

Learning Lessons from the Urban Renewal Era

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The Regional Plan Association (RPA), the nearly 100-year-old independent, not-for-profit research, planning, and advocacy organization devoted to improving life in the tristate area of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, has recently released its *Fourth Regional Plan*, subtitled *Making the Region Work for All of Us*. Much as it did in its previous plans of 1929, 1968, and 1996, the RPA has set out to identify the most pressing problems facing the region and to offer solutions it considers promising and feasible. Each plan serves as a fascinating window into what analysts at the time considered the greatest impediments to a thriving Greater New York area as well as how they proposed to address them.

The 1929 report, *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, was ambitiously and optimistically forward looking, laying out a blueprint for the transportation, open space, and planning infrastructures deemed necessary to make New York the global city it indeed became by the middle of the century. The *Second Regional Plan of 1968* was more sober, as it began to recognize the price the region was paying for prosperity and called for robust remedies to better tie the tristate area together rather than encourage continued sprawl. Recommendations included extensive mass transit; greater investment in smaller cities and commercial districts, such as Stamford, White Plains, Newark, and downtown Brooklyn; the necessity for more mixed-income and mixed-use neighborhoods; and an aggressive program of acquiring and protecting natural resources and landscapes before they disappeared with development. The federal government was assumed to be a partner in making many of these investments.

The *Third Regional Plan of 1996* was more guarded still. Coming on the heels of the recession of the early 1990s, it warned that the region's continued success and global standing were not guaranteed without major new investments in infrastructure, ranging from

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schools to transit; in mixed-use expansion into New York City's Far West Side; in land conservation; and in institutions better capable of financing and delivering regional services. Today's *Fourth Regional Plan* is the most wide-ranging and cautionary of them all in the concerns it raises and the recommendations it makes. Some topics very much speak to preoccupations of this moment—such as preparing for climate change post-Hurricane Sandy and making more healthy, fresh food widely available—but the general thrust of the report acknowledges the worsening of long-persistent problems of equity and affordability, particularly how inequalities of income and racial status continue to undermine the future prospects of the tristate region. Strikingly, in a printed report of more than four hundred pages, there is little mention of any key role for the federal government, other than occasional laments about the decline in its funding. Almost all attention focuses on the respective responsibilities of states, localities, the private sector, and newly imagined semipublic regional authorities for rebuilding crumbling infrastructure and creating a more equitable and affordable region for all its residents. There could be no clearer articulation of the political realities of the present moment.¹

Not surprisingly, what this current regional plan does not include is much historical perspective. I have just published a book on evolving strategies for urban revitalization from the 1950s through the 1980s, with particular attention to efforts in New York State and New York City from 1968 to 1985. This book, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age*, uses the career of a major figure in urban redevelopment to track how strategies of addressing urban decline in an era of mass suburbanization and urban disinvestment shifted over time.² Challenging the blanket dismissal of all “urban renewal” in the postwar era as unchanging and disastrous, *Saving America's Cities* explores both its successes and failures and the altered roles played over time by localities, states, and the federal government. What emerges is a history of more nuanced, experimental, and evolutionary responses to many of the same kinds of crises that the RPA's reports have persistently documented and decried over almost a century. There is much that today's policy makers, government officials, planners, and ordinary citizens might learn by looking backward as well as forward in seeking “a new kind of inclusive growth that fosters equity, sustainability and health, and makes a region that works for all,” in the words of Tom Wright, president of the Regional Plan Association.³

First, some background on Ed Logue and how his career in urban redevelopment

1. Regional Plan Association, *The Fourth Regional Plan: Making the Region Work for All of Us* (New York: Author, 2019), description of RPA and description of previous plans, 379–87; also available at <https://fourthplan.org> (2017). See also Tom Wright, “The Regional Plan Association: A Civic Planning Model for New York,” *The Urbanist*, August 12, 2013.

2. Elizabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2019). The analysis of this essay is more fully developed in the book. See the book for more details and greater documentation beyond these footnotes.

3. Regional Plan Association, “RPA Releases Fourth Regional Plan for NY-NJ-CT Region,” November 30, 2017, www.rpa.org/article/rpa-releases-fourth-regional-plan-for-ny-nj-ct-region.

brought him to New York. He was born in Philadelphia, was educated at Yale College and Yale Law School, and began his work in the urbanism field upon returning to New Haven after working in India as special assistant to Ambassador (and former Connecticut Governor) Chester Bowles, under whom he had served as Connecticut labor secretary. Bowles and Logue were liberals on civil rights and advocates for government—particularly at the federal level—playing an important role in creating a more equitable and democratic America. In Connecticut, the Bowles administration had tried to implement a “Little New Deal,” bringing to that long Republican stronghold a more progressive agenda adapted from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s national-level New Deal—until the voters booted the Bowles administration out.

