

Did I say slums? Housing Reform in the City of Los Angeles

For Presentation at the 2002
Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) Conference

Baltimore, Maryland

November 23, 2002

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INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles has a popular image as a sprawling urbanization with large concrete freeways, endless single-family dwellings and unattractive strip malls. It is commonly perceived as an unplanned metropolis, long subject to the whims of real estate entrepreneurs and land barons and serving the needs of the middle and upper classes. As the editors of one of the recent books looking at the state of Los Angeles describe:

Most everyone considers it a “developers’ city. Residents and critics have interpreted the city-building process here as unfettered and expansive growth and the region as undifferentiated, monotonous, and chaotic. (Hise et al., 1996, p. 6)

Popular images, of course, do not always represent reality very well. Real estate and business interests have certainly played a central role in the development of the city, but it is clearly not simply a suburban paradise. Despite the common perception of Los Angeles as a paradise of single-family homes along streets lined with palm trees, there has long been evidence of slum conditions in the city. For example, Charles Abrams observed about mid-twentieth century Los Angeles:

Behind the palm trees are grim four-story wooden structures affording a miserable shelter to tens of thousands of families....Unlike those in older cities, the slums in this sprawling community are not all in the central areas; many lie hidden on the hills, along side roads, or behind store fronts. Shacks made of old crates and little garages on back alleys house thousands of recent immigrants. In one wooden tenement I saw a single hot-water faucet servicing some seventy-two families, a condition outlawed in New York fifty years ago. (1950, p. 177)

Unlike New York, however, evidence of these horrible living conditions in Los Angeles did not immediately translate into significant tenant or community-based housing movements, nor in noteworthy housing reform in the local political sphere. Los Angeles did not develop a significant amount of public housing, due in large part to opposition by real estate interests, and the city’s only means for addressing urban blight for many years was through the local redevelopment agency (Parson, 1985). The first instance of significant housing reform in the city was not until at least the end of the 1970s and 1980s, when rent control was passed, the city Housing Department was founded, and Community Development Corporations first came onto the scene (Goetz, 1993).

Despite the dominance of private sector interests in Los Angeles real estate and a relatively weak record on housing reform, the City of Los Angeles undertook a major slum housing reform effort near the end of the 1990s when it created a new \$8 million Systematic Code Enforcement Program. Initiated by a group of community leaders and political activists who began meeting in 1996, this reform effort resulted in a highly regulatory code enforcement program. This program was designed to be “proactive” in addressing housing disinvestment and deterioration, with the goal of inspecting all 750,000 apartments in the city every three years. Slum housing, urban disinvestment and abandonment are more commonly associated with Eastern cities that have experienced population decline over the past several decades than with a growing Western city like Los Angeles (Scafidi, et al., 1998; Wilson, et al., 1994; Sternlieb and Burchell, 1974). Moreover, code enforcement strategies have lost favor among many policy analysts who see them as ineffective and even hastening property abandonment due to

increasing costs to landlords (Mallach, 2001; Ross, 1996). Why, then, did the City of Los Angeles choose to go the route of a systematic code enforcement program?

The purpose of this paper is to answer that question. In order to understand the background and outcomes of this major policy shift in the city, I seek to identify the institutional and political actors behind the reform efforts and analyze their roles in relation to traditional power brokers and regimes in the city. For this analysis, my primary data set comes from fifteen in-depth interviews I conducted of participants in the reform effort. I interviewed five persons from the citizens group that initiated the process, five city staff persons involved in the political process, the head of the most important landlord lobby in the Los Angeles area, and four community activists who were involved in organizing support for the policy change (see list of interviews in the Appendix). Given access to archives regarding the reform effort by participants, I also reviewed primary and secondary source material (e.g. newspaper articles, committee and department reports and memoranda).

Before reporting on my findings regarding the case of slum reform in Los Angeles, I first briefly review the strategy of housing code enforcement in the U.S. and its relationship to housing reform. Next, I provide background on the political scene and housing conditions in the City of Los Angeles. I then will turn to the case of multifamily housing code enforcement reform in Los Angeles, outlining the process and then reflecting on the factors that led to this major policy change in the city.

