate response to the rapid and intense development underway in Providence is to regulate more carefully the building process by instituting zoning and tightening construction standards. Within several years, his major recommendations will be adopted. However, the pattern of Federal Hill (and much of just about all of Providence for that matter) will have already been determined. Ihlder's statements are also interesting from the perspective of understanding the rapid transformation of nineteenth century American cities. In a remarkably brief period, the Victorian order of Federal Hill was transformed. The streetcar suburbs of Providence were extremely vulnerable to rapid change because of the proximity of divergent classes and the lack of "place commitment" of previous residents. As long as a reasonable balance of class mix was maintained, the community could remain stable. However, with the rapid growth of a working class immigrant population who were clearly "unAmerican" in lifestyle in close proximity of the Broadway mansions, the property values of the middle and upper class areas were immediately
threatened and quickly undermined. The real estate market had determined a new higher and best use for the area even though, as Ihlder points out, it meant a depreciation in property values for some of the city's wealthiest residents. Ihlder also points out that it is the cultural conflict between the long-term residents and the recent arrivals which diminished the property values of Broadway. And, gradually, his predictions were borne out. Broadway did decline as a prestigious residential address for the well-to-do natives.

As Warner points out, the streetcar suburb was a settlement pattern incapable of dealing with the growing complexities of life:

> In 1900 the new metropolis lacked local communities that could deal with the problems of contemporary society at the level of the family and its immediate surroundings and it lacked a large scale community that could deal with the problems of the metropolis... Each decade brought an increase in the scale and complexity of economic and social life; each decade's problems demanded more wide-scale attention, more complex solutions. Because of the physical arrangements of the new metropolis, each decade also brought an ever greater fragmentation of community life into town and ward politics, church and social clubs, and specialized societies of all kinds.

The form of the Broadway area did not adapt particularly well to its new uses. Houses which had been grandly appropriate for single families were later divided for use by several families as apartments. Rooms were frequently dark and poorly ventilated. Again, Warner comments on the Boston experience, which parallel events in Federal Hill:
Neither the architecture nor the land planning of the new suburbs took any account of the possible subsequent users. A satisfactory single family house brought, when divided, two or three cramped and mean apartments, each one often well below the building's original standards for light, air and sanitation. The reduction in floor area per person brought an immediate and obvious retreat from the norms of the first owner. The garden setting of the street often disappeared under the feet of running children; back yards and porches filled with the overflow and trash from the houses; planted playgrounds required tar to support increased use; and large parks grew to weeds because of lack of time and interest among the new park users.

The growth of Federal Hill prompted more than housing studies by the native American population. There was a general and widespread concern that the growth of the Italian community posed a real threat to American institutions. As was the case in many of the other Little Italies, several attempts were made by the native population to aid in Americanization. The Italian immigrant had to be taught American ways, according to Ihlder, before their poor housekeeping created serious problems for the entire community. Their existing housekeeping methods, described in the report on housing, leave a great deal to be desired:

Italian women have industry, often poorly applied, but reasoning seems to be beyond them. They see no connection between a nursing bottle full of tea colored milk and the nervous restlessness of the baby. They see no reason why they should walk down four flights of stairs with a heavy garbage pail, when things can be thrown out of the window, and someone else sweeps up the yard. Though they bring it down, under coercion from the landlord, they cannot read the signs, even when printed in their own language, telling them not to mix swill with ashes.

Several attempts were initiated to address these very real problems of adaptation. The first serious attempt to Americanize
the Italians was by a group of Baptists who opened a small church in the neighborhood to teach the immigrants American customs and values while attempting to convert them to Protestantism. The fact that a Protestant Church would open its doors in a Catholic stronghold appears remarkably bold. In many Little Italies, though, immediate conflicts arose between the existing Catholic Church largely dominated by Irish and the new arrivals. The Catholic Church was generally unresponsive; few Italian priests were willing to make the journey to America with the peasants, and the new arrivals found the Catholic Churches quite dissimilar both in its social makeup and in its service than the church it left in Italy. Unlike many American diocese, the Bishop of Providence, Bishop Harkins, immediately recognized the cultural differences between the more dogmatic Irish-dominated hierarchy of the American Catholic Church, and the more fluid, festivity oriented Southern Italy style of Catholicism. Harkins therefore sponsored the establishment of the Holy Ghost Italian National Parish on Federal Hill in 1889 to serve the needs of the new immigrants. As a result of this wise action, many of the conflicts which arose in churches in other American cities were avoided in Providence. The major difference between the American Territorial Catholic Church, which has administrative control over the appointments of all priests in the diocese, and the Italian National Church, which is also controlled by the local bishop, is that the priests of the Italian church are trained by the Scalabrini Order in Italy.
It was assumed that the Italian training gave a priest a greater sensitivity to the needs of the Italian immigrant and their culture. A Scalabrini was able to cope better with the reworking of Catholic dogma made by Italian peasants--adoration of Madonnas, great festas, and numerous celebrations--activities which many American Catholics might have considered sacrilegious, or even pagan.

Conflict did arise between the Church clergy and the membership which threatened to greatly weaken the new community. The newly arrived Scalabrini priest at Holy Ghost was considered arrogant and aloof by much of the Church membership, and a petition was drawn asking for his removal. Many of the historic tensions between priests and peasants came to the surface. Fees were claimed to be too high, there was alleged insensitivity to the needs of the poor, and traditional celebrations and customs were ignored.

Although the tensions within the Church were eventually resolved, the plight of the Italians and the other immigrants attracted other religionists who saw the religion and customs of the new arrivals as potential converts. In Providence, the birthplace of the American Baptist Church, a mission was established to help the foreign population "appreciate the greatness of America as well as to set behavior models and standards." Programs included child rearing, Saturday night showers, health care,
employment referral and language courses for adults. The impact which the Baptist Church had on Federal Hill was really limited, however. Despite the conflicts within the Catholic Church, the population was, in fact, dedicated to its form of Catholicism and the religious ceremonies offered by the Protestants were not responsive to the Italian immigrant's traditions and culture. As was true elsewhere, after the initial years of serving a positive role in Americanization, the Italian Baptist Church lost the interest of the community and by the early 1960's, as the strong ethnic identity of the Italian Baptist Church weakened, the church attracted membership from outside the immediate neighborhood. Eventually, conflict arose between the existing community and the new church congregation. The church burned in a mysterious fire and the congregation was disbanded.

In addition to the Italian Baptist Church, a settlement house was established in the neighborhood and was operated by native American trained social workers. The settlement house was originally called the Sprague House and had been in existence for some years in another part of the city. However, when the massive number of new immigrants arrived in Federal Hill, the Sprague House board decided it must move to meet the needs of this new group. The Sprague House rented a small house along Atwells Avenue and ran a variety of social programs. The Yankee ladies, who originally staffed the center, met some resistance from local residents - there was a real communication problem.
After several years, though, the settlement house became an important part of the neighborhood as it adapted its programs to meet local residents and was totally run. Boxing matches were sponsored, a parole officer set up an office so that local parolees would not have to travel very far and a wide range of social programs were organized. Among the most noteworthy of these was a debating society, which in fact evolved into a training group for young Italian professionals to-be. A recent newspaper article about the club and its many distinguished alumni points out the importance that Federal Hill House had for many neighborhood residents. Today, the Federal Hill House looms large in the recollections of neighborhood residents, while in fact, it was an extremely small facility, and reached only a very limited number of local residents. Support from the Providence native population was actually minimal.

Given little support from either their country of origin or their new homeland, the immigrants developed a wide network of social and financial services within the community during their early settlement years to meet their basic needs. Early institutions arose based largely on the extended family, social societies, and "padrone" system and were controlled by "prominenti" (important people). Under this network, a system of mutual responsibility and loyalty was established - frequently to the advantage of the "prominenti" and at the expense of the newly arrived immigrant. One of the most important institutions which
arose in Federal Hill were the "bancas" which was more than a traditional banking institution but a sort of "social emporium" where immigrants could obtain information and advice. As in many Little Italies, the "bancas" on Federal Hill operated as a travel agency, employment center, mailroom and safe deposit vault. The "bancas" rarely dealt in real estate mortgages. Sometimes a higher than normal rate of interest was paid on savings, reflecting the greater willingness of the bancas to take risks in their investments. Often times, they paid very low rates, preying on the ignorance of and loyalty of immigrant residents.

Typical of this type of account, a local resident recalled:

My grandfather, who died several years ago at 92, bought shares for all his grandchildren for $200. In return, he was given a note by this banker that he would be guaranteed 3% interest as long as he held the share. You know, each year, the banker would come to my grandfather's house to deliver the interest payment and thank my grandfather for his trust in the bank. Occasionally, he would go to the banker for advice or for some small favor, but let's face it, the banker had the old man's life savings tied up and could use it to make lots of money. As hard as we tried to talk him into taking his money and putting it someplace else, my grandfather believed he was getting a good deal and didn't want to disappoint his friend the banker.

Over the years, these bancas and loan agencies grew into legal (although some argue not always legitimate) second mortgage houses. Many remain on Federal Hill, while others have grown and have taken new offices in more fashionable parts of the city.

In addition to the banking and financial institutions which grew during the early years of Italian settlement of Federal Hill, a
A wide variety of religious and mutual aid societies were formed. Forty such organizations existed in the city by 1920 and over seventy by 1925.

Many of these societies were named for the village in Italy where its members came from while others were given the name of the saint of their home town. The societies provided important security for members by helping out in times of family crisis; a missed paycheck because of illness could be supplemented by aid from the group. During a death, the society would handle funeral arrangements, frequently paying for all funeral expenses. Societies also sponsored a variety of festivals and celebrations.

By the time this first period of Italian community in Federal Hill came to an end, when immigration laws in the United States were severely tightened, a hierarchical, introspective neighborhood has taken form. The look of residents was inward toward the community, despite the growing class conflicts in the industrial workplaces. The labor movement attempted to cross ethnic lines and was somewhat successful in Rhode Island in bringing together working class Italians, Poles, French-Canadians and Jews into an alliance on specific issues. However, the basic national consciousness, fostered by the living patterns of the Federal Hill neighborhood and the dream of some sort of American identity proved to be far more powerful a vision. Besides, striking, espousing anarchism, which many of Federal Hill did, could be very dangerous. The case of Sacco and Vanzetti
was a dangerous precedent and their deaths were a real warning to those political radicals in the Federal Hill neighborhood.
The Second Period

The years between the two world wars mark what many current residents recall as the golden age of Federal Hill. Although when pressed, the memories are bitter sweet, residents will still talk about this time when the neighborhood was at its peak. However, a number of conflicting events were transpiring simultaneously which foreshadowed future difficulties.

The 1920's are remembered as years of prolific economic expansion across America with New England leading the nation as a mature, diversified area. Rhode Island industry afforded a wide array of job opportunities for people with few skills and as an economy which had come to age before the rest of the nation, job opportunities were extremely diversified. Residents in Federal Hill were within walking distance to manufacturing jobs at Brown and Sharpe (a major machine manufacturer), U.S. Rubber, Nicholson File, a range of metal manufacturers as well as textile mills in nearby neighborhoods. Italian immigrants found as well service positions downtown or in restaurants, bars and shops in nearby neighborhoods. The construction industry, where little capital was required to get started, became an important industry for Italian-Americans.

There were other outlets for enterprising Italian immigrants as well. Several Italian politicians emerged as important spokesmen for the community. Restrictions on voting, the strong and entrenched position of the Irish in this domain and the lack of
unified organization limited the extent to which Italians became major political leaders in Providence. This does not mean that local politics were not important on the neighborhood level; on the contrary, politics have always generated enormous interest. Even today, when the stakes of political power in Federal Hill have become much lower, the neighborhood is absorbed in political processes. During the period between the world wars, when political office meant access to welfare, patronage positions and favors (likely even more important for survival than today), attaining political office was a major accomplishment.

In Federal Hill, as in other Italian neighborhoods, loyalty to Italian traditions and values were important election themes. Politicians were known to exploit their personal background to woo voters and speak of the splendor and importance of their shared national heritage. Among the most noteworthy of Rhode Island's Italian politicians was the career of John O. Pastore, a Federal Hill native, whose eloquence and demeanor served him well in a career which saw him as Governor and U.S. Senator. His impact on the local political scene, though, was limited, and Pastore's success was based on his ability to transcend local political conflicts.

In addition to business and politics, a third road to success existed for ambitious Federal Hill residents. Organized crime has been described as "part of the American enterprise system". 
but few can condone the acts of violence and corruption which have been perpetrated. No history of Federal Hill would be complete without mention of the importance of organized crime in the neighborhood. The subject is clearly a difficult one to get a handle on - there are few facts and figures taken by the census department. However, it is well known and documented that with the coming of the Prohibition era, organized crime became an extremely important factor. Federal Hill, as the alleged base of operations for several important "underworld" leaders, was undoubtedly an important center of criminal activity and organization. In Rhode Island, this outlet was an important means for social mobility for many first and second generation Italians - and continues to be so. Again, the same basic principles instilled at the street level of loyalty, male leadership and localistic interests, have renewed importance to members of organized crime.

Many of Federal Hill's residents who became successful through any of the channels previously described found that the neighborhood was no longer adequate for their housing needs. Like members of the native population, Italians were attracted to newly developing single-family suburban areas in Mt. Pleasant, Cranston, and Johnston. Growing affluence afforded luxuries like automobiles, appliances and the other accouterments of middle class American life.

The finest residential neighborhood in Federal Hill was still Broadway, although its glimmer had greatly tarnished.
During the 1920's, many of the mansions had been broken up into rooming houses. In many cases, storefronts had been added on to the front, reducing the set-back from the street. Commercial uses, like social clubs and funeral parlors, were tolerated. In summary, the area became a mixed use, ad hoc strip development, still without focus or center, reflecting the needs of the new population and the historical development patterns of previous generations. This character of the Broadway area remains to the present - it is still a mixture of uses, from elaborate residents to candy stores and gas stations.

But it is the life that continued in the neighborhood that is really of interest to us. With the decline of immigration because of changed laws and the growth in the suburbanization of the more affluent, the demography of Federal Hill began to change. The neighborhood was largely made up of young working class families unable to afford suburban living or who preferred traditional "Italian" values to "American" ones. The neighborhood was enigmatic to most of Rhode Island - a strange admixture of old and new worlds. For residents, it provided several important functions. DiMambro points out several of the important roles of ethnic neighborhoods during his period. "First, for those who could not join the mainstream of American society, it provided a "protective space," and "cultural retreat", a safe world where it was possible to preserve traditional values, to develop a strong sense of communal solidarity. Secondly, for those who eventually hoped to join the mainstream, it was a sort
of purgatory, a place where it was possible to wait and build the necessary strength (cultural, economic) to climb the ladder of the American dream."

Consequently, for those who remember Federal Hill this golden era, it was an exciting time. Atwells Avenue, the main shopping street of the neighborhood, was lined with stores specializing in every sort of merchandise. Everyone in the neighborhood would come to the street to talk, shop and eat. Louis Tortilani, who grew up in the neighborhood during this time period remembers:

It was fantastic. On every street corner there would be a group of men. On one were the forty year olds, on the next the thirty year olds, the next twenty year olds. People would come out to watch, see their friends and talk. If someone was on the wrong corner, boom, they'd knock him down to where he belonged. And there were plenty of nickle-beer barrooms, especially near the downtown. Non-Italians would hardly ever come up town into the neighborhood, except maybe for some special reason. We were really a community unto ourselves in those days.

Atwells Avenue functioned as the main street for the entire area, but Federal Hill was actually divided into several sub-neighborhoods largely related to church parishes. Even though the area is relatively small in area, the population density grew to over 20,000, so smaller divisions of the neighborhood slowly formed. Each of these sub-neighborhoods had local institutions which met daily needs and a sense of territoriality quickly emerged. Churches, bakeries, restaurants, shopping areas, drug stores, served small divisions within the Federal Hill community.
In fact Federal Hill contained a minority community within its neighborhood. In addition to Italians, approximately 500 Lebanese from the village of Kfarsob migrated in the early years of the twentieth century to Providence and formed a small portion of the neighborhood in the Spruce Street area—the original entry point for the Italians in Federal Hill. Lebanese and Italians mingled and mixed without incident for many years. In many cultural attitudes, the two groups are very similar, sharing outlooks about family, insularity and community. A Lebanese Church was established in the neighborhood and over the years a substantial amount of intermarriage between the two groups took place. The sub-neighborhoods became the social realm for residents.

A neighborhood resident recalls:

You hardly left the neighborhood in those days. Oh sure, some people had to go into town to work, but at five o'clock you headed right up the Hill. Why leave? There were social clubs on every corner, a couple of movie houses. You have your family up here. If you were a big kid, you had to take care of somebody in the family and if you were an adult, you had all your friends up here.

This kind of close association naturally led to extremely close knit family and social associations. The neighborhood, or more precisely, your street, your block formed a social network that became your world. Social attitudes such as mutual obligation, a community sense, respect for male leadership became the transmitted values to the young.
In attempting to assess the meaning and importance of the type of society which Federal Hill became in this period between the wars, we come up against some difficult dilemmas. The neighborhood appears to have functioned quite well as a buffer for a group of recently arrived immigrants. In addition, it was also fostered a set of attitudes which many today would consider extremely positive - loyalty to one's family, friends, and community, etc. There were some negative aspects to the evolving social structure as well. Within the community, a group of intermediaries arose who often operated for their own interest while pressing others for support on the basis of their being "paisan".

