

PUBLIC HOUSING REFERENDUM AND ELECTION RESULTS,
1954-1967

1954: Establishment of a Public Housing Authority

	For	Against
Ward One	149	400
Ward Two	380	210
Ward Three	131	153
Ward Four	445	306
TOTAL	1,105	1,069

1960: Proposed Hartman's Mill Road Site

	For	Against
Ward One	426	694
Ward Two	549	301
Ward Three	196	450
Ward Four	660	363
TOTAL	1,831	1,808

1960: Urban Redevelopment at Vinegar Hill

	For	Against
Ward One	444	723
Ward Two	591	280
Ward Three	253	433
Ward Four	718	364
TOTAL	2,006	1,800

1960: City Council Elections

	Forbes	Haggerty	Mount	Lee
Ward One	823	864	777	502
Ward Two	360	723	669	614
Ward Three	452	418	394	305
Ward Four	487	893	878	764
TOTAL	2,122	2,898	2,718	2,162

1961: Proposed Cox's Row Site

	For	Against
Ward One	789	166
Ward Two	513	239
Ward Three	481	114
Ward Four	700	280
TOTAL	2,483	799

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History

A Community in Turmoil: Charlottesville's Opposition to Public Housing

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In the twenty-five years following World War II, American society endured dramatic alterations. Before and during the war, thousands of black Americans migrated to urban areas in search of decent paying jobs. Both federal and local government attempted to address the ensuing urban overcrowding through slum clearance and the construction of public housing. At the same time, numerous court cases slowly began to tear down Jim Crow segregation.¹ After nearly fifty years of "separate but equal," the United States Supreme Court ended school desegregation in the 1954 court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The death of Jim Crow accelerated the pace of civil rights for African Americans, and the U.S. government responded with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. At the same time, however, some white Americans opposed these changes outright, while other whites began to feel alienated by the progressive actions of government.²

During the Great Depression, the federal government created the public housing program to provide both housing and jobs. The Wagner Housing Act of 1937 attempted to build low-cost homes for families who could not "afford to pay enough to cause private enterprise in their locality or metropolitan area to build an adequate supply of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for their use."³ The

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1. See *Murry v. Maryland*, *Gaines v. Missouri*, *Smith v. Albright*, *Morgan v. Virginia*, *McLauren v. Oklahoma Regents*, *Sweatt v. Painter*.

2. See Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 1984); Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York, 1990); E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York, 1991); Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York, 1995).

3. Lawrence M. Friedman, *Government and Housing: A Century of Frustration* (Chicago, 1968), 110; see also Robert Moore Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing: Economic Aspects of the Federal Program* (New York, 1959).

Housing Act of 1949 strengthened the 1937 act while granting vast powers to local authorities, including the location of future housing projects.⁴ In many cases, local authorities used their power to promote and continue racial segregation.⁵ In 1953, the NAACP wrote: "The decisions as to whether or not Negroes shall be completely excluded from federally-aided projects or segregated within them or otherwise discriminated against is left almost entirely to the discretion of the private developer, lender, or local public agency."⁶

Residential segregation existed in all parts of the country, and recent scholarship has examined the effects of segregated housing on social and political relations.⁷ The small southern city of Charlottesville, home of Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia, presents an opportunity to explore the issues of residential

4. The 1949 Housing Act granted federal aid for urban redevelopment. Local communities received added influence because the Act required local public bodies to demonstrate that the city had taken positive steps to reduce the spread of slums. Local authorities attempted to stem slum growth through land use regulations, health and sanitation laws, and dwelling accommodation codes. See Friedman, *Government and Housing*, 49.

5. *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) struck down restrictive covenants in private real estate. This ruling created the need for under-the-table agreements by real estate agents to maintain residential segregation. The ruling did not deal with public housing, which tacitly allowed for segregation in future public housing projects.

6. "Racial Discrimination in Housing," NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. Report of March 1953 Conference Committee, 1.

7. Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York, 1985); Jackson identifies the importance of local control of housing projects in promoting and maintaining residential segregation; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (New York, 1983); "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966," *Journal of American History*, 82 (Sep. 1995), 522-50; Hirsch correctly displayed class differences among Chicago's white community; Stone and Chafe examine southern cities and analyze the role of local business elites and connections between school and residential segregation; Thomas Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction Against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1960," *Journal of American History*, 82 (Sep. 1995), 551-78; Sugrue's argument remains unique, however, because he stresses the importance of the urban North in breaking up the New Deal coalition. Other historians, such as

segregation, public housing, community activism, and race relations. Until the 1960s, segregation existed in Charlottesville's schools, restaurants, and housing. The public housing issue divided Charlottesville. Indeed, many citizens fought to establish public housing, while others campaigned to keep public housing out of Charlottesville and their neighborhoods. This essay deals only with those residents who opposed public housing. While the opposition included both black and white residents, these residents opposed public housing for vastly different reasons.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many black residents lived in "blighted areas," and the city of Charlottesville engaged in massive attempts to clear the city's slums and create public housing for displaced residents. City officials chose areas for urban renewal and selected sites for the construction of subsidized housing amid accusations of attempting to continue segregated housing. Charlottesville provides an excellent opportunity to gauge community opinion on public housing and its sites, because for each public housing proposal, residents faced a referendum. The referendum process spurred opponents to petition the city's elected officials, and citizens on both sides of the issue mobilized to convince their fellow Charlottesville residents to join them on election day.

Charlottesville was, in fact, a city divided by both race and class. Each public housing referendum provided relatively close election results. Establishment of the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority in 1954 remained highly controversial, and discussion centered on the merits of public housing in general. The nature of the housing debate changed in 1958 in response to a court ruling that ordered school desegregation in the city. While racial

Allen J. Matusow, have placed their focus on the South to explain liberalism's demise; Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1989); William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980). For further study of white urban backlash, see Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1991); J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York, 1985).

PUBLIC HOUSING REFERENDUM AND ELECTIONS RESULTS, 1954-1967
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1965: Proposed Ridge Street Site

	For	Against
Recreation (Ward One)	370	394
Clark (Ward One)	118	222
Lane (Ward Two)	152	196
Greenbrier (Ward Two)	445	309
Firehouse (Ward Three)	58	214
Johnson (Ward Three)	208	258
Venable (Ward Four)	381	291
Alumni Hall (Ward Four)	231	161
TOTAL	1,963	2,045

1967: Proposed Garret Street Site

	For	Against
Recreation	646	243
Clark	130	314
Lane	287	206
Greenbrier	660	122
Firehouse	107	249
Johnson	407	185
Venable	584	163
Alumni Hall	341	77
TOTAL	3,162	1,559

1967: Proposed South First Street Site

	For	Against
Recreation	582	288
Clark	88	343
Lane	258	229
Greenbrier	638	141
Firehouse	98	252
Johnson	359	224
Venable	584	171
Alumni Hall	326	82
TOTAL	2,933	1,730

1967: Proposed Ridge Street Revised

	For	Against
Recreation	530	312
Clark	112	327
Lane	233	243
Greenbrier	553	205
Firehouse	67	276
Johnson	293	279
Venable	481	260
Alumni Hall	286	121
TOTAL	2,555	2,023

concerns existed in 1954, topics regarding race remained below the public surface of the housing debate. After school desegregation, however, white residents opposed to public housing sites openly expressed their racist concerns.

Additionally, election results suggested many economic divisions in Charlottesville's white population.⁸ Throughout the housing debate, local white residents remained divided over the issue. Wealthier residents tended to support public housing programs, while the city's poorer residents generally opposed public housing. But this breakdown of Charlottesville's white residents is too simple. While the poorer residents tended to oppose public housing, they also bore the brunt of the proposed sites. The Housing Authority generally proposed public housing sites in the Third Ward near some of the poorer white sections in town. At no time did the wealthier areas surrounding the University of Virginia feel threatened by the potential of nearby public housing.⁹ Due to school desegregation, many of Charlottesville's middle- to lower-class white residents did not want a public housing project in their neighborhood, for school assignments hinged on residence.