CODE ENFORCEMENT AS HOUSING REFORM

Efforts to improve slum housing conditions through the establishment of building and housing codes began with Progressive Era reforms of New York's tenement housing during the late 19th century and early 20th century. Fearful that unsanitary conditions in overcrowded housing would spread to other areas of the city, a citizens group surveyed tenements and helped establish basic building safety standards in New York's Tenement Housing Act of 1867 (Plunz, 1990; Ross, 1996). Social reformers pushed for more stringent codes and enforcement, and these standards spread to other major cities such as Chicago in the early 1900s (Hall, 1996). The adoption of housing codes and creation of municipal enforcement agencies became more prevalent across the U.S. after the federal Housing and Development Act of 1965, which obligated cities to establish codes and enforcement agencies in order to receive federal funding for housing (Ross, 1996).

As housing code enforcement has developed as a strategy to maintain habitability standards, however, it has increasingly become subject to critique. In a review of housing code enforcement as a strategy for preventing urban blight, Ross characterizes municipal housing codes as "voluminous, vague and ideal" (1996, p. 31). They tend to be extremely long and verbose and use subjective terms such as "good repair" and "safe condition." Moreover, Ross argues, housing codes tend to reflect an idealism that "is based on an implicit promise to provide a middle-class house to city residents of all income levels" (p. 32). Because this ideal can never be attained for all residents, code enforcement is often left to the discretion of inspectors and varies widely in how "proactively" it is carried out. In the cities that Ross studied – Boston, Baltimore and Buffalo – inspections were once done in a proactive manner; but today, as departmental budgets have decreased, they result only from complaints, a situation that is common to the majority of cities in the U.S. Besides the fact that resources available for code enforcement have become scarcer is the contention that strict enforcement can pass on increased costs to low and moderate income property owners and lead to property abandonment. As Ross concludes in his study, "overzealous enforcement of existing housing codes increases urban decline but sensitive and moderated enforcement can help the code

accomplish its goals” (1996, p. 45). Despite these reservations, several jurisdictions have experimented with innovative approaches to code enforcement as part of an anti-slum strategy.

For example, the State of New Jersey’s Bureau of Housing and Inspection (BHI) oversees a systematic housing code enforcement program, inspecting all dwellings with three or more units, as well as all hotels and motels, at least once every five years (AELCP, 2001). Owners of multifamily units must register with the state and pay \$10 per building per year; if they fail to register, owners can be fined and – perhaps more importantly – cannot evict tenants for any reason. Nearly all inspections are systematic – i.e. not in response to complaints – and result in a 95% rate of compliance. According to administrators of the program, it has helped decreased property abandonment and improved the quality of the state’s housing stock (AELCP, 2001).

During the mid-1990s, the City of San Francisco underwent a substantial reform in its code enforcement efforts. A coalition of developers and tenant and community activists worked to ensure passage of Proposition G in 1995, which created a new independent Department of Building Inspection to be overseen by a seven-person board of commissioners (Heron, 1997). The Department of Public Works had previously been responsible for code enforcement and was criticized for not being able to secure compliance on violation abatement orders and for allowing property owners too much time to make repairs. The new program, though not systematic in nature, was organized to increase compliance, largely through an innovative outreach program, which educates landlords, tenants, and the public about housing codes and penalties for non-compliance. The most unique part of the outreach program is that it contracts with two tenant organizations and a landlord organization to mediate complaints. According to one of the tenant organizations, they are able to help resolve about half of the complaints that come in without referring them for inspection (Heron, 1997, p. 47). If the complaint cannot be resolved, it is referred first to another subcontractor, the San Francisco Apartment Association, which contacts the landlord to see if they can convince them to resolve the issue. It is only after these two avenues are explored that cases are referred to the city for inspection.