The success stories of Federal Hill - those who moved up through available channels of enterprise, politics or organized crime - in a peculiar way further isolated the remaining community from the mainstream of Rhode Island society. These individuals became the representatives of the neighborhood to the outside world, allowing those who remained to have little contact with other communities. Assimilation for those who remained was slower and more difficult. DiMambro argues that intermediaries were in a position to manipulate the majority of the neighborhood residents and become interwoven with the "exploitative network of the system". Surely it is true that many of the intermediaries became "cooptive" forces - attempting to play the game with the dominant culture - there is another side to the picture. Federal Hill during this period appears to have functioned exceptionally well in providing thousands of people individual opportunities.
for employment, personal development in a relatively safe, strong and stable community. Federal Hill, however, was not the independent, self-sufficient village it thought of itself as, and was tied in the larger Rhode Island economy and political structure in important ways. However, it was inward focused, protected and filled with a richness few communities could offer. And although the Great Depression caused suffering, bankruptcies, and dislocation, the bonds of community helped to carry residents through the economic crisis.
The Third Period
Federal Hill 1950 to the Present

The Federal Hill neighborhood grew in a thirty-year period between 1885 and 1915. In that brief period, thousands of immigrants made the area a vital community. As we look over the thirty-year period from around 1950 to the present the transformation is equally striking. The most dramatic shift is the change in population. A neighborhood which had about 21,000 people in 1950 now is estimated to have a little over 7,000.\textsuperscript{12} On the basis of this factor alone, one could easily assume that thousands of neighborhood residents decided individually that the area no longer "worked", that it didn't make sense to live in Federal Hill.

If thousands decided that the neighborhood was no longer viable, they were given every support and incentive by government, industry leaders, and the local banks. A variety of factors created questions about the future of the neighborhood, in particular the neglect of twenty years because of depression and war had taken their toll. The neighborhood's housing stock, particularly that built as tenements for newly arrived immigrants was in very poor condition. The housing had been built in very dense patterns and lacked the comforts and basic standards which modern life required. Many houses were without heat or hot water and were no longer serviceable. As early as 1933, plans were announced for slum clearance in Federal Hill. Nothing was done, however, until the 1950's when the City of Providence, supported by new housing
legislation from the Federal Government, initiated efforts for housing improvements, rehabilitation and slum clearance. Although a formal plan was adopted by 1954, implementation was delayed for several years. Regardless of the fact that the social structure of the community remained tight and strong, the area appeared blighted to outside planners and the process documented so well by Gans and others was at work in Federal Hill. Large portions of the neighborhood were slated for slum clearance. City officials advised landlords not to improve their properties because they were to be demolished and the advice was followed.

Adding to the confusion over the future of the neighborhood were plans to connect two major highways by constructing a new road along the edge of the Federal Hill neighborhood. The plan seemed to make a good deal of sense. By cutting along the downward slope end of the neighborhood, only a few hundred houses would have to be demolished. However, this meant that the Lebanese area of the neighborhood would be eliminated.

Possibly the most important factors in the decline of Federal Hill during the post war years was the relocation of thousands of jobs out of the neighborhood. The manufacturing district along the Woonasquatuck River, including the Brown and Sharpe factory, Nicholson File, U.S. Rubber and many others, relocated to the suburbs or out of state where costs were lower. Many residents followed their employer out of the city and others found they had to move to be near work.
To detail all of the injustices of the so-called renewal process in Federal Hill would not really serve any real purposes. On the basis of numerous actions, though, it would appear that there was a serious effort to destroy a neighborhood. Plans were issued, changed, and re-issued, without community support or involvement. The story is familiar to those with an understanding of American planning practices. The 1960 census data only hastened the perception that Federal Hill was a hopeless place. Between 1950 and 1960 eight thousand people moved out of the neighborhood, and by 1965, the population drop amounted to twelve thousand. Housing deterioration continued because banks were reluctant to invest in an area with no possible future. Without capital, the housing conditions quickly worsened. Somewhere between two thirds and three quarters of all the homes in the neighborhood were characterized as having major deficiencies - largely the consequence of delayed or neglected maintenance. Drastic measures were called for unless Federal Hill was to become the most blighted neighborhood in the City of Providence.

The drastic measure, announced in 1964, was a slum clearance proposal which would remove nearly half of the neighborhood's housing. The plan, developed in part by an Italian-American architect, called for the elimination of all commercial activity along Atwells Avenue and the replacement of the low-rise triple deckers with mid and high-rise apartments. The plan also called for open space with lots of parking, parks and playgrounds. A clover leaf would be built at Dean Street. The neighborhood would be modernized.
It was truly a drastic plan and its assumptions are interesting and important. Federal Hill was seen as a hopeless case, and housing indications served as a barometer of larger social problems. The ethnic character of the area was something of the past, and of no importance or value for the future. And finally, the plan assumed that by willing a neighborhood renewed, it could be accomplished. The entire process of how the area would be rebuilt was relegated to three pages of a sixty-page report. What was important was that the area must be demolished as quickly as possible.

It took until 1968 for the proposal to move through the various systems of local and federal approval. By that time some changes were already incorporated into the planning process and anticipating additional reforms. It was now recognized that a true renewal program had to change local attitudes about their community—to turn a slum into a community required more than new housing. The first provisions of local approval and input were put into place in an advisory capacity. Some of the prominent neighborhood leaders, particularly church representatives, became active in the renewal process, and they became later targets of criticism for selling out the neighborhood for their own narrow interests.

There was enough of a national commitment to renewal in the late 1960's to finally implement some of the proposals which had been discussed for over a decade. After years of delay, the highway route was begun and wholesale demolition took place in the northern boundary of the neighborhood. Several target areas
for demolition programs were finally outlined, and the work was carried out. Houses in poor condition were torn down in a random pattern leaving gaping holes in the neighborhood without a serious program to have the lots rebuilt. Many remain vacant today. A comparison of land use surveys indicate the effect of the demolition program. In 1960, there was almost no vacant land on Federal Hill. In 1975, 12% of the neighborhood was vacant land. The Providence Redevelopment Authority, which carried out the renewal program, was accused of poor management and given their approach to renewal, good management was almost impossible.

Delays abounded, and there was little thought to how the neighborhood would ultimately be brought back to life. As long as the federal dollars flowed, the problem could be solved. Approximately seven millions dollars was spent in the renewal of Federal Hill, most of the money spend on planning, administration, relocation, and demolition. Little new housing, jobs and social benefits came back for the amount spent.

Quite late in the process, community opposition began to grow. The highway construction as damage grew was particularly irritating to neighborhood residents because the State of Rhode Island Department of Transportation took few measures to minimize the negative impact the project would have on the neighborhood. People affected by the road construction began active opposition to the plan as proposed and were effective in having a retaining wall built to protect their property. Others resisted the demolition of houses. It seemed a desperate struggle but
community meetings began to form. What was most objectionable they decided wasn't that bad housing was being lost, but that nothing was done to replace it. Community residents considered possible options.

But before we turn to the bright side of this story - the growth of a grass roots revitalization movement - it is essential that we examine the extent of the damage done by the renewal program. Federal Hill in 1950 was a neighborhood with a strong social rootedness, and housing that was fairly well maintained. Owner occupancy rates were high. Institutions were strong and the ethnic identity of its residents, bolstered by the neighborhood's history, was strong. The renewal program did little to try to retain these characteristics and build upon them. If anything they were deemed a liability because they "held people back from integration into the mainstream of American society." What is important is that this prevailing attitude was accepted by many residents of Federal Hill, who quickly gave up their opportunity for mainstream identity and suburban housing in the 1950's. This is not to say that an Italian-American resident of Federal Hill who moved out of the neighborhood no longer felt Italian or never came back to the old neighborhood; clearly ties were re- tained. However, the social structure reflected in the built environment of Federal Hill was exactly replicated in the newer suburbs for Italian homeowners. It was an important transition for the Italian community in Rhode Island (as it was for ethnics throughout the northeast and midwest). This is a point which I feel DeMambro doesn't fully come to terms with. It is
important to draw a distinction between Federal Hill as a place and Federal Hill as an ethnic enclave. Even though Federal Hill the place was allowed (and encouraged, some would argue) to decline, other housing areas in Rhode Island emerged as new Italian centers - at lower densities, with greater opportunities for personal consumption, and in more a heterogeneous setting. But the fact remains that with the decline of Federal Hill, Italian-Americans did not become completely assimilated and identity-less by any means. Communities such as North Providence, Johnston and portions of East Providence, Cranston, and Warwick developed "Italian-American neighborhoods" and many of the social and cultural traditions associated with Federal Hill were continued in a transformed manner. What is certainly true, however, is that these communities reflected a growing class stratification within Rhode Island's Italian community, but we have seen that this is a process that began in the middle period of Federal Hill's history, when the "prominenti" began moving out of the neighborhood. Those Italian-Americans who "made it" into the ranks of the managers, owners, and professionals, were likely to be the most assimilated and had the widest housing choices. Middle class Italian-Americans, teachers, shop-owners, merchants, city employees, skilled workers, now found another set of suburban housing options. And those with the fewest options or the greatest need for the "old style of life" remained in Federal Hill.
Who was left in Federal Hill? With two thirds of the population gone, the remaining residents were mostly the old, the poor, and the true believers (in lesser numbers). The statistics show that the median age rose, the number of working aged families declined, and the median income of the area was substantially below that of the City of Providence, itself a relatively poor city (See Appendix for precise data). Atwells Avenue, which continued to be an important shopping street for some time, declined in its ability to attract outside residents. Between 1960 and 1976, the commercial area lost 83 businesses because of demolition. Many merchants who remained found that their once thriving business was suddenly marginal, and they didn't know how to get themselves out of the rut. Others prospered by finding a niche in the marketplace.

The late 1960's saw other changes as well. The social disruptions brought about by the war in Vietnam, student revolt, the growth of black consciousness had an impact on the Federal Hill community. The challenge presented by black power was especially significant to the remaining poor, and there was a good deal of tension on race questions. Many residents of Federal Hill greatly feared a "black invasion" of the neighborhood. Riots in Central High School raised serious questions about school integration and the viability of public education. However serious racial matters became, the situation in Rhode Island was never as threatening as it was in other Little Italies. The basic difference is numbers; the black population of Providence isn't as proportionally large
as it is in other northeastern cities. And although there was considerable resentment on the part of Italian-Americans to the pressure placed by blacks to open up the city government, labor unions, schools, etc., there was a basic understanding that everybody has to do what they have to do to get ahead. Many Federal Hill residents realized that this is how the game is played, and everybody has to get a little piece of the pie if the system is to continue. Again, the relatively small number of black residents in Providence, combined with clear boundaries between black neighborhoods and Federal Hill undoubtedly contributed to this uneasy truce.

One of the most interesting effects of the 1960's was the recognition that Federal Hill was like other inner city neighborhoods and had been damaged in ways similar to black communities. Many of the complaints made by the black community applied to the situation in Federal Hill as well - poor schools, redlining, destruction of housing without adequate replacement, damage caused by highway construction. The pattern of protest, the anger, the style of demonstrations of ethnic residents were frequently modeled after the success of black groups within the City of Providence.

The growth of ethnic consciousness affected ethnics no longer living in the old neighborhood as well, and Federal Hill had growing political influence based on a recognized legitimacy of their demands. It is fair to say that Italian-Americans in banks, government agencies, business felt a growth of ethnic
consciousness during this period along with poorer residents of Federal Hill. The impact that this had is difficult to fully ascertain, however, the environment for further attacks on the neighborhood greatly changed. In fact, there was a growing national consciousness that the older urban neighborhoods were in need and worthy of support. Several liberal foundations and components of the federal government began to fund ethnic heritage projects and begin to develop programs to assist grass roots campaigns to revitalize ethnic neighborhoods. In particular, the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, headed by Monsignor Gino Baroni, proved an effective organization for mobilizing communities to plan for revitalization. NCUEA provided seed money for community organizers to help the Federal Hill neighborhood to do something about their problems. In 1972, the first funding for community organizers came into the neighborhood. By this time the decline of the community had seemed to have "bottomed out"; anyone who wanted to leave the neighborhood or could afford to had left and the government sponsored demolition programs had completed their work. The "intermediaries", the neighborhood old guard, had left and the remaining residents were for the most part committed to staying in Federal Hill. This was an important asset to the early organizers because they could begin working with grass roots community people and not have to bypass channels of old ineffective leadership. In addition, the insensitive planning approach had promoted such intense hostility that ad hoc groups began forming
at gripe sessions at the Federal Hill House and other places. These clear, solvable complaints offered easy targets for community organization.

A variety of basic fights were waged in the early 1970's by community people with the support of good organizers. Big bureaucracies were taken on, and "little people" won. For example, the inadequate plans of the State Department of Transportation for maintaining the property of neighborhood residents was attacked. The agency was forced to redesign aspects of the road to meet community objectives. In another case, the announcement that the Providence School Committee was going to decide where to build a new school prompted local parents to fight to have the school built in Federal Hill. Overcoming serious obstacles, the parents group lobbied, demonstrated and cajoled the School Committee into building the school in the neighborhood. Parents also insisted that they maintain involvement in the design of the school and worked effectively with the architect to make certain the design was appropriate to the community. The school is a neighborhood and architectural success. The school opened in 1977. Other fights were fought and won on fire station closings. But perhaps the most significant neighborhood victory thus far was a plan to revitalize the Atwells Avenue strip, the main shopping street of the neighborhood.

After decades of economic decline, the merchants of the Atwells Avenue shopping area began to consider the possibility of trying
to improve the shopping area. The idea was first introduced at a meeting of the businessmen's association in 1972 and met with a cool response. The old guard of the merchant's association, with their vision of Federal Hill "as it was in the old days" could not really foresee any type of future for the neighborhood at all. It was not until two years later, when conditions grew even worse, that a younger group of merchants, many with long familiar ties to the street, began to take action. They elected a new slate of officers who were committed to making things happen. As a first step, a festival was planned for St. Joseph's Day with carnival rides, a parade, and speakers. After some basic cosmetic changes to the appearance of the street, the festival was held and was universally hailed a great success. Crowds lined Atwells Avenue for the first time in decades, and the organizers realized that they had struck a responsive chord with the Rhode Island community.

With St. Joseph's Day success behind them, these new community leaders, again with the help of paid organizers, began thinking about future developments. Grants were written and obtained to form a business development organization with the support of NCUEA and the Office of Minority Business. In the earliest stages of the planning for economic revitalization, a Neighborhood Economic Revitalization Commission was formed, with representatives from all aspects of the neighborhood. This format, recommended by the NCUEA, proved important and effective. For the first time, all the divergent actors in the process of improving Federal Hill were in one place at one time with a
common agenda. Basic hostilities between neighborhood residents and the small merchants who operate stores along the shopping street were hashed out in the beginning. Many of the fights were heated, but through this process the differences were brought out into the open and resolved. This process established neighborhood spokesmen for the major issues facing the community. Any housing program would originate from housing activists and would receive the support of the rest of the body after careful discussion; social programs, business programs and other ideas would also be worked out within the NERC and then presented with the full support of the neighborhood. The NERC concept is only as good as the people who make up its board because its credibility depends on its neighborhood support. Fortunately, the Federal Hill Neighborhood Economic Revitalization Commission has proved to be an effective and political alliance with strong neighborhood credibility.

During this time period, the political climate of the City of Providence changed significantly. After many years of rule by a Democratic Party machine, Providence elected its first Republican Mayor since the 1930's. Vincent A. Cianci, Jr., whose grandfather was a Federal Hill resident upon arrival from Italy, squeaked into office because of divisions in the Democratic Party. Cianci recognized that if he was to establish some sort of mere permanent political base, he must begin making direct ties to voting constituencies. Again, the intermediaries of previous generations - the ward healers, councilmen and local politicians - were bypassed. Cianci needed neighborhood support and was willing
to speak directly with community representatives.

Cianci also benefitted from good timing. Changes in federal programs for housing and urban development gave chief executive officers far greater power in deciding how money was to be spent in their communities. Block grants rather than categorical grants were made to "entitlement cities" and Cianci found that this switch gave him important power in deciding how and where to spend money. The new Mayor found that he was able to use Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to forge a new political machine. He was able to support projects which benefitted him politically, offer jobs and set up a network of patronage which bypassed the existing channels. However, the Mayor recognized that to use CDBG funds overtly to accomplish these objectives would create as many enemies as friends, and so a Citizens Advisory Committee of over eighty members was established to set policy objectives for how money should be expended. Cianci was able to use the funding to create a broad based political alliance with representatives of all neighborhood and downtown interest to advise him on how to spend the money. Although the Mayor is not obligated legally to follow the strict determinations of the Citizens Advisory Committee, Cianci has been keenly sensitive to their directives and rarely goes against the Committee's decision. The process is a long and arduous one, and was especially painful during the first few years of the program when priorities and new political alliances were being forged. However, the process has worked, not only for well
organized neighborhood groups, but for the Mayor as well, who can now shift responsibility for decision making to a broadly based advisory board.

Politicizing the planning process for Community Development funds has had serious consequences for Providence, some positive, some not. On the positive side, for the first time, there is now direct neighborhood access to the Mayor's office and federal housing funds. The Mayor's political sensitivity to how community people react to programs has meant that those neighborhoods which are well organized and articulate will gain a measure of support. Federal Hill has been extremely successful in this process. On the other hand, those neighborhoods without articulate spokesmen or in an unorganized state have suffered. The City has become a passive element in neighborhood affairs, offering support, but unable to initiate programmatic innovations. This does not mean that CDBG funds are not spent in those communities; the political realities of Providence are that Cianci recognizes the necessity to service each community in some way. However, in many neighborhoods, weak programs are supported, and the neighborhood is not really helped.

Nonetheless, this political climate was extremely advantageous for the Neighborhood Economic Revitalization Commission of Federal Hill; they now had direct access to the Mayor's office at a time when the Mayor had real power and financial backing. Using these channels, the NERC was able to propose and have funded a variety of important projects. In the early stages of
development were Festivals of the Arts, streetscape studies, business development funds, storefront improvement grants and the like. As the support and effectiveness of the NERC grew, plans for a full scale reworking of Atwells Avenue were completed which called for brick sidewalks, new street furniture, a large piazza with fountain, the return of pushcarts to the neighborhood and a parking lot on empty land. Over a period of years, each of these proposals was approved and funded, some with CDBG, others with funds from the Economic Development Administration and other organizations. The process of rebuilding the neighborhood was well under way. Simultaneously, the housing problems of the neighborhood were also being addressed.
Civic Developments
Arrival of the first group of Italian immigrants into the Federal Hill neighborhood in the area nearest the industrial section.