In the 1950s, Charlottesville's black leadership fought segregation and focused its efforts on school desegregation. At the time, however, black residents divided over the public housing issue. While many black residents did not want to leave their homes for the sake of "urban renewal," other people in the black community saw public housing as a means to improve poor housing conditions.

8. Charlottesville public housing referendums experienced heavy voter turnouts. See "Housing Authority Issue Brings Out Heavy Vote," *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, 15 Apr. 1954; "Authority OK's Cox's Row After 3-1 Voter Approval," *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, 24 May 1961; "Housing OK'd by Wide Margin," *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, 10 May 1967; The 1965 referendum for the Ridge-Lane Street site saw a drop in voter participation. This fact lies not in decreased interest, but many voters could not find the issue on the ballot. See "30 Percent Fail to Vote on Housing Site," *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, 3 Nov. 1965.

9. Most members of the Housing Authority lived in the wealthier sections of town. Authority members who resided in the Fourth Ward included E. Thornton Tayloe, Robert P. Englander, Edwin L. Turner, Gilbert J. Sullivan, and Francis H. Fife; see *Charlottesville City Directory* (Richmond, 1964).

Economic divisions existed between poor residents who did not want to move and better-off residents who saw public housing as a positive good. As the housing debate continued through the years, Charlottesville's black citizens became active in the referendum process through voting. By the mid-1960s, local groups, such as the Charlottesville branch of the NAACP, became more vocal on proposed housing sites, and as a result, blacks began to vote both in concert and in larger numbers. Economic divisions diminished, and after expressing little organized opposition to Charlottesville's public housing in the past, black residents strongly opposed these projects by 1965. Blacks increasingly expressed their concerns that public housing represented an attempt by city planners to create ghettos and continue the practice of residentially segregated housing.¹⁰ Residential segregation affected the cost of homes, quality of homes, and the ability to desegregate local schools.

Finally, opposition in the housing debate included participants from both ends of the political spectrum. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the strongest opposition came from white residents who were fearful of the racial implications of public housing near desegregated schools. This resistance remained strong throughout the housing debate. By the mid-1960s, dissent also began to develop among Charlottesville's progressive citizens. Both whites and blacks, through groups such as the local NAACP, opposed public housing because many people believed that the Charlottesville Housing Authority used potential sites both to reinforce residential segregation and to create ghettos. School desegregation, the foremost reason for conservative whites to oppose the construction of public housing projects, also facilitated progressive resistance among blacks. The black leadership understood that residential segregation made school desegregation more difficult, and in later years, the NAACP increased its efforts to oppose public housing. Thus while

10. Middle- to upper-class blacks often faced difficulty moving into prestigious white neighborhoods. Segregated housing markets often forced middle- to lower-class blacks into over-priced, poor housing. Additionally, segregated housing markets sometimes led to overcrowding, and blacks often faced hostile real estate agents. See Rose Helper, *Racial Policies and Practices of Real Estate Brokers* (Minneapolis, 1969).

conservatives and progressives differed on their reasoning, both groups united to oppose public housing. Charlottesville's political center would lead the fight for urban renewal and the establishment of its public housing units.

"IS THERE A NEED FOR A HOUSING AUTHORITY IN CHARLOTTESVILLE?"

In the early 1950s, residential segregation existed in Charlottesville, although the city enjoyed relatively peaceful race relations.¹¹ Most black families lived near the east-west railroad that ran through town, and blacks residing around Vinegar Hill and Cox's Row experienced the worse housing in the city. Other black residents lived south of town near Ridge Street and Hartman's Mill Road. Blacks faced difficulty buying homes elsewhere, due to segregated housing markets which brought high prices and real estate agent hostilities.¹²

At the same time, many prominent businessmen in the city recognized the commercial potential of areas such as Vinegar Hill. Redevelopment would also improve the flow of automobile traffic around the downtown area. For the business community to develop these residential areas, however, the city needed to install a public housing authority. Establishment of a housing authority allowed cities to become eligible for federal funds to finance the construction of low-rent public housing. Under federal law, the city had to provide housing, usually in the form of public housing, for any citizens displaced by urban renewal projects. Therefore, before local businessmen could redevelop Vinegar Hill, Charlottesville needed to establish a public housing authority and construct public housing within the city. Public housing became an issue in

11. See Gaston and Hammond, *Public School Desegregation: Charlottesville, Virginia, 1955-1962*.

12. *A Preliminary Report upon Housing: Charlottesville, Virginia*, prepared for the City Planning Commission by Harland, Bartholomew, and Associates, 1957, 16; for a brief discussion on the housing situation in the early 1950s in Charlottesville and other American cities, see Alexander L. Crosby, "Discrimination in Housing" (New York, 1951).

Charlottesville because of the pressures from the local business elite.

On 7 December 1953, Mayor William Hill appointed a committee to prepare a resolution establishing a housing referendum. On 18 January 1954, the city council unanimously adopted a resolution which called for a referendum to establish a local housing authority.¹³ The resolution noted that "there is a shortage of safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations in the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, available to persons of low income with rental they can afford."¹⁴ While housing existed within the city, affordable housing did not exist for the city's black residents due to the segregated housing markets.

On 15 April 1954, the residents of Charlottesville approved the establishment of a local housing authority by a margin of 1,105 to 1,069.¹⁵ Opposition to the creation of a public housing authority remained strong throughout the debate as citizens recognized that the housing authority would create subsidized low-rent public housing units. Conservative white citizens opposed the "socialistic" nature of public housing. In a public debate on the housing situation, Raymond V. Long said that subsidized public housing was one of the best examples of "the creeping socialism we voted against when we voted out the Truman administration." The *Daily Progress*'s lead editorial on 13 April even added, "public housing is socialism." Perhaps influenced by the McCarthy hearings in early 1954, opposition groups attempted to wrap public housing in anti-American rhetoric. Additionally, people argued that subsidized public housing destroyed the American work ethic. Charlottesville residents valued individual liberty and self-reliance, and public housing threatened these notions of proper American behavior. Hartwell P. Clarke's editorial read: "the healthy individual who moves into one of these units knows that the federal government is

13. For a full text of the resolution see the Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 18 Jan. 1954. City council minutes can be found at city hall at the east end of the Downtown Mall, Charlottesville, Virginia.

14. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 18 Jan. 1954.

15. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 3 May 1954.

paying a large part of his rent. There seems no better way to give him a government-owes-me-a-living complex."¹⁶

The housing authority debate also revealed the conservative nature of Virginia's politics. Since the New Deal, the federal government increasingly encroached upon areas formerly reserved for the states. Virginia traditionally fought for states rights, and many of the arguments put forth against public housing rejected federal influence at the local level. Charlottesville residents sought to control their own city with their own solutions. Raymond Long even noted that he would not object to a housing authority that did not use federal funds.¹⁷ Earlier attempts, however, to fund housing projects through private funds had failed, and thus federal funds provided the only viable option to create housing for the poor.

The opposition arguments mentioned above represent the public discussion of white Charlottesville in 1954. The well-being of the soon-to-be-displaced residents of Vinegar Hill never entered the public dialogue, even though many of these residents opposed the establishment of a housing authority. Many Vinegar Hill residents did not want to move for the sake of urban renewal. Poor black resistance to urban displacement often differed from the opinions of wealthier black residents. At this stage, however, the black leadership faced conflicting objectives. While many people wanted improved housing for the black residents living in slum areas, other black leaders saw housing projects as a means to continue patterns of residential segregation. As a result of these conflicting objectives, the local NAACP did not strongly condemn the local housing authority. Also at this time, the NAACP actively committed itself to school desegregation, and perhaps, other issues took on a greater sense of importance. Vocal opposition from the local NAACP did

16. "Housing Authority Applauded as Only Answer to Slums and Attacked as Outright Socialism," *Daily Progress*, 14 Apr. 1954; Charlottesville *Daily Progress*, 13 Apr. 1954; Hartwell P. Clarke, letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 9 Apr. 1954.

