

Planning Through the Private Sphere and the Transformation of Reform in Early Twentieth Century America

By Geoffrey Guy

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology
University of Chicago, Illinois

gaguy@midway.uchicago.edu

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The Rockefeller Foundation (RF) determined in the early 1920s that development of a program in housing reform was an appropriate field of activity, yet over the next two decades, it would repeatedly lament its failure to develop such a program.¹ The RF's home city of New York occupied the national vanguard in housing reform, containing a dense network of organizations with a tradition of reform dating at least to the 1850s. While not always directly participating in groups such as the Association to Improve the Condition of the Poor, the Committee on the Congestion of Population, the Bureau of Municipal Research, the National Housing Association, committees on zoning, and others, RF officials remained part of the social world defined by organizations such as these. So it is probably natural that they wished to participate in this collective project, as an emblem of belonging to the reform community.

Existing research has extensively documented the content of the programs of these reform organizations, and exhaustively questioned the extent to which it reflected the material or ideological interests of a ruling class, the working class, or a more universal public.² Strategically, these programs spanned a wide ideological spectrum, ranging from affirmations of classical liberal individualism, market relations, and benevolent charity, to calls for public distribution of resources for housing, to every conceivable public-private blend. At the level of

content, programs varied as to scale of redistribution, what goods should be redistributed (property, money, etc.), and how redistribution should be undertaken. But while established reformers fought over different programs, the practice of reform underwent a shift inexplicable solely in terms of the rise and fall of particular programs. While once populated primarily by voluntary organizations created by morally-motivated individuals with significant ties to many domains of reform, by midcentury specialized and paid professionals populated autonomous and differentiated policy fields.

At the same time, the advent of modern philanthropic foundations placed vast economic resources potentially at the disposal of the reform community. On the one hand, this made it possible simply to pursue established types of morally-oriented reform projects on a much-expanded scale. Most notably, the Russell Sage Foundation underwrote the National Housing Association's campaign for improved housing codes, while many individual philanthropists such as John D. Rockefeller Jr. (JDR Jr.) used these resources to build model housing projects throughout American cities in an attempt to stimulate the benevolent spirits of other economic elites. On the other hand, another contingent of actors would, without always being fully conscious of this fact, mobilize these economic resources to redefine the terrain upon which reform was undertaken, emphasizing the positive role of institutions such as universities and professional groups in discovering and diffusing innovative techniques, and in investing private business with ethical content. These reformers increasingly displayed their authority through the mantle of reason and expertise rather than through a universalizing morality accessible to all, resulting in a shift in the center of gravity of reform discourses from a broadly inclusive public sphere defined by its moral assumptions to spaces defined foremost by access to intellectual resource embodied in universities and professions.

On the face of it, this looks like fairly standard rationalization, bureaucratization, modernization, etc. These moral and rational types of reform cannot, however, be placed in a linear chronological series. Through this period, the Sage Foundation worked with moral reformers to modernize their practices through development of social surveys and other research facilities, developing a specific type of methodology grounded in experience with social casework.³ Morally-oriented reformers would launch withering critiques of individual “innovative” projects, arguing that they failed to achieve their advertised system-wide effect; instead, improvements in housing and planning required improved bureaucratic facilities for collecting and presenting data to the public, which might enact positive but coercive legislative measures.⁴ Confident in the shared moral values and judgments of the community, these facts could speak for themselves and demand organized action to rationalize modern society according to moral goals.

Similarly, the “modernized” pole of this historical change did not monolithically and inexorably take the form of differentiated fields. Materials at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) document at least two modalities in which this type of rationalization might have taken place, represented by a proposed Research Institute of Economic Housing and the City Housing Corporation. Although these materials cannot illuminate the entire scope of this change in the practice of reform – lacking in particular detailed reflections on their moralistic colleagues and private industry – they do reveal the concerns and aspirations of central agents of this change, as well as the logics whereby this marriage of economic and intellectual resources was accomplished. Attempts by agents on all sides to portray their programs as technically neutral notwithstanding, these documents reveal awareness that “innovations” at a programmatic level also signaled affiliations with particular groups trying to create and structure autonomous fields

according to particular social agendas and types of resources. Although the RF felt its family of philanthropies had failed to ever articulate a program in housing reform – in other words, a unified series of cumulative programmatic innovations – their periodic activities managed, without any conscious agenda at the outset, to contribute materially to this social project of transforming the reform field along specific trajectories. Moreover, this provided crucial groundwork for establishing the capacity of federal agencies to operate in the housing field during the 1930s – a feat likely unattainable by moral reformers directly advocating state action.

The Holden Report

The Rockefeller philanthropies were concerned about innovation not just in terms of new programs, but at least equally about the form of social relationships presupposed by different programs. In at least one case, this normative concern about formal social relationships trumped sympathy with the content of a program. Ultimately, the normative strictures they placed around the development of a program prevented them from developing a unified series of programmatic innovations.