Industry becoming the predominant sector of the Rhode Island economy.

Architectural Development
Broadway continues to flourish as the pre eminent neighborhood in the City of Providence. Large mansions are built along Broadway in the elaborate Queen Anne revival style.

Tenement housing beginning to be built on a speculative basis in working class immigrant areas.
Civic Developments

Significant increase in employment in industrial economy.

Broadway losing its attraction due to uncertainty about the future of the area.

Architectural Development
Large numbers of tenement houses built along back streets of neighborhood. Older single family houses in working class districts are divided into apartments or converted into rooming houses. No new "high architecture" built along Broadway.
Civic Developments
End of migration of large numbers of Italian immigrants to Federal Hill.
Growth of smaller Lebanese community.

Development of smaller sub-neighborhoods within Federal Hill, each with their own church and social services.

Growing stratification within Italian community.

Architectural Developments
Transformation of Atwells Avenue to major neighborhood shopping center and locus of intense street life.

Reworking of Broadway to mixed use area with bottom floors converted to offices, stores, etc. New uses appear on street including gas stations, movie theatre, funeral homes.

Continued infilling of back streets with high density, multi-family housing.
Civic Developments
Out-migration of many of the more affluent community members to Italian-American neighborhoods in other parts of greater Providence.

Large portions of the neighborhood slated for urban renewal or torn down for highway construction.

Decline of industrial area and reduction in employment opportunities.

Architectural Developments
Little or no new construction. Large portions of the neighborhood are planned as garden apartments and high rises with urban renewal funds. Program makes slow progress. Expectations are that the area will be cleared and few improvements are made by property owners.
Civic Developments
Growth of citizen protest to renewal activities. Anger turns to organization.

Government programs continue to clear portions of Federal Hill, often without ready reuses and land remains empty for years. Moratorium on housing program limits prospects for new uses.

Mayor Vincent Cianci elected, and proves a responsive advocate of neighborhood revitalization.

Architectural Developments
New effort to get people involved in revitalizing Federal Hill:
- Atwells Avenue Street Improvements
- New Bridgeham School
- New Homes for Federal Hill
  *Home Improvement Program
  *New Houses Program
- Neighborhood Strategies Area
NOTES


2. Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission, Antoinette Downing, Chairman, West Side, Providence, James H. Gibbs, Pamela Kennedy, authors, Statewide Preservation Report P-P-1 p. 27

3. DiMambro, p. 27


6. ibid., p.262

7. Ihlder, p. 56

8. Interview with anonymous Federal Hill resident, July 1978

9. DiMambro, p. 31

10. Interview with Louis Tortilani, former Federal Hill resident, July, 1978

11. ibid.


13. ibid., chapter 10
"There are only three things that I care about - sex, food, and housing. In that order." Although some interesting stories could be written about Lou Viti's first two interests, it is concern for housing and the Federal Hill neighborhood that is of interest here. To say that housing is important to Viti, is to completely miss the point. Housing is analogy for life itself. You can be talking about somebody's personal problems, a political dispute in the neighborhood and Lou will respond with something like, "Well, that's just like last week. A contractor is fixing a roof on Sutton Street and he breaks the antenna..." As the story unfolds, sometimes the connection is crystal clear. Other times you have to stop and think about what he's trying to get at. The basic point remains, though, - housing (the process as much as the product) offers insights into everything. The problems and satisfactions of housing go beyond their own intrinsic meaning and are the basis for a world view.

Viti was born on Federal Hill and has spent his entire life in the neighborhood. He could have left. His salary as a oil burner repairman and delivery driver for his family owned business was certainly sufficient for a house in Johnston or Cranston. Combined with his wife's teaching salary, the Vitis easily could have escaped the problems of an old, and admittedly run-down neighborhood. But it was never worth it. First of all, his family was still in the neighborhood. Lou's parents and many of
his relations all live in the area and are active in a large number of organizations and clubs. Federal Hill is filled with social clubs—there's almost one on every corner. Men gather to play a little cards, drink a beer or two, and find out the latest news. Many of the clubs have outstanding kitchens where a good lunchtime dinner can be had at a remarkably low price. In addition, many people are active in one of the three Catholic churches, each of which has a distinct character. Lou was never involved as an adult in the church, and in private conversation, mixed feelings about the church emerge. Viti is often highly critical of local priests whom he believes have worked against the interests of the neighborhood. Although he considers himself Catholic and sends his daughters to parochial school, Viti rarely attends church himself. Boy scouts have been a long-term interest, and Lou has served as a troop leader at the Federal Hill House, a settlement house and community center. Although the troop has scaled down its activities, the adult leaders have remained close and continue annual reunions and get togethers.

Viti thinks that he was an unlikely candidate to become a housing activist. Although he understood home heating through his work as an oil burner repairman, he was never a full-time housing contractor. It was the things that were happening to the neighborhood that got Viti involved. First and most importantly, the State of Rhode Island took hundreds of houses down to build (in
fits and starts - it is still under construction) the Route 6 Connector. Some of the land required came from Viti's own backyard. Other plans were being unveiled during the 1960's which would have cleared large portions of the neighborhood and replaced them with new housing for middle class residents using a variety of federal programs.

Redevelopment attempts were needed, Viti believes, but those proposed by city officials were extremely insensitive. Where a scalpel was called for, a meat ax was offered. It is here that the remarkable quality of an Italian neighborhood emerged. The Italian-American lifestyle, perhaps more than that of any other ethnic minority in the United States, is spatially dependent. What Ihlder, the author of a 1911 report of Providence's housing, called the Italian's "clannishness" and "fondness for living among his own people" have remained as characteristics of enough people in Federal Hill to keep the neighborhood vital. The city's redevelopment plans attacked this vitality. The extended family is not just a social system, but in neighborhoods like Federal Hill, it is a housing system as well. Many families form clusters of housing units in triple decker buildings - sometimes two buildings on a single lot - and an attack on the housing was in fact an attack on the social system.

What is more, the neighborhood retained an importance to Italian Americans throughout the State of Rhode Island, because just about everyone of Italian heritage traces their family back to a Federal Hill address. Through its stores and churches, which
serve a far greater market than the adjoining neighborhood, Federal Hill remained the touchstone of a living culture of unmeltable ethnics. The Redevelopment Authority didn't understand. They saw blighted housing and a decaying neighborhood. They had to be told.

"Two things happened that got me into the housing business on a full-time basis. I got fired by my father and the million dollar wall." The million dollar was a name given to a retaining wall demanded by neighborhood residents to protect their property from erosion caused by highway construction. As was the case in so many similar situations, the designers of the highway were insensitive to the impact their actions had on the nearby community and generated enormous resentment. They worked slowly, ponderously and with a very narrow perspective on their mission. In this particular case, the highway builders took dozens of houses at the fringes of the neighborhood and bought more land from other residents backyards. It seemed little could be done to fight the road builders.

The highway was only one element of a frontal attack by outside agencies to "renew" Federal Hill. In addition, there were proposals from the Redevelopment Authority to tear down large sections of the oldest parts of the neighborhood for renewal. Triple deckers were to be replaced with streetless "garden apartment" developments with parking and open space. Clearly, there were many who thought that the neighborhood had played out its role and was dying. It needed to be torn down and rebuilt
and made more respectable. Many proposing this action were Italians born and raised in the neighborhood who saw its weaknesses overpowering its strengths. However, very few making these large scale renewal proposals consulted current neighborhood residents.

Resistance grew slowly. After nearly a decade of tentative plans and false starts by the Redevelopment Agency, local people were confused; neighborhood confidence diminished as the future remained clouded. The Director of the Federal Hill House began in 1971 to organize "gripe sessions" on Urban Renewal. These meetings lacked focus and organization and there was little follow up to the complaints. Over a period of years a group of neighborhood leaders emerged, helped by several creative and active community organizers. Lou Viti was one such leader.

The Ridge Street Neighbors in Action was one of the first neighborhood groups of Federal Hill to prove that you can fight government programs and win. Ridge Street is part of the western boundaries of Federal Hill, located at the top of a very steep grade. The State Department of Transportation was busy as work at the base of the hill building a highway connector. Although the plans for construction were proposed in the mid 1960's, work was still just getting underway in the early 1970's. In 1973, the noise and vibrations of the road construction convinced residents of Ridge Street that their houses on top of the hill were in danger of sliding because of the extreme vibrations caused by construction. They were also concerned that when the road was
complete, their property would continue to suffer from erosion and vibrations.

The State Department of Transportation recognized that there was truth to the community's complaints, and their solution was simple. Rather than try and develop a solution to the erosion problem, the State contacted the Redevelopment Authority and asked that they expand an existing demolition program to include the Ridge Street area. They felt that this would be the cheapest and most effective solution to the problem.

Lou Viti, who lives on Ridge Street in a house he shares with other members of the family, was furious. After preliminary meetings with representatives from the state and PRA, two demands were drawn up; remove Ridge Street from the demolition plan and build a retaining wall to end the danger of erosion to property owners. A petition was drawn up, and every one of the neighborhood residents signed up, which was later presented to the Redevelopment Authority and Transportation Department. Officials reluctantly agreed to have test borings drilled to see if a retaining wall was feasible. After dozens of phone calls and meetings, the Ridge Street block club won a tentative commitment to build a retaining wall, and Redevelopment promised to remove Ridge Street from their demolition plans. Slowly the pall of uncertainty was removed from the Ridge Street area.

"It was an education - a damned good education," Viti recalls. "It was us versus them in the old days. Now these are people that we work with every day."
The transformation from a block club active in stopping callous highway construction to a neighborhood based housing development organization is an important transition. "We learned a lot about organization and felt that if we didn't do it right (improve the neighborhood's housing), it just wouldn't get done right." By the summer of 1973, interest in beginning an active community based housing organization had grown. The urban renewal process had bogged down, leaving empty lots scattered throughout the neighborhood with no proposals for construction. The moratorium on new federal housing construction left little hope in seeing these lots filled quickly. It was from an objective viewpoint the worst possible time to get a housing program started.

"A group of us interested in housing got together to form some sort of organization. Most of us were from the far end of Federal Hill where the situation was the worst," Viti notes. Much of the early impetus came from Father Joe Invernizzi, Pastor of Holy Ghost Church, which had lost a large number of parishioners because of the changes in the neighborhood. A new organization was formed called "New Homes for Federal Hill" with Anthony Pennine and Lou Viti as co-chairmen supported by a board of many neighborhood residents.

The approach to building new housing on the empty lots in the neighborhood could not have been more "grass roots". A first house was to be constructed with funds raised by the
sale of $2.00 non-profit "shares" in the community. Each share entitled its members a vote in the organization - one person one vote. The first share was sold to Bishop Gelineau at a ceremony on the Holy Ghost Church steps. The event brought wide press coverage. Additional fund raising efforts were planned including dinner dances, bingo games, and the like.

The sale of shares and the overwhelming response had a remarkable effect in improving the feeling for the community. "People began to think that maybe the neighborhood had a future." The efforts slowly gathered momentum. A CETA position was assigned to the organization giving the group a full-time coordinator. A grant on a matching basis was obtained from the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs. The first shareholders meeting was called in 1974, and over 300 people attended and a formal set of by-laws and Board of Directors was established. Awards were granted. Working committees were formed.

As its first project, New Homes for Federal Hill built a small single-family house on one of the neighborhood's empty lots on a speculative basis. Construction money was borrowed from the Rhode Island Department of Community Affairs and the proceeds from the sale of shares provided the required equity. After settling some internal squabbles, the house was sold (at a loss to New Homes) for $27,500. Even though the house was not a financial success, it was important in establishing the credibility of the organization, even on such modest terms. Despite the fact that the house was sold at a loss, people in the community stood by and held on to this new housing entity.
"The major need in the community remained rehab - we weren't going to get anywhere unless we could come up with some way to help the guy fix up his house at reasonable rates." Home improvement loans were hard to come by in Federal Hill and even when available, the going rate was 12% (and banks would frequently put a lien on the property as well). This was much too steep a burden for local residents. When Mayor Cianci came into office in 1974, he found that he had this new source of funds to use for housing programs. Cianci, a Republican in a city long regarded as a Democratic stronghold, recognized that community development Block Grants were an opportunity to build a powerful political base. He formed a hundred member Citizens Advisory Committee to determine allocation of funds. "Residents of Federal Hill were ready," Viti remembers. "We had a list of projects approved by the Neighborhood Economic Revitalization Commission that were ready to go - the new Federal Hill House, a new park at the entrance to the neighborhood and a housing rehabilitation program which we have controlled in the neighborhood." By playing the system well, and having broad support in the community, each of the neighborhood's requests were granted.

After the long internal negotiations, Federal Hill was given a $365,000 commitment from Community Development funds to operate a housing rehabilitation program over three years. Although a similar program was planned for the entire city, Federal Hill was the only organization to propose that the program be operated on a neighborhood basis. By August of 1975, the New Homes Board was able to sign a contract with the City for $194,000 to run
Federal Hill's housing improvement program, operated by New Homes for Federal Hill. By that November, a Director was hired and an office was opened on Atwells Avenue.

New Homes was fortunate in finding an outstanding person to help organize the program and get it operating efficiently and quickly. The first director, Joe Dabek, came with professional management background, and was able to work well with neighborhood residents, contractors and City officials. Although he remained in the position for only a two-year period, his mark remains in the home improvement program. Lou Viti started out as Dabek's part-time assistant, supervising construction, working with contractors and serving as a community liason. When Dabek left New Homes to work as the City's Chief Economic Planner, Viti took over as director of the Home Improvement Program, and has been at work full-time for the past year.

Viti offers some interesting perspectives on the future direction of the neighborhood. According to Viti, Federal Hill will continue to change from the old ethnic enclave it was once known as. "The old days are over. This isn't an Italian neighborhood anymore, like we knew it. Sure the stores are mostly Italian - but the people who come in there are from outside the neighborhood, and for that matter, so are many of the merchants. The future of this area is to keep our people here. We have to set up "people programs" for the old time residents. And we have to learn to live with good new people that come into Federal Hill." Viti's
theory is that once the street improvements are completed, the neighborhood will be increasingly attractive to outside investors. It is not an area that is likely to become "gentrified", at least, not in a drastic way. The historic development of the neighborhood meant that the largest houses with the greatest appeal to "gentrifiers" are along Broadway and have retained their economic viability through commercial conversion. These houses are frequently used as offices, apartments, and funeral homes, and continue to make good returns for their owners. The middle class housing adjacent to the boulevard, off the side streets has continued to remain in the hands of homeowners and are well-maintained. Many of these properties are architecturally handsome, but they are relatively few in number and also are well maintained and fairly expensive to purchase and renovate. The housing built for workers, "tenement housing" as it is known in Federal Hill, is basically unattractive to potential middle income residents. Some is in good condition, others need major work to bring it to contemporary standards. These are houses that continue to serve "neighborhood people", often at remarkably low rents. These are also the houses which have the greatest time maintaining their economic viability. Rents are below the level which warrant improvement to the owner. Consequently, this is the softest part of the housing market - the areas with the greatest potential for neglect, abandonment and poor maintenance.
The Housing Improvement Program (HIP) operated by New Homes for Federal Hill provides low interest funds to homeowners in the neighborhood. The program is set up to work directly, with a minimum of red tape. A homeowner who is of moderate income applies directly at the New Homes office to participate. The rule requires that code violations be taken care of before any cosmetic work can be done. A set of specifications are drawn up by Lou Viti or John DeCataldo, a young rehabilitation officer on staff, and bids are obtained. The most difficult part of the program is finding willing contractors to bid on jobs and follow through with quality work. The lack of reliable contractors has been an unending problem to Viti and the staff.

The homeowner is free to select his own contractor, but must also obtain other bids before the work is authorized. The program is set up to subsidize the interest costs of the home improvement project. For every four dollars the homeowner borrows from a bank or puts up from savings, he is given a dollar from the program. This has the effect of reducing borrowed funds from 12% to 3%. The borrowed funds are directly repaid to the bank; the grant from the HIP program is not repaid.

A committee of neighborhood residents has been established to supervise the policy decisions made by the HIP program staff and reviews major contracts and provides advice when conflicts
arise. There is an on-going discussion about the role of the board, because many board members feel that they are not used with enough regularity. It appears, however, that the Board does play an important role in keeping the objectivity of the staff and insuring that procedures are followed. Viti likes to say, "If one person approves a loan or grant, there's reason to be suspicious. If a committee gives its approval, they have to put us all in jail."

During the past three years, over three hundred apartment units have been modernized through the program. Most of the work is basic maintenance - new heating and wiring, bathroom repairs, siding, painting and the like. Most of the improvements are non-controversial but some have presented dilemmas to the committee. Some involve conflicts between homeowners and contractors; New Homes for Federal Hill is not a direct party to the agreements and can frequently "persuade" one side or another to come to reason. Other conflicts are more philosophical. Rhode Island has an active historic preservation movement, and all of the Federal Hill area has been surveyed by the R.I. Historic Preservation Commission. When historic properties are rehabilitated under the HIP program, plans must be reviewed by members of the Commission's staff. Conflicts arise around issues such as residing an historic property, which does negatively impact the aesthetic qualities of the home, or around use of materials and color. Viti has little patience with the historic people,
although he recognized their interest and concern. The debate always boils down to a conflict over property rights versus public good, and in Federal Hill there is a tilt towards the right of the property owners - provided the property is maintained.

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To summarize the situation, by the Spring of 1977 a variety of circumstances set the stage for increased housing activity in Federal Hill. The organization of New Homes for Federal Hill was operating two fairly complicated programs -- a new home and a housing rehabilitation program -- with considerable success. The organization had won a set of neighborhood control battles and had developed a core of articulate spokespeople with strong neighborhood credibility. The group had a variety of positive experiences with outside experts, including program administrators, community organizers, and academicians. Members of the organization were growing in confidence and ambition to tackle the larger problems facing the neighborhood.