17. Raymond V. Long, Jr., letter to the editor, Charlottesville *Daily Progress*, 10 Apr. 1954.

not emerge until 1961.¹⁸

The narrow vote for the housing authority suggested divisions within the city, and breaking down the vote by ward revealed class differences within the city. All four wards possessed white majorities.¹⁹ Wards Four and Two voted in favor of the authority by percentages of 59.3% and 64.4% respectively. Located in the northern and western regions of the city, Ward Four included the area surrounding the University of Virginia, while Ward Two included the homes north of Rugby Avenue and west of the southern railroad tracks. These wards contained many of the wealthier residents of Charlottesville, and these residents remained open to arguments promoting the benefits of urban renewal.²⁰ Additionally, these citizens probably did not believe that the city would place a housing unit near their homes. Ward One, however, only showed 27% support, and 46% of Ward Three voted for the site.²¹ The poorer areas of Charlottesville produced the greatest resistance to the housing authority, and these neighborhoods opposed public housing for a variety of reasons, including its "socialistic" nature and fears of federal influence. Additionally, residents may have privately considered the racial implications of the establishment of a housing authority.

18. "The most ironical aspects of the housing situation are that more than 90 percent of the slum dwellers affected are colored persons, with a negligible vote as compared to well organized real estate interests who own these slum areas and extract exorbitant rentals from their tenants" (*Richmond Afro-American*, 3 Apr. 1954; also Interview with Drewary Brown, 4 Dec. 1996).

19. According to the 1960 census, 29,391 persons resided in Charlottesville. Of this number, 23,830 were white while 5,561 were black (see Gaston and Hammond, *Public School Desegregation*).

20. The 1970 Census was the first to provide block statistics. While the census was produced in 1970, it does demonstrate comparative differences in property value throughout the city since residential patterns remained relatively stable over the years. According to the census information, the average home in Charlottesville was valued at \$23,000. The average home values in the Second and Fourth wards were \$35,400 and \$36,900 respectively. See *1970 Census of Population and Housing: Selected Areas in Virginia* (Washington, DC, 1970).

21. "Housing Body for City Voted by Slim Margin," *Daily Progress*, 16 Apr. 1954.

Racial divisions, however, remained noticeably absent from the public rhetoric in 1954. Residents understood that many of the new projects would house blacks, but instead, opposition focused on problems with public housing itself, such as its socialistic nature. White citizens did not stress the racial make-up of public housing's future residents. Racial considerations would remain outside of the public dialogue until other events thrust racial fears into the Charlottesville public housing debate.

A CITY IN CRISIS: SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Supreme Court ended school desegregation. In 1956, after extensive legal work by the local NAACP, Judge John Paul asked for a plan from the school board to address Charlottesville's segregated schools, and in 1958, the court ordered implementation of a school desegregation plan. At the time of the decision, black students attended Jefferson Elementary School and Burley High School. The court's decision threatened the all-white composition of Venable Elementary School and Lane High School. While some in the city realized that desegregation was inevitable, Governor Gray, with the support of Senator Harry F. Byrd, ordered a program of massive resistance in 1956. Under massive resistance, any school ordered to desegregate by the courts would be closed by the Governor. In September 1958, Judge Paul ordered Venable and Lane to admit ten and two black students, respectively. On 19 September Governor Almond invoked massive resistance and ordered the schools closed. Charlottesville's white community responded by teaching students in homes and other buildings throughout the community. After a one-year standoff, Venable admitted nine black children, and three blacks enrolled in Lane.

Racial tensions in the public housing debate had remained submerged, but after school desegregation, racist rhetoric openly emerged in the discussions concerning public housing. In 1954, other considerations took precedent over race-related complaints. Additionally, after the creation of the housing authority, debate shifted from the general desirability of public housing to specific locations of public housing projects. White residents, fearing

implications involved with school desegregation, would protest vehemently against proposals for nearby housing sites.

ORIGINS OF VINEGAR HILL RENEWAL AND ORGANIZED WHITE RESISTANCE

On 2 March 1958, the City Council requested a loan of \$39,673 for urban renewal in the Vinegar Hill area.²² Mr. E. R. Slaughter, a member of the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority, wrote, "if public housing is made available to the authority, Vinegar Hill will be made into a very desirable business section. The value of all downtown property will be enhanced, new streets will be possible and the sanitary and housing code can be enforced." Additionally, urban renewal gained the support of the presidents of three local banks.²³ Before slum clearance and urban renewal could begin, however, the federal law required the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority to select sites and construct public housing for the displaced citizens. In March 1959, the housing authority proposed construction of a small white housing project in the Belmont area on First Street and a two hundred-unit black housing project near Cherry Avenue. The housing authority placed both sites in the Third Ward, which had narrowly voted against the public housing authority. Both white and black middle-to lower-class neighborhoods surrounded the proposed sites, and announcement of the site locations mobilized local opposition in Belmont and around Cherry Avenue.

With the recent school desegregation episode in residents' minds, white opposition to the Cherry Avenue site involved racial implications. Both lower- and middle-class whites lived in the neighborhood surrounding Cherry Avenue, and W. R. Bingler, Jr., emerged as the leader of the Cherry Avenue opposition. The *Daily Progress* reported that Bingler objected to the site because "the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority plans to

22. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 3 Mar. 1958.

23. E. R. Slaughter, "Public Housing the Key," letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 8 June 1960. Mr. Slaughter lived in the Fourth Ward on Edgewood Lane; "Bank Presidents Support Redevelopment Program," *Daily Progress*, 9 June 1960.

locate its Negro public housing projects in or near presently white neighborhoods instead of the cleared slum areas."²⁴ Residents also opposed construction of the project due to the anticipated loss of property value. The existence of a housing project for poor blacks in the neighborhood threatened these citizens' largest financial investment—their homes, and with the threat to the home came the threat to the neighborhood. The *Daily Progress* reported that Bingler believed that "damage would not come from the housing itself, but from the lower-class people who would be relocated there from condemned slum dwellings." Residents further feared that the project "would result in a spreading deterioration of the whole neighborhood."²⁵ Public housing, however, threatened more than just property values and the local neighborhood. Local residents believed that public housing on Cherry Avenue would lead to integration of Johnson Elementary School.²⁶

W. R. Bingler, Jr., understood the ramifications of a black public housing project on Cherry Avenue. Bingler's efforts included organizing a petition drive and trips to Richmond to lobby the state government. One week after the housing authority's decision, city council received petitions protesting the Cherry Avenue site, and the citizens demanded a public referendum for the project site.²⁷ Bingler's opposition to the site also hinged on the school desegregation issue. The son of a plumber, Bingler valued a good education, and when the governor had ordered Venable and Lane closed, Bingler's children were locked out.²⁸ Many residents feared overcrowding at Johnson and the uncertainty involved with desegregation.

24. "Petitions Ask Public Housing Referendum," *Daily Progress*, 11 Mar. 1959.

25. "Housing Opponents Air Site Objections," *Daily Progress*, 28 Mar. 1959.

26. While residents believed that the Cherry Avenue site would force desegregation at Johnson, E. R. Slaughter of the housing authority claimed that the Cherry Avenue site fell within the Jefferson elementary district. Jefferson remained an all-black school ("Petitioners Oppose Negro Housing Site," *Daily Progress*, 11 Mar. 1959).

27. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 16 Mar. 1959.

28. Interview with W. R. Bingler, Jr., 29 Oct. 1996.

ing the local elementary school. Although desegregation had occurred at Venable and Lane, desegregation did not enjoy unanimous support throughout the city.