Nevertheless, the Rockefeller philanthropies early resolved that contributions to housing projects were within their policy, provided they were limited to research into management and construction, and to dissemination of findings.⁵ Although this resolution appears to have contemplated primarily pursuit of innovations in programmatic content, the RF's initial research subtly committed it to a much broader-based social agenda. The initial resolution authorizing the research program in housing also resulted in formation of a Housing Committee chaired by Beardsley Ruml of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM). Its activities were bookended by two reports on the state of the field of housing research – the first completed in 1924 by Arthur C. Holden and Associates, an architectural firm with a proprietor active in

housing reform and the emerging field of city planning, and the second in 1931 by Ernest M. Fisher, an economist previously affiliated with the Institute for Research in Land Economics (also funded in part by LSRM), Director of Research and Education for the National Association of Real Estate Boards, and later Economic Advisor for the Federal Housing Association. Both of these argued vigorously for the need to take an objective view of the whole field of housing construction and provision, and not just its separate aspects, a position with which those at the Rockefeller philanthropies would agree.⁶

The 1924 Holden report summarized research into the sources of the housing shortage which had afflicted the nation following the First World War – labor costs, materials shortage, capital costs, etc. – and the proposed means of addressing each. The office memo on this report noted the general inadequacy of statistical data on housing in the New York area, but affirmed (against findings by the New York Real Estate Board and the mayor’s office) that the shortage was very real. More importantly, the report took the additional step of arguing that the shortage did not result from exceptional disruptions brought on by wartime, and thereby denied that the housing market would return to “normalcy” via its own natural operations. With this, the Committee aligned itself with findings of the 1920 New York State Reconstruction Commission on the Housing Situation in which New York was experiencing a “permanent housing crisis”, and implicitly set itself against established interests in the real estate and building industries.⁷ Without explaining the precise source of this permanency, this implied that modern conditions were qualitatively different from the 19th century, and therefore reform could not rely on traditional market and charity mechanisms.

The implication was that the desire to move beyond short-term solutions and address the “permanent housing crisis” necessitated fundamental reorganization of the building and real

estate industries. The memo championed industrial restructuring on mass-production lines, alongside substantial rethinking of basic relations of property-holding and land tenure, and a replacement of market-oriented mechanisms by large-scale organization in the building industry. Each of the existing policy solutions reviewed addressed only one aspect of the housing crisis – technical, pecuniary, legal, or economic – while leaving fundamental issues unresolved. Taking inspiration from leaders in the new corporate economy, the memo would sum up, “It would seem that many of the aspects of the housing problem rose from this lack of organized effort necessary for building houses and that in the long run efforts to solve the housing problem would be successful only in so far as they addressed themselves, not to the symptoms of this disorganization as is so frequently the case, but to the provision of some means whereby the labor and materials of all kinds can be brought to a focus upon building construction as part of an integrated plan. In other words it may be necessary to consider the development of some such integration of sources of raw materials, of building material factories and construction management and labor as is found in the Ford Motor Company or the United States Steel Corporation.”⁸ Thus “objectivity” and a holistic perspective were wedded to an organized surpassing of 19th century individualism, as well as to emerging mass production technologies.

This went well beyond the traditions of 19th century reform. Reorganization of an industry could not be accomplished by restrictive state legislation, nor through the voluntary charitable action of wealthy individuals. The market could not be trusted to correct itself, and morally-oriented action would fail to accomplish more than piecemeal reforms. Without calling attention to the fact, this also stood in tension with projects undertaken by JDR Jr. personally, such as his investments in a series of “garden apartments” developed by Andrew J. Thomas and Charles Heydt in the New York and New Jersey area.⁹ These continued the moral traditions of

19th century limited-dividend “investment philanthropy” and model housing embodied by groups such as the City and Suburban Homes Company¹⁰, aimed at demonstrating that low-cost but good-quality housing could be produced at a moderate profit, and at inspiring other civic-minded wealthy individuals to follow the example. By the terms being staked out in the mid-1920s, these practices were suited to an era gone by, defined by individual moralism.

Hence, the Rockefeller philanthropies looked for new ways of solving problems of housing and planning, less bound to traditional forms of philanthropy. These relied more on improving knowledge and technology, professionalizing the fields most directly charged with urban development and construction, and cultivating an “objective” standpoint distinguishable from charitable voluntarism. This strategy embodied a particular understanding of the necessary conditions for social change, and who could be relied upon as partners in reform. Two projects – one completed and one abandoned – embodied this agenda. The more successful of the two culminated in a three-way partnership between the LSRM, the City Housing Corporation (CHC), and the Institute for Research in Land Economics (IRLE), who built and analyzed large developments at Sunnyside Gardens in Queens (1924-1926) and Radburn in New Jersey (1928-1930). The second came in and out of focus throughout the 1920s, and contemplated establishment of a research institute dedicated to the implementation of mass production and rationalization of production in housing. Although only the first would attract substantial economic resources of the Rockefeller philanthropies, the Rockefeller philanthropies were at least initially in sympathy with both. Both sought to develop innovations in the housing field based on “objective” lessons drawn from the corporate economy and mass production; however, their understandings of the proper social means of implementing these lessons differed substantially. In evaluating these two projects, the Rockefeller philanthropies leaned heavily on

fundamentally normative criteria regarding the proper relationships of technology, experts, and society – criteria which, although never fully articulated, would guide their attempts to reshape the terrain of reform and governance for the next two decades.

