Guide to the Mobile Housing Board Records

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Various

Title: Mobile Housing Board Records

Dates: 1950-1980

Quantity: 305.0 linear feet

Abstract: Appraisal reports with photos, project planning books, maps of project areas, correspondence between officials, various HUD publications, administrative files.

Accession: 98-09-344 ; 344-1997

Organizational History:

The Housing Act of 1949 authorized the federal government to provide financial assistance to cities that undertook urban redevelopment. In the Housing Act of 1954 the term urban redevelopment was changed to urban renewal. Even before then, though, the concept of urban renewal and redevelopment had begun to take shape in Mobile. A 1945 housing market analysis sponsored by the City Planning Commission stated that "The condition of a good portion of Mobile's housing is so far below any reasonable minimum standard that actions toward remedying the situation at least in part are warranted immediately. In 1949 the city began forming its Master Plan for Urban Redevelopment which would change over time. The responsibility for carrying out this plan for urban renewal in Mobile was given to the housing board. Over the next three decades the Mobile Housing Board would undertake numerous projects in accordance with the Mobile Master Plan. These projects were designed, in theory, to remove or rehabilitate blighted, sub-standard structures and replace them with newly constructed or renovated structures built to meet modern standards. It was thought that through these efforts property values would be stabilized and further deterioration would be prevented, thus eliminating slums. The major projects were the Broad Street -- Beauregard Street Connector, Water Street, East Church Street, and the Central Texas Street area. There were also a number of smaller ones.

Through the course of these projects property was appraised and acquired. Homes were purchased from their owner(s), and along with tenants of acquired property these individuals and families were forced to relocate elsewhere. These individuals and families were eligible for the relocation program administered by the relocation department of the housing board. If a family or individual qualified, low-income public housing was an option if a unit was available. Some displaced residents were eligible to receive a relocation adjustment payment and the moving expenses of most families were paid. Displaced businesses were also eligible for relocation assistance. In addition to finding adequate housing and disbursing payments, the relocation department provided a social worker to assist with the social problems encountered by the occupants during the relocation process. All of these actions generated files on each parcel of land and individual forced from his or her home. It is these files concerning these actions -- appraisal, acquisition and relocation -- that constitute the bulk of the Project Area Series (Series I).

Because local urban renewal projects were funded primarily by the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency (FHFA) and later the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), voluminous amount paper work was generated in the process of meeting federal requirements. The Administrative Office Files which make up Series II contain much of this paperwork.

The collection also contains the office files of two housing board employees. John Murphy was the Assistant Director of Urban Renewal and later the Community Development Programs Officer during the 70s and on through the 80s. John Devery was the Relocation Officer for the Mobile Housing Board during the late 60s and early 70s. John Murphy's files make up Series III, and John Devery's make up Series IV.

In the early 80s Urban Development Action Grants funded projects such as the building of the Medical Community Clinic in the Davis Avenue redevelopment area. Jimmie Dallas owned the company which ran the clinic until it ran into financial difficulties and the facility was taken over by HUD. Series V concerns this project.

Lastly, the scope of urban renewal broadened in the mid and late 60s. Officials realized that more needed to be done than simply removing sub-standard structures to slow down the

spread of blight and the poverty associated with it. With the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, community action programs were developed in cities across the country. The Mobile Area Committee for Training and Development (MACTAD) was approved by the Mobile Community Action Committee as a delegate agency. It sponsored programs to assist a number of unemployed youths and adults from impoverished areas of the city. These impoverished areas were also undergoing urban renewal. MACTAD provided programs for the "selection, counseling, testing, evaluation, training, placement and follow-up" for individuals in these areas. Series VI contains files, manuals, and reports concerning these programs and the individuals involved.

The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 created the community development block grant program which increased the government's committment to the revitalization of the community. "Community development" replaced the term "urban renewal" and rehabilitation and conservation took top priority in government housing programs. Files and reports concerning community development in Mobile during the mid 70s and through the 80s are found in Series VII.

Several unoccupied structures were bought by the housing board and later sold. While the housing board owned them they were referred to as "inactive structures." They were scattered throughout the city in several different projects. The files on these structures make up Series VIII.