As Binger mobilized opposition to the Cherry Avenue site, angry residents sought relief from their elected officials. Not only did residents appeal to city government through petitions, but citizens also turned to lobbying their state representatives, Virginia state delegate William R. Hill and state senator Edward O. McCue, Jr. While Delegate Hill, an ardent segregationist, supported the decision of the housing authority, Senator McCue gladly took the opposition cause to Richmond.²⁹

Senator McCue introduced a resolution that forever altered Charlottesville's public housing situation. In an effort to protect and increase the political power of his constituents who were opposed to public housing, McCue proposed that any site recommendation made by the housing authority must also receive the approval of city council. Furthermore, if opposition residents collected more than one hundred signatures, the bill required city council to hold a city-wide referendum for final approval of the site. The general assembly, which had recently supported and then repealed massive resistance, quickly passed the bill.³⁰ This bill politicized local residents, and a familiar pattern developed. Local

29. A simple connection between those who supported or opposed public housing with those who supported or opposed racial segregation did not exist. Some segregationists opposed public housing over racial concerns, while other segregationists supported public housing and saw an opportunity to continue residential segregation through construction of the projects.

30. Many elements in Charlottesville, including city council, opposed this bill. Some correctly believed that the bill unfairly singled out Charlottesville. McCue's bill applied only to cities with 25,000 to 35,000 residents, and at the time, Charlottesville was Virginia's only city within these population limits. To avoid accusations of singling out one city, the general assembly wrote aspects of the bill into Charlottesville's city charter. See *The Code of the City of Charlottesville, Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1966), 20.1. The city's black newspaper, the *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune*, stated in its 24 Apr. 1959 issue: "The bill—a masterpiece of discrimination—if finally passed as drawn and signed into law by the Governor, would permit one small segment of our local citizens to thwart the wishes of the City as a whole."

residents would quickly mobilize in response to proposed sites to force the issue into a public referendum. After passage of McCue's bill, every major housing proposal in the 1960s faced a public referendum.

In response to the massive opposition efforts of the Cherry Avenue group, Delegate Hill sent a letter to the housing authority requesting a less controversial site, and the housing authority looked for other sites in black school districts. The authority also dropped its plans for the small white project in Belmont. The *Daily Progress* reported that the authority "intends to find privately owned housing in which to relocate these [white] families."³¹ Charlottesville's real estate agents understood the implicit existence of separate white and black housing markets. As a result, the housing authority could turn to affordable private homes for the white residents. Conversely, the segregated market limited the authority's options with the black citizens, and the lack of choice required a new site for displaced black residents.

VINEGAR HILL AND THE PROBLEMS WITH HARTMAN'S MILL ROAD

To accommodate black residents who would be displaced by the Vinegar Hill project, the housing authority proposed a site in the Third Ward at Ridge Street and Hartman's Mill Road. Opposition residents quickly gathered the signatures necessary to hold a referendum on the site, and city council determined that the referendum would be held at the same time as city council elections. In June of 1960, the voters faced three issues: city council elections, urban renewal at Vinegar Hill, and consideration of the Hartman's Mill Road site.

For the first time, City Council candidates ran on the housing issue. Lindsay B. Mount, Bernard J. Haggerty, and Robert E. Lee supported the housing authority, while S. Dexter Forbes campaigned as a determined opponent of the housing authority. In a campaign speech with racial overtones, Forbes said, "you can provide new buildings for people to live in but you can't provide

31. "To Locate Whites in Private Housing," *Daily Progress*, 1 Mar. 1960.

new habits or morals for those people."³² In Dexter Forbes, housing opponents had a candidate who would fight against public housing. Forbes expected strong support from the First and Third wards.

Residents again formed local citizen groups to battle urban renewal and the proposed Hartman's Mill Road site. The Citizens Committee for Information on Public Housing distributed leaflets urging Charlottesville residents to oppose the Hartman's Mill Road public housing site. Additionally, Citizens for Local Action sponsored speeches and ran advertisements in the *Daily Progress* stating their opposition to the housing site. Through such groups, citizens expressed their disapproval of public housing.

Once again, opposition centered on the racial implications of the proposed site. A pamphlet distributed by the Citizen's Committee for Information on Public Housing played upon the school desegregation issue and the racial fears of local residents. The Citizen's Committee recognized its support base and targeted the First and Third wards, for their flier proclaimed that "the Negroes will be too far from their present schools and will be using the First and Third Ward schools." The pamphlet further warned that "there is no limit to the number of Negroes to be placed [on the Hartman's Mill Site]." Imploring citizens to "PROTECT YOUR HOME, YOUR CHILDREN, YOUR FUTURE!" the Citizens Committee for Information on Public Housing used racial scare tactics to mobilize opposition to the Hartman's Mill site.³³

Along with instigating racial fears, the opposition to public housing and the Hartman's Mill site attempted to point out that the housing site would be detrimental to the blacks who would inhabit the project. While their rhetoric did not blatantly play on racial fears, these citizens still attempted to maintain Charlottesville's segregated housing patterns. Noting that most blacks lived outside of the Third Ward, H. M. Addington, Jr., a maintenance worker at

32. "Forbes Urges Rejection of Vinegar Hill Program," *Daily Progress*, 13 June 1960.

33. "Some Facts You Have a Right to Know About Public Housing" (pamphlet distributed by the Citizen's Committee for Information of Public Housing, 1960, University of Virginia Archives, Alderman Library). Charlottesville citizens demonstrated tactics similar to white opposition throughout the country.

Martha Jefferson Hospital, opposed the Hartman's Mill housing site because "locating them [blacks] away from the area that contains their schools, businesses, and social activities would be a further displacement for them."³⁴ J. B. Hemmings expressed his concern that "the [black] businessmen will be far removed from his scattered customers."³⁵ Some in Charlottesville's black community, however, often disagreed with the assessments of the white opposition groups. Many black citizens, while opposing residential segregation, supported public housing to improve the homes of fellow black residents. Black supporters of public housing generally included the middle-class to wealthy black citizens of Charlottesville. An editorial in the *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune* stated, "we believe that the establishment of decent low-rental public housing is a matter of prime necessity in Charlottesville."³⁶

White citizens also expressed their concern for public housing residents through race-neutral language. While the ultimate end of this language maintained Charlottesville's established residential patterns, some believed that public housing hurt its residents—black or white—by reducing the resident's personal motivation. Ray Long stated that public housing "does a dis-service to the tenant himself by giving him something which our American heritage has taught us we must earn for ourselves." In addition, some citizens believed that public housing was unfair to other local citizens. Long continued: "subsidized housing is unfair to the man who by his own hard work is renting or buying a non-subsidized home, for in addition to paying his own rent and taxes, he must also help pay the rent of his subsidized neighbor."³⁷ Moreover residents expressed disapproval of federal influence in local affairs and continually

34. H. M. Addington, Jr. "Sites for Public Housing," letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 9 June 1960; *Charlottesville City Directory* (Richmond, 1959).

35. "The Other Side of the Redevelopment Question" (advertisement in *Daily Progress*, 13 June 1960).

36. "Let's Have Decent Low-Rent Public Housing." *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune*, 19 May 1960.

37. "The Other Side of the Public Housing Question" (advertisement in *Daily Progress*, 13 June 1960).

asked if housing could be furnished through local private funds. Concern for residents of Vinegar Hill who wished to remain in their homes, however, did not significantly enter the public debate among white opponents.

Having expressed their concerns, opponents of public housing waited for the election results. In a close city council race, Bernard J. Haggerty, Lindsay B. Mount, and Robert E. Lee defeated the anti-housing candidate S. Dexter Forbes. Robert E. Lee narrowly edged out Forbes by forty-five votes for the final council position. Charlottesville voters also chose to begin urban renewal in Vinegar Hill. This measure passed by a vote of 2,006 to 1,800. The final issue, approval of the Hartman's Mill site, barely passed by a vote of 1,831 to 1,808.³⁸ These close results suggest that Charlottesville's residents remained divided over the public housing issue. In fact, evidence suggests that if Charlottesville's black residents followed the advice of the editorials in the *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune*, the black vote may have turned the tide in favor of public housing. In the days preceding the elections, the *Tribune* supported the proposed Hartman's Mill Road site and continually encouraged blacks to turn out to vote. The paper said, "Having followed closely the maneuvers of the principles in Charlottesville's Public Redevelopment and Housing controversy we believe that the Negro vote, for whose race decent low-rent public housing will be made available, will have better than a 50-50 chance to help win or reject the program next Tuesday."³⁹ The site passed by only twenty-three votes.