A Research Institute of Economic Housing

The first opportunity to implement a large-scale program of this nature presented itself in the architect Grosvenor Atterbury's proposal to found a Research Institute of Economic Housing. Atterbury was already well known for his experimentation with different kinds of materials and prefabricated housing parts starting in 1907 at the Phipps Model Tenements, and continuing through his work with the Russell Sage Foundation at Forest Hills Gardens. Atterbury first proposed sponsorship of the Research Institute in 1921 to James Angell at the Carnegie Corporation, although the idea was percolating while he was still at work at Forest Hills Gardens. Although Angell expressed interest in this project, and despite support from figures such as Herbert Hoover and Gifford Pinchot, Carnegie interest in this proposal would stall after Angell left for Yale later that same year.¹¹ This proposal came to the attention of the Rockefeller Foundation five years later, following Atterbury's recommendation of a \$4.5 million endowment for an Institute to the New York State Housing Commission, and favorable coverage of this recommendation in the *New York Times*.¹²

These housing experiments aimed to demonstrate the possibility of building aesthetically appealing homes at prices affordable by lower and middle income families without relying on permanent subsidy from either government or philanthropy.¹³ In Atterbury's understanding, this meant directly transposing production processes from the automobile or textile industries to home construction. This would drive down costs of construction through economies of scale and tighter control of production: essentially, reorganizing the housing industry under criteria

familiar from engineering. First, construction of a larger number of units would allow wider distribution of costs of professional design, making these professional services more affordable. Second, utilization of modern materials (e.g. concrete), standardization, and factory prefabrication of modularized housing parts would eliminate waste in production relative to antiquated methods of custom-built wood construction. Factory production would lower labor costs by allowing employment year-round and regardless of weather, smoothing out sudden spikes and troughs in demand. This lowering of production costs would lower the price of houses, while preserving market relations and the profit motive.¹⁴ The field of housing reform could make its greatest strides by taking advantage of the intellectual resources embodied in technology, and orienting action in the field toward technical advance.

On the face of it, this seemed to suit the criteria spelled out in the reaction to the Holden report. It contemplated reorganization of the whole industry, adapted lessons of mass production, and relied on concrete research. However, the Rockefeller Foundation would voice two main criticisms of the proposed Institute, which together point to a more specific understanding of the prerequisites of viable reform. First, RF officials would reassert a central argument of the 1924 Holden Report: what was needed was not a program which treated “symptoms” of the problem, but something which addressed root causes. To Atterbury, they responded that they felt that solutions to the housing problem were already too fragmentary and unconnected, and that the emphasis on construction responded to only one side of a more general problem. The problem had to be treated as a whole, in all its aspects. In this context, they expressed skepticism of Atterbury’s claim that “[the constructional objective] appears to offer...an opportunity far transcending all other aspects of the problem.”¹⁵ How could it be shown that this outstripped the importance of taxation, interest rates, planning, land use, and

legal, sociological, and economic factors?¹⁶ Although expressing sympathy with and interest in the project, the RF would remain concerned about the difficulty of ascertaining what constituted a “useful contribution,” and what simply dealt with a single aspect of the problem.¹⁷

But why was it so important to implement a “unified” program and what exactly did that mean? The RF had become expressly concerned in 1931 that it had not developed such a unified program in housing, despite the fact that the new head of the Social Sciences Division, Edmund Day, had wished to make housing a central concern of the division.¹⁸ Responding to a report by Ernest Fisher commissioned to help develop such a program, a staff member identified by the initials TBA (Thomas B. Appleget) would argue that technical innovations and model projects paled in importance relative to the overweening importance of the “sociological, political, and economic factors involved in the problem.” He continued, “The general effect of Mr. Fisher’s report is to convince one of the importance and difficulty of the housing problem and to discourage one from any approach towards this solution which would not include an attack on the whole front...The trouble with the work so far done is that it has been dominated by special interests and has attacked parts and frequently peripheral parts of the task.”¹⁹ In other words, a simple technological fix was insufficient, without simultaneously pursuing fundamental changes in the basic institutions structuring the provision of housing. Technology could improve, but of what value would this be if development were still constrained by the gridiron street plan? Would houses be built one lot at a time? How would communities develop in such a space? What safeguards would exist to prevent potential homeowners from overextending themselves financially? Without treating all these areas simultaneously and in a unified way, any amount of technological advance would have limited effect. Therefore, if the RF could not act on this

“whole front,” if it could not contribute to fundamental change, then it was unlikely it could achieve a durable contribution.