In India, Logue was inspired by U.S. government- and Ford Foundation–funded programs in community development, which assumed that modernizing the physical infrastructure of Indian villages—such as roads, wells, housing, and schools—would help improve lives and create a more democratic Indian society, a desirable American goal in the Cold War world of the early 1950s. Logue brought those lessons on the social and political virtues of physical renewal back with him to the United States, where he found a partner in the newly elected reform mayor of New Haven, Richard C. Lee. Lee had ridden to victory on a platform of revitalizing a rapidly declining New Haven. Although the city had flourished with robust manufacturing and a central position in transportation networks during the nineteenth-century industrial age, by the mid-twentieth century it was struggling with plant closings, job losses, the decline of downtown retail, and the suburban exodus of middle-class residents, while new African American migrants were arriving, hoping to secure good industrial employment and a better life than the American South offered them. With Logue serving as development administrator, Lee and Logue together aggressively pursued the new resources Washington was making available under the Housing Act of 1949 and its successors to revitalize troubled cities like New Haven in the face of booming suburbanization. Lee and Logue’s goal was nothing less than to create a model city of urban renewal. Through their will and their wits they attracted more federal dollars per capita to New Haven than any other American city was getting.

There were some successes in New Haven’s effort, but overall it epitomized many of the flaws in the first stage of urban renewal during the early 1950s: too much demolition of the old city, too much mimicking of new suburban solutions such as car dependence and shopping malls, and too much displacement of current residents while reconstructing deteriorating but far-from-dead neighborhoods. But it is also important to acknowledge the renewers’ achievements. In an effort that had the support of established African American organizations such as New Haven’s NAACP chapter (and met opposition from many white residents), the urban renewers promoted a vision of neighborhoods and schools that were mixed in income and race—an ideal that Logue would embrace throughout his career. They also recognized that renewal needed to include social services as well as physical improvements and established an agency called Community Progress, Inc. It implemented programs that, by the mid-1960s, became signature elements of President Lyndon Baines

Johnson's War on Poverty, such as Head Start, the Job Corps, and Neighborhood Legal Services. And with the help of new regulations accompanying the Housing Act of 1954, Logue and Lee introduced more rehabilitation of existing structures, not just demolition and rebuilding, into the city's urban renewal.

After seven years in New Haven—and before opposition to urban renewal became more vocal, particularly from a younger, more radically activist generation of black New Haveners—Logue was recruited to lead the redevelopment of the larger New England city of Boston by another newly elected Democratic mayor, John Collins. Collins was a dark horse candidate who was independent of the long-established Democratic machine of James Michael Curley, which had rewarded white ethnic neighborhoods while heavily taxing—and alienating—downtown business interests. Consequently, the city that Collins inherited was on the verge of bankruptcy, suffering much of the same disinvestment that New Haven had, but still boasting a Yankee elite with deep pockets, just ones that had not been opened to the city for many years. Instead, business leaders leapfrogged over the city, controlling it as much as possible from the Massachusetts statehouse.

In the 1950s, Boston had experienced its own destructive first phase of urban renewal, when most notably the West End immigrant neighborhood was demolished and replaced with luxury apartment towers intended to attract middle-class residents to the city. But by the time Logue arrived to head the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), there was general agreement by all, including Collins and Logue, that the clearance-style approach to urban renewal was misguided. Hence, Logue developed strategies in Boston that reflected lessons learned in New Haven as well as new sensibilities on his part.

With its focus on both downtown and neighborhoods, Logue's Boston renewal plans exhibited several principles beyond avoiding excessive demolition. Federal dollars were still crucial, but not just for their cash value. In the development of a Government Center downtown, Logue used public sector commitments as leverage to jumpstart private investment and force the hand of reluctant business elites. Accepting the inevitability of residential suburbanization, he made a priority of keeping jobs in the city. Contrary to many assumptions about urban renewal, Logue also came to appreciate the importance of preserving historic buildings in this centuries-old city; Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market, the Old Statehouse, Sears Crescent, and the old City Hall, for example, were all eventually incorporated into renewal plans.