Relations outside the neighborhood had also improved substantially. The Providence Redevelopment Authority was a far different organization in the mid 1970s than a decade previously and was willing to work with local communities in more of a partnership approach to renewal. The PRA had recently financed a $4 million street improvement program for Atwells Avenue which had broad community support. Mayor Vincent Cianci was committed to working with neighborhood based organizations to effect change and was anxious to support reasonable proposals. On a national level, the new HUD officials were interested
in directly helping neighborhood organizations and Msr. Geno Baroni, who helped provide initial financial support to New Homes for Federal Hill through the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, was now an Under Secretary of HUD and in a position to provide key support and assistance. It appeared that all that was required was a concentrated effort at planning and organizing and some meaningful results could be realized.
The Development of a Housing Proposal

My involvement with the Federal Hill neighborhood began when I returned home from Boston one night in March of 1977 to find a message that Joe Dabek, the Director of New Homes for Federal Hill's loan program, had called. I had met Dabek once before, when I was working as a planner for Central Falls, Rhode Island, and I had been given the responsibility of starting up a housing improvement loan program. I met with Dabek to see how New Homes operated and was quite impressed with the kind of program they were running. It seemed non-bureaucratic, truly neighborhood based and effective. I later formulated the program for Central Falls along very similar lines.

When I returned the call that evening to Dabek, I learned that New Homes for Federal Hill was considering a study of how to develop the many empty lots left in the neighborhood as a result of the urban renewal process and to expand its housing activities. As a potential funding source for this study, Dabek had contacted the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities (RICH) and had been given my name as a possible resource. I had previously done some work with RICH in Central Falls and had spoken to Tom Roberts, RICH's Executive Director, about the possibility of additional
projects concerned with issues of neighborhoods and housing. When New Homes for Federal Hill came in to see Roberts, he suggested that we get together.

During the following few days, Dabek, Chester Smolski, the head of the Urban Studies Program at a local college, and I put together a funding proposal for the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities to support some research and neighborhood meetings on housing conditions in Federal Hill. As part of the program agenda, we would attempt to formulate housing policy alternatives for the neighborhood. We all felt that it was important to keep a practical focus to the project to insure meaningful participation by local residents. Dabek argued that unless the project offered some hope of real tangible results, there would be little local involvement. My own experiences in similar situations also led to the same conclusion.

The grant proposal we put together outlined a summer long research project followed by a series of forums where options for future activity would be discussed. The meetings also were to be an opportunity for local residents to make known their feelings about the future of the neighborhood and offer their ideas about what should be happening. The grant went in just under the April 1 deadline.
Approximately six weeks later, a letter came to the New Homes for Federal Hill office stating that the grant had been approved. At this point, the only person I had met from New Homes was Joe Dabek, and I began an effort, on a somewhat limited basis because of my own time scheduling problems, to meet other members of the organization. I made an appointment with the director of a local affiliated neighborhood organization called the Congress of Ethnic Neighborhood Organizations (CENO), and I came in to meet Lou Viti, the assistant director of New Homes for Federal Hill. Slowly, I began to sense some serious problems which I knew I would be facing as the "Humanities" (as it was called) Project got off the ground. First, an ongoing case study of neighborhood revitalization was simultaneously being carried out by outside consultants, had been generating some resentment. The exact basis for the problems are still very confusing but the emotional conflict made any outside experts suspect.

Although I sensed that there were going to be some problems, I felt that things would quickly work themselves out--after all my personal demands were limited. The grant was already approved and was available, and it was clear (at least to me) that the Humanities grant could be a staging effort for larger activities in the future. I was optimistic and confident, but as I began making final arrangements to start
work on a full-time basis that I realized the extent of the problem. Several events had transpired. First of all, the case study project was going especially badly when I first began, and members of the neighborhood organization felt that there was a conspiracy to deny them money from the grant and that little work of value was being performed. Several "late into the night" meetings had been held, and tension was riding high. In addition, Joe Dabek, my initial and best contact in the community, had been offered the job as Economic Planner for the City of Providence and decided that the change would be fortuitous. Lou Viti, a man with enormous street sense--a "diamond in the rough"--had taken over as director of the loan program and was not yet accustomed to his new responsibilities. Consequently, he was quite anxious about his new position and not very interested in beginning another new project.

My first meeting in the office of New Homes for Federal Hill proved to be an unforgettable experience. Attending were Lou Viti, Joe Dabek (New Homes board member), and Ann, the New Homes secretary. In addition, were several board members, Anna Purro and Emilia Maron. Mrs. Maron, the President of the Board of CENO was irate; she saw another new project giving more money to "outsiders" without any benefit to the neighborhood and planned without
any consultation from the Board of Directors. Every aspect of the grant was questioned, especially the salary set aside for the Project Coordinator -- me. It was very trying. Several times during the discussion, the possibility of sending back the money to the Humanities Committee was considered as a serious option, and, by that time, I began to question the possibility of managing a successful project. After almost an hour of charges and defenses, it was decided that the project would begin under a new set of conditions -- a reduction in my pay, a commitment to work on a full-time basis in the New Homes office, and a project focused toward practical results. In addition, a Board meeting would be called to further discuss the project and decide whether or not the program should be continued or dropped. I left the meeting with the feeling that I had been through the wringer, and in a week, I would either have a viable project or be looking for a new summer job.

This disastrous first meeting, where the rules for the coming project were spelled out, was a confusing and difficult experience for me and raised a variety of fundamental issues. On the one hand, it could be argued that the community people had been frequently victimized by planning and architectural professionals, and, as a result, distrust
and hostility were natural reactions. This argument appears to be wrong for several reasons. First of all, New Homes had a variety of positive experiences with young professionals who had operated successful community programs with close supervision from the local organization. My personal approach, appearance and style were much closer to the people who had been responsive and helpful, rather than those old line transportation and urban renewal planners whom the community had opposed.

Although the initial experience was puzzling and confusing to me, I remained committed to trying to make the project work. During the first few weeks I tried to come to understand the events of the preceding years by reading newspaper clippings, talking to past organizers, activists as well as to neighborhood residents in order to sense the neighborhood context and political situation. In particular, I spoke in depth to the people preparing the Federal Hill case study who provided some interesting social background. In general, I kept a low profile, coming in early, making clear my willingness to work hard. I also put together a brief booklet for the first scheduled meeting which outlined some of my preliminary impressions of housing opportunities in the neighborhood. Although the booklet was not particularly polished, it did indicate my willingness and ability to produce tangible products quickly and professionally.

At the meeting where this booklet was presented, the following agenda for the summer's activity was prepared:
-Develop a model program for the Knight Street Target Area.
-Produce a means of informing the neighborhood residents about the capacity of New Homes for Federal Hill to address the housing problems of the neighborhood and engage them in dialogue about what a program for the neighborhood should be.

In fact, both tasks were taken on simultaneously and a slide show with Questionaire was developed (see Appendix for Slide Show Script, Questionaire and results) to be presented at neighborhood forums at meeting halls throughout the neighborhood. The slide show emphasized the positive aspects of life in the neighborhood while the questionnaire centered on basic policy issues of what should be accomplished by a neighborhood based housing effort. The slide show was presented several times to audiences of about eighty people per showing in the Fall of 1977 and, in general, was effective in raising issues of community concern. Interestingly, the preferred housing style in the neighborhood remains the two family detached house, an updated and somewhat modified triple decker. Frequently, though, the meeting would lapse into discussions about past battles,
the neighborhood's frustration with talk of neighborhood revitalization, and the recent history of the neighborhood which indicates the effort is long and mostly futile.

The meetings though were effective in generating publicity about future plans and showing that New Homes was interested and active in representing the neighborhood's housing needs. During these sessions, Lou Viti displayed a remarkable ability for addressing complicated and difficult questions and the meetings helped to win neighborhood approval for expanded action. Although community meetings with an open agenda are difficult and frequently unwieldy, the forums were in fact successful and important in gathering momentum for a housing effort in the neighborhood.
The first element of the agenda -- providing a model program for the Knight Street area -- proved to be the more demanding and time consuming task. The first element in the planning was to attempt to categorize different housing conditions in the area and develop appropriate strategies for each of the problems. Lou Viti gave a running commentary on each of the houses as we toured the area, filling in on social conditions and what the interior of each of the houses was like. This survey was augmented by research at the City Hall on ownership, taxes and changes in tenure. After several weeks of examination, several conditions and categories were formed, represented in the table below:

**NSA STATISTICS**

- Number of structures: 181
- Number of residential structures (including commercial/residential split): 176
- Number of residential structures owner occupied: 102 (58%)
- Number of residential structures absentee owned: 74 (42%)
- Number of residential structures good/excellent: 69 (39%)
- Number of residential structures maintenance needed: 56 (32%)
- Number of residential structures major repairs needed: 41 (23%)
- Number of residential structures demolition: 10 (5.6%)
- Number of units: 534
  - Number of owner occupied units: 102 (19.1%)
  - Number of absentee owned units: 432 (80.9%)

As a result of this survey, several program types were proposed. The major need in the neighborhood was an expansion of the rehabilitation program. To meet the need for more rehabilitation, a special
allocation of HIP funds was requested from the Mayors Office of Community Development, the agency which administers Community Development Block Grants and eventually, a targetted fund of $100,000 for FY 1978 was approved. Given the leveraging ability of other home improvement funds, this can be used to bring a substantial amount of rehabilitation money into the area.

Housing rehabilitation programs alone were not adequate to meet all of the housing conditions in the neighborhood. Many owners were unwilling or unable to carry out basic maintenance and improvements to their homes and in addition, there were a number of empty lots and vacant buildings which diminished the efforts of the rehabilitators. To meet these conditions, it was proposed that a new entity be created to buy properties, carry out improvements and rent out the housing under the Section 8 rent subsidy program. Under this arrangement, New Homes for Federal Hill would become the initiator of housing development, rather than reacting to the proposals of others. New buildings would be built on the empty lots which would conform to the basic pattern of the neighborhood and fit in with the architectural style of the community and several abandoned buildings would be purchased and rehabilitated. Originally, two empty schools would be recycled in this way, however, a new user was found for one of the buildings and only one school remained in the final proposal. One final element in the proposal called for an expansion of the Section 235 single family house program, which allows a family of moderate income to afford a new single family house. This program was already in effect through the efforts of NHFH and appealed to those in the area who
aspired to be homeowners.

This basic method of attacking the neighborhood's housing problems was widely discussed at numerous board meetings of New Homes for Federal Hill with the major question revolving around the measure of control which the group could have over the development design and operation. Many board members were uneasy with the scope of responsibilities such a comprehensive effort would mean and were reluctant to become involved. Under the proposal, the group would take on several new roles. First, NHFH would greatly expand its rehab program. Secondly, it would increase its activities in counselling potential homeowners in the neighborhood on the benefits and requirements of the Section 235 Home Ownership Program. Thirdly, it would take a more active part in determining how the Redevelopment Authority spent its funds in the neighborhood.

Finally, and most problematic, New Homes would have to decide whether to become a neighborhood based housing sponsor which implied a qualitative leap in operations. A variety of roles could be followed with varying degrees of complexity—but, the final decision was really based on a new level of participation. Under the plan which was developed for the Knight Street target area, a project of new construction and substantial rehab amounting to about 100 units would be
realized under the Section 8 rent subsidy program. Because of limited equity requirements and the high financial benefits of syndication, a new legal entity would be spun off of New Homes for Federal Hill in conjunction with an outside development organization to form a profit making partnership. This entity would develop the project and share decision making about design and operations. Preliminary estimates of the financial benefits to New Homes for Federal Hill were somewhere in the order of $1 million; about $100,000 in syndication proceeds, and about $900,000 in residual value of the property (when discounted at 6%, the present value of the package was about $500,000), assuming 20% of the syndication and 25% of the residuals.

Not surprisingly, the issue of control became more important to many board members than the financial benefits. The basic counter argument was simple -- Federal Hill was ready for this kind of development and if New Homes didn't do it, than a private firm certainly would. New Homes involvement would insure basic responsiveness to community needs and issues. After numerous meetings and discussions, it was decided that this was the course to follow.
Naturally, the financial estimates (which, by the way were always portrayed more conservatively than shown here) were based on the organization's ability to obtain Section 8 allocations and use them as bargaining chips with private firms. Preliminary discussions with organizations like the National Corporation for Housing Partnerships were encouraging in convincing people from New Homes that Federal Hill was an attractive area for development, but offered less control and monies to the neighborhood. As luck would have it, though, the announcement of a new federal program, the Neighborhood Strategies Areas, fit in perfectly with the planning and objectives of New Homes for Federal Hill. Under the provisions of the NSA, local communities could target allocations of Section 8 funds to particular neighborhoods to complement a range of other activities. Final selection would be based on several criteria including basic program viability, level of public and private sector commitment to the neighborhood, and citizen support and involvement. Once selected, the city could then advertise openly for developers or work with pre-selected sponsors. The program proved an excellent vehicle for New Homes because of its close relationship with Mayor Cianci and his administration, its past efforts to involve local residents in planning and finally because of the ongoing success of
other investments in the neighborhood. New Homes requested that it be named as the pre-selected developer of the Knight Street area, and, in the coming weeks, a NSA application was developed and filed.

The actual application (see Appendix) outlines the component in the total neighborhood housing strategy which involves a community based housing sponsor. In the City of Providence, the bulk of the planning for all four of the NSA applications was carried out by community housing groups and then reviewed by city officials. As an interesting side light, once the applications were filed, representatives of all four of the groups met to discuss ways to work cooperatively to make certain that all the proposals were funded and an informal organization called the Providence Neighborhood Coalition for Housing was established to discuss lobbying and possible group actions. The Coalition did in fact make several trips to Washington for lobbying purposes and was generally successful in helping to see three out of the four applications were approved. The announcement in September of 1978 that Federal Hill had been selected a Neighborhood Strategy Area by HUD has brought New Homes for Federal Hill one step closer towards its goal of being capable of having significant impact on the community's housing problems.
Finally, it is only fair to close this thesis with some speculations about the specific situation in Federal Hill and the potential of similar neighborhood based groups to address the problems facing older ethnic neighborhoods. The basic dilemmas described in detail in the following chapter are very real and serious problems and difficulties can quickly emerge in any neighborhood organization with devastating results. A volunteer community group is a fragile entity, and any change can lead to serious problems — quickly, key elements or actors in the organization can pull out charging that the group is unrepresentative and threaten its efficiency. In the particular case of Federal Hill, at this moment in time, of the major dilemmas facing neighborhood organizations, the question of leadership during the coming months will be most problematic. The NSA commitment will mean the need for organized, professional leadership to organize a complex process and there is some question whether the New Homes recognizes the staff requirements such a program entails and whether the organization is willing to place its confidence in yet another outside professional.

The experience has also raised questions about the time requirements of planning and coordination measured against the scale of results. Both New Homes and I were
very lucky that the NSA Program was introduced at a most fortuitous moment. If NSA had not been introduced, it would require several more years of scheming with less rewarding results financially. Sooner or later interest and perspicacity die with nothing being accomplished. One could argue two positions as a result. First, it could be stated that neighborhood groups should be given more power and that access to housing programs and professional planning should be made available as a matter of course because community sponsors will likely be better planners, and operators of housing development groups will be able to tailor specific programs to the conditions of their neighborhoods and provide better housing services. Once community groups could be involved on a large basis with the mechanisms of control, they in fact would become more professional.

On the other hand, it could be argued that because of the tenuous political make-up of most neighborhood housing groups, empowering such highly factional and incoherent groups would only impede the delivery of housing and add to its cost. Ultimately, the issue is quality, affordable housing with good management and the name and location of the owner is of secondary importance.

After the experience of working in Federal Hill, I would argue that urban housing for families (not elderly) for people of low and moderate income is such a difficult
project that neighborhood involvement and support is a prerequisite for true success. Housing in this case is far more than providing shelter, but includes the whole range of goods and services which are only found in that entity called "neighborhood", and because people form a key element in neighborhoods, they must be empowered to make family housing work. It is a long difficult process to bring good housing to an urban ethnic neighborhood which is responsive to community residents, but in Federal Hill, a course has been charted that seems to make sense. Although there is a great deal to be done in the months ahead, all the participants feel that we have accomplished a great deal and are moving in the right direction.
Thoughts on the Dilemmas of Community Based Revitalization

In reflecting on my experiences with New Homes for Federal Hill and after numerous discussions with architectural and planning professionals involved with similar organizations, it is clear that there are a set of problems which emerge in varying degrees in any community based change situation. Because grass-roots organizations provide an important basis for legitimizing decision making, the dynamics within such organizations are worthy of serious investigation. Their role in sanctioning or condemning a proposal can have a significant impact on the future of their communities.

In the following few pages, I would like to describe some of the most basic of the dilemmas inherent in community organizations which must be recognized and overcome if the group itself and any professional planner/architect it hires are to be successful. The following are my views on several of the most fundamental of these conflicts:

The Neighborhood Mandate: Consensus Vs. Innovation

On-going organizations which represent a variety of perspectives and interests often find that any proposal for new activity is greeted with resistance and suspicion. Given the diversity of interests in even the most homogenous of communities, it becomes extremely difficult to attempt to initiate innovative programs. Existing models for planning have difficulty coming to terms with the general
reluctance of organizations to take the offensive in housing or social activities. For example, the advocacy model as explained by Davidoff in the famous AIP Journal article of November, 1965, has proven inappropriate to most community organizations, largely I believe, because almost any group large enough to be mount and sustain an important campaign on a set of "community" issues (housing, transportation, commercial revitalization) must reflect more than one segment of the community it represents. Often times it is difficult to take an advocacy position because of the differences of opinion within the represented group. Consequently, this mode has proved ineffective in widening the base of support within the community in formulating action. Several groups emerge which claim to "speak" for the community, and the planner may become trapped in a single interest within his client group. Pyriotis (1974) has also effectively pointed out in a recent thesis that advocacy planning often works against raising real issues of community need by focusing on narrow topical concerns. Even though neighborhood groups share locational interests, and often may have common ethnic ties, as in Federal Hill, once the highway has been stopped and complicated issues of next steps are raised, it becomes clear that perceptions about
the neighborhood's future are, in fact, diverse and factionalized, representing the economic and social differences present in even the most heterogeneous community. In ethnic neighborhoods, with their history of localism, familial ties and suspicion of those outside the immediate circle, it is difficult to maintain a sense of neighborhood purpose.

