

Urban Renewal, Vinegar Hill, 1960
***Charlottesville Daily Progress*, “Bank Presidents Support
Redevelopment Program,” June 9, 1960 Transcription (page 1 of 2)**

The presidents of the three local banks have endorsed the proposed redevelopment and public housing program in a radio interview recorded for broadcast today.

W. Wright Harrison of the Peoples National Bank, Henry A. Haden of the National Bank and Trust Company, and William B. Trevallian of the Citizens Bank and Trust Company all recommend that the program be adopted.

The statements were made in answer to the questions by Ray Niblack, news director of Station WINA.

“The future of our community is dependent upon the passage of this legislation,” Harrison said.

Haden said he favors the proposal and will vote for it next Tuesday. A referendum on redevelopment and public housing will be held at the same time as Tuesday’s City Council election. Trevallian said he favors the program and urged support of it “to the fullest.”

Asked his opinion on the feeling of some downtown merchants that urban renewal of Vinegar Hill would be detrimental to merchants already in the downtown area, Harrison replied, “I certainly disagree with this feeling. New business will come to the community as the buying power of the community increases. They won’t come simply because a piece of land is available.

“When new businesses decide to move to Charlottesville, they will either select a site in the downtown business area, or be forced to go to the outskirts of the city, perhaps to a shopping center.

“If there is available good land within three or four blocks of the center of the downtown business area, they will go there, which will mean a further development of our downtown area rather than a further development of the more remote shopping centers.”

Harrison said this would give downtown merchants “assurance that the downtown area will have space to grow and that new business will join with present merchants in building up the downtown section.”

“Certainly a merchant would rather have a competitor within four blocks than have that same competitor move out to the shopping center, miles away, and thus draw traffic away from the downtown area,” he said.

Asked his prediction of what would happen if urban renewal is voted down, Harrison said, “I believe the effect would be rather serious in that the present downtown area is limited as far as possible expansion is concerned. There is nowhere that new store buildings can be erected in what is considered the downtown section.

“This means further expansion would have to be at a more remote location than in the present urban renewal site. I cannot say that this would be the end of downtown Charlottesville,” said Harris, “If we do not pass this legislation, however, I do feel it would curtail the future growth and

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possibly in the long run result in a depreciation of the values of downtown and real estate.”

Haden said, when asked what effect he thought the program would have on downtown Charlottesville, “I believe it will be helpful. As everybody knows, our business section of the city has been divided largely into two sections—the University section and the downtown section. This Vinegar Hill area has been all my life a very blighted area and it seems to me that if the situation is corrected, the whole business area of Charlottesville will be much helped.”

Haden indicated it would make the business sections more cohesive.”

Asked what he thought the effect would be if the program were defeated, Haden said: “I suppose we would be in the same position we have been for the past 100 years as far as the business area of the town is concerned, and new business will continue to move to the suburbs.”

Asked if he thought the program was important to the economic health of the community, Haden replied: “Very important.”

Trevallian said, “I certainly do favor the adoption of the urban renewal plan. “Public housing and urban renewal for any city is essential if that city is to grow and prosper. Blighted areas are certainly to occur through age and growth and lack of repairs, and usually wind up in the very heart of the city itself.

“Improper housing brings to a locality disease, crime, structural fires and juvenile delinquency. Bad housing is extremely costly—large sums are expended for fire and police protection, health and sanitary service, and administration—yet, they return very little in taxes. Its depreciating effect, and that of hindering logical growth, represents an intangible cost far greater than the direct cost, as shown by Harland Bartholomew and Associates in this report on the city’s masterplan. “All cities are faced with the problem of obsolescence which, if ignored, leads progressively to blight and slum conditions. We must eliminate this condition if it is present by encouraging the rehabilitation of good housing and provide protection and regulation to see that it is maintained.

Congress years ago recognized the necessity of slum clearance in many of our growing cities, and realized that localities could not finance a project of such size. Due to this fact. They appropriated certain sums of money to be used for this specific purpose—cities that could qualify would be included in this program.

Charlottesville has qualified, and the citizens have already paid their fare shares in establishing these funds—it is now our right to participate in the program without further cost. If we fail to take advantage of this—some other cities will—and our only salvation is to do it ourselves. This we know cannot be done without raising taxes completely beyond our citizens’ ability to pay. We must proceed—let’s be sensible—let’s vote for public housing and urban renewal to our fullest.”

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Charlottesville Daily Progress, "Fact and Propaganda," (editorial), June 13, 1960
Transcription (page 1 of 2)

Fact and Propaganda

An anonymous leaflet left on many Charlottesville doorsteps yesterday says the mayor's committee for public information on the redevelopment and housing program "turned out to be only another propaganda device to force you to accept federally financed housing." And for this reason, it goes on, "certain concerned citizens have banded together in an effort to see that the taxpayers are given the complete truth."

But the fact is that the mayor's committee includes leading opponents as well as supporters of the program. All of its decisions as to the information it published were by unanimous vote. And as all who have read its reports know, besides giving information about the program it presented arguments for it as well as against it.

Furthermore, regardless of any possible shortcomings in the committee's work, its members are known. They accept the responsibility for their work. And that is something that can't be said of the sponsors of yesterday's leaflet, whose identity can only be guessed at. Certainly the words of men who stand behind what they say are more to be trusted than those of men who speak anonymously.