In the neighborhoods, Logue learned quickly that he needed to identify negotiating partners from within the community to undertake any redevelopment. Doing so was not always easy, as different groups vied to speak for a community. But it is noteworthy that no predictable pattern emerged where local elites always won what one observer called the "rehabilitation planning game."⁴ For example, in the Washington Park area of Roxbury, black

4. Langley Carleton Keyes Jr., *The Rehabilitation Planning Game: A Study in the Diversity of Neighborhood* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1969).

middle-class homeowners welcomed urban renewal as a way of preserving the one neighborhood in Boston where they could purchase houses. In poorer and more deteriorated Madison Park a mile and a half away, low-income residents successfully pressured the BRA for replacement housing to be added to plans for a new high school. Building that housing became the first project of one of the earliest community development corporations in the nation, the Lower Roxbury Community Corporation.

There were plenty of contentious moments between Logue's BRA and neighborhood residents over renewal plans and implementation. Most common were complaints that more housing was being torn down than being replaced, and that the new options tended to cost more than many former tenants could afford. Logue's BRA itself expressed much frustration over limits to federal funding available for rent subsidies and replacement housing. But in the end, despite these tensions, some Boston neighborhoods worked in partnership with the BRA. As South End community activist Mel King explained it, although he felt that Logue put too much priority on downtown over the neighborhoods, he gave him credit for setting the stage for neighborhood groups to get involved in housing development. In contrast to private-sector-driven redevelopment, the public process required with city, state, and federal urban renewal financing provided a way for a mobilized community to participate.⁵ This neighborhood organizing experience would in fact make possible the great victory of the early 1970s—after Logue left town—where popular protests stopped the construction of the Inner Belt and Southwest Expressway, highways that would have slashed through many Boston-area neighborhoods. By the time Logue stepped down from leading the BRA in 1967, the city bore some wounds but was widely acknowledged as being well on its way to becoming a more thriving “New Boston.”

Logue's next job brought him to New York State in the summer of 1968, in an initiative that the RPA would do well to take stock of, given common goals with the *Fourth Regional Plan* and the major roles it assigns to state agencies, semipublic authorities, and the private sector. Governor Nelson Rockefeller, after suffering voters' repeated defeats of his bond issues to build much-needed subsidized housing in the state, came up with a new approach: the creation of a state superagency—legally a public authority. This new entity would have the mandate to build thousands of units of subsidized housing as well as to undertake industrial, commercial, and civic projects aimed at revitalizing the many New York cities struggling with deindustrialization. It would do this with the help of extensive powers to override local zoning and building codes, implement eminent domain, and be exempt from normal taxation. Called the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC), it would be funded by a combination of state appropriations, existing federal programs, and most controversially, sales to private investors of what were labeled “moral obligation bonds,” to be backed by the state if ever necessary. Although not receiving the

5. Mel King, interview by Lizabeth Cohen, June 17, 2009, Boston, MA; “New Boston' Planner Comes Back for More,” *Boston Herald*, January 12, 1988.

state's full faith and credit, which required voter approval, this bond instrument had the blessing of John Mitchell, the municipal bond lawyer who later became President Richard Nixon's ill-fated attorney general during Watergate.

Shifting the initiative and funding for urban renewal to the state and private sector appealed to Rockefeller, who, although a liberal in many ways, retained the Republican faith in these alternatives to the federal government, which had seemed only to be growing in power and prestige over the postwar era, most recently with Johnson's Great Society. For Logue, a die-hard New Dealer who believed deeply in the capacity and necessity of federal action, Rockefeller's proposal nonetheless held some great appeals. He was becoming increasingly frustrated with how the cost of the Vietnam War was wreaking havoc on Johnson's domestic programs, particularly housing and other urban assistance. He was also often frustrated with all the red tape that accompanied grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development; he hoped that these alternative sources of funding might expedite the process. And he was excited about finally being in the position to pursue metropolitan-level initiatives to tackle the inequities within cities and between cities and their suburbs. In New Haven and in Boston, he had called for better sharing with suburbs the burden of housing low-income residents and providing them with good quality schools and other services—to no avail. Now, armed with big bucks and a statewide mandate, he envisioned what from his earliest days at the UDC he described as "Fair Share Housing." In short, Logue saw little downside from these new state and private funding arrangements. Although he knew that the New York State legislature only reluctantly approved the UDC, he was confident that he, as UDC president and CEO, would be fully in charge, still a public servant entrusted with the public interest, if one fortunate enough to benefit from new sources of capital. And, of course, federal grants would still be crucial.