The 1960 housing vote closely resembled the 1954 vote to establish the housing authority. The wealthier Second and Fourth wards supported the housing programs, while the First and Third wards opposed the public housing issues. Dexter Forbes, who championed the anti-housing movement, found his greatest support in the First and Third wards, and these wards also strongly opposed both housing measures. On the urban renewal question, the First

38. "Close Vote Clears Way for Program," *Daily Progress*, 15 June 1960.

39. "Negro Vote Can Play Important Role on Public Housing Question," *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune*, 9 June 1960.

Ward only 38% backed the measure. Ward Three showed only 36.9% support. These residents also strongly opposed the Hartman's Mill site. In the First Ward only 38% voted for the site, while the Third Ward similarly showed 36% in favor. Overwhelming majorities in the Second and Fourth wards, where many of the city's business elite lived, carried these issues to victory, for these residents looked to the economic benefits redevelopment would bring to the city.⁴⁰

The housing authority had placed the proposed Hartman's Mill site in the Third Ward, and many of its residents adopted a "not-in-my-neighborhood" stance to the issue. Residents of the First and Third wards were not Charlottesville's wealthiest citizens, and the voting results suggest that economic interests connected to urban renewal did not tremendously affect these wards. Since most members of the housing authority lived in the Second and Fourth wards, class resentment may have existed. The First Ward, which included many of Charlottesville's poorer residents, embodied the anti-housing rhetoric and expressed their disapproval through their votes, while residents in the Third Ward feared the uncertainties a black public housing unit would bring. Both wards responded to the perceived belief that the Hartman's Mill site would integrate local white schools.⁴¹

BREAKING GROUND: COX'S ROW

After approval of both urban renewal in Vinegar Hill and the

40. Ward Four strongly supported both housing issues. Renewal of the housing authority passed by a margin of 718 for and 364 against, while the Hartman's Mill site passed 660 for and 364 against. Ward Two also supported both measures. Perhaps Ward Two did not show the overwhelming support exhibited by Ward Four, because, while Ward Two included some of the wealthiest residents in town, it also included Vinegar Hill. Residents who did not want to move may have voted against urban renewal and the proposed site.

41. The Mayor's Committee for Public Information on Public Housing and Urban Renewal noted that "the Hartman Mill Road site is in the Jefferson School District," ("Public Housing & Urban Renewal Information" [advertisement in *Daily Progress*, 11 June 1960]).

Hartman's Mill site, city council reconsidered the situation, for the close vote on the Hartman's Mill site signified a divided community. Therefore, city council implored the housing authority to consider another site, and the housing authority looked to Cox's Row near Lane Street in the Second Ward. The city planning commission's 1957 report on housing determined that Cox's Row was the second worst slum area in the city (behind Vinegar Hill). In one program, the city could engage in slum clearance and construct low-rent housing. In March of 1961, city council approved Cox's Row.⁴²

Once again, citizens gathered the necessary signatures to force a referendum on the proposed housing site. Under the leadership of George Gilmer, Jr., some citizens expressed their disapproval with the site and public housing in general. Gilmer's group stated that the site was too small. Since Cox's Row was near the heart of downtown Charlottesville, some feared that public housing at Cox's Row would remove a potential source of high tax revenue for the city.⁴³ George Gilmer's opposition focused upon the economic aspects of the Cox's Row site. While Gilmer claimed to act in the best interests of the community, it should be noted that he owned property in Cox's Row.⁴⁴

For the first time, significant, unified opposition surfaced in the local black community. While opposition had existed in some circles based upon concern for both Vinegar Hill's residents and residential segregation patterns, groups such as the local NAACP or *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune* did not vocally protest the housing issues. The *Tribune*, which had initially supported the Cox's Row site, eventually resisted the proposed site. Opposition centered upon Schenk's Branch, a stream that flowed through the site. Local black residents proclaimed Schenk's Branch a health hazard and opposed the site because the proposal did not include filling in the

42. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 15 Mar. 1961.

43. "Voters Decide Tomorrow on Cox's Row Housing Site," *Daily Progress*, 22 May 1961.

44. "Authority OK's Cox's Row After 3-1 Voter Approval," *Daily Progress*, 24 May 1961.

stream.⁴⁵

The Charlottesville branch of the NAACP also expressed its disapproval of the site and actively campaigned against it. Eugene Williams, president of the Charlottesville branch, stated the NAACP's reasons for opposition. The NAACP resisted the site because of its proximity to the city's storage yard, nearness to the Southern Railway, and problems associated with Schenk's Branch. Additionally, Williams noted that the land appeared to be in a hollow and would prove costly to the city. Finally, the NAACP opposed the amount of proposed fencing, for they feared the project would assume a caged appearance. At the same time, Eugene Williams expressed his approval of the Hartman's Mill site.⁴⁶

Leaders from the Third and First wards, however, remained noticeably absent from the opposition to Cox's Row. For the first time, the housing authority had selected a site outside of the Third Ward. Raymond Long, who had opposed both the establishment of a housing authority in 1954 and Hartman's Mill location in 1960, supported the Cox's Row site. Long said, "I believe this site is large enough to meet all of Charlottesville's public housing requirements for the foreseeable future."⁴⁷ If Cox's Row passed, the housing authority would abandon its Hartman's Mill site. Therefore, support of Cox's Row also signaled disapproval of the Hartman's Mill site.

On 23 May 1961, local leaders expected a close vote. Charlottesville residents, however, surprised everyone by approving Cox's Row by a margin of three to one. The First and Third

45. *Charlottesville-Albemarle Tribune*, 18 May 1961.

46. "Radio Favors Cox's Row, NAACP Doesn't," *Daily Progress*, 22 May 1961. Williams approval of the Hartman's Mill Road suggests adamant opposition to public housing did not exist among the black community at this point or in earlier years. Previous proposals, while placed in black communities, also bordered white communities. Later proposals around the Hartman's Mill site would bring strong opposition from local NAACP because, by the mid-1960s, more people in black community began to view public housing as a means to continue residential segregation patterns.

47. Citizen's Committee on Redevelopment and Housing (advertisement in *Daily Progress*, 20 May 1961).

wards, which had overwhelmingly opposed previous housing initiatives, provided the strongest support for Cox's Row. 82.6% of the voters in the First Ward supported Cox's Row, while the Third Ward also provided 80.8% in favor. The Fourth Ward continued its support of the housing authority, and Second Ward, while approving the site, approved Cox's Row by the smallest margin of all four wards—513 to 239 (68.2%).⁴⁸

While previous elections had determined that public housing would exist somewhere in Charlottesville, the Cox's Row referendum gave residents of the First and Third wards an opportunity to locate this housing away from their neighborhoods. This referendum demonstrated that white residents who vehemently opposed black public housing in their neighborhoods would gladly send black public housing elsewhere. Other complaints, such as public housing being detrimental to the individual and fears of federal influence, remained secondary to the concern of having a black housing unit in the area.

If Charlottesville residents of the First and Third wards did not want public housing near their neighborhoods, why then did not the Second Ward show stronger opposition to Cox's Row? In fact, a comparison between the Second Ward's voting record with Hartman's Mill and Cox's Row shows continuity, more than change. In 1960, the Second Ward voted 549 to 301 for the Hartman's Mill site. In 1961, the Second Ward polled 513 to 239. The Second Ward always gave solid support for public housing, and perhaps its citizens listened to the positive aspects of the Cox's Row site. The Citizens Committee on Redevelopment and Housing supported Cox's Row because the site was near black churches, schools, and shopping districts. Additionally, the committee noted that a project at Cox's Row would relocate families displaced from Vinegar Hill in the same general area as their present homes.⁴⁹ Most importantly, however, by placing the site in an existing black neighborhood, the

48. Authority OK's Cox's Row After 3-1 Voter Approval," *Daily Progress*, 24 May 1961.

49. "Why Cox' Row Is Best!" Citizens Committee on Redevelopment and Housing (advertisement in *Daily Progress*, 19 May 1961).