Conflicts usually emerge when new programs or activities are discussed as a result of a delicate organizational situation. In the course of setting up any activity, a number of internal relationships are established. In the case of NHFH, the home improvement program was approved after lengthy discussions and debates during which members identified NHFH with a particular type of activity and mode of operation. This helped form a collective organizational sense--this is what we do and this is how we do it. Programs are not the only activities which help form that identity and events such as dinner dances, fund raisers, as well as the board member's outside careers and activities which interact indirectly with the organization, contribute to the organizational sense and pattern of behavior.

However, when presented with a proposal for a new set of activities such as a new program of the organization, the organizational identity established over time is called
into question. A frequent first reaction is to dismiss the proposal if only because it will certainly challenge existing patterns. Frequently, the inherent worthiness of the proposal is not really the issue, but the discussion centers on the challenge which the change would introduce to the collective identity. In organizations with a particular precarious mandate, the slightest change from "procedures" (if we had a bake sale last year, why no bake sale this year) is enough to set the organization into crisis. It is this ongoing mode of operation that makes bringing new leadership up through the ranks an almost impossible task for neighborhood organizations. Frequently, the group remains the domain of several of the most active members who shaped its "organizational identity". Despite rhetoric to the contrary, it becomes extremely difficult for new members to become active.

In an article entitled "Social Planning: The Search for Legitimacy", Martin Rein clearly makes the point that the wider the representation and wider the consensus, the decreasing likelihood of innovation. He states:

A broad based representative organization structure that serves to legitimate reform may conflict with its very purpose--the search for innovation and change. The greater the diversity of institutional interest that is embraced within such a planning structure, the greater can be the claim for legitimacy, since it can be claimed that most of the community is represented.
In practice the commitment to shared goals seems less compelling than the preservation of organizational autonomy. Involvement of community leaders does little to resolve the problems of jurisdictional conflicts; indeed, it may only aggravate the task.

The dimensions of this conflict within an organization are difficult to assess. In the case of neighborhood organizations, an unwillingness to innovate could lead to the exclusion of new membership, a narrow community perspective, and eventual moribundity. The task for the planner/designer is to pose innovative programs in a manner which is non-threatening, maintaining the organizational focus, attracting new members, and explaining any new program in terms of the organizational mandate of the group. Although this is easy to posit in an article it is difficult, time-consuming, and a frustrating task. However, it is essential for success.

Personnel:

Outside Expertise Vs. Internal Development

Part of the mandate of almost every community organization is the development of local expertise on important neighborhood issues. The concern is the logical outgrowth of the aspiration for self-reliance, independence, and growth -- all legitimate and important goals. Frequently, though, these objectives come into conflict with the
primary goals of the organization, particularly in staffing questions. Working class neighborhood organizations offer an interesting case in point because they draw upon locations where there are limited professional population, and debates frequently arise over whether to hire community residents who are marginally qualified over outsiders who could be better suited to the demands of the job.

To lay down hard and fast rules would be senseless, because this issue must be resolved in terms of the primary objective of the organization. In the case of NHFH, the debate was usually settled in terms of how the housing needs of the community could best be served, with local employment being treated as a secondary goal. However, building the capacity of community residents to meet continuing challenges and operations is a legitimate and valid topic for concern and action.

It is also important to note that the question of internal development and employment may become one of the ways which the reluctance towards innovation of organizations, described in the preceding section, is expressed. Innovation may be challenged on the basis that it will take resources from outside of the neighborhood to initiate and consequently may involve leadership or input from
outsiders. Although the discussion of a new program may center on employment and "new hires", the hidden issue might well be the fragile consensus upon which the organization functions.

In order to address this issue, Emilia Maron, an active board member of New Homes expressed the relationship of the group to outside consultants succinctly. "We are the experts" she would frequently say, "but you have the expertise". This relationship was understood and workable.

Formulating Policy:
Scientific Rationale Vs. Local Expertise

One final dilemma which confronts community organizations is the basis for policy and decision making. What people know about neighborhoods is elusive and sketchy. In a place like Federal Hill, where the social network is closely related to the physical environment through a nexus of hazy connections, it is difficult to make quantitative sense of the neighborhood. What does $150 in rent per month mean, when the landlord is the tenant's brother-in-law and is expected to take care of a sick aunt on alternate Sundays, etc., etc. The goods and service aspects of neighborhood housing is extremely difficult in the ethnic area to categorize as well. How much is fixing the wiring, or keeping an eye on a sick relative worth?
To someone responsible for developing a strategy for housing, the social component of each site and home takes on an importance which one would rarely assume by a so-called objective process. For example, in Federal Hill, a prime lot which appears perfect for redevelopment is "cursed" by the neighborhood resident's associations with its previous use. Houses, which could be renewed but are occupied by neighborhood problem tenants, are recommended for condemnation by local residents, and, on the other hand, there are numerous examples of houses with serious physical problems which community people felt should be left alone because they housed a family of importance to the neighborhood.

It was this social dimension of the housing in Federal Hill which the Providence Redevelopment Authority would not or could not understand during the urban renewal heydays of the 1950's and 1960's. By pretending that there were fixed and objective standards for blight, the PRA contributed to the neighborhood's decline. It is imperative that their mistake not be made again, and new mechanisms for measuring and knowing the neighborhood must be developed.

Clearly, it is essential that some methodical and organized process be implemented to measure community needs.
Board members of organizations sponsoring programs like housing development frequently ask; "How many elderly apartments do we need in this neighborhood?, How many large families are there here?" The questions can and should be addressed within the best limits of planning expertise, but it is my feeling that over-studying the neighborhood can easily incapacitate an organization, if gone out of proportion. The need for elderly apartments in an urban neighborhood is more or less a given today because of the changing demography of cities and the limited response available to meet the need. Also, the ultimate impact which one hundred units of elderly housing (the average size of a development) will have on an urban housing market is minimal; for almost any neighborhood justifies the need for elderly housing. It appears that the far more important question which must be answered is the political and programmatic goals of the group. What kind of statement will their sponsoring a particular program or project make about who they are and whay they can accomplish? The question of who the group hopes to serve and the goals of the neighborhood are far more important over the long term.

Given these caveats, it is fair to say that it is possible to make sensitive planning decisions about a
community through a balanced approach of working with neighborhood residents to develop a social and cultural picture of a neighborhood while simultaneously using the latest statistical evidence to complete the view. Good planning and theorizing is dependent on intertwining both views of the community by informing neighborhood residents of the statistical picture and qualifying objective information with the human dimension.

Controlling Change: Inevitable Processes Vs. Conscious Development

If there is a theory of neighborhood change at work with many people of Federal Hill (and one suspects many other neighborhoods), it closely resembles what has been called an organic theory of neighborhood development. This model of neighborhood change takes the position that there is a natural set of rules operating which shape urban growth and decline. The theory has a wide basis of support in planning literature and traces its roots (again, the organic analogy) to the work of Mumford, Park, and Burgess, et al. Describing the general theory, Kevin Lynch in an unpublished draft wrote:

Settlements are born, grow and come to maturity, like organisms. (Unlike organisms, however, when a death occurs it is pathological.) Functions are
rhythmic and the healthy community is stable, by virtue of maintaining its dynamic, homeostatic balance. Societies and resources are permanently conserved by this uninterrupted cycling and balancing. If extended growth is necessary, it should occur by budding off new colonies. The optimum state is the stage of ecological climax, with a maximum diversity of elements, an efficient use of energy passing through the system, and a continual recycling of material. Settlements become pathological when the balancing reaks down, the optimum mix degenerates to homogeneity, growth breaks its bounds, recycling fails, parts de-differentiate, or self-repair ceases. Pathology is infectious and it can spread if not treated or cut out.

Lynch goes on to critique the model by arguing that "Cities are not organisms any more than they are machines, or perhaps even less so. They do not grow or change of themselves, or reproduce or repair themselves. They are not autonomous entities, nor do they run through life cycles, or become infected." But of all the theories which are operating and help shape perceptions about cities, the organic model, seems to be argued most frequently and interpretations based on an organic theory are easy to come by.

In the particular case of Federal Hill, the organic theory has a number or proponents who have interpreted the model in social terms. The three periods of the Itailian settlement in the neighborhood have been characterized as a natural phenomena: The Italians arrived to transform the neighborhood and took root, the area blossomed to maturity as a diverse and mature entity, and finally, the
neighborhood became geriatric and frail as it naturally grew older. Through this natural social transformation, the neighborhood became physically transformed as well in an equally organic and natural manner. The current state of disrepair in many parts of the neighborhood is evidence of disease-- a spreading infection certain to spread if not excised.

There is more than enough apparent truth in this analogy to make it dangerous and misleading. As was stated previously, there is, in fact, no natural course to neighborhood development and no inevitable outcomes. If one assumes that the course of the neighborhood’s development is following some preordained pattern, there is little hope of intervening to mitigate the inevitable. One of the important roles of urban experts, who attempt to help neighborhoods in efforts of revitalization, must be to convince local residents that there are few fixed rules or pre-determined fates for urban neighborhoods. People make cities and people can change them as they desire within societal constraints. Frequently, planners and architects are looked to as experts in seeing just how far the inevitable has progressed in order to offer a prognosis about how far along the disease has spread.
Experts can play an important role in dismissing false prophecies and diagnosis.

By making the development of urban neighborhoods a conscious and explicit analysis which is controllable and understandable, we can then begin to discuss in a rational and orderly manner which parts of the neighborhood should be changed to better reflect current needs. Portions of this discussion will be about the economic and social development of the community as well as the physical pattern of growth. In this kind of analysis, the particular history and development pattern of the neighborhood is critical. In Federal Hill there were portions of the community which have undergone major changes in use during the past few years, and it appears that those areas where new uses are in conflict with previous arrangements suffered the greatest problems. The misfits are of a variety of types. The transformation of Broadway is a misfit because many of the old stately mansions suffer as a result of being turned into apartment buildings or commercial space. It is certainly true that certain buildings have adapted poorly -- some of the most important Victorian residences remain virtually vacant and underused because they have not been easily transformed. However, the
transition from residential to mixed commercial uses in generally successful and Broadway retains a vitality and excitement and is perceived as less of a problem to people in the community. Its current use may not make to most architectural sense, given the outstanding architectural quality of the buildings, but the area continues to make social sense to people in Federal Hill.

The list of dilemmas outlined in this chapter is unfortunately not definitive. It is remarkable, though, that these problems had a habit of reappearing with almost certain regularity during the planning activities and one can be reasonably certain that they will continue as major issues in the coming months and years. The situation is not hopeless or debilitating because a body of shared experiences help to resolve tensions and establish a modus operandi. In the case of Federal Hill all parties are now sensitive to the rights and concerns of others involved. Outside experts have learned the bounds of their decision making authority and local residents have a sense of trust that the decision making process will insure that all important decisions will belong to them. The problems continue without easy resolution -- however, it is a struggle which all parties believe is worth the effort.
NOTES


APPENDIX

A. Letter from Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
B. Slide Show Script
C. Neighborhood Strategies Areas Proposal
D. Chronology
E. Bibliography
Mr. Richard Polton  
366 Morris Avenue  
Providence, Rhode Island  

Dear Mr. Polton:  

Three months ago, I was pleased to forward Neighborhood Strategy Area applications to the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington. Today, I am proud to celebrate with you the approval of three applications which will provide resources for improved housing in the Federal Hill, Lower South Providence and Elmwood neighborhoods.  

Today the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development has approved funds to provide subsidy for 384 units of low and moderate income housing. This approval is especially pleasing since these 384 units are over and above our allotment through the Housing Assistance Plan.  

The following neighborhoods will be the recipients of these units, broken down in the following manner:  

- Neighborhood Housing Services for the Elmwood neighborhood subsidy for 130 units  
- New Homes for Federal Hill, Inc. subsidy for 100 units  
- Peoples Redevelopment Corporation, Inc. for Lower South Providence 154 units  

This decision today will make it possible for your organization to move ahead with your plans.  

I congratulate you for your fine work and effort in cooperation with my administration that made it possible for us to achieve success in this program.
At times such as this, I am more than ever convinced that the progressive revitalization of Providence is best done through a continuing partnership of my office and administration and the organizations and residents in our neighborhoods.

I look forward to the swift start up of these programs and I assure you of my continuing personal support.

Warm personal regards,

VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR.
Mayor of Providence

VAC
Suppose for a few minutes that you knew nothing about Federal Hill. Nothing at all. Nothing about its past, nothing about its people. What would you be able to figure out by looking at the place. By looking at its stores... By listening to its sounds... By its smells... By its institutions and celebrations... But most importantly, what would you be able to figure out by looking at the places where people live... By the way people use their grounds... And their streets... When we look closely, we begin to get a sense of what Federal Hill is all about. But to really find out, we've got to talk to people, because Federal Hill isn't a collection of individuals or buildings, its a state of mind. When you talk to the old time residents about the neighborhood in the old days, you frequently hear that the area worked together like one big family.

First Interview:

Voice of elderly resident

In the summer, there was more activity in the streets. People would have parties with all good things to eat. If someone was sick, everybody would come to visit. It was like one big family. There was more respect. Their stores in the old days were very good. My father worked at a pushcart and many times I would help him until very late -- two, three o'clock in the morning. But as people became wealthier, they began moving to other neighborhoods, like Cranston... Mt. Pleasant... and Johnston.

There really wasn't any room for new houses here--there wasn't the land... and living patterns were changing in a way that some felt made Federal Hill less attractive. Cars became important... and more cars needed more roads. Federal Hill was hurt by road construction. Houses came down for the highways, and houses near construction sites lost value.
Gradually, a wall of traffic grew up which separated Federal Hill from other parts of the city. Over a period of years the neighborhood population dropped, as more and more people moved to the suburbs and houses were lost because of highway construction. Neighborhood confidence began to decline and some people let their property deteriorate.

To fight neighborhood problems, people began organizing around key issues: housing, commerce, landlord-tenant problems. Businessmen and neighborhood residents joined together to address the problems of Atwells Avenue and their efforts resulted in a store-front improvement program to bring order to the appearance of the commercial area. This program evolved into a street upgrading proposal, which was recently funded. This will mean that Atwells Avenue will again be a neighborhood showplace - for stores, banks, restaurants, commerce and the local institutions. The street will be carefully designed to maintain the ethnic character of the area. The efforts of the residents and merchants underscored all the positive elements of Federal Hill -- things which make it a really good place to live. Its warm, friendly people... Its many good houses... Of interesting architectural quality... Its access to downtown... and good highway connections... Its proximity to many kinds of jobs so that people can walk to work or take the bus... And save car costs... As well as energy.

People also took notice of the neighborhood's upgraded schools... and other social services... and good shopping. Neighborhood residents also realized that the existing housing stock represents an important resource... And began programs like New Homes for Federal Hill. The Mayor's Office of Community Development Home Improvement Program also helped to renovate older houses in need of basic repairs.
Second Interview:

Voice of Lou Viti, Director of New Homes for Federal Hill - Home Improvement Program

The HIP program is a loan and grant program for the low moderate income people of Federal Hill. It basically provides loans or grants for people to fix up basic problems with their homes. The response to the program has been very good. So far, we have fixed up over 85 homes and have another 135 applications on file.

Voice of Mrs. Lisi, HIP Program Participant

He asked us he said "Why don't you fix up your house? Why don't you apply to the HIP program and if you're eligible, and I think you are, you can get some money to fix up your house." This program has really made a difference. When we first moved into this neighborhood, this house over here was really a mess, so we said, who needs to look out that window, we'll look out the front window. But now, they've painted, they've vinyled, they fixed up the neighborhood and it makes a difference, it really does.

Through all this activity it has become undeniable that people love Federal Hill and want to see it improved. But despite all these efforts, a great deal remains to be done. The need for an expanded housing program is strong and there are ample opportunities for the right kind of development. There are numerous empty lots -- a legacy of fires, outmigration, uneven development and urban renewal. Also there are a few abandoned houses... and schools... and many homes still in need of major renovations. Federal Hill is now at the crossroads. The danger exists that hasty or poorly planned development could undermine those qualities which make it a good place to live. In order to get a sense of how to respond, we have asked people in the community, "What should be the major goal of a housing program for Federal Hill?"
Third Interview:

Attract New People

"I think that the major focus of a housing program should be to attract new people, new blood into the community. Hopefully, some of the people will be young people who grew up on Federal Hill, have gotten some education and reached that middle class standard so they can buy a house and fix it up."

Fill the Empty Lots

"I think that a housing program should try to fill the empty lots which are starting to look like small dumps all over Federal Hill. This would improve the community 100%."

Preserve Historic Architecture

"Any housing program for Federal Hill should preserve the existing architectural character, which is unusual in a city like this."

Improve the Local Economy

"The area is potentially viable to develop. You have your water and your sewers and the cost of land is reasonable. And again, you have the three and a half million dollar improvement to Atwells Avenue which makes the area even more attractive."

These statements summarize what some people in the neighborhood want from a housing program. But they also point up some of the problems that Federal Hill will face. Perhaps the most important of these is how to maintain the existing neighborhood character of the Hill. Other neighborhood renewal experiences point out some of the difficulties. This was once a Portuguese neighborhood...

And this was once a neighborhood of Black and White working people. What are the dangers of this kind of thing happening to Federal Hill? Everyone would agree that the neighborhood needs a housing program and an
infusion of new people into the neighborhood -- but the character of the area -- how can we make sure that its retained?