The UDC, unique on so many levels, opened for business on July 1, 1968. Rockefeller had used the occasion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination the previous April to call for a "true memorial to Martin Luther King . . . made [not] of stone . . . [but] of action" and then engaged in extensive arm twisting of state legislators, who feared infringements on the home rule of their constituents' communities. Eventually, he managed to wrangle a positive vote.⁶

One of the major recommendations in the RPA's *Fourth Regional Plan* is to "make sure all neighborhoods include homes that are affordable for low-income households, and that fair housing regulations are enforced." This will only be accomplished, the report continues, if every community offers "more multifamily, affordable housing . . . [which] will require reforming zoning and financing rules to facilitate more transit-oriented and mixed-use development." The current situation, where large numbers of "low- to moderate-income

6. Statement by Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, April 5, 1968, Public Papers of Nelson Rockefeller, 1968, New York State Library, 1039, quoted in Richard Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Random House, 2014), 522.



Governor Nelson Rockefeller signing the legislation creating the New York State Urban Development Corporation, 1968. (COURTESY OF DIGITAL COLLECTIONS OF THE NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES.)

households, 70 percent of them Black or Hispanic, are at risk from displacement . . . is largely the result of discriminatory policies over decades, such as unequal access to financing, restrictive covenants, and redlining that prohibited people of color from living in the region's new and desirable communities in the suburbs." Today, "the New York Region continues to rank as one of the most racially and economically segmented metropolitan areas in the United States."⁷

Much of the same reality had greeted Logue when he arrived in New York in 1968, and it motivated many of his efforts as head of the UDC until its demise in 1975. In fact, the strategies he employed to overcome both past flaws in urban renewal practices and popular resistance to creating mixed-income and mixed-race communities are instructive, as the RPA continues to chastise the region for housing inequity and segregation.

Logue recognized the damage that urban renewal had done to cities as well as its own reputation, with its overly aggressive demolishing of existing buildings and displacing of their residents, and sought alternative approaches in New York State. As he told a conference of colleagues in 1970, "We cannot repeat the mistake of the Housing Act of 1949,"

7. Regional Plan Association, *Fourth Regional Plan*, 239, 240, 242, 247.

which “put all of the emphasis on rebuilding, tearing down and rehabilitating in the inner city. . . . [A]nd city solutions alone will not work.”⁸ Logue’s desire to have a big impact and to foster socially mixed communities, but without the controversies of the past, propelled him to embrace new sources of land for UDC projects. The first were languishing former urban renewal sites that existed in many cities, where clearing had taken place but no developer had stepped forward with a project.

The other approach consisted of identifying sizable tracts of open land outside major urban centers that could be turned into New Towns. New Towns had been relatively rare in the United States. The British Garden City Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had inspired only a handful of American replicas, such as Radburn, New Jersey, and Sunnyside Gardens and Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, New York. Under the New Deal, a few more ambitious New Towns had emerged—most notably, Greenbelt, Maryland, and Roosevelt, New Jersey. Early in the postwar years, prominent commercial developers had founded Reston, Virginia; Columbia, Maryland; and Irvine, California. But the real momentum behind the concept of a self-contained planned community that integrated residential, work, and civic life took place in Europe, where governments looked to New Towns as an ideal way to recover from massive wartime destruction. By the time he arrived at the UDC, Logue had carefully tracked the emergence of New Towns worldwide and had visited many of them. What attracted him to both of these strategies for creating new residences was how it freed him from so many of the traps of old-style urban renewal. Now, “I don’t have to condemn it. I don’t have to relocate any families. I don’t have to demolish any buildings.”⁹

The UDC created three New Towns—two in upstate New York and the most successful one, Roosevelt Island (the former Welfare Island), in New York City’s East River between Manhattan and Queens. In these towns, and in much of the rest of the 33,000 units of housing that the UDC managed to create before it collapsed, the UDC was committed to creating communities that were integrated along the lines of income, race, and age. Over the years, Logue had become convinced that a mix of residents was the key to ensuring more stable and better-resourced communities. Otherwise, the better-off always got the best. Efforts to implement this ideal in previous redevelopment efforts in New Haven and Boston, however, had been difficult. Too often, it was impossible to force white communities to open up to lower-income whites or blacks. And integrating low-income black neighborhoods often meant that more white, middle-class residents moved in,

8. Edward J. Logue, “A Summing Up,” from the New York State Urban Development Corporation, *Urban America, The Proceedings of the Conference at Tarrytown*, New York, 1970, 221.