Unfortunately, the means of acting “on the whole front” were somewhat obscure; this comprised the second criticism of Atterbury’s proposal. Atterbury had extrapolated from one aspect of mass production, and he imagined this resulting in massive cost savings when implemented system-wide. Continuing this line of thought, he imagined that continued experiments in a specialized setting would result in a linear accumulation of technological knowledge and innovations resulting in directly proportional decreases in construction costs. Insofar as this knowledge was conceived as purely technical, Atterbury could propose instituting a division of labor between the intellectual labor of technological development and the manual labor of construction and contracting. This would result in an organizational separation between conception and execution, a radical deskilling of the construction industry, and a hegemony of experts possessing a monopoly of legitimate knowledge. Atterbury justified this hegemony by a rhetorical placement of the traditional trades as backwards, and modularized mass production as modern. By the time of his final proposal to the RF, this separation would expand into a call for a completely new industry dedicated to producing standardized parts of housing, completely circumventing the traditional trades, and steered by the technological prowess of experts.

But the RF was hesitant to sponsor a research project conceived and executed outside of the community it was directed toward. If the industry were interested in such technological advances, it could and should pursue these of its own initiative, in a manner similar to how the chemical and electrical industries were pursuing their own modernization through establishment of technical institutes.²⁰ In the meantime, the constellation of established interests clustered around the continuation of existing technologies was sure to mount resistance to any innovation

threatening to unsettle their position.²¹ Of what value was an innovation in concrete if the industry was tied to wood through established production skills and distribution networks? The RF could not impose research and innovations on an industry and, perhaps unfortunately, the industry did not seem particularly interested.²² The RF, it would be explained to Atterbury, was not in the practice of initiating change.²³ Without the proper social program, an innovation within a field might just as likely appear as an unwanted intrusion.

Atterbury's embedding of "mass production" within a narrowly technical rhetoric obscured the fact that he was proposing to strip authority and control over the field of house construction away from traditional groups and give it to experts lodged in a centralized institution. This rhetoric figured the accumulation of technical knowledge as a politically and socially neutral process, while ignoring its complex interaction with established interests and identities. By contrast, those around the RF feared the exclusionary implications of this particular means of marrying or combining political and intellectual resources – that it would be ill-received by the industry and ultimately self-defeating. As seen in the response to the Holden report, RF officials actually sympathized with Atterbury's emphasis on technological advance via mass production. However, technological superiority, or a well-crafted program, was not sufficient by itself. By failing to act on the whole social front, Atterbury's industrial avant-gardism would inadvertently allow for the continuation of "old" business practices, which could be expected to provide a source of continued resistance to his proposed innovations.

The City Housing Corporation

This provides some explanation of the difficulties experienced by the RF in developing a unified program. On the one hand, it felt the need to act "on the whole front." On the other hand, it is unclear what kind of agency might have been able to act at this scale. The RF rejected

a traditionally hegemonic type of program which would impose its interests or ideas externally on an industry, yet it felt that simply “contributing” in haphazard fashion to different program proposals would fail to amount to much.

Although not explicitly conceived as such, one cluster of projects undertaken in the 1920s with sponsorship from LSRM, JDR Jr., and others began carving out how to elaborate a program capable of navigating between these strictures – a program which would in some ways anticipate the turn to public administration by the RF and the Spelman Fund a decade later. These projects were brought together by participation in a model suburban development at Sunnyside Gardens in Queens (starting in 1924) and at Radburn in New Jersey (starting in 1928). Primary participants included the City Housing Corporation (CHC), a limited dividend corporation founded in 1924 for the express purpose of building these suburbs and with direct ties to the regional planning movement, and the Institute for Research in Land Economics (IRLE), founded in 1920 for the primary purpose of studying agricultural problems. These projects are remembered primarily for technical and design advances associated with superblock development, regionalism, mass production, professional management, financing, and usage of the corporate form.²⁴ Much like Atterbury, those at CHC proposed experimenting with different forms of mass production and technological innovation, even going so far as suggesting direct adoption of Atterbury’s methods.²⁵ Their understanding of mass production, however, emphasized savings resulting from developing multiple houses as part of an integrated community, complete with a social-economic plan (embodied in deed restrictions) to keep housing affordable – and not primarily from lowering the cost of individual houses through standardization of production processes. However, its contributions in acting along “the whole front” are of at least equal importance.