Housing Authority nullified the protests based upon neighborhood integration. Thus the Second Ward received two benefits by locating a project within its boundaries—new and improved housing for displaced residents and eradication of one of the worst slums in Charlottesville. At the same time, Charlottesville's segregated housing patterns remained the same.

WESTHAVEN, GARRETT STREET RENEWAL, AND MRS. NIMMO

One year later, city council revoked authorization of the Hartman's Mill Road site, and construction began on the Cox's Row site.⁵⁰ The city built Hardy Road through Cox's Row, and the housing authority named Charlottesville's first public housing project Westhaven.⁵¹ With urban renewal at Vinegar Hill underway, the Redevelopment and Housing Authority sought to clean up the city's other slums. In March of 1964, A. E. Arrington presented a preliminary study to the city council for a slum clearance project near Garrett Street.⁵² Once again, the wealthy business community looked forward to the economic benefits of urban renewal. Slum clearance, of course, meant that the city would have to find yet another public housing site.

In June 1965, E. R. Slaughter of the housing authority proposed construction of 188 units at Ridge and Lane streets. Located in the Third Ward, construction at the Ridge site would force the relocation of less than a dozen people.⁵³ The housing authority had expected smooth approval of the site, and city council sponsored a public hearing on 2 August 1965, to outline the merits of the

50. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 16 May 1962.

51. The housing authority named the project after two prominent black citizens in the community's history. The housing authority named the new road Hardy Drive, in honor of Reverend R. B. Hardy, a pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church from 1892-1917. The name Westhaven honored Mr. John West who was born a slave but amassed a fortune before his death.

52. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 2 Mar. 1964.

53. Black and white residents lived near this proposed site. Property values fell roughly between \$11,000 to \$15,000, well below the city average of \$23,000. See *1970 Census of Population and Housing*.

proposal. City authorities, however, soon realized that substantial opposition existed. Once again, residents of the Third Ward fought the potential intrusion of public housing into their neighborhoods. At the same time, the local NAACP mobilized to oppose the proposed site. While Charlottesville's political center, supported by the local business interests, campaigned to establish public housing, black citizens and whites from the First and Third wards organized the opposition against the proposed Ridge Street site.

While civic groups such as the League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, and Retail Merchants Association supported the Ridge-Lane site, residents opposed to the site mobilized to form their own groups and organizations.⁵⁴ Citizens formed the Committee Against the Ridge-Lane Site and charged the housing authority with "disregard" for the residents living at and around the proposed site.⁵⁵ Once again, school desegregation entered the debate, for white residents feared altering the racial make-up of Clark Elementary School. Additionally, residents continued to call for local private business to address Charlottesville's housing problems, and citizens feared governmental intrusion into their local lives.

In addition to these customary concerns, new considerations entered the local debate, for opposition now included not only whites who were fearful of a nearby black housing unit, but also a majority of Charlottesville's black community. While previous referendum had shown class divisions between the black community, the Ridge-Lane site aroused opposition from the entire spectrum of Charlottesville's black residents. The area surrounding the Ridge-Lane site consisted mainly of middle-class black families, and for the first time, residents, both white and black, openly addressed residential segregation and the creation of ghettos. Many feared that housing authority would "simply be exchanging one

54. "Vote for Housing Referendum," (bumper sticker, League of Women Voters, 1965), and "Pro-Housing Views Hit," *Daily Progress*, 1 Nov. 1965.

55. "Complete Picture Not Given on Housing Location, Ridge Lane Opponents Charge," *Daily Progress*, 28 Oct. 1965.

slum for what would eventually become another."⁵⁶ Tim Echols, an independent candidate for the House of Delegates, outlined a progressive argument against the proposed site and said that public housing was "largely a hypocritical means of leapfrogging our Negro citizens from one ghetto to another—a thinly disguised but very effective method of keeping them segregated and regulated, while we piously proclaim the brotherhood of man."⁵⁷ In an attempt to break residential segregation, local black leaders wanted the new public housing sites to be scattered, but the housing authority rejected this proposition due to excessive cost. Scattered sites also aided attempts by the black leadership to desegregate local schools. In a 1996 interview, NAACP activist Drewary Brown noted that integration of schools would be more difficult "if they're putting people in the same neighborhoods."⁵⁸

Additionally, black citizens placed the proposed site in the context of Charlottesville's segregated housing market.⁵⁹ The proposed project would reduce the amount of land available to local black citizens, and residents from nearby Hartman's Mill Road asked, "where else in Charlottesville can we, as Negroes, buy other houses?"⁶⁰ Jane Foster, a local school teacher, asked, "Have you ever talked to a Negro family trying to rent an apartment or buy a house?" The Committee Against the Ridge-Lane Site stated, "every one of these [black] property owners has worked hard for what they now have. They could not possibly duplicate their holdings should

56. "Housing and Renewal—Misunderstanding, Misinformation," *Daily Progress*, 27 Oct. 1965.

57. "'Overwhelming' Vote Against Housing Site Urged by Echols," *Daily Progress*, 19 Oct. 1965.

58. Interview with Drewary Brown, 4 Dec. 1996.

59. In 1965, concerned citizens formed the Charlottesville Fair Housing Committee. This group sought to end segregated housing and wanted to "create an environment in the community that would permit Negroes to purchase or occupy housing in any neighborhood in the City or County" (from the Charlottesville Fair Housing Committee's "The Churches and Fair Housing" [University of Virginia Archives, Alderman Library], 2).

60. "Homeowners Object," letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 22 Oct. 1965; Jane Foster, "A Vote Against Housing Site," letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 27 Oct. 1965; *Charlottesville City Directory* (Richmond, 1966); "Complete

they have to sell." While these community-oriented concerns emerged in public dialogue, these issues also combined with the case of Mrs. George Nimmo to encourage citizens to oppose the Ridge Street site.

Community approval of the Ridge-Lane site would have meant the relocation of Mrs. Nimmo, who lived in a 125-year-old home on the proposed site. Additionally, the family graveyard remained on the property, and construction of public housing would require destruction of the Nimmo home and removal of the family graveyard. Opposition forces, led by Nimmo's son Thomas P. Nelson, who worked as a real estate salesman, used this sad story to persuade the public to vote against the housing referendum. An opposition newspaper advertisement read, "Building the Ridge-Lane Project would mean the destruction of our 125-year-old home, where our Mother, now in her 80th year, lives and has lived since 1910, when she left her girlhood home on Barrack's Road to marry our father who died August, 1964." The advertisement noted that seven of her sons were veterans of both World War II and the Korean War and asked, "Does our Mother not now deserve more than a FORCED removal from her property and savage bulldozing of her home?"⁶¹ Many citizens did not oppose public housing per se, but significant opposition resulted from the site location. Public concern over Mrs. Nimmo transcended the other issues, and many citizens called for the housing authority to choose another site.

In November, citizens went to the polls and rejected the Ridge-Lane site by 82 votes. Once again, substantial opposition surfaced in the Third Ward. Both the Firehouse and Johnson precincts opposed the site.⁶² Firehouse, which would have contained the new housing project, provided only 21.3% support. The referendum also

Picture Not Given on Housing Location, Ridge Lane Opponents Charge," *Daily Progress*, 28 Oct. 1965.

61. "Vote Against Ridge-Lane" (advertisement in *Daily Progress*, 1 Nov. 1965).