9. Edward J. Logue, interview by Ivan Steen, October 31, 1986, Lincoln, MA, in Edward J. Logue Papers, 2002 Addition, Box 21, Folder “EJL Rockefeller Oral History,” Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives, New Haven, CT (hereafter Steen), transcript, 6. I am indebted to Ivan Steen for generously sharing the recordings and transcriptions of his ten interviews with Logue from 1983 to 1991, which are also available in Logue’s papers at Yale.



The New Town of Roosevelt Island on the former Welfare Island in the East River of New York City, under construction, with new buildings as well as the repurposing of historical structures. *The Roosevelt Island Housing Competition*, New York State Urban Development Corporation, 1974.

antagonizing current inhabitants, who understandably feared that their foothold would slip with gentrification.

In contrast, Logue hoped that constructing new socially mixed communities from scratch would achieve the residential diversity he sought. As Logue wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, the danger of “destructive confrontations with opponents already on the turf” would thus be diminished, “since all the occupants of the new community are, so to speak, volunteers.” And if prospective residents “don’t like our mix, well don’t bother to come.”¹⁰ After much internal discussion, the UDC finally decided that the ideal social mix for residential projects would be an allocation formula of 70 percent moderate and middle income, 20 percent low income, and 10 percent elderly low income, all subsidized but at different levels. They felt that this balance held the most promise of retaining middle-income people who still needed assistance, while also housing the more economically disadvantaged, who would benefit this way from higher quality services. The UDC was also explicit about seeking racial diversity, to an extent rare today in the wake of the landmark

10. Edward J. Logue, “Piecing the Political Pie,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, May 15, 1971, 29; Logue, interview, October 31, 1986, Lincoln, MA, Steen, 15.

Regents of the University of California v. Bakke Supreme Court decision of 1978 and its successors, which barred many kinds of racial quotas. By 1975, 33 percent of UDC residents statewide were low income and 42 percent were minority. While Roosevelt Island was under construction, Logue explained his ambition for it to an interviewer: “It is perhaps our last chance to demonstrate that people of different incomes, races, and ethnic origins can live together . . . and that they can send their children to the same public schools.”¹¹

Actually establishing the diverse communities that the UDC sought proved challenging, both in New Towns and in other projects. Upstate, the jurisdictions where both New Towns would legally reside—Audubon in Amherst near Buffalo and Lysander in Baldwinsville outside of Syracuse—fought the UDC on the grounds that the new communities would bring new burdens to local services like schools. Less frequently said but even more influential, they feared the diversity of population that they knew the UDC sought. The *Buffalo Evening News* did not hold back, however. Homeowners, it claimed, feared “moving the ghetto to Amherst.”¹² In both cases the lawsuits were lost and the New Towns proceeded. The UDC had a much harder time, however, when it set out to implement Logue’s dream of a metropolitan New York Fair Share Housing program, just the kind of effort that the RPA is calling for today.

In many ways, Logue’s effort to build 100 units of subsidized housing in each of the nine Westchester County towns was his Waterloo.¹³ He had always been careful to use his unusual power to override local zoning sparingly and often in response to a local request. But faced with the exclusionary “snob zoning” of many New York suburbs, he felt he had no choice, particularly when the UDC’s efforts to work with local communities resulted instead in vicious public meetings, denunciations of intrusive “big daddy government,” and personal threats against Logue himself. The UDC staff had intentionally kept its approach limited in scope, hoping to minimize its impact on any one community. The projects were designed to be low-profile, garden apartment-style buildings. Rental priority was given first to current town residents, then to town and school district staff, and finally to employees of local businesses, with Vietnam veterans favored in all categories. In its prospectus, the UDC promised that each development would be “marketed . . . with the objective of achieving a minority occupancy of approximately 20 percent,” a goal that the UDC considered conservative.¹⁴

Confident at first that its modest plan would put to rest any suburban fears of a large invasion of poor blacks from the Bronx or Harlem, the UDC was in for a surprise. What followed was a firestorm of protest. In town after town, something approximating a civil war

11. Carlos C. Campbell, *New Towns: Another Way to Live* (Reston, VA: Reston Publishing, Prentice-Hall, 1976), 209, 214.

12. *Buffalo Evening News*, November 24, 1969, quoted in Ed Durbin, “Contesting Suburbia: The Struggle for Suburban Space in Western New York” (paper, Oxford University, Oxford, UK, May 2012).