While framed as a “demonstration project”, much like the model housing experiments of the 19th century, the CHC projects imagined a different mechanism for reforming the field of housing. As Richard T. Ely, board member of CHC and director of IRLE would explain, “[T]he fundamental purpose of the City Housing Corporation is *to establish standards and methods* and to stimulate others – not merely those who have similar benevolent aims, but private builders working for a profit.”²⁶ Whereas early model projects relied on the benevolent spirit of wealthy individuals, willing to limit their profits in the interest of affordable housing, the CHC projects proposed gradual improvement of practices within the industry itself through an accumulation of knowledge. Notably, the project broke with standard model housing practice in declining to offer houses at the lowest possible price. Instead, enhanced profits from lower-cost construction would finance further construction in new locations.²⁷ The directors imagined CHC operating in cities across the nations, or providing a model for businessmen.²⁸

At first glance, this would seem hopelessly naïve. What incentive would private builders have to pay attention to this idealistic experiment, especially given its philanthropic character? But IRLE had begun by April of 1923 developing a series of textbooks for the National Association of Real Estate Boards for use in standardized real estate education courses, the successful completion of which was becoming prerequisite to obtaining a real estate license in an increasing number of states. At the same time, a growing number of urban real estate dealers, the “community builders,” were expanding into the development of entire subdivisions.²⁹ Ely would write to Alexander Bing, president of CHC, that “findings” from “experiments” at Sunnyside in construction, planning, financing, marketing, and management of a subdivision would be used in these textbooks, which by 1925 were used by at least fifty universities.³⁰ These texts would remain standard until at least the 1960s.³¹

This combination of an experimental project with a concerted effort to reform the ethics and identities of real estate practitioners undid the separation of conception and execution underlying the RF's criticism of the Atterbury proposal for a centralized institute. Instead of foisting a fully-formed program on practitioners with established methods and practices, CHC and IRLE could strategically ally themselves with like-minded factions within the industry, while simultaneously inculcating newer members of the profession with new practices. Reform would come not from a top-down restructuring of the whole industry, but through establishing a new set of ethical and professional criteria for participation in the field of housing production and steering practitioners towards a changed understanding of their duties, identities, and interests. Similar to the organization of social science pursued at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), best practices and legitimate knowledge would not be produced in an external setting, but out of the shared experiences of the practitioners who were themselves the bearers of this knowledge. In short, any innovations developed by CHC already had its public built in.

Additionally, this move toward professionalization mobilized the police power of the states in a manner less coercive than the regulatory strategy supported by Lawrence Veiller and the reformers at the National Housing Association. Instead of fashioning the law as the repository of knowledge about standards and practices, bodies of licensed professionals would decide upon which practices were permissible and which not. Private sphere voluntarism would be maintained, but actors would only be allowed into the housing field after demonstrating their motivation by moral as well as pecuniary forces. Presumably, these moralized market actors would not countenance the detestable practices of the past. Reform would not depend on the coercive power of the state to achieve its goals, for actors within the field of housing production under this new regime would naturally produce better conditions. The pursuit of private interest

need not produce collectively pathological results, but rather in combination with professional content, could reform the entire field.

Unlike Atterbury's institute, these projects attracted substantial support from the Rockefellers.³² As CHC began building Sunnyside in the summer of 1925, JDR Jr. purchased \$150,000 of stock in the company. At the urging of his advisor Kenneth Chorley, he would consider in late 1926 raising his investment to a half million, provided two other stockholders would similarly raise their commitment. JDR Jr. was willing to put considerable financial support behind the company, but simply wished to avoid taking undue responsibility for the project by becoming the largest single stockholder. When the difficulty of finding others willing to invest at this level became apparent, JDR Jr. agreed in the spring of 1927 to retire his stock investment, instead investing half a million dollars in bonds issued by CHC secured by second mortgages issued by home purchasers.³³ As CHC initiated its second development project at Radburn, New Jersey in late 1928, JDR Jr. committed up to \$3.4 million in loans, provided matching funds could be raised by the Corporation, whether as stock or loans.³⁴

Apart from JDR Jr.'s direct financial investment, LSRM staff also participated directly in the formation of the program of CHC. The Housing Committee chaired by Beardsley Ruml met in early 1923 with Alexander Bing, the eventual President of the CHC, before commissioning the report from Holden. While JDR Jr. privately pursued a series of model garden apartments in collaboration with the architect Andrew Thomas, the LSRM cultivated a proposal to develop a full model garden suburb community. At the instigation of this Committee, Bing, along with architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, would draft a "Preliminary Study Regarding Garden Suburb Development with the limits of the City of New York," detailing the possibilities for building such a suburb within the New York region. The initial site chosen was deemed by Bing

too small for a full garden city – it could not support employment for all the projected residents – but pointedly planned for residential, park, commercial, and some industrial space. This initial proposal emphasized suppression of speculative activity through various restrictive devices and cooperative ownership patterns, in an attempt to ensure that any increases in land value resulting from development would benefit the community, and not individual profit-seekers.