62. In 1963, the city of Charlottesville annexed additional territory, and the city divided its wards into two precincts as follows: Ward One: Recreation and Clark; Ward Two: Lane and Greenbriar; Ward Three: Firehouse and Johnson; Ward Four: Venable and Alumni Hall.

failed to pass in Recreation, Clark, and Lane. The referendum gained substantial majorities only in Ward Four.⁶³ While the results disappointed the housing authority, the authority attributed the defeat to poor campaigning and believed that support for public housing still existed.

A detailed look at Third Ward provides a case study for Charlottesville's opposition to public housing, for the Third Ward, containing Firehouse and Johnson, showed opposition by both blacks and middle- to lower-class whites. Firehouse was Charlottesville's only precinct with a black majority. Firehouse's overwhelming rejection, 21.3% (58-214), of the Ridge-Lane site demonstrated that many local black citizens strongly opposed the location of the public housing site. Many issues drove Firehouse blacks to oppose the site. First, the area surrounding the Ridge site contained some middle-class black homes. Many blacks, like Charlottesville's white citizens in previous referendums, feared declining property values and other perceived negatives associated with public housing. Charlottesville's segregated housing market meant that replacement of these black homes would prove difficult. Later referendums would demonstrate that middle-class blacks opposed public housing in poorer neighborhoods as well. Second, the black community, which began to vote in concert by 1964, began to view CRHA's public housing proposals in a negative light.⁶⁴ Many people began to believe that the housing authority used public housing to reinforce residential segregation. Residential segregation affected many related issues such as the cost of housing and efforts to desegregate local schools. The other precinct in the Third Ward, Johnson, which was comprised of a white majority, provided only 44.6% support for the project site. This precinct feared the racial implications of establishing public housing nearby, such as additional integration of local schools. Also, class resentment against the wealthy members who controlled the housing authority

63. "Unofficial Election Results From Central Virginia: Housing Site Referendum," *Daily Progress*, 3 Nov. 1965.

64. Alan Burns, "Negro Vote, A Pattern," *Daily Progress*, 12 May 1967.

may have emerged from this poorer section of town.⁶⁵ Consistently voting against public housing sites in the Third Ward, residents of both Firehouse and Johnson once again adopted the not-in-my-neighborhood attitude and demonstrated how both the blacks and middle- to lower-class whites united their votes to oppose public housing for vastly different reasons.

1967: GARRETT, SOUTH FIRST, AND RIDGE ONCE AGAIN

In 1966, the housing authority attempted to gain approval of a modified version of the Ridge Street site. Once again, opposition emerged from Thomas Nelson's group and the NAACP. Just over a month after recommending the Ridge Street site, the Housing Authority withdrew its proposal.⁶⁶ In an attempt to gain community support for its actions, the city formed the Housing Advisory Committee, which included representatives from each precinct. After failure in 1965 and 1966, the housing authority proposed the creation of public housing around Madison Avenue in the Second Ward, a site surrounded by white residents. The Housing Advisory Committee noted the widespread opposition to this site and the Housing Authority quickly withdrew its proposal before the site came to a referendum.

On 20 February 1967, E. R. Slaughter met with city council and requested approval of three sites: Garrett Street, South First Street, and another revised location on Ridge Street.⁶⁷ Public housing at these three sites would serve the local residents displaced by urban renewal at Garrett Street. Opposition again emerged from white and black residents, and by March local citizens had produced petitions with over thirteen hundred signatures requesting a referendum.⁶⁸ Since voters would decide on each location individually, some

65. Property value in these white neighborhoods near the proposed site stood well below the city mean and averaged between \$12,000 to \$15,000 (1970 *Census of Population and Housing*).

66. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 8 Sep. 1966.

67. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 20 Feb. 1967.

68. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 27 Mar. 1967.

groups opposed some sites and supported other sites, while other groups stressed opposition to all three proposed projects.

Thomas Nelson, who had led the Ridge Street opposition in 1965, directed Citizens Against Public Housing. This group, oriented toward the traditional white concerns, encouraged citizens to vote against all three sites and called for private business to address Charlottesville's housing needs. Rather than focus on the negatives involved with each site, Citizens Against Public Housing pointed out the negative aspects of public housing in general. Its rhetoric, while still including racial overtones, returned to traditional themes such as governmental intrusion and destruction of personal initiative. In a pamphlet encouraging citizens to vote against all three sites, Citizens Against Public Housing stated, "We who oppose additional federal housing projects for Charlottesville are sometimes branded as being against progress, or worse, as lacking conscience." The flier continued, "NOT SO! Rather it is those who would take away individual initiative, individual pride, and individual freedom of choice who are anti-liberal, anti-humanitarian, AND ANTI-PROGRESS." Citizens Against Public Housing attempted to harness local dislike of the federal government. Since the housing debate began in 1954, Charlottesville had felt increased governmental intrusion on a number of issues, including desegregation. Citizens Against Public Housing implored citizens: "LET'S GET IT [public housing] OUT OF CHARLOTTESVILLE BEFORE ITS TOO LATE!"⁶⁹

W. R. Bingler, Jr., brought out public housing concerns that had been expressed in every election since 1954. Like those before him, Bingler argued that public housing "kills the initiative of the average person." Public housing not only damaged the community, but subsidized housing hurt the individual resident. Bingler recognized the positive aspects of slum clearance, but he added, "I'd like to see the slum areas cleaned up, but there are other ways to do it such as private enterprise or enforcement of the (city's) minimum

69. Charlottesville Citizens Against Public Housing, Campaign literature opposing public housing, 1967 (University of Virginia Archives, Alderman Library).

standards) housing ordinance." While admitting that Westhaven's buildings were "much superior" to those cleared from Vinegar Hill, Bingler also attacked Westhaven, saying that "the restrictions they live under are much more severe. Their freedoms have been taken away."⁷⁰ Bingler, like many Charlottesville residents opposed to public housing, believed that clearance at Vinegar Hill was "cruel" and that blacks "got a raw deal."⁷¹

Along with the Citizens Against Public Housing and citizens like W. R. Bingler, Jr., the Charlottesville branch of the NAACP also opposed all three sites. Just as in 1965, NAACP opposition focused on residential segregation and the potential creation of ghettos through public housing. The NAACP did not oppose public housing, but rather, the organization opposed the public housing site selection which reinforced residential segregation. The NAACP declared "unequivocally that the proposal for low-rent public housing is a racial move to perpetuate segregation and to keep Negroes from entering into the mainstream of the community."⁷² In a letter to the editor, Virginia B. Carrington, president of the Charlottesville branch of the NAACP, urged citizens to vote against all three sites and wrote, "the result of countless individual acts of discrimination is the spawning of ghettos, where housing is inferior, overcrowded, and too often overpriced."⁷³

While the business elite continued to campaign for urban redevelopment and public housing, other civic groups and citizens in the political center selectively endorsed the three housing sites. Both the local Jaycees and League of Women Voters supported the

70. "Public Housing Is Attacked and Defended in Radio Interview," *Daily Progress*, 8 May 1967; *Charlottesville City Directory* (Richmond, 1966).

71. Interview with W. R. Bingler, Jr., 29 Oct. 1996.

72. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 20 Feb. 1967.

73. Virginia B. Carrington, "'No' Vote Asked on All Three Sites," letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 8 May 1967. The Southern Regional Council worked at the national level to eradicate segregated housing and wrote, "In spite of being more expensive, Negro housing is often located away from places where Negroes work, in areas where public facilities are declining and where industries and business distract from the residential credibility of the neighborhood. Housing for Negroes, at any price, is extremely limited" ("Slum Ghettos in Your Town," Southern Regional Council, Atlanta, Feb. 1967).

Garrett Street and South First Street sites, but they refused to sponsor the Ridge Street site. The Charlottesville Chamber of Commerce encouraged citizens to vote for public housing in Charlottesville, but due to the contentious nature of the housing debate, the group refused to give a site endorsement.⁷⁴ Controversy still swirled around the Ridge Street site. While the housing authority had revised the site since 1965, many citizens believed that they were voting on the same location. Mr. and Mrs. Jack M. Horn, who lived in the Third Ward, expressed their concern that "this issue [Ridge Street site] was resolved in the last election and that it is not in the best interest of the city to pursue it any further."⁷⁵ Most people, however, who opposed only the Ridge site accepted the necessity of public housing in Charlottesville.