There were a number of smaller projects undertaken by the housing board. These were mostly located in the downtown area but a couple were in the western part of the city. Public housing projects were also undertaken as demand for low-income housing increased. Files concerning these smaller urban renewal and housing projects are located in Series IX.
It is important to remember that at the same time, the 50s, 60s and 70s, other cities were also undertaking urban renewal -- Richmond, Va., Memphis, Tenn., and Philadelphia, Pa., to name a few. But Mobile was one of the first cities to put a comprehensive plan together for rehabilitation and redevelopment. Materials concerning urban renewal in other cities are found in the reference series (Series X). Also in this series are handbooks and manuals explaining the national and local urban renewal program. These were scattered throughout the records and have been assembled by the archivist processing the collection. See also Series III (John Murphy's files) for other information about national urban renewal efforts.

Scope and Contents:

The collection contains appraisal reports with photos of acquired properties, project planning books, maps of project areas, correspondence between the Mobile Housing Board and the Department of Housing and Urban Development officials, various HUD publications, as well as files concerning the activities of the Mobile Community Action Committee. (See also Photograph Collections under the same heading and under Mobile Historic Development Commission, and Printed Material under Mobile Housing Board.)

Arrangement:

Series 1: Project Areas

Series 2: Administrative Office Files

Series 3: John Murphy Files

Series 4: John Devery Files

Series 5: Jimmie Dallas / Urban Development Action Grant

Series 6: Mobile Community Action Committee / Mobile Area Committee for Training and Development

Series 7: Community Development

Series 8: Inactive Structures

Series 9: Miscellaneous Smaller Projects

Series 10: General Reference

Access Restrictions:

This material is open to research.

Preferred Citation:

Mobile Housing Board Records, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL.

Series Description:

SERIES I: PROJECT AREAS (266 cu.ft.)

The Mobile Housing Board Records are generally boxed and organized by urban renewal project areas -- Broad St. - Beauregard St. Connector, Central Texas St., East Church St., De Tonti Square, Water St., West Church St., Davis Ave. For the most part, the boxes are classified according to their document type which is indicated in the box inventory under the project area heading. In most project areas there are several different file types. The major ones being: acquisitions, appraisals, condemnations, rehabilitation, relocation, completed contracts, urban renewal files and loan and grant applications. A brief description of the document types contained in each project area is given below.

Acquisition Files -- These files are arranged by block number and contain the name of the owner, the warranty deed, policy of title insurance, price of property acquired and the parcel appraisal report for the property which includes a photo of the acquired property.

Appraisal Reports -- These are mostly in brown binders labeled by area with parcel and/or block numbers. Generally, each binder contains about 50 - 75 parcel appraisals giving the owner's name, a description of the property, its value, and a photo.

Condemnation Files -- Arranged in alphabetical order with a parcel number on the file label, these files contain the probate court records concerning the condemnation process (process sometimes needed for the acquisition of property by MHB). Included is correspondence of lawyers, a brief description of property, and damages awarded.

Rehabilitation Files -- Arranged by parcel number with the owner's name on the file label, these files give the plans for rehabilitating properties. Some contain detailed drawings of the plans. Also included are inspection progress reports on rehabilitation of a particular parcel.

Relocation Files -- Arranged by parcel number with the owner's name on the file label, these files give information on replacement housing. They provide the new address of the relocated person, new rent, and expenses in the move. Also provided is information on each individual such as the amount and source of income which was used to determine whether an individual or family was eligible for public housing. These files contain information which is subject to privacy restrictions.

Business Relocation Files -- Arranged alphabetically by company name, these files provide information on the company relocated -- their new address, photos of business before the move, a general description and inventory of the building and also claims for relocation payment.

Miscellaneous Office Files -- These files give numerical summaries of activities regarding relocation assistance, property acquisitions and citizen participation. There is also correspondence between FHFA/HUD officials and Mobile Housing Board officials as well as inter-office memos, financial statements, and paperwork related to general office operations.

Urban Renewal Files -- These files contain miscellaneous items on urban renewal. Some contain actual plans for a project, others have workable program submissions. Other files contain correspondence between HUD and Mobile Housing Board officials.

Completed Contracts -- These files are arranged by parcel number and contain contracts between the housing board and individuals who agreed to rehabilitate there sub-standard homes to meet local codes in order to be considered a standard dwelling.