This support notwithstanding, RF officials would still express some uneasiness about the division of responsibilities between private industry and foundations. Although generally impressed with the operations of CHC and convinced of the importance of its raising of standards, some felt that private industry should undertake actual construction, with CHC in charge mainly of shifting population.³⁵ These objections, however, did not address the overall strategy of structuring reform and the field of housing, but only the distribution of responsibilities within it. In contrast to Atterbury's attempt to restructure the field of reform based on the basis of an abstracted accumulation of technical knowledge, the CHC-IRLE program cultivated organic ties to the industry itself. Simply using the economic resources of the RF to develop intellectual resources was sufficient; a means of mediating the intellectual and industrial worlds had to be developed as well. By placing reformers and practitioners in cooperative relationships, the educational and professionalizing program of IRLE would ensure the acceptability of programmatic innovations by the industry.

Conclusion

Sadly, no amount of support or profession-building was able to protect the CHC projects from the onset of the Great Depression. Construction at Radburn would stall while only half finished. And although residents were initially surprisingly able to continue making payments on houses built by CHC, by the mid-1930s, increasing numbers of houses had fallen into

foreclosure. Residents at Sunnyside had organized to force renegotiation of debt. Many challenged the CHC's practice of selling above cost and using excess profits to fund new projects, drawing on old morally based notions that philanthropic reform efforts should prioritize lowest prices above all else.³⁶

Nevertheless, despite this ostensible failure, the CHC projects would continue to figure as important innovations as planners and reformers thought about the development of their profession, especially among those committed to a progressive understanding of planning.³⁷ In part, this might be attributed to the work of profession-building undertaken by this network. Future entrants to the fields of urban and housing development and reform were increasingly socialized to the values represented in the CHC projects. Its assumptions, even if not enacted, had been internalized into the community at least as an ideal for professional practice.

The Rockefeller philanthropies, primarily through the Spelman Fund of New York (SFNY), continued and consolidated this development of a social network in the 1930s, affecting a similar marriage of economic and intellectual resources through the medium of professional communication. Its support of the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO), a member of the "1313" organizations housed at the University of Chicago under the aegis of the Public Administration Clearing House, emphasized development of publications, conferences, and other mechanisms for the sharing of experiences among experts in housing and reform from different cities. Most importantly, it developed a field service, funded by SFNY, to visit cities in the process of founding housing councils under the Federal Housing Act. This field service facilitated a two-way exchange of information, gathering information about local conditions and practices while simultaneously educating newly-minted local officials about the best accepted professional practices.³⁸ In 1934, its first year of operation, it visited eight cities.³⁹ In its next

year, it expanded its reach to thirty-five cities,⁴⁰ and by 1939 the chief of the Field Service made 183 local visits.⁴¹ This field service developed most fully under the directorship of Coleman Woodbury, himself an alumnus of IRLE's graduate program. While not a direct continuation of IRLE's collaboration with real estate agents, the philosophical and personnel continuity suggests considerable overlap. Woodbury himself saw the development of this work as important enough to decline an offer to head President Roosevelt's commission on housing,⁴² claiming that work with NAHO promised to have greater effect. Two Rockefeller philanthropies concurred in the importance of this program, with the RF funding it in 1934 and 1935, and the SFNY funding it at least until 1940, at a rate of approximately \$10,000 per year.⁴³

In addition to providing a mechanism for cultivating professional practice, the NAHO additionally helped explain the significance of new federal laws to local committees. In this task, Woodbury felt that the NAHO likely profited from the placement of personal friends of his from the IRLE-CHC network, primarily Frederick Babcock and Ernest M. Fisher, at different points in the policy-making process at the Federal Housing Administration.⁴⁴ Correctly or not, Woodbury credited the work of the Field Service with securing substantial local support for (or at least stifling local resistance to), the expansion of federal policies in housing.⁴⁵ The field service accomplished this task, according to Woodbury, by "widening the horizons" of local officials, and slowly exposing them to the perspective of new laws by helping them develop the technical capacity, and the local intellectual resources necessary to conform to the law. In a perhaps unconscious reflection of the CHC-IRLE strategy, NAHO facilitated the spread of a technically innovative program not through an external imposition of a fully-formed program, but through gradual re-education of established interests to the technical requirements of the new structures of housing and reform. In Woodbury's terms, their personal consultations encouraged

local councils to keep “on the job of learning the scope and possibilities of their agencies when otherwise they probably would have thrown up their hands in disgust.”⁴⁶ Members of the newly-formed councils came from all sorts of backgrounds, and they might have then been expected to conduct surveys and economic analyses, and to acquire a facility with tax and property law. Participation in the new housing field being developed at the federal level demanded possession of these types of skills, this type of intellectual resource. By working with local councils, NAHO permitted individuals to gradually acquire these skills, and gradually invest themselves in the rules of the emerging field.