Charlottesville voters went to the polls on 9 May, and under heavy voter turnout, both Garrett Street and South First Street passed by margins of 3,161 to 1,559 and 2,933 to 1,730. Ridge Street, which had seemingly been on the ballot for years, gained approval by a margin of 2,555 to 2,023. After years of hard fought battles, the political center in Charlottesville, which favored the benefits of urban renewal, carried these issues to victory. On 16 May 1967, City Council authorized and approved all three sites.⁷⁶

Class differences surfaced between Charlottesville's white population, and opposition from white citizens continued to emerge from areas that would endure altered racial make-up of local schools with the construction of a public housing project. Just as in 1965, residents believed that the Ridge Street site would alter the racial proportion of nearby Clark Elementary School. Accordingly, Clark, with a white majority, adopted a not-in-my-neighborhood stance and provided only 25.5% support for the Ridge Street site. On the other sites, Clark voted 29.3% for Garrett Street and 20.4% for South First Street. While lower-class white opposition remained predominant in Clark, white residents in the Second and Fourth Ward once again provided overwhelming support. These wealthier

74. "Tomorrow Is the Showdown," *Daily Progress*, 8 May 1967.

75. Mr. and Mrs. Jack M. Horn, "Decent Housing Seen as Main Question," letter to the editor, *Daily Progress*, 6 May 1967.

76. Minutes of Charlottesville City Council, 16 May 1967.

Ward once again provided overwhelming support. These wealthier neighborhoods, far removed from potential public housing sites, supported all three sites, with the Fourth Ward showing a margin of close to five to one.

Charlottesville's black residents led the progressive opposition and made up a significant portion of the voters in three districts: Lane, Firehouse, and Venable, and roughly half of the city's registered fifteen hundred registered black voters cast their ballots. Lane and Venable, however, possessed a white majority which erased much of the black vote in these precincts. Black opposition, however, created close races in Lane, for of the five hundred and eleven voters, two hundred and thirty were black. Lane passed Garret Street and South First Street by margins of only 58.2% and 53%. Lane rejected the Ridge Street site with only 48.9% support. In Firehouse, black residents enjoyed a substantial majority. Of the three hundred and seventy-one voters in Firehouse, two hundred and fifty were black. This black precinct easily opposed all three sites. Unlike referendums in the 1950s and early 1960s, black citizens voted together and voted against the proposed public housing sites. By 1967, organizations such as the NAACP strongly opposed CRHA's selection of public housing sites. These concerns centered on residential segregation and its implications, which included the potential creation of ghettos and difficulty desegregating local schools.

BEYOND 1967

Therefore, by 1967, both conservatives and progressives simultaneously opposed public housing sites in Charlottesville. While uniting to resist the housing sites, these ends of the political spectrum had different motives for their opposition. First, after school desegregation in 1956, white voters on the right openly expressed racial fears. These white citizens feared the influx of poor black residents into their neighborhoods and schools. At the same time, however, Charlottesville's white residents remained divided. Wealthier residents, living without the fear of a potential public housing project nearby, embodied the political center and supported public housing throughout the next decade because of the benefits

brought on by urban redevelopment. Residents living in homes of lesser value often opposed public housing sites, employing a not-in-my-neighborhood or -my-school philosophy. At the same time, Charlottesville's black residents increasingly expressed stronger opposition over the course of the housing debate. The early years show little vocal participation from black residents, and some black citizens supported new public housing projects. Differences existed between the poor black residents forced to move by urban renewal and the wealthier black citizens around Charlottesville who saw potential benefits in public housing. Over time, however, not only did Charlottesville's black community gain a degree of voting solidarity, but black residents also began to strongly oppose public housing sites. This opposition stemmed from the housing authority's placement of the sites and the realization that the sites perpetuated residential segregation. Many citizens believed that public housing represented a deliberate attempt by city officials to keep blacks and whites apart from each other. Residential segregation reinforced many problems faced by the black community including high real estate prices, the potential creation of ghettos, and difficulty desegregating local schools.

While the city council did authorize all three sites in 1967, opposition continued. Court cases dealing with racial segregation held up construction. Eventually, however, the city did engage in slum clearance at Garrett Street and build public housing units at South First and Ridge streets. Much to the chagrin of those opposed to federal influence, the federal government paid 100% of all construction costs. In 1973, the state of Virginia amended Charlottesville's city charter and removed the provision which allowed local residents to force public referendums on housing issues.⁷⁷

In retrospect, many people in the Charlottesville community view public housing and its effects in a negative light.⁷⁸ Interestingly, people who fought for and others who fought against public housing dwell on its negative aspects. Hovey Dabney, a school

77. *The Code of the City of Charlottesville, Virginia, 1965*, published by order of the City Council (Charlottesville, 1966). This edition found in Alderman Library includes amendments made after 1965.

segregationist in the 1950s and president of National Bank and Trust Company in the 1960s, supported urban renewal and public housing projects. In recent times, however, Dabney, while acknowledging that displaced residents moved into better homes, expressed disappointment over the problems that residents of public housing face. He attributed many of these problems, such as crime and drug abuse, to the fact that many people from the surrounding counties outside the city moved into the housing units. Eugene Williams, who actively opposed public housing sites as local NAACP president in the 1960s, noted that public housing continued patterns of residential segregation. In retrospect, Williams said that the establishment of public housing was "racist from the beginning." Just as the political right and left stressed different reasons to oppose public housing in the 1960s, Dabney and Williams provided differing interpretations of its current status.⁷⁹

The public housing debate revealed many divisions along lines of race and class. While segregated housing practices by homeowners and real estate agents has legally ended in Charlottesville and throughout the country, a degree of residential segregation still exists. Charlottesville's black residents, while many have entered previously all-white neighborhoods, continue to reside together, and Charlottesville's prestigious neighborhoods remain mostly white. Additional residential separation exists along lines of class, regard-

78. Regarding Vinegar Hill, John Hammond Moore wrote, "Vinegar Hill did not burn down nor did all the 'bad folks' disappear when that sordid but colorful jumble of buildings was razed. Center of bootleg activity and vice it was, but the hill most assuredly was much more vibrant and alive in its former guise than it is today, now merely an expanse of bare ground stretching like a no-man's-land, perhaps to be the site of the downtown business district's last stand should the upstart shopping centers mushrooming a few miles to the west ever launch an all-out attack," (Moore, *Albemarle, Jefferson's County, 1727-1976* (Charlottesville, 1976), 430.

79. Personal interview with Hovey Dabney, 5 Nov. 1996; Interview with Eugene Williams, 25 Nov. 1996. Reactions of both Dabney and Williams portray a sense of disappointment over the end result of public housing in Charlottesville. Similarly, both Matusow's *Unraveling of America* and Dionne's *Why Americans Hate Politics* have shown the disillusionment many have felt over the perceived failure of the "liberalism" of the 1960s.

less of race.

The housing authority had, but did not examine, an additional option to the public housing problem. Perhaps the best way to appease working-class whites and blacks who were angry over residential segregation was to place a housing project near a wealthy, white neighborhood. A housing unit such as this would integrate people of different races and classes into one neighborhood. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, wealthy, white neighborhoods traditionally supported public housing due the benefits of urban renewal. A housing unit, however, in the wealthy areas of the Second or Fourth wards surely would have brought out strong opposition. Given the make-up of the housing authority (white, wealthy members of the community who lived in the Second and Fourth wards), Charlottesville never had to face the possibility of a housing unit in a wealthy neighborhood. In retrospect, perhaps the case of Charlottesville's public housing remains a depressing story in which a mutually beneficial solution to both working-class whites and blacks was impossible.