Loan and Grant Applications -- These are copies of applications that were sent to HUD to apply for federal funds. They are in binders and contain detailed information about each urban renewal project area. (The applications for individual project areas are grouped together in boxes near the end of the project area series.)

PROJECT AREA: BROAD ST. - BEAUREGARD ST. CONNECTOR (13 cu.ft.+ mixed boxes*)

This project area, Mobile's first urban renewal project, consists of acquisition files, appraisal reports, and urban renewal files. Planning for the Broad St. -- Beauregard St. Connector

actually began in the early 50s but the project did not get underway until 1956. It had two objectives. One was to recover a deteriorating area of the city, the other was the construction of the Broad St. - Beauregard Connector as the "initial phase of the Downtown Loop," which surrounds the central business district. The project was completed in 1968.
*Mixed boxes are those that contain several different project area files. There are a total of 65 of these boxes. A list of the different project areas in these boxes is found in the box inventories.

PROJECT AREA: CENTRAL TEXAS STREET (94 cu.ft.+ mixed boxes)

The largest project area in the collection, as far as paperwork generated, it contains acquisition files, appraisal reports, relocation, condemnation, rehabilitation, and urban renewal and miscellaneous office files. The objectives of the Central Texas Street project were two-fold. One was to rescue this primarily residential area from blight and further deterioration and secondly to reclaim the area as an economic asset to the city. A four-fold plan was adopted to accomplish these main objectives: 1) eliminate overcrowded structures; 2) open space for schools and parks; 3) rearrange the streets to improve and re-route traffic flow; 4) remove deteriorating sub-standard structures. In meeting these objectives Washington Avenue and Texas Street were converted to four-lane traffic arteries. Money was provided for some owners to rehabilitate their homes. Many though opted for the housing board to purchase their homes. These individuals moved to homes nearby, some relocated to other areas of the city while others who were eligible chose public housing.

PROJECT AREA: EAST CHURCH STREET (13 cu.ft.+ mixed boxes)

This project area contains acquisition files, appraisal reports, condemnation files, relocation and miscellaneous office files. Begun in 1961, this project was different in scope from the others because of the historical nature of the area. The first telegraph office in Alabama was rebuilt as well as the old Carriage House and Phoenix Fire Station. While this project was underway, the city completed the Mobile Municipal Auditorium and Theater as well as Spanish Plaza.

PROJECT AREA: WATER STREET (58 cu.ft. + mixed boxes)

This project area contains appraisals, relocation files, and business relocation files. Begun in 1964, this project also played a part in the Downtown Loop plan, with the completion of the Water Street thoroughfare. Besides improving the flow of traffic, further reconstruction of blighted areas was the other main objective of this project. The Orange Grove and Owens neighborhoods were converted almost entirely into public housing. But the Water Street project also concerned the once central business district of downtown Mobile -- the old warehouse district. This area consisted of many historic buildings which stood as examples of the commercial architecture of 19th century Mobile. These were demolished during urban renewal to make way for more modern structures and the thoroughfare.

PROJECT AREA: DE TONTI SQUARE (6 cu.ft.+ mixed boxes)

This project area consists of appraisal reports, relocation files, and loan and grant applications. Survey and planning for this smaller project began in 1970. The area, bounded on three sides by the Water Street Project, contained many historic homes that had deteriorated. Many of these were rehabilitated. This project area consists of appraisal reports, relocation files and loan and grant applications. The appraisal reports of this project contain rehabilitation data for many of the historic homes of the area.

PROJECT AREA: WEST CHURCH STREET (6 cu.ft. + mixed boxes)

This project area consists of appraisal reports and relocation files. While planning for this project began in the early 60s at the same time that the East Church Street area was undergoing renewal, it was not until the early 70s that this project actually got underway. This area also contained many historic structures that were restored. The project area was bounded by Canal, Broad, Government and Lawrence Streets.

PROJECT AREA: DAVIS AVENUE (6 cu.ft. + mixed boxes)

This project area consist of acquisition files and appraisal reports. Most of the files concerning this project area are grouped with other smaller projects such as DeTonti Square and West Church Street. The acquisition files are located near the end of the collection. While sections of the Davis Avenue area were included in the Broad - Beauregard project in the mid 50s, other parts of the area underwent renewal in the late 70s and early 80s. Residential areas as well as parts of the black business district were affected.