Other voice --
These are the two problems any neighborhood housing program faces. How do you break through the inertia and the red tape to get a program started, and once it is underway, how do you manage it from getting out of hand, so that it doesn't drive up prices and force out people who have spent their lives in the area.

New Homes for Federal Hill is now formulating possible approaches to meet the neighborhood's housing needs and has begun serious discussions with investors, developers and government agencies. New Homes is attempting to formulate a housing program made up of three elements: major rehabilitation, new construction of rental units and new construction of for-sale houses. But in order to make this program truly responsive, we need your help. As a first step, let's think again about this notion of "neighborhood character"...

A neighborhood is people and a physical setting -- and a good housing program must be responsive to both. Being responsive to the people means involving them in determining the key features of the program. Being responsive to the physical environment means coming up with plans which harmonize with the existing character of the neighborhood.

With these 2 topics in mind, let's talk about a housing program for Federal Hill. We want your ideas in three areas in order to create a housing program tailored to the needs of Federal Hill. The first of these, the Market for new housing asks, "Who should we target a housing program towards? Although we are forced to cater to only one market for housing, like elderly or young families, we should set neighborhood priorities and try to attract the kind of people the neighborhood wants. But who? Singles? Families? Luxury? Moderate Income?
In the questionnaire you will find space to answer the following question: The type of Market Federal Hill should try to reach in its housing program is - elderly, families, singles. Put a number one next to the name of the group you feel it is most important to build new housing or rehabilitate existing buildings for. Put a number 2 next to the second most important. If you feel that any of the groups listed should not be the focus of a housing program, place an X next to their name.

The next question is about the income group you feel the program should be directed towards. In making your choice, remember that a good housing program must be responsive to the existing neighborhood and take into account what can happen in the future. In answering the second question, follow the same procedure as before, and put a number one next to the highest priority a number two next to the second and down the list. Again, if you feel that any of the listed income groups should not be the target for a housing program, place an X next to their name.

Now lets turn to questions of the design of the new housing. As has already been mentioned, the existing neighborhood is the great asset a new housing program for Federal Hill has to work with. Consequently, it is only logical to take advantage of what we have by rehabilitating the existing housing whenever possible. But there are many situations where rehabilitation is now impossible or impractical. We have seen that there are now a good many empty lots caused by fire, urban renewal or uneven development. These too are a resource -- but how they will be used remains an open question.

There are several approaches which could be followed. The forms of housing which you should consider include Row Houses, similar to those on Broadway... Duplex... Garden Apartments... High Rise... or Single Family... Again, we ask you to rate your preference in the same way you did before by indicating your choices with number one being your top selection.
In planning for new housing, two different approaches to placing the housing on the site would be to continue the old patterns, filling in with new buildings OR creating a new pattern which forms new passageways and traffic flows. As a general rule, which concept do you prefer...

One last question about the design of new housing. What is your feeling about the architectural style new housing for Federal Hill should take? Do you think that new housing built here should try to reproduce the look of the old architecture of the area... or should we use contemporary imagery, with familiar materials or break away completely and try for a whole new look.

Our final group of questions relate to the subject of ownership. The way people think about and relate to property are closely linked to ownership patterns. Owner occupancy has the advantage of having the landlord on the premises at all times. Owner occupants tend to be better landlords - taking greatest concern for their property. However, not everyone wants or can afford to be a property owner. Rental apartments offer a wide variety of housing at all price ranges on Federal Hill and many people want the option of finding good rental housing. Cooperatives and condominiums provide a type of housing in which the individual apartment is owned by the tenant and managed by a cooperative group. Arrangements vary, but this type of housing is growing in popularity because it has many of the advantages of owning your own home and frequently requires less of an initial investment. Although there are currently no examples of cooperative or condominiums on Federal Hill, they might be an option worth considering for the future. On your questionnaire, indicate which form of ownership would meet the most important housing need on Federal Hill?

Finally, lets assume that Federal Hill becomes an increasingly desirable place to live -- and as a result, property values rise dramatically. We would then face the danger of losing the neighborhood character as old time residents sold their house for a profit and left. Do you
think that the neighborhood should accept the "forces of the market" or do you think that mechanisms should be created to protect the existing character of the area, insuring that local people have the first chance at staying here, even if profits or real estate values are somewhat reduced. What other alternatives should be considered? Mark your opinions on the Questionaire.

That concludes our questions, and we want to thank you for your help. Please stay with us now as we discuss some of the issues raised in this presentation.
NSA PROPOSAL
FEDERAL HILL

City of Providence, R.I.
Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Mayor
Executive Chamber, City of Providence, Rhode Island
Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
MAYOR

April 14, 1978

Mr. Sirrouka Howard, Director
Providence Area Office
United States Department of Housing
and Urban Development
Federal Building, Kennedy Plaza
Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Mr. Howard:

It is a great pleasure to wholeheartedly endorse this proposal to designate Federal Hill as a Neighborhood Strategy Area. As this application makes clear, Federal Hill is an area with significant housing problems due to the age of the housing stock and a previously uncertain future because of highway construction and urban renewal. Today, however, the future of the neighborhood is truly bright. There are several reasons for my optimism.

First, and most importantly, Federal Hill is an area with community organizations which are models of integrity, concern, and dedication. In recent years, neighborhood groups like New Homes for Federal Hill have become increasingly sophisticated and now have the ability to work with professionals within the City Administration to plan for their future. This document and proposal is an indication of close cooperation of my staff and community residents. The result is a sensitive, workable, and important approach to addressing the housing problems of the area.

In addition, the Federal Hill area has been the focus of an on-going neighborhood revitalization process which is truly comprehensive. The main shopping street of the neighborhood, Atwells Avenue, is undergoing a $4 million transformation which should make it a regional retail center and renew its importance to the neighborhood and the City. The recently completed Federal Hill House in the proposed NSA, the new Bridgeham Middle School, and a host of other projects and programs are all further indication of the resurgence of this proud and strong community. I am confident that the NSA proposal will further this process by providing residential stability to a troubled area of the neighborhood and by continuing to raise community confidence.

Federal Hill, I believe, will be a significant example of effective community participation and revitalization and will indicate
the way the new Neighborhood Strategy Area program can be tied to other elements in a comprehensive approach to solving problems. There are many in this City, and I include myself in their numbers, who are deeply committed to seeing a fully revitalized Federal Hill made a reality. The designation of Federal Hill as a Neighborhood Strategy Area will bring us one important step closer to our goal.

Warm personal regards.

Sincerely,

VINCENT A. CIANCI, JR.
Mayor of Providence

VAC
Neighborhood Strategies Area: Federal Hill Providence, R.I.

Proposal Submitted by
Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Providence, Rhode Island

Report Prepared By:
The Mayor's Office of Community Development
Vito Russo, Director

New Homes for Federal Hill
Anthony Pennine, President
Louis Viti, Director

Staff:
Richard E. Polton, Coordinator
John DeCataldo
Helen Priske
Acknowledgements

This proposal is the result of over a year of planning and has involved the participation of a wide variety of people. Although it is impossible to give all of those active in the planning process credit, the following people deserve recognition for their work in helping to develop the Neighborhood Strategy Area proposal.

City of Providence
Vincent A. Cianci, Jr., Mayor
Vito Russo, Director of Community Development
Steve O'Rourke
Helen Priske
Randy Komisar, staff

New Homes for Federal Hill
Anthony Pennine, President
Elinor Dyer, Vice President
Emilia Maron, Treasurer
Ann Purro, Secretary
Louis Viti, Director
John DiCataldo
Therese Bernier, staff

In addition, several other people deserve special thanks. Thomas Roberts of the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities was instrumental in developing an initial proposal for neighborhood forums about the future of Federal Hill. Joseph Dabek, former Director of New Homes, was a valued participant. Eric Pfeiffer and Julia Smith of Glaser, DeCastro and Vitols provided important architectural assistance which is included in this report. And finally, special thanks to the people of Federal Hill who expressed their viewpoints and made clear they believe in their neighborhood's future.

Richard Polton, Project Coordinator
Neighborhood Strategy Area: Federal Hill  Providence, R.I.

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1.2  Map Indicating Context of NSA

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2.2  Description of Demographic and Physical Characteristics

2.3  Proposal Conformance With Planning Objectives

3.1  Evaluation of Feasability of Rehabilitation
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4.0  Housing Revitalization Plan: Introduction and Index
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9.1  Selection of Developer Proposals

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1.1 Map Indicating Context of NSA

Note: This map represents the best efforts of the City to define the NSA. We recognize that a successful development may require some activity in adjacent areas.

This map indicates buildings of historic value as judged by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission.
1.1 Description of the Proposed NSA

The NSA will consist of approximately twelve square blocks in the Federal Hill Neighborhood. The area is bounded essentially by Gesler, Knight, Almy and Grove Streets. However, activities in areas adjacent to this area should be considered allowable. The City recognizes that successful development may require some activity outside of these boundaries, however, the major work should fall within this area.

The proposed NSA is presently almost exclusively residential and enjoys good shopping and related service. Atwells Avenue and Broadway are major commercial streets and offer a broad range of stores, offices, restaurants, banks, medical offices and social agencies. Both streets are major bus routes and connect to the downtown and other sections of the City.
2.1 Description of Demographic and Physical Characteristics

Description

Federal Hill is located in the west central portion of Providence, adjacent to the downtown. It is bounded by Route 1 95, Route 6, Route 10 and Westminster Street. The highways serve as a sharp physical boundary, clearly demarking the neighborhood edges and follow topographic formations. The neighborhood boundary along Westminster Street is a functional boundary, formed by social practice.

The area developed between the mid-Ninteenth and early Twentieth Centuries and is characterized by a broad range of architectural styles, including several grand Victorian mansions on Broadway as well as simple, wood framed multi-family houses in other parts of the area. A portion of the neighborhood is incorporated in the Broadway-Armory Historic District, which was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 following the state survey.

The neighborhood is 34% of a square mile and has a population in 1970 of 10,228 with a population density of 47 people per acre. Despite the considerable drop in population during the post war years, the neighborhood remains fairly dense, although well within reasonable residential densities of standard professional site planning.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population and Ethnicity</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>22,010</td>
<td>14,692</td>
<td>10,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (%)</td>
<td>4,659 (15%)</td>
<td>7,416 (50%)</td>
<td>3,744 (37%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Standards here are derived from Site Planning by Kevin Lynch, Second Edition, 1971, Cambridge. See chart on p. 315 which allows for seven to sixteen families per acre in a two family/three family walk up neighborhood. Because so many (32.9%) of the households in Federal Hill are single people, these density figures become more acceptable.
Approximately 55% of the neighborhood is residential and there are numerous mixed use areas. Much of the non-residential activities are commercial and are confined to the main shopping streets. There are some instances of light industry, particularly jewelry manufacturing, scattered throughout residential areas. Community standards find this acceptable. Heavier manufacturing and larger scale commercial establishments are limited to the fringe areas, adjoining the major circulation routes.

The most important commercial area in the neighborhood is Atwells Avenue, containing 98 stores, 3 churches and a variety of other functions. Many of the stores along the street are specialty stores with an Italian-American focus. The area had suffered a slow decline of activity in the past years, but through a community-merchant effort, the City of Providence has agreed to use urban renewal bonding powers to spend $3,500,000 on street improvements, including brick paving, tree planting, the creation of entrance archways and plazas. The renewal is designed to take advantage of the neighborhood's ethnic character and it is widely anticipated that the project will increase the commercial activity making the area a center of regional significance. It is difficult to predict with certainty the full impact of the renewal on the residential market, but the neighborhood visibility is certain to be increased.

In addition to Atwells Avenue, the Broadway area has remained a major professional area with numerous medical and professional offices. The street has many of the grandest mansions from the Victorian era in all of the Northeast, many of which have been restored and maintained. Broadway continues to have the reputation of being the best address on Federal Hill and commands the highest rents.
Housing Characteristics

The vast majority of the housing, 93%, was built before 1939, with 60% of all the buildings containing 2 to 4 units. The owner occupancy rate is 17% neighborhood wide, below the City of Providence average of 36.1%. The difference is largely attributable to the relative lack of single family houses in Federal Hill which provide the greatest likelihood of owner occupancy and the figure should not be taken as an indicator of neighborhood stability. Ethnic housing patterns of co-ownership add to the statistical confusion.

Houses on Federal Hill are relatively well maintained with only 3.4% being substandard, compared with 3.9% city-wide. Because of their age, many homes are in need of modernization, especially upgrading basic services like heating and electrical systems. An on-going home improvement program, administered through the offices

---

### HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS 1970

#### Units in Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units in Structure</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>( % )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>1264</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 49</td>
<td>1344</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 or more</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4557</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Year Structure Built

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Structure Built</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>( % )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-68</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-64</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-59</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939- or earlier</td>
<td>4235</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4549</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Heating Equipment 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heating Equipment</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>( % )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steam or hot water</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm air furnace</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built-in Electric</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall, floor or pipeless furnace</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other means or not heated</td>
<td>2246</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4549</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of New Homes for Federal Hill, offers three percent loan and grants for basic home repairs. Thus far over eighty homes have been improved through the program and demand has outstripped available funds. The experience of the program indicates that home improvements completed under the program have resulted in private expenditures far surpassing outlays of public funds.

Other government housing programs which have affected the neighborhood include the housing for the elderly initiatives, resulting in two high rise towers at either end of the community, the Model Cities neighborhood program in the West Broadway area, which cleared several scattered sites. The Model Cities program was defunded before new construction could be completed and the lots have remained vacant for the past four years.

Efforts were recently taken to attempt estimating the average purchase price of single family and two/three family houses. Using records supplied by the City of Providence Tax Assessors Office, averages were calculated of a random sample of recent selling prices. By comparing selling prices to property tax valuations, an average selling price was projected of $9178.00 for a single family house and $11,679 for a two/three family house. These figures represent an approximation of the costs of housing based on forty-one sales during 1974–5. See Appendix for further explanation of this projection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied Units</td>
<td>1073 (17%)</td>
<td>960 (17%)</td>
<td>782 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter Occupied Units</td>
<td>6295 (81%)</td>
<td>2951 (69%)</td>
<td>2246 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>137 (2%)</td>
<td>279 (14%)</td>
<td>309 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Housing Units</td>
<td>6535</td>
<td>5590</td>
<td>4520</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The neighborhood's income figures for 1969 was $7103, which is considerably below the $8430 City median and far behind those of the SMSA at $9929. A sizable portion of the neighborhood, approximately one fourth of the neighborhood, fell below $4000 per year during that time period. The number of households below the poverty level, defined as 50% below the City's median income, rose from 14.3% in 1960 to 16.2% by 1970. Although no recent figures are available, the poverty rate has probably grown slightly or remained at the 1970 level.

**INCOME OF RESIDENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CT 9</th>
<th>CT 10</th>
<th>CT 11</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Families</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969 Median Family Income (Not adjusted for inflation)</td>
<td>$6,034</td>
<td>$8,262</td>
<td>$7,013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969 Mean Family Income</td>
<td>$6,569</td>
<td>$9,723</td>
<td>$7,723</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Characteristics

The current social conditions of Federal Hill are the consequence of the great migration of Italians into Rhode Island during the early decades of the Twentieth Century. Providence, as a port city with direct shipping lines to Italy, became one of the major centers of Italian immigration. By 1930, when the flow of new citizens slowed, Italian born residents constituted 20% of the population of the City of Providence. Federal Hill was the first and most important of the Italian communities which grew in Rhode Island, providing housing, education and economic opportunities to the thousands of new Americans. Although there were numerous conflicts with the Irish residents of the area, Federal Hill soon became a vibrant center of culture and religion with numerous links to Italy. A variety of institutions, shops, organizations and cultural associations grew to support Italo-Americans from all over the region. As Italo-Americans integrated themselves into the mainstream of Rhode Island's economic, social and political structure and found homes in other neighborhoods, Federal Hill remained as the touchstone area, the place most associated with the heritage of Rhode Island's largest ethnic group. It is on Federal Hill where many places of state-wide interest and importance remain.

Today, Federal Hill is facing the problems of many older urban ethnic neighborhoods. Its population has decreased from over 22,000 in 1950 to around 10,000 today. Much of this loss is an outcome of government highway programs which resulted in large scale demolition along three edges of the neighborhood. Also, many younger families found suburban living both desirable and affordable in the post war years and moved away from the immediate area, often keeping contact with family or parish church.

The population profile of Federal Hill reflects the stability and the increasing age of the residents. A large portion of the
neighborhood's residents have spent their entire lives in the area and are now growing older. This is reflected statistically the increase of people 65 and over from 12.9% in 1960 to 17.9% in 1970, with every indication that the trend is continuing and growing. The drop in residents between the ages of 20-44 from 32.4% to 27% during the same ten year period is also a statistic of important social significance. Although greatly debated in planning circles, it is generally assumed that this age bracket is essential to a "balanced" neighborhood, because of their likely economic and social vitality.

An examination of the economic statistics complements the observations made above. The most important feature is the stability of the Federal Hill work force, with few changes over the past fifteen years. The problems of the aging population will likely become more evident in 1980 census material, but the most recent figures show some notable changes. The number of residents employed in manufacturing dropped about 5% during the period from 1960 to 1970, as industry continued to relocate from the areas adjoining Federal Hill. More people are finding work in the service sector and the clerical, sales categories. This is generally a common trend in urban ethnic neighborhoods and reflects typical economic changes of recent years.