POLITICS AND HOUSING IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES, 1948-1997

Political Background

Highly regulatory policies such as code enforcement and community-based mediation are not strategies commonly associated with a place like Los Angeles, where pro-growth and entrepreneurial regimes have long held sway, and there has been a dearth of community activism in the city. Civic and business leaders have been able to exert substantial influence in Los Angeles municipal governance due to Progressive Era reforms at the end of the nineteenth century. In reaction to corruption in political machines in many Eastern cities, as well as due to the substantial influence of the railroad companies in California politics at the time, the City of Los Angeles Charter of 1889 set the tone for the political history of the city by diffusing power between a weak mayor, the city council and citizen commissions, and these reforms were designed to benefit urban elites (Schockman, 1996). Schockman contends that the lay board and commission system is indicative of the “informal arrangements” of urban governing regimes, as explained by Stone (1993) and other regime theorists, referring to it as a “shadow government” (Schockman, 1996, pp. 65-6).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Los Angeles was a largely agricultural area that few would have predicted would shortly become one of the world’s most important cities. During the first two decades of the century, the construction of the Los Angeles aqueduct – which brought water from over two hundred miles away to the dry Los Angeles area – and the annexation of the San Pedro harbor enabled the city to greatly expand in area, population, and

economic power.¹ During this period, Los Angeles represented the classic “growth machine” theory of urban politics and development (Molotch, 1976; Logan and Molotch, 1987), as urban elites and civic boosters sought to increase land values through population growth and land subdivision. In contrast with many large Eastern cities, Los Angeles’s population continued to grow during the post-World War II period due to its booming defense industry, leading Abu-Lughod to refer to the era as representing “The True Growth Machine” (1999, p. 245). However, as the city became increasingly built out and population growth in the region was increasingly dispersed to suburban areas of the county, the consensus for growth in the City of Los Angeles began to wane during the last half of the century.²

Regimes that represented various interests within the city began to form, with diverse visions for what the city should look like and how its problems should be remedied. Fletcher Bowron was a Republican who was elected Mayor in 1938 to reform the city from the previous corrupt administration of Frank Shaw, with the support of labor and Democrats. Bowron held office for 15 years until being unseated by Norris Poulson, who was supported by the downtown establishment and the *Los Angeles Times* (Pitt and Pitt, 1997). Capitalizing on the “Macarthyism” of the era, Poulson and his coalition attacked Bowron’s support of public housing, characterizing it as part of a socialist agenda supported by labor unions (Parson, 1985). The Poulson administration oversaw economic expansion during the post-war period, especially through urban renewal in the downtown area. Instead of constructing a public housing project in the Chavez Ravine area near downtown, the city evicted hundreds of families from the area in 1959 and granted the land and \$4 million in incentives to the owner of the Brooklyn Dodger to relocate to the city and construct a new baseball stadium (Parson, 1985).

Poulson’s coalition was defeated in the 1961 election, however, as former state assemblyman Sam Yorty capitalized on the anti-downtown sentiments of suburban voters from the San Fernando Valley, as well as the dissatisfaction of urban African American residents with the Poulson regime and the Police Department. Yorty, despite his campaign rhetoric, reached out to the Police Chief and downtown elites: “he came in as a progressive, and soon built a powerful conservative coalition” (Sonenschein, 1993, p. 258). Yorty’s conservatism became entrenched during the 1960s, as he refused millions of dollars in federal funding as part of President Johnson’s War on Poverty (Greenstone and Peterson, 1973) and the Watts riots of 1965 solidified his standing with suburban Anglo residents. Community opposition to Yorty grew, however, and a powerful biracial coalition of African Americans and mostly Jewish liberal elites from the city’s Westside was finally successful in defeating Yorty in 1973, electing city councilman Tom Bradley as the city’s first African American Mayor.