The marriage of intellectual and economic resources accomplished by the SFNY and NAHO went one step further than that of the arrangement between IRLE, CHC, and LSRM. The SFNY-NAHO arrangement spawned yet another marriage, giving substantial political capital to the growing federal housing bureaucracy by creating a social environment ready to accept its decisions and requirements. With this move, the fields of housing and reform were durably transformed from a moral to a technical-professional order.

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The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

ENDNOTES:

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- ¹ See Resolutions #19067 and #19066 in RF, RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 5, Folder 50, "Discussion of Housing Study 2/10/1931," in RF, RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 6, Folder 51.
- ² Radford, Gail. *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggle in the New Deal Era*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1996; Lubove, Roy. *The Progressives and the Slums*. Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962.
- ³ Although focused on one survey in particular Stephen Turner's essay has been particularly helpful. Shelby Harrison's summary essay on social surveys from the early 1930s is also helpful. Turner, Stephen. "The Pittsburgh Survey and the Survey Movement." In *Pittsburgh Surveyed*, editors Greenwald and Anderson, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996; Harrison, Shelby. *A Bibliography of Social Surveys*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1930.
- ⁴ Wood, Edith Elmer. *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner*. New York: Macmillan, 1919; Veiller, Lawrence. *Housing Reform*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911.
- ⁵ See Resolutions #19067 and #19066 in RF, RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 5, Folder 50.
- ⁶ "The Housing Committee First Meeting May 16, 1923," and "Memorandum No. 1," both in LSRM, Series III-7, Box 82, Folder 860. On garden cities more generally, see also Buder, Stanley. *Visionaries and Planners*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- ⁷ "Survey of Housing Studies in New York City," in LSRM, Series III-7, Box 82, Folder 860 (hereafter "Holden Report.") *Message from the Governor Transmitting the Report of the Reconstruction Commission on the Housing Situation*. State of New York Legislative Document No. 78. (1920), Albany. *Report of the Commission of Housing and Regional Planning to Governor Alfred E Smith*, (May 27, 1926), Albany.
- ⁸ *Holden Report*, p. 6.
- ⁹ See Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports, Rose, Kenneth. "Partners in Housing Reform: The Apartment Developments of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Charles O Heydt, and Andrew J. Thomas," 2008.
- ¹⁰ Gould, ERL. "The Housing Problem in Great Cities." In *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 14: 3, (1900) pp. 378-393,
- ¹¹ See documents in LSRM, Series III-7, 82: 860, "Housing Situation in New York City, 1923-1924."
- ¹² "Puts Home Building on Factory Basis," *New York Times* 1/5, 1926; "Housing Research," *New York Times* 1/6, 1926; "Proposal to End Housing Shortage" *New York Times* 2/14, 1926.
- ¹³ Sage Foundations Home Company. *Forest Hills Gardens*, Descriptive Pamphlet No. 1, 1912. See also correspondence between directors of the FHG and minutes of early meetings, housed at Rockefeller Archive Center, RSF Early Office Files, Boxes 21-23.
- ¹⁴ Atterbury, Grosvenor. "Studies in Economic Construction." In *Cement Age*. 11: 6 (1910), pp. 315-325; also in RSF Early Office Files, Box 21, Folder 167.
- ¹⁵ "Draft of a Definition of the Objective for a Research Institute of Economic Housing, 10/23/1935," p. 2, in RFC, RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 6, Folder 51.
- ¹⁶ Stacy May to Atterbury, 10/31/1935, in RFC, RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 6, Folder 51; See also Bing to Chorley, 2/1/1926, in RFC, Series 2 (OMR), Subseries J, Box 17, Folder 152.
- ¹⁷ "New Program for the Social Sciences." RFC, RG 1.1, Series 100, Box 31, Folder 244, p. 51.
- ¹⁸ "Discussion of Housing Study – February 10, 1931," RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 6, Folder 51; Also see "memo of meeting with Messrs. Ruml and Day to discuss procedure on housing in Rockefeller Foundation," RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 5, Folder 50.
- ¹⁹ Day to Fisher, 6/1/1931, interoffice memo TBA to MM, 3/16/1932, in RF, RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 6, Folder 51.
- ²⁰ "Memorandum dictated by Mr. Chorley, 4/13/1926," in RFC, Series 2 (OMR) Subseries J, Box 17, Folder 152.
- ²¹ "Memo AKS meeting with Mr. Joseph Beuttas, 1/14/1929," RG 3.1, Series 910, Box 5, Folder 50. The memo does not specify the identity of AKS, but it is most likely Alfred K. Stern.
- ²² "Memorandum dictated by Mr. Chorley, 4/13/1926" and "Memorandum of my conversation with Mr. Atterbury in the Century Club on Thursday November 18, dated November 19, 1926 – Chorley" in RFC, Series 2-J, Box 17, Folder 152. The RF would consider another type of Institute, on the model of the Hooverian associative state, with the cooperation of the National Association of Real Estate Boards. For the next couple of years, Ruml and Day would try to arrange joint funding for such a project with the Rosenwald Fund, but the Rosenwald Fund eventually pulled out and the project was dropped once again. The intent of this proposed institute seems to parallel that of Research in Land Economics (IRLE), discussed in the next section.