PROJECT AREA: CHURCH STREET-TEXAS STREET (5 cu.ft.)

For a short period of time, 1960 to 1962, urban renewal was carried out by the Mobile Urban Renewal Agency. During this time the Church Street-Texas Street plan, R-27, was drawn up. In 1962 urban renewal in Mobile was placed back under the authority of the housing board. Boxes 119-123 concern this project which became two separate projects under the housing board. These boxes contain mostly miscellaneous files and reports concerning the project area.

SERIES II: ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE FILES (20 cu.ft.)

This series contains files regarding the progress of urban renewal in Mobile which also detail the objectives and problems encountered. Some files contain blueprints and maps of community development plans and there is correspondence, mostly regarding the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). Other reports in these files give numerical summaries of activities regarding relocation assistance, property acquisitions and citizen participation. The files also include correspondence between FHFA/HUD officials and MHB officials as well as inter-office memos, financial statements and paperwork related to general office operations. There is also one box of surveys of residents from the Central Texas Street area.

SERIES III: JOHN MURPHY FILES (10 cu.ft.)

The files of John Murphy, Assistant Director of Urban Renewal, contain numerous pamphlets and technical bulletins from HUD discussing policy and procedure as well as magazines of the time containing articles concerning urban renewal. Correspondence between Murphy and other MHB officials as well as HUD officials is also included. Murphy traveled to conferences in different areas of the country and accumulated quite a large amount of literature concerning urban renewal in other cities. This literature is contained in this series.

SERIES IV: JOHN DEVERY FILES (2 cu.ft.)

Relocation Officer John Devery's files concern various aspects of urban renewal projects in

Mobile. There are relocation pamphlets and brochures from HUD as well as relocation data for urban renewal projects in Mobile.

SERIES V: JIMMIE DALLAS / URBAN DEVELOPMENT ACTION GRANT (UDAG) (2 cu.ft.)

This series concerns the financing and building in the early 80s of the Medical Community Clinic in the early 80s. It was to be located in the Davis Avenue redevelopment area. This was the first minority owned nursing home in Mobile. It was financed by an Urban Development Action Grant and operated by C.H.C., Inc. Jimmie Dallas, an African American, owned the company.

SERIES VI: MOBILE COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE / MOBILE AREA COMMITTEE FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (17 cu.ft.)

These boxes contain files on persons enrolled in community action re-education and re-training programs. The files are arranged alphabetically by student's name and contain report card-like sheets documenting the student's progress. A few of the boxes have manuals concerning re-training and re-education as well as miscellaneous correspondence. This series also contains files on businesses hiring those who completed the programs. These files contain information which is subject to privacy restrictions.

SERIES VII: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (12 cu.ft.)

This series contains miscellaneous files, everything from requisitions and employee attendance reports to a MHB job description manual. Files concerning rehabilitation and conservation efforts are also found in this series. These files detail the later stages of projects such as Central Texas Street.

SERIES VIII: INACTIVE STRUCTURES (2 cu.ft.)

These files concern structures that were acquired by the housing board then rehabilitated and sold. These structures were in various urban renewal areas: DeTonti Square, West Church Street, Davis Ave. Some were moved to other areas of Mobile after being sold.

SERIES IX: MISCELLANEOUS SMALLER PROJECTS (2 cu.ft.+ mixed boxes)

This series concerns several smaller projects in the collection which are usually grouped together in boxes: Oaklawn and Owens Homes, Trinity Gardens, Sandtown, Happy Hills, Zack Logan Estates, and Michigan Ave. The files concerning the Ft. Conde redevelopment project are also found in this series but they are in one box whereas most of the other smaller project files are in boxes scattered throughout the collection.

SERIES X: GENERAL REFERENCE (3 cu.ft.)

This series consists of three boxes: The first contains project planning books, pamphlets and brochures all concerning urban renewal and public housing projects administered by the Mobile Housing Board; the second contains HUD publications including "Local Public Agency Letters" sent to the Mobile Housing Board detailing procedures and policy for urban renewal projects; the third contains literature, pamphlets and brochures concerning urban renewal in other cities.

Content List:

Box inventories to the collection are available on site.