**Occupation Information**  (Census tracts 9, 10, 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th></th>
<th>1970</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Managerial</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical, Sales</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen, Operatives</td>
<td>2769</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>2074</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service labor</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL workforce</strong></td>
<td>5221</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4310</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Neighborhood Characteristics - Land Use (1970)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Type of Use</th>
<th>Sq. Footage</th>
<th>%</th>
<th># of Parcels</th>
<th># of Housing Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Undeveloped Land &amp; Water Areas</td>
<td>715,617</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Residential Uses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. 1 Family</td>
<td>557,573</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. 2 Family</td>
<td>1,087,596</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. 3 Family</td>
<td>1,883,296</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>1,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Multi (4-9 Units)</td>
<td>1,669,908</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>1,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Multi (10 Unit Plus)</td>
<td>111,908</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. Other</td>
<td>101,345</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Food &amp; Related Products</td>
<td>22,588</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Apparel</td>
<td>29,295</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Furniture</td>
<td>6,684</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Paper &amp; Related Products</td>
<td>45,877</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Printing, publishing &amp; related</td>
<td>26,460</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. Chemicals &amp; Related Prods.</td>
<td>3,260</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. Primary</td>
<td>6,660</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H. Fabricated Metal Products</td>
<td>324,647</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Transportation</td>
<td>3,809</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. Professional, scientific</td>
<td>27,970</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K. Jewelry, etc.</td>
<td>165,502</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. Misc.</td>
<td>1,804</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Transportation, Communication &amp; Utilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Fixed Rail</td>
<td>486,371</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Motor Vehicles</td>
<td>32,302</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Highway &amp; Street</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Off-street Parking</td>
<td>607,588</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Other transportation,</td>
<td>3,874</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communication &amp; utilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Wholesale trade</td>
<td>133,949</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Retail trade</td>
<td>35,746</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Retail-general mdse</td>
<td>5,502</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Retail-food</td>
<td>51,149</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Retail-automotive</td>
<td>188,313</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F. Retail-apparel</td>
<td>12,830</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. Retail-furniture</td>
<td>122,853</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H. Retail-eating &amp; drinking</td>
<td>64,080</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Retail-misc.</td>
<td>67,268</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI General Services</td>
<td>Sq. Footage</td>
<td>%</td>
<td># of Parcels</td>
<td># of Housing Units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Finance, insurance</td>
<td>32,927</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Personal services</td>
<td>59,262</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Business services</td>
<td>50,288</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Repair services</td>
<td>172,123</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Professional</td>
<td>23,755</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F. Construction</td>
<td>13,262</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Warehouse &amp; storage</td>
<td>47,810</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VII Institutional &amp; Government</th>
<th>Sq. Footage</th>
<th>%</th>
<th># of Parcels</th>
<th># of Housing Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Educational</td>
<td>235,356</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Special school</td>
<td>5,094</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Religious</td>
<td>146,271</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. State &amp; Local Gov.</td>
<td>27,714</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Federal</td>
<td>24,040</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Service Organization</td>
<td>77,176</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VII Cultural, Entertainment &amp; Recreational</th>
<th>Sq. Footage</th>
<th>%</th>
<th># of Parcels</th>
<th># of Housing Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Spectator Assembly</td>
<td>20,079</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sports facilities</td>
<td>4,677</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Parks &amp; Playgrounds</td>
<td>52,245</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 1,789,266 100 2,275
The proposed NSA clearly meets criteria mentioned in 881:112(a) since the neighborhood has facilities (water, sewers, gas and other infrastructure) for larger populations than are currently living in the area. The proposal indicate a higher use of existing facilities but will in no way strain existing capabilities.

The proposed NSA area does not currently have a significant number of minority persons. However, the increased number of family units and the quality of the rehabilitated housing as well as the improved overall neighborhood atmosphere will provide more opportunities for minority families to find adequate housing in the area. The proposed NSA site will therefore facilitate the higher neighborhood standards of compliance with 881:112 (b).

The proposed rehabilitation and construction of housing in the NSA will clearly add significantly to the housing stock of the area. These new additions will give more choice for families who often find it very difficult to access good quality moderately priced housing of adequate size. This NSA proposal will not concentrate more assisted persons in already very low income areas but will rather restore and stabilize an area populated by working people of moderate income. In addition, this proposal furthers the major goal of this year's Housing Assistance Plan since the units are planned for families and makes rehabilitation the primary activity. New construction is used only where necessary and appropriate. This is also consistent with the current HAP plan.

The area is free from serious adverse environmental conditions and has adequate facilities for social, recreational, educational, commercial and health needs. The entire Federal Hill area is a focal point for Italian-Americans from all over the region. Many people retain psychological, cultural and sentimental ties with the area and look on it as a touch-stone for their ethnic and familial heritage. The current revitalization of Atwells Avenue should enhance the neighborhood's importance in this area.

Social and recreational programs are offered at the Federal Hill House. This multi-purpose neighborhood facility (which receives some funding from the Mayor's Office of Community Development) provides after school and evening recreation and education programs for children, seniors and young adults. In addition, there are a wide variety of church related organizations which compliment these programs with activities in scouting, education and recreation.

The NSA is located within 1.6 miles of the Providence Public Library and is also in close proximity of several colleges and
2.2

technical schools as well as the commercial and shopping opportunities of the downtown area. Federal Hill is served by three hospitals -- Rhode Island Hospital, Roger Williams Hospital and the Veterans Administration Hospital and all these facilities are readily accessible by public transportation.

Clearly, the proximity of the NSA and the wider Federal Hill neighborhood to the downtown services and facilities and its proximity to major highways and public transportation make it a suitable target for rehabilitation efforts. The neighborhood with its vibrant ethnic spirit is still a closely knit community. Many people wish to remain in the proposed NSA but are reluctant to do so because of poor housing conditions and the uncertainty of the area's future.

In addition, there are some commercial and light manufacturing (primarily jewelry and food processing) firms in the neighborhood which provide some employment opportunities to people with limited training and experience. In addition, public transportation makes other more heavily industrialized areas highly accessible. This is in conformance with the necessary range of jobs for lower income workers outlined in 881:112(g).

The entire range of Federal requirements outlined in section 881:113 and 881:114, including environmental and Davis-Bacon regulations will be strictly adhered to. The project will not require any relocation payments and is not located in an area that has been designated as an area of special flood hazard.
2.3 Evaluation of Feasability of Rehabilitation

Although the housing problems of the NSA are serious, there is strong indication that a concentrated effort will be successful in improving conditions in the area. Although the housing in the area is deteriorated, it is not beyond repair. In a survey conducted by the Providence Department of Planning and Urban Development in 1975-6, it was found that although 72% of the housing in Federal Hill needed rehabilitation, none were judged to be beyond repair. The neighborhood's vacancy rate is fairly low (approximately 5%) and housing demand appears to remain quite strong according to the figures of local community groups and real estate firms.

Because of the range of programs which will be in effect in the NSA -- the 312 Loan Program, the HIP loan and grant program, and the proposed Section 8 Substantial Rehabilitation program -- we feel that almost every housing situation can be addressed. The City working with a responsible developer will have powers ranging from grants, loans, to the purchasing of dilapidated structures for reuse.

In addition, there has been strong interest on the part of local property owners to participate in some of the on-going programs. Several homeowners in the proposed NSA have already taken advantage of the HIP program and have demonstrated a willingness to commit private resources. However, the current efforts have not been targetted and coordinated and this has resulted in a lack of neighborhood confidence. Using the powers of the NSA, we anticipate being able to reverse the lack of confidence and stabilize the area.

This NSA proposal also calls for the rehabilitation of two former neighborhood schools into housing. Preliminary review by project architects indicate that the schools lend themselves well to rehabilitation and are in fairly good conditions. In the unforeseen event that either of the schools is unable to undergo rehabilitation, the units allocated will be transferred to other elements of the project, either new construction or rehabilitation of existing housing. This is seen as an unlikely possibility.
3.1 Plan to Remedy Neighborhood Deficiencies

The Federal Hill area has benefitted from several important programs designed to improve neighborhood conditions during the past few years. The community projects recently completed or currently underway include:

* The construction of a new Federal Hill House, a neighborhood settlement house that has grown into a major social service center housing facilities for the elderly, day care, meeting rooms and a broad range of services. The new facility was constructed with the help of Community Development Block Grants and is located within the NSA.

* The commercial areas revitalization program, which consists of a storefront improvement program, a street upgrading development and revitalization of the local business organization. This project uses the urban renewal bonding powers of the City of Providence and is currently underway. Budget: $4,000,000.

* The Mayor's Office of Community Development has recently completed a small neighborhood park, John A. Pastore Park, which consists of playground facilities, open spaces, etc. in the NSA. Budget: $85,000 of BOR, CDBG funds. Complete 12-77

* A new Bridgham Middle School was opened during the past school year which greatly enhances the area's educational facilities. The new school offers the latest in equipment and is adjacent to the NSA.

* The Route 6 Connector, which has been under construction for the past 8 years is scheduled for final completion during the coming year. The destruction which this roadway caused is finally complete and its negative impact on the neighborhood should finally come to an end. When it is finished, it will provide excellent highway access to the neighborhood and the NSA.

* An innovative program to reuse existing lots as garden plots and parking areas has been funded by the Mayor's Office of Community Development in the proposed NSA. Open spaces will be transformed into green spaces providing community people with an opportunity to grow some of their food. The program will begin in the Spring of 1978. Budget: $25,000.

* Several active community groups are working to address other neighborhood problems. Among the most important of these is the Congress of Ethnic Neighborhood Organizations (CENO) which
3.1 has been operating on Federal Hill for five years. CENO acts to develop block clubs, represent community interests and serve as a liaison between local residents and city and state agencies, landlords, etc. CENO has been active in organizing many cultural events in the community and has played an important role in the current redevelopment of Federal Hill. Other important and active community organizations include the Federal Hill Businessmen's Association, the Neighborhood Economic Revitalization Commission and a wide variety of social and religious groups, all of which take an active role in the neighborhood's affairs.
The most important question facing the Federal Hill neighborhood today is how to increase the supply of good quality housing. The community has changed significantly in the post-war years because of highway construction, redevelopment and changes in the use of existing buildings. The resulting drop in population threatens the very vitality and viability of the neighborhood. There is also concern that the economic revitalization of Atwells Avenue, financed by the Providence Redevelopment Authority will accelerate market pressures and drive up the price of housing, thereby forcing out residents who have spent their lives in the neighborhood. Although demand for moderately priced housing remains strong, factors such as the unavailability of adequate housing supplies, bank reluctance to finance urban housing and the moderate income of neighborhood residents has meant that the community continues to experience an unfulfilled need for new and substantially rehabilitated housing.

The Mayor's Office of Community Development together with New Homes for Federal Hill, a four year old community organization which sponsors the construction of new houses and operates a home rehabilitation program, have worked together to formulate a comprehensive proposal to take advantage of the existing housing programs already at work in the neighborhood with the possibilities offered through the Neighborhood Strategies Area program. This proposal is the result of an intensive planning effort which has included a detailed survey of the neighborhood, a slide show presentation with questionnaire on housing (sponsored by a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities) and innumerable discussions within New Homes for Federal Hill, the Congress of Ethnic Neighborhood Organizations and the Mayor's Office of Community Development.

The proposal detailed in this section of the report is made up of the following elements:

4.1 Statistical Profile of the NSA
4.2 Targeted Rehabilitation Program

Use of Community Development Block Grant funds for a targeted rehabilitation of the Knight Street area adjoining the recently completed Pastore Park. There are some seven structures in need of rehabilitation in the immediate area. New streets, curbs and trees are eligible activities.

Budget: $100,000

Source: Mayor's Office of Community Development Funds allocated.
4.3 Demolition Program
Work with the staff and resources of the Providence Redevelopment Authority to demolish those buildings in the NSA which are beyond repair or are a threat to the health and safety of the neighborhood. These sites will be converted to houselots and other uses.
Budget: $180,000
Source: Providence Redevelopment Authority
Proposed

4.4 New Single Family Home Construction
Through the offices of New Homes for Federal Hill and the HUD area office in Providence continue to counsel and reach out for families interested in building new single family housing under the Section 235 program.
Source: FHA, HUD Area Office
Committments for houses available.

4.5 NSA - Section 8 Program
The proposed NSA program using Section 8 assistance consists of the following three elements:

4.5a Substantial Rehabilitation of Existing Housing
Rehabilitate units in existing housing in older small multi-family buildings so that they meet HUD standards and can be used for Section 8 housing. Owner-occupancy of those buildings will be encouraged; not all the units in a building must be Section 8 rentals and allocations will be granted to owner occupants.
In cases where owner-occupancy is impossible, other alternatives will be considered.
Number of Section 8 Allocation: 40
Source: HUD/ Neighborhood Strategies Areas Program
Financing: Rhode Island Housing Mortgage Finance Corp.
Proposed

4.5b Adaptive Reuse of Historic Properties
Convert two former neighborhood schools into family oriented housing with a total of approximately 20 units. The schools are small buildings of historic importance; one is in the NSA and the other is just adjacent.
Number of Section 8 Allocations: 20
Source: HUD/Neighborhood Strategies Areas Program
Financing: Rhode Island Housing Mortgage Finance Corp.
Proposed

4.5c New Construction
Construct twenty units of new housing on land cleared by the Providence Redevelopment Authority in the NSA. This development, which is essential to the final
completion of the project and will remove a blighting influence from the area. The housing would be in character with the surrounding neighborhood and would be family oriented.

Number of Section 8 Allocations: 40
Source: HUD/Neighborhood Strategies Areas Program
Financing: Rhode Island Housing Mortgage Finance Corp.
Proposed.
4.1 Statistical Profile of Housing in the NSA

The following figures represent the best efforts of the City of Providence to estimate the housing conditions in the proposed NSA. The information displayed below was gathered from windshield surveys, census records and interviews.

Existing Conditions in the NSA

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Residential Structures</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Number of Units</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures in Need of Rehabilitation</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Number of Units Which Are In Need of Rehabilitation</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Unoccupied Structures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tenure Characteristics (estimated)*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied Housing</td>
<td>34 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter Occupied</td>
<td>92 (73%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comprehensive approach to solving housing problems described in this application should be capable of meeting the needs for rehabilitation in the NSA through a combination of direct action by means of the NSA Section 8 program, the targeted HIP funds, the 312 program, and private initiative.

*There is some confusion about the reliability of these figures because of some changes since the census and whether recent attempts to update tenure characteristics have distinguished between owner occupied units and owner occupied structures. In a densely populated neighborhood of two and three family houses, this is a significant distinction.
4.2 Targetted Rehabilitation Program
Pastore Park/Knight Street Area

The following information was the basis of a report to the Mayor's Office of Community Development and the subsequent allocation of $100,000 in CDBG for a targetted rehabilitation program. Final plans for how this money will be spent is pending notification of designation of the area as an NSA.

Summary

One of the most troubled and troublesome areas of Federal Hill is the Knight/Gesler/Tell Street vicinity. The corner is characterized by poor housing conditions, vacant and degraded lots, noise and vandalism. Although the Mayor's Office of Community Development and the Providence Redevelopment Authority have begun improvement projects in the area, conditions are so serious that further action is warranted. New Homes for Federal Hill, a community organization concerned with housing, has evaluated the situation and believes a cooperative, inter-agency neighborhood improvement plan is required if the problems are to be solved.

A summary of the proposal includes:

- Rehabilitation of those houses in the target area where the building is less than 60% expired.

- Demolition of those structures where the building is more than 60% expired.

- Moving buildings now on sites ill suited to residential purposes.

- A comprehensive program of street improvements to re-define boundaries and street edges. Upgrading of City owned sites is essential.

- Painting the Municipal Pool.

The plan will be carried out by the Mayor's Office of Community Development, the Providence Redevelopment Authority with New Homes for Federal Hill acting as the lead agency.
4.2 Map Showing Target Area of Targetted Rehab Program

Note: This area falls within the proposed boundaries of the NSA.
Pastore Park Area Proposal

The key to upgrading this area is a comprehensive program to improve the physical environment, as indicated in the above plan. This type of focus will mean major rehabilitation, demolition, new construction and the moving of buildings when necessary. This will lead to an improvement of the housing conditions as well as a change in the tenancy for problem buildings, making building management less difficult.

In the following pages, some of the particular buildings and sites are analyzed and suggestions for their future use are proposed.
Background

In past years, Knight Street was an important secondary shopping area, capturing the commercial traffic of those travelling from Atwells Avenue to Broadway. The development of the area was somewhat more dense than the adjoining streets and the ground floors frequently were used for shops and businesses. Several of the stores along the street have remained economically vibrant and attractive. However, altered traffic and shopping patterns have made several of the storefronts non-competitive and their future usefulness to the community is questionable.

The most significant problems of the area are the poor housing conditions and related social problems. All the buildings are at least fifty years old, with many being far older. They are all in need of repair. Because they were built at a time when Knight Street was an important throughfare, the buildings contain more apartments, often of lower quality than those in adjoining areas. Absentee ownership and poor building/tenant management have become major problems. Many of the neighborhood residents in near-by streets are greatly concerned about the Knight Street area and have expressed alarm about its impact on the larger neighborhood. Some indicated that they had considered moving from the immediate area because of the problems associated with the corner.

The City of Providence has indicated by its actions that the area is deserving of special attention. The Mayor's Office of Community Development recently completed an improvement project of an existing playground at Knight and Gesler Streets by adding tennis courts and new play equipment. The playground has been renamed John O. Pastore Park. In addition, the Providence Redevelopment Authority purchased and cleared three sites in the immediate area several years ago and is now in the process of supervising their redevelopment. These sites would be incorporated into the NSA proposal and would be the sites of new construction.

The community is concerned about the prospects for improving the area and believes that unless a broad, comprehensive approach toward improvement is implemented, the work already committed will likely be lost through vandalism and further disinvestment. The targeted rehabilitation program, explained in the following pages, is another important step. The designation of the area as an NSA will add even more force to the efforts to improve the neighborhood.
4.3 Demolition Program

Although abandonment and vacant structures are not a major problem in the Federal Hill area, there are some instances of buildings which are beyond repair and some situations where lot coverage is far beyond acceptable modern standards. In those cases, funds would be utilized to relocate current residents and demolish the structures. This should not be a widespread problem and a limited number of projects are foreseen.