13. The nine towns were Bedford, Cortlandt, Greenburgh, Harrison, Lewisboro, New Castle, North Castle, Somers, and Yorktown.

14. “Housing: How Ed Logue Does It,” *Newsweek*, November 6, 1972.



Protesters at a public hearing on the UDC's Fair Share Housing program in Bedford, Westchester County, 1972. *Annual Report of the New York State Urban Development Corporation, 1972.*

broke out. In favor were civic groups like the League of Women Voters; all the black organizations in the county united under the flag of the Coalition of Black Westchester Residents; and many clergy, inspired by the unequivocal message of the liberal Episcopal bishop Paul Moore Jr. to his ministers: “You have my total backing in endeavoring to make decent housing possible in Westchester, even when such an effort brings you into conflict with some powerful members of the community or perhaps even the Church.”¹⁵ The opponents, galvanized by a newly formed citizens group, United Towns for Home Rule, turned informational forums into raucous, foot-stomping rallies, aggressively lobbied their elected officials, brought lawsuits against the UDC, and generally whipped up hysteria that this one crack in the zoning wall would invite in a torrent of development and diversity.

Rockefeller, who had endorsed Logue's plan when first proposed with enthusiasm and optimism—“Go ahead! What a wonderful idea. It isn't going to hurt anybody too much”—soon found himself bombarded with objections from all directions.¹⁶ Particularly worrisome were the ones from Republican officeholders up for reelection. As one town

15. “Bishop Urges UDC Support Even in Conflict with Church Members,” *Harrison Independent*, July 26, 1972.

16. Edward J. Logue, interview, August 4, 1983, quoted in Gerald Benjamin and T. Norman Hurt, eds., *Rockefeller in Retrospect: The Governor's New York Legacy* (Albany, NY: Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, 1984), 211; Logue, interview by Frank Jones, April 1999, Martha's Vineyard, MA, Edward J. Logue Papers, 2007 Addition, Box 2, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives, New Haven, CT, Transcript, Tape 3:34.

supervisor explained, “It would be political suicide for me in an election year to support UDC openly.”¹⁷ This response was hardly surprising, when anti-UDC Westchester County supervisors were issuing such nasty statements as “we have some agonizing liberal supervisors in Westchester County who have seen fit to go to bed with the UDC dog and now they’re waking up with fleas.”¹⁸ Rockefeller first called for a several-month moratorium on Fair Share Housing until January 15, 1973, hoping to give towns time to come up with their own alternative plans. But in the end, hostility toward the program gained too much momentum, and in June 1973, Rockefeller reluctantly signed a bill curtailing the UDC’s power to override local zoning in New York State’s villages and towns, only keeping it in cities. (He compensated the UDC by giving it an additional \$3 million in appropriations to cover the costs of closing down the project and an increase from \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion in bonding authority.) Fair Share Housing was essentially dead.

Although the RPA’s *Fourth Regional Plan* is articulate about the persistent economic and racial segregation of the Greater New York area, it does not propose remedies that would give responsibility for enforcement to jurisdictions other than municipalities, counties, and occasionally the state, and even those are vague calls for cities and states “to be more proactive in protecting vulnerable residents from displacement” and to “update zoning to facilitate more housing production, especially near transit” while also “allowing accessory dwellings.”¹⁹ One could argue this is not unlike leaving voting rights protections to localities, without the muscle of national voting rights legislation. The UDC experience with Fair Share Housing should serve as a cautionary tale about the difficulty of achieving a more demographically balanced metropolitan area. The persistence of the conditions that Logue had set out to address more than half a century ago should likewise be sobering.

Logue’s UDC experience has another important lesson to impart to those committed to an aggressive program of constructing a large amount of affordable housing. Although the UDC boasted of its newfound sources of funding to undertake the physical renewal of the state, in reality federal dollars were always the most dependable source of capital. So when Nixon announced a national moratorium on housing subsidies of all kinds for eighteen months, beginning in January 1973, until new programs could be developed that limited what he considered the federal government’s excessive involvement in urban renewal and housing provisions, the UDC faced a crisis. Nixon’s desire for devolution in federal authority undermined much of the financial basis for the UDC’s activities. And as federal withdrawal destabilized the UDC’s funding model, private investors found more reason—beyond the growing instability of the state’s finances and their increasing distrust that the

17. Quoted in Eleanor L. Brilliant, *The Urban Development Corporation: Private Interests and Public Authority* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, D. C. Heath, 1975), 142.