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- ²³ Ibid. It is also worth noting that, while the avoidance of initiating programs is often interpreted in the context of the RF's aversion to controversy, it also registered a strategic intent.
- ²⁴ The best account of these innovations is provided in Schaeffer, Daniel. *Garden Cities for America*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1982.
- ²⁵ Bing to Chorley, 2/1/1926, in RFC, Series 2-J, Box 17, Folder 152.
- ²⁶ Ely, Richard T. "The City Housing Corporation and 'Sunnyside'." *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics* 2: 2 (1926), pp. 172-185, (p. 173, emphasis in original).
- ²⁷ "Sunnyside and the Housing Problem," page 6. In the organization records of the Institute for Research in Land Economics, Box 4, Folder 18. Housed at Wisconsin Historical Society.
- ²⁸ "Housing Committee Fourth Meeting, 5/29/1923" in LSRM III-7, Box 82, Folder 860. The correspondence between Bing and Ely contained in the Richard T. Ely papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society also contains multiple references to the desire of the City Housing Corporation (CHC) to expand to multiple projects nationwide, particularly in Chicago.
- ²⁹ Weiss, Marc. *The Rise of the Community Builders*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. The correspondence between Herbert U. Nelson (executive secretary of the National Association of Real Estate Boards), and Richard T. Ely, in the Ely papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society, also provides substantial insight into the educational cooperation between IRLE and the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB).
- ³⁰ Richard T. Ely to Alexander Bing, 4/23/1925, in Richard T. Ely Papers at Wisconsin Historical Society. One of the textbooks produced for NAREB, *Urban Land Economics*, contains multiple references to Sunnyside.
- ³¹ Rader, Benjamin. *The Academic Mind and Reform: The Influence of Richard T. Ely in American Life*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966, pp. 212-216. On the enduring influence of these texts, see Nourse, Hugh O. "A Note on the Origin of Real Estate in Collegiate Schools of Business Administration." *Journal of Real Estate Research* 10: 2 (1995), pp. 227-234.
- ³² RF documents do not preserve their assessment of the importance, or lack thereof, of this educational dimension, although Ely continually mentions it in his correspondence with Ruml, located in the Ely papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society.
- ³³ See correspondence between Heydt, Chorley, Bing, and JDR Jr. contained in RFC, RG 2-J, Box 10, Folder 97.
- ³⁴ See documents in RFC, RG 2-J, Box 11, Folder 101.
- ³⁵ Chorley to Woods, 12/12/1925 and 3/15/1926, "Memorandum dictated by Mr. Chorley, 3/4/1926," RG 2-J Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller (OMR), Box 10, Folder 98.
- ³⁶ Most of the documents from this period relate to the changing business relationships between the CHC, JDR Jr. ..., the residents of the suburbs, and the details of the bankruptcy. Aspects of the growing tension between residents and JDR Jr. are preserved in RG 2-J OMR, Box 10, Folder 98.
- ³⁷ Schaeffer, Daniel, 1982. See also Stein, Clarence. *Toward New Towns for America*. Great Britain: University Press of Liverpool, 1951, for a contemporary attempt to place these projects in a linear narrative of technical and moral advance.
- ³⁸ For descriptions of the Field Service, see Coleman Woodbury to Guy Moffett, 1/3.1935, "Report of the Executive Director to the First Annual meeting of the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO), October 13, 1934," both in RG IV-2 Spelman Fund of New York (SFNY), Box 61, Folder 666, as well as Charles Ascher, to the members of the Executive Committee, 4/19/1934, RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61, Folder 665.
- ³⁹ Charles Ascher to the members of the Economic Community (EC)," 4/19/1934, RG IV-2 (SFNY), Box 61, Folder 665.
- ⁴⁰ "Executive Director's Annual Report – Annual Business Meeting, New York City, 12/14/1935," RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61, Folder 666.
- ⁴¹ "Report to Mr. Guy Moffett Executive SFNY, March 1, 1939," RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61, Folder 669.
- ⁴² "Memorandum of Interview with Coleman Woodbury re: Budget of the NAHO, 9/25/1935," RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61, Folder 666.
- ⁴³ See budgets for NAHO in RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61.
- ⁴⁴ Coleman Woodbury to the members of the Executive Committee, 11/8/1934, (annual report), RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61, Folder 665.
- ⁴⁵ Coleman Woodbury to Guy Moffett, 11/12/1936, RG IV-2 SFNY, Box 61, Folder 667.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 4-5.