4.4 Single Family Home Construction

The Section 235 Program is currently in operation in Providence and has continued funding to build new single family housing in urban areas. In the past, the program has had some problems in gaining acceptance in the Federal Hill area, although there are some homes built under the provisions of Section 235. Currently, New Homes for Federal Hill is working with residents and others interested in building homes on the lots cleared in the early 70s under urban renewal programs. Although progress is slow, several potential homeowners have expressed interest and one application is now being reworked for approval. Fortunately, a local bank, Columbus National Bank, has expressed an interest in financing potential homeowners involved with the 235 program. Construction is scheduled to begin in June of 1978 for an additional 235 house which will bring back to the neighborhood people who previously lived in Federal Hill and had moved to the suburbs.
The proposed program under the Section 8 provisions of the NSA will consist of three elements:

* Substantial rehabilitation of existing housing.
  40 Units

* Adaptive reuse of existing structures.
  20 Units

* New Construction
  40 Units

The development will be family oriented and will be carried out in a manner which assures a variety of housing types. At this point it is difficult to give a detailed breakdown of the number of units of each bedroom number. However, the following targets will be followed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 BR</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BR</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 BR</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 BR</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following chart is an estimate of the number of units and a projection of the total project cost. The figures used are provided by the Providence office of the Federal Housing Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>New</th>
<th>Rehab</th>
<th>Est. Cost</th>
<th>Estimated Total Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 BR</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$32,508</td>
<td>$637,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BR</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39,861</td>
<td>2,291,978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 BR</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49,923</td>
<td>887,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 BR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59,103</td>
<td>118,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,934,716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All units will be in low-rise, walk-up buildings. The new construction will be in semi-detached buildings, which are also low-rise and walk-up.
The existing housing of the NSA area will be upgraded using Section 8 allocations through acquisition and substantial rehabilitation. Upon completion, this housing will be comparable in quality to new construction standards. It is anticipated that the rehabilitation of the existing housing will have an important effect in leveraging private investment in the area by encouraging owners to upgrade their properties.

Criteria for property selection by the community developer should include:

- Property will be in conformance to good housing standards when completed. Property should be easy to manage and maintain when finished.

- Properties should not be owner occupied upon the time of their purchase. The NSA program should try to compliment other programs to encourage owner occupancy in the City's neighborhoods. Abandoned or severely neglected properties should be given special consideration as potential sites.

- Properties selected should have an important impact on improving the image of the area and should be selected in way to maximize the social and visual effectiveness of the rehabilitation.

- The historic qualities of the housing should be respected and every effort should be made to maintain the architectural character of the neighborhood.

The City believes that the NSA represents the best mechanism to accomplish these objectives within this target area.

Number of Units to be Rehabilitated 46
Types of Housing to be Provided 1,2,3 BR walk-ups.
This portion of the NSA proposal would facilitate the reuse of two former neighborhood schools as housing. Both buildings are within the Broadway - Armory Historic District and are currently in a state of extreme disrepair. Because the building is now occupied for offices, it will be included in this program as an option, subject to satisfactory relocation of current users.

**ALMY STREET SCHOOL**

The Almy Street School is a two story wood framed building in the Late Victorian – Queen Anne style. The building has a cross gable roof on a hip and square belfry base. The building also features a large central brick chimney. Although the building was last used as a school over nine years ago, it is fully sprinklered and has the latest fire detection equipment. The property is owned by the City of Providence and is in need of substantial rehabilitation.

Preliminary architectural drawings, indicated in the following pages, show that the property could be converted to housing. The exact number of units the building could ultimately contain requires more detailed analysis, particularly of the roof structure.
ALMY STREET SCHOOL
Schematic Plan
The Grove Street School is a simple Victorian brick structure which consists of two floors of class rooms. The building is on a residential street and has a site large enough to accommodate adequate parking. The building is just off Broadway and enjoys good access to shopping, bus routes and many services. The building is currently unoccupied but has new electrical systems and modern fire detection equipment.

Schematic plans for the reuse of the building indicate that a successful conversion of the property to housing would be feasible. Again, the exact number of units is difficult to determine without further investigation. It is estimated, however, that the two school buildings could provide as many as 20 units of housing if the structure of the building allowed use of third floor units.
GROVE STREET SCHOOL
Schematic Plans
First Floor
During the late 1960s and early 1970s the Providence Redevelopment Authority created the West Broadway Urban Renewal Area in the hope of removing some of the worst housing conditions in Federal Hill and facilitating the construction of new residential and commercial structures. A variety of small parcels were cleared and redevelopment was begun. However, the housing Moratorium which President Nixon declared in 1973 severely limited the prospects for completing the original plan. For the past 6 years, the lots have stood vacant, an eyesore to the neighborhood and a sign of frustration to the City of Providence.

The failure to carry through to completion the original West Broadway urban renewal program has had a powerful negative influence on the immediate area. The empty lots are garbage strewn and overgrown. In order to make the rehabilitation of the NSA successful, the largest and most visible of these lots is to be developed into twenty units of housing.

In developing plans for the area, the City has the following concerns:

- The design should harmonize with the existing scale and character of the neighborhood. Density should be moderate the streetscape of the area should be respected.

- The new construction should be part of an overall attempt to upgrade the area and should enhance the development concept.

- The stigma of public housing should be avoided, however, the existing social services of the neighborhood should be used to their best advantage.

The site at the corner of Courtland and Tell Streets was selected because it met all the criteria and the following feasibility study indicated the type of units which might be built on the site, using the land currently owned by the Providence Redevelopment Authority.
SCHEMATIC PLANS
Unit types for new construction.
The design follows closely the type of housing already existing in the neighborhood and would function like a small, multi-family house.
We have, in this application for NSA designation for a portion of the Federal Hill area, presented a detailed plan for the revitalization of the neighborhood. This revitalization will be accomplished through housing rehabilitation and construction, public improvements and social activities and programs. Everyone who is familiar with the area and the proposal is confident that the Federal Hill neighborhood will become an increasingly vital and popular urban neighborhood.

We are certain further that one of the essential elements of this neighborhood revitalization is the encouragement of increased owner occupancy in the area. Owner occupancy makes the neighborhood more attractive to potential tenants and is associated with increased neighborhood interest.

For these reasons, we are asking that HUD grant the Federal Hill application a waiver so that we may include the Section 8 Existing - Leased Housing Assistance program (24 CFR Part 882) in the overall plan for the revitalization of the neighborhood. This program would add to the owner occupancy of the area and would enhance the potential success of the overall plan.
5.1 Description of Citizen Participation

The proposal outlined here is the result of a long-term, cooperative planning effort between the City of Providence and members of the local community. Indeed, the bulk of this proposal reflects the initiative of a community based organization, New Homes for Federal Hill, to address the housing needs of its neighborhood.

Citizen participation in formulating a housing policy for Federal Hill began again in earnest in the Spring of 1977 when New Homes for Federal Hill began investigating ways to expand its housing activities. Students of Professor Chester Smolski at Rhode Island College were asked to conduct a simple survey to find out about the housing preferences of people in the neighborhood. There was concern about what to do with the empty lots and how the redevelopment of Atwells Avenue would affect the residential areas of the neighborhood. This survey revealed a general preference for rehabilitation and the construction of new two-family houses in the neighborhood. However, more information was required if a detailed and truly representative plan was to be developed.

New Homes for Federal Hill then applied for a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities to support a series of community meetings on the topic of housing in Federal Hill. During this past summer, intensive research was carried out in order to formulate a workable program and generate community interest and discussion. A slide show and questionnaire was prepared and two major public meetings were held. Several hundred neighborhood residents voiced their concerns at these meetings and their policy adopted in this proposal reflects the overwhelming viewpoint of neighborhood residents. The need for rehabilitating the existing housing in the neighborhood, combined with reusing other structures for housing and filling the empty lots with a housing type in harmony with the character of the area were heard again and again as the major objectives of community people.

Throughout this effort the City of Providence has provided technical support. Joseph Dabek of the Department of Planning and Urban Development worked closely with the membership of New Homes for Federal Hill and was involved with all aspects of the planning program. In addition, the Office of Mayor Vincent Cianci, the Mayor's Office of Community Development, and a variety of other agencies were most attentive to the process of working with neighborhood residents to help define a housing program.
Under a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities, a series of neighborhood meetings on housing questions were held in the Fall of 1977 throughout the neighborhood. A slide show and questionnaire were prepared and a summary of the questionnaire is included on the following pages. The meetings were well attended and reflected the concern of people in the neighborhood about housing issues.

**Skeptical of change**

Residents like Federal Hill, as is

PROVIDENCE — More than 90 percent of Federal Hill’s houses were built ‘before World War II, and to hear some of its residents talk about the community’s future last night, that’s the way the area should stay.

About 70 residents of the one-third-square-mile Italian neighborhood in the heart of the city gathered at Holy Ghost Church Hall to view a slide show on “Housing on the Hill” and present their opinions on what should be done to promote the area’s future.

On Federal Hill, speakers made it clear last night, the residents are suspicious of any major project which might change the character of their neighborhood. Many of the people have lived there all their lives and have seen what urban renewal did to South Main Street and Lippitt Hill in recent years. They are anxious that the multi-million-dollar Atwells Avenue project not spur the same kind of change.

One of the Rhode Island College professors who presented the slides, Chester Smolski, warned that the renewal of the Atwells Avenue corridor may have exactly the opposite of the desired effect. An improving neighborhood environment coupled with the proximity of Federal Hill to downtown work and shopping areas could make it attractive to young people, professional couples and more affluent families.

Residents at the meeting expressed support for the idea of having two- or three-story duplexes built on the many vacant lots that have appeared as the population shrank from 22,000 in the late 1950s to about 7,500 today.

The show and discussion will resume tonight at 7:30 in Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church hall on Brayton Avenue.

Providence Journal, September 29, 1977
New Homes for Federal Hill, Inc.

QUESTIONNAIRE

TOTAL - 2 night 83

- Market

80 The type of market Federal Hill should try to reach in its housing program is:

Elderly 11
74% Families 59
Singles 10
Other (specify)

88 Which of the following income groups should be the target of the housing program:

Low 20
48% Moderate 42
Middle 20
Upper Middle
High

- Types of Housing

84 Which of the following forms of housing would meet the greatest housing need on Federal Hill:

Row Houses
50% Duplex 42
Garden Apartment 7
High Rise 4
Single Family 23

69 Which approach to placing the housing on sites do you prefer:

71% Filling in with new buildings, but keeping present patterns

Creating new patterns which form new passageways and traffic flows 26
What is your feeling about the architectural style new housing for Federal Hill should take:

62% Reproduce the look of old buildings

Use contemporary imagery with familiar materials

Try for a whole new look

Forms of Ownership

78% Which form of ownership would meet the most important housing need on Federal Hill:

41% Owner Occupancy

36% Rental Apartments with the owner living in the building

Rental Apartments

Cooperatives and/or Condominiums

If Federal Hill becomes an increasingly desirable place to live and neighborhood people begin to move out in large numbers because their houses have become very valuable or rents have become too high, do you feel:

Nothing should be done because this is the way things work in the market.

Mechanisms should be created to protect the existing character of the area, insuring local people the chance of staying, even if property values or profits are reduced.

Please provide the following information about yourself:

Age

Median - 40-49

Average - 46.1

Male or Female

26 38 NA

Do you now live on Federal Hill?

Yes - 49

No - 27 NA - 7

If not, where do you live?

Do you own or rent your current home?

Own - 39

Rent - 33 NA - 11
Come to a slide show and discussion about current housing conditions and the alternatives facing the community. The meetings will be held on:

Wednesday  
Sept. 28  
Holy Ghost Church  
Church Hall, Knight St. and Atwells Ave.  
7:30 pm

Thursday  
Sept. 29  
Mt. Carmel Church  
Church Hall, Brayton Street  
7:30 pm

Sponsored by

New Homes for Federal Hill, Inc.  
Louis Viti, Director

through a grant of  
The Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities
The City of Providence has submitted this application for the designation of an area of the Federal Hill neighborhood as a Neighborhood Strategy Area to the A-95 clearinghouse for comment and review simultaneously with the submittal of this application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. We have requested that the A-95 Clearinghouse forward any comments it has to HUD.

This schedule for submittal of the NSA application is pursuant to 881:303(d)(6).
Chronology of Richard Polton's Involvement with New Homes for Federal Hill

1977

March 15
Call from Joseph Dabek, Director of NHFH, to discuss the possibility of working together on a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities on what to do with the empty lots in the neighborhood.

March 17
Meeting at Dabek's house with Chester Smolski, professor of Urban Studies at Rhode Island College. A format is adopted for proposal - a detailed planning study and series of neighborhood forums will be proposed.

March 25
Meeting with Steve D'Amico, organizer for the Congress of Ethnic Neighborhood Organizations (CENO), the community organization on Federal Hill. D'Amico informs Polton of an ongoing case study underway which is sponsored by a HUD grant. Case study is to document how the neighborhood has developed; case study is being done by outside consultants and should be complete within several weeks. Steve is the only representative of the organization present at the meeting.

April 1
Grant application is delivered to the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities.

May 15
Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities informs New Homes for Federal Hill that the grant has been approved.

Discussions held with a variety of faculty members at MIT on ways to approach problem of working with neighborhood group.

Summary of responses:

Susskind: Establish housing task force within community made of diverse elements and build their capacity to solve problem. Emphasize the planning process and their organization.

Keyes: Find out how the neighborhood works and try and document useful information with the hope that this will suggest strategies.

T. Lee: Ask lots of people in the neighborhood what they want and what they're concerned with and see if you can get it for them. Figure out who you want to help.
Chronology (continued)

1977

May 20  Joe Dabek accepts a position with the Department of Planning and Urban Development of the City of Providence as the Chief Economic Planner. Will work closely with project on Federal Hill but the new Director, Louis Viti, will assume principal responsibility.

May 26  Meeting with Lou Viti, Emila Maron, Anthony Pennine, and Elanor Dyer of the New Homes for Federal Hill Board. Board expresses extreme displeasure with grant proposal as written; not practical enough, too much money for more consultants, not informed of the process. After long, heated discussion, the Board decides to accept the grant despite reservations. Agreements are renegotiated. Sets a bad tone for the start of the project.

June 20  Polton begins work at New Homes for Federal Hill on a full-time basis for ten weeks. Sets up small office in storefront of CENO.

Early July  Given the cool reception and serious misgivings about the worth of inputs, Polton decides to maintain a very low profile for the first two weeks of the project. Effort placed in learning as much as possible about the community, talking to people, walking the streets. Much of the energy of the community leaders is placed in resolving the problems of the case study which is not proceeding smoothly.

July 7  Full Board Meeting with about fifteen members in attendance. A report entitled "Housing/Federal Hill" is presented to indicate that grant can provide some practical approaches to solving community problems. Although the report is not carefully written or put together, it does serve an important function in demonstrating that Humanities project may provide some skills currently lacking.

July 12  Meeting with Ralph Pari and Merrill Cornell of the Rhode Island Housing Mortgage Finance Corp. Feel that a Section 8 housing development is feasible on Federal Hill, although they are primarily concerned with getting a large enough project to make things economically viable. Recommend that we contact the National Corporation for Housing Partnerships, whose representative is currently in town.
Chronology (continued)

1977

July 15
Meeting with Tom Zuniga of NHP, interested in seeing project area and learning more about possible development. Explains ongoing work in Rhode Island. Meeting marks a turning point in project, if only because everyone begins to recognize that something can happen if we work seriously. Makes the entire effort seem somehow more real; also focuses the project to studying the feasibility of Section 8 housing and less with a general neighborhood study.

August
In order to better assess the feeling of the neighborhood and to meet the grant requirements of the RICH funding, a slide show is prepared to explain housing issues. Local "professional humanist scholars" are to be involved in setting up these meetings and their content, although in actuality have difficulty meeting their obligations.

August 26
Last day of full-time work. Slide shows prepared, Community meetings organized.

September 28
First of two meetings held at Holy Ghost Church. Approximately 80 people in attendance. Meeting goes in fits and starts; not great presentations. Community response is active and there are lots of discussions.

Fall 1977
Several meetings and discussions are held to discuss ways to further the project -- a target neighborhood is proposed, funds are requested for a targeted rehab program, applications for Section 235 single-family houses are solicited (two are later accepted and built). Discussions about a Section 8 development which will be sponsored by New Homes for Federal Hill are held but the resources and mechanisms for implementation are unclear.

Winter 1977
HUD announces the Neighborhood Strategy Area Program and requests that cities formulate applications.

December 1977
The City of Providence agrees to work with New Homes for Federal Hill to propose Federal Hill -- Knight Street as a NSA. Application is begun by Richard Polton, based on work during the previous summer.
Chronology (continued)

1977
December (continued) Preliminary discussions are held with the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation about the proposal. Close cooperation with staff at RIHFC is established.

1978
Spring 1978 Numerous Board meetings of NHFH to discuss and authorize NSA proposal. Report approved.

April 30 NSA application submitted to Washington, one of four from Rhode Island, all from Providence. Unique situation arises because all four NSA applications are initiated by neighborhood organizations.

June Discussions are begun about the possibility of a neighborhood group working together to promote all of the applications. This idea -- of a neighborhood coalition for housing is discussed by each of the boards of the organizations and supported.

June 22 Polton meets with Jack Carry and Alice Shabecoff at HUD about the neighborhood coalition. Is informed that such collaboration would improve all the members chances of approval.

Week of June 24 Letters prepared by newly formed Providence Neighborhood Coalition for Housing and are sent to local representatives, key personnel at HUD. Mayor Cianci of Providence sends additional letter of support.

Representatives of other member organizations travel to Washington to support the Neighborhood Coalition. Receive warm reception and feel that their lobbying efforts will help develop support.

July 26 Meeting with RIDCA to discuss the request for seed money. Request approved within a week for $39,500. Funding approved.

September 18 NSA application for NHFH approved by HUD; three of four NSA applications for Providence approved. Work begins on implementing proposal.
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