18. Quoted in Elizabeth Simonoff, “Town Will Sue UDC,” *Patent Trader* (Mount Kisco, NY, newspaper), July 13, 1972.

19. Regional Plan Association, “RPA Releases Fourth Regional Plan for NY-NJ-CT Region,” November 30, 2017, www.rpa.org/article/rpa-releases-fourth-regional-plan-for-ny-nj-ct-region.

state would live up to its moral obligation to back UDC bonds—to issue an ultimatum that the UDC do nothing more than complete the projects it had started. Logue resisted, arguing that the UDC was basically sound and still doing crucial work. When a new Democratic governor, Hugh Carey, took over in Albany in January 1975, the UDC's days became numbered. Logue was forced to resign in anticipation of the UDC's massive default on its bonds, which indeed happened in February.

After the UDC's debacle, Governor Carey convened a blue-ribbon Moreland Act Commission to investigate—and make recommendations about the future of—the UDC and similar state authorities backed by moral obligation bonds. It met for more than a year, was staffed by thirty lawyers, accountants, and housing specialists, interviewed at least 100 witnesses, and examined more than five hundred thousand documents. On March 31, 1976, it issued a lengthy final report titled *Restoring Credit and Confidence: A Reform Program for New York State and Its Public Authorities*. Although there were many enemies of the UDC, including private sector investors, who hoped that the commission would uncover malfeasance at the UDC, Logue and his organization were cleared of any wrongdoing, other than sloppy accounting and indulging their ambition to build over their responsibility to investors. Instead, the commission concluded that the basic cause of the UDC's downfall could be attributed to the contradiction between its social mission to aggressively provide housing for low- and moderate-income state residents and its fiscal mandate to do so at no cost to taxpayers.

In short, there was a mismatch between the UDC's charge and the agency's financial structure, with its dependence on a federal government that was steadily withdrawing support, on private investors who expected a profit and had no intention of supporting a social welfare agency, and on a state legislature skeptical of empowering such an independent authority within a state that was increasingly debt-ridden. As *New York Times* journalist and close UDC observer Joseph Fried boldly put it, the “fundamental issue raised by the plight of the Urban Development Corporation . . . goes to the heart of the fact—which this country still does not acknowledge—that only a long-range, public effort will make possible the construction and rehabilitation needed if 10 million or more American families are to live in decent housing and decent neighborhoods.” He continued that the “skittish and volatile” private investment market “can hardly be expected to have the staying power to underwrite a task as difficult” as this one. “Rather,” he asserted, “the job must be done by American society generally, and that means sufficient public funds for subsidized housing and redevelopment programs to begin with, as well as a willingness by government to take the ultimate risk when it does seek to draw private capital into the effort.”²⁰ Fried's warning of the pitfalls involved in depending on the private sector and tolerating a lack of commitment from the federal government would be worth the RPA heeding. Minimally, the RPA might want to reconsider its failure to pressure the federal government to contribute more

20. Joseph P. Fried, “The Roof Falls In,” *The Nation*, August 15, 1975, 102–106.

generously to the enormous costs of providing sufficient affordable housing and rebuilding the region's crumbling infrastructure.

In contrast to the warnings raised by Logue's UDC experience, his last major job in the field of urban redevelopment provides a positive model for one of the *Fourth Regional Plan's* recommendations: "target middle-income programs to home ownership, not rental housing." That proposal to incentivize and help this group become homeowners is based on both the "stability provided by homeownership" to both individuals and communities and the desirability of removing them from "the rental market, where they are often able to outbid lower-income households, therefor reducing the affordable rental stock."²¹ After three years of licking his wounds and working as a consultant and visiting university instructor following the UDC's ignominious end, Logue finally got himself back into a full-time position in his chosen field of redevelopment. He was appointed in 1978 by New York City Mayor Edward Koch to be president of the South Bronx Development Organization (SBDO). Here he found himself with much less power, many fewer dollars to spend, and the most serious urban problems he had ever encountered. And he had to operate in the post-Nixon era of fewer public sector tools to work with and greater dependence on the private sector. The SBDO was a small, scrappy organization that was officially a city department but without much funding or authority—only what Logue called a "hunting license" to search out resources to address the deep problems facing a South Bronx ravished by poverty, arson, and abandonment. Here he pieced together remnants of federal and state programs and resources from foundations and a new entity to emerge in this era—a spin-off of the Ford Foundation called the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which served as an intermediary between private sources of funding and worthy urban projects.