So when it comes to a question of who is presenting facts and who is indulging in propaganda, it is the mayor's committee, composed of well known citizens representing both sides of the issue, that has by far the better claim to public confidence. The rightness of this conclusion is confirmed by a reading of the pamphlet prepared by the unidentified "concerned citizens." For in the main it is devoted not to a presentation of facts but to an attempt to breathe new life into the old bugaboo that public housing means racial integration.

Experience clearly proves that it means no such thing. It is true that federal law does not permit the enforcement of segregation in federally assisted public housing, such as is contemplated here. But neither does it require integration. And the fact is that not one of the scores of federally assisted public housing projects that have been built throughout the South under similar programs, including many that have been in operation for years, is racially integrated.

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The only public housing to be provided if the Charlottesville program is approved in the referendum tomorrow will be for Negroes. It will be built at the south end of Ridge Street, in an area already inhabited by Negroes. Under law, it may be supposed, some white family meeting the requirements for residence in such a project might in theory be in a position to bring a successful suit to compel its admission to the project. But that is the only way the project could be “integrated.” And honestly, now, who thinks that is likely to happen? For that matter, if it did happen how would it impair the sight of the rest of the people of this city to the racially separate housing accommodations to which they are accustomed?

Reasonable men can differ in their judgment as to the wisdom of this whole undertaking. There is a case against it as well as for it. This newspaper endorses it in the belief that the benefits to be expected from it far outweigh any possible disadvantages. The great benefit is that a very large sum in federal money—really our money, collected from us in federal taxes—will be made available for the doing of a job of civic improvement that is very much in need of doing. It is every citizen’s right to disagree with this conclusion. But we trust no one will permit himself to be frightened into disagreeing, and into casting an adverse vote in tomorrow’s referendum, by the raising of this “integration” scarecrow. There is no basis for fear on that score. The public housing that is planned will be occupied solely by Negroes; it will be built in an area already occupied by Negroes; it will be in the school district served by a school attended exclusively by Negroes.

One further point:

It is said that the redevelopment of Vinegar Hill could be accomplished by the city itself, without federal assistance and without providing public housing for the families that would be displaced. Perhaps so, although no way had yet been found to overcome some of the obstacles that would be encountered. But if it could be done at all, it could only be done at a cost to the taxpayers of this city vastly greater than the cost to them of the federally assisted program. And if it was nevertheless undertaken despite this great additional cost, what would become of the families that would be displaced? To what part of the city would they move?

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Urban Renewal, Vinegar Hill, 1960
***Charlottesville Daily Progress*, “City Council Approves Vinegar Hill Project,”**
June 28, 1960 Transcription (page 1 of 2)

City Council approved a specific plan for redevelopment of Vinegar Hill yesterday and signed an agreement to contribute about \$400,000 in street construction and utility installations and in land.

The action was taken after a quiet public hearing on the Redevelopment and Housing Authority’s application for a federal loan and grant from the Urban Renewal Administration.

Council then gave notice that at its July 17 meeting, it will consider the long-postponed minimum housing standards ordinance. Action on this ordinance, which would permit condemnation of dwellings for health reasons and safety reasons broader than those currently permitted under the City Building Codes, has been deferred because, until public housing was approved in the July 14 referendum, city officials felt persons whose dwellings were condemned would have no place to move.

Douglas J. Wood Jr., attorney for the Authority and its acting director, gave negative answers to the only two controversial questions that were asked at the public hearing. He said no special provision could be made to relocate Negro businesses in the redevelopment area, and every effort would be made to avoid controversial placement of displaced families when new homes are found for them outside the Vinegar Hill area.

In response to a letter from W.R. Bingler Jr. asking that surveys be made now and again five years after the area is redeveloped so the true economic effect of redevelopment could be determined, Council voted to have a survey made of gross income, taxes paid and similar data from businesses now located in the redevelopment area.

Questions from the floor were from Lionel S. Key, who asked if there would be any “block-busting” in relocation of Negro families whose homes will be demolished in redeveloping Vinegar Hill , and from Mrs. Arthur M. Smith, who asked if part of the redevelopment area could be set aside for Negro businesses displaced from their present quarters during the project.

Wood gave negative answers to both questions.

Citation: “City Council Approves Vinegar Hill Project” (excerpt) Charlottesville Daily Progress, June 28, 1960

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He said relocation would be handled by two full-time employees of the Authority, and that “every effort will be made to avoid” controversial placements of families with whom this agency carries out its work. Most of the Negro families relocated from the Vinegar Hill area will go into public housing units when they are completed, but some families will not qualify for public housing because their incomes are above the maximum set for eligibility.

Wood said the Authority is prohibited from discriminating on the ground of race in disposing of property after Vinegar Hill is redeveloped, and that this would prohibit restriction of any one section to Negro businesses. He said Negro business is envisioned developing along Fourth Street NW north of Inge’s market, as this land will be less expensive than that along Main Street and other principal street but that none of the land can be sold at less than a reasonable cost.

Mrs. Smith had suggested some land be reserved especially for Negro businesses displaced from their present locations, and asked if arrangements could be made to assure those affected that sites would be available in the area after redevelopment.”

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