The SBDO engaged in economic development, seeking to attract new businesses that would provide jobs; planned a couple industrial parks; established a robust human services program; and focused most intensively on providing more subsidized housing. The centerpiece of that effort was Charlotte Gardens, an unusual project that departed in every way from the architecturally innovative housing designs that Logue had promoted at the UDC. It consisted of ninety ranch-style, prefabricated houses for purchase with heavy subsidies on devastated blocks of the South Bronx. Logue's goal was to take advantage of the era's pressure on the private sector to lend in the communities where they did business and thereby create homeowner anchors to help the neighborhood revive. Despite skepticism by many, including architects and planners who balked at the introduction of low-density, suburban-style housing, the project was a huge success, with hundreds of Bronx residents hoping to qualify to buy a home. Lower-middle-class police, firefighters, teachers, security guards, and the like—most of them black and Latino—were eager for the opportunity to own the kind of home that they could not afford or would not find accessible to them

21. Regional Plan Association, *Fourth Regional Plan*, 264.



Prefabricated, single-family houses for purchase, with large subsidies, going up in Charlotte Gardens in the South Bronx during the early 1980s. (COURTESY OF PETER BRAY.)

in predominantly white suburbia. Although the immediate beneficiaries were few, Logue's SBDO was credited with inspiring Mayor Koch's ten-year housing plan that followed it and eventually contributed to turning around the South Bronx, a process that is still ongoing. The RPA's *Fourth Regional Plan*, in fact, notes that although the communities of the South Bronx suffered more than any other area of New York City during the 1970s and 1980s, "since then these neighborhoods of the South Bronx have undergone a dramatic community-led transformation: between 2005 and 2015, the Bronx outpaced the city as a whole in both job and population growth."²²

Logue's SBDO experience is instructive not just for how homeownership helped the community revitalize, but also because, for probably the first time in his career, Logue fully collaborated with a grassroots local community. With few supporters he could count on in City Hall, Albany, or Washington, he turned to the community planning boards in the area and an activist neighborhood community development corporation—the Mid Bronx Desperadoes (MBD)—to be his partners. The MBD was so named by its founder, a local African American resident named Genevieve Brooks, "because we were desperate. Our streets

22. Regional Plan Association, *Fourth Regional Plan*, 350.



New York City Mayor Edward Koch speaking at the dedication of Charlotte Gardens, April 17, 1983, with South Bronx Development Organization President Ed Logue to the right and a neighborhood resident to the left. (COURTESY OF PETER BRAY.)

were lined with garbage, we had drug trafficking and arson. We needed everything, especially decent housing.²³ Brooks had joined forces with a local Catholic priest, Father William J. Smith, by the time Logue arrived in the South Bronx. They and the SBDO divided the work on Charlotte Gardens, with the SBDO overseeing the funding and construction of the homes, and the MBD, with its thorough knowledge of the community, undertaking the soliciting, screening, and selecting of buyers for the much sought-after homes. Brooks herself interviewed every one of the hundreds of families who applied, gave counseling sessions in home purchasing and ownership, encouraged buyers to get involved in the community, and in every other way possible tried to make Charlotte Gardens successful. The deep roots that the SBDO hoped the pioneer residents of Charlotte Gardens would plant in the South Bronx were only possible because representatives of the local community seeded and nurtured them, which is another lesson for those seeking to implement the home ownership recommendation of the RPA.

The Regional Plan Association is to be applauded for its vigilance in monitoring the tristate region's development over almost a century. In persistently assessing the New York metropolitan area's strengths as well as its glaring weaknesses and inequities, it has provided documentation of enormous value to historians, planners, and policy makers. My hope is that all who struggle today to address the very difficult challenges facing the region

23. Kathleen Teltsch, "Once Desperate, a Bronx Housing Group Earns Praise," *New York Times*, October 30, 1987.

will see this nearly 100-year record not simply as an archive, but also as a useful bank of efforts made—some successful, others not. Ed Logue’s long career hopefully demonstrates that urban renewal was not one failed undertaking to be dismissed out of hand, but rather a more changing, improvisational, often times effective effort to intervene on behalf of cities and their less well-off residents. Even if the strategies tried did not always work, the determination to hold the public sector responsible for solving metropolitan area problems should inspire us in an age when so much is being left to the profit-making private sector to resolve. It has been half a century since the federal government began its retreat in funding and political support for cities. That the Fourth Regional Plan has found so many problems to be longstanding and even worsened today should inspire us to reevaluate our current repertoire of approaches and perhaps even look back to successful models from the past.