After losing to Yorty in the 1969 election, the Bradley camp became “both more professional and less ideological” for its 1973 campaign (Sonenschein, 1993, p. 105), which helped increase its support across various sectors of the Los Angeles populace. Bradley’s liberal regime centralized control city policy became more centralized following an influx of federal funds to address social problems (Saltzstein et al., 1986), and its promotion of urban redevelopment attracted support from the business leaders and labor unions. Bradley’s most enduring legacy from his 20 years as Mayor was in making Los Angeles a “world-class city,” exemplified in the rebuilding of the central business district as well as the successful 1984 Olympic Games. The Bradley administration oversaw the vast redevelopment of downtown into gleaming commercial space, but community residents and advocates criticized the city’s redevelopment agency for displacing thousands of low-income residents through “slum clearance” (Haas and Heskin, 1981; Keil, 1998).³ The liberal coalition began to fragment as community activists became disillusioned with Bradley’s focus on downtown redevelopment, and the 1992 civil unrest highlighted the administration’s inability to deal with social and economic division in the city.

In 1993, with Bradley not running for Mayor, liberal city councilman Mike Woo was defeated by a political novice, wealthy entrepreneur and philanthropist Richard Riordan, whose

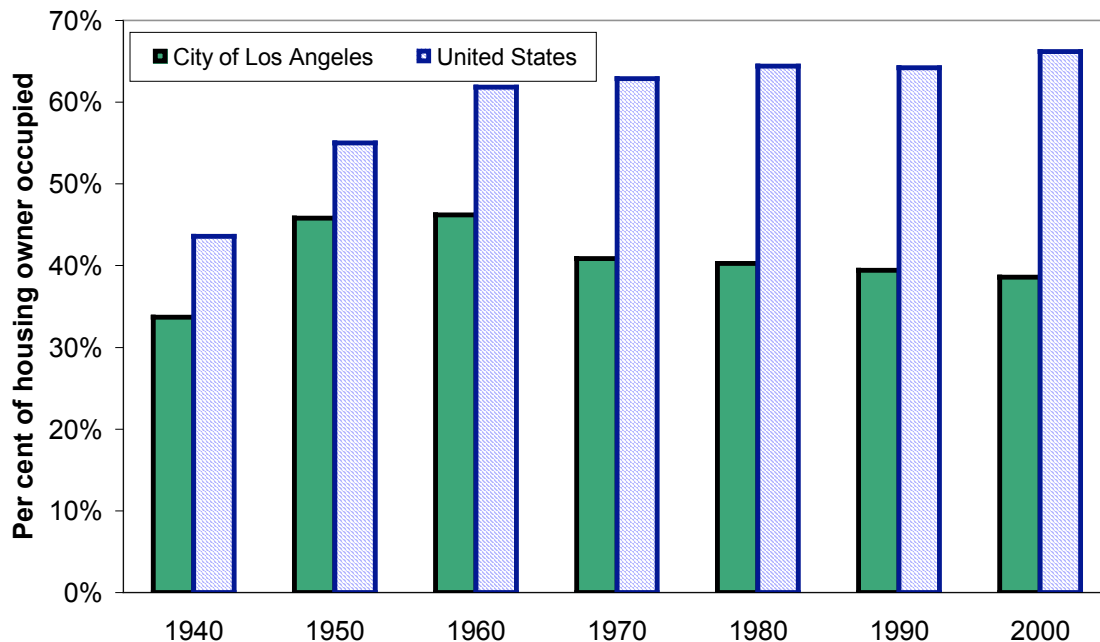
campaign slogan proclaimed he was "Tough Enough to Turn L.A. Around." Riordan promised to use his private sector skills to increase the efficiency of Los Angeles city government. He established early on in his term a Development Reform Committee made up of business and civic leaders with the goal of making recommendations for streamlining municipal operations and attracting new businesses to the city. While Riordan's appointments to municipal commissions during his first term reflected the ethnic diversity of Los Angeles, they tended to over-represent relatively affluent areas of the city and region (Schockman, 1996). With the Los Angeles recovering from economic recession and the 1994 earthquake, Riordan was elected to a second term on April 8, 1997.

In general, then, Los Angeles municipal government during the last half of the twentieth century was heavily influenced by the private sector. Though these tendencies have been checked by homeowners' organizations and community residents that have sought to exclude undesirable development in their neighborhoods, ⁴ the administration in place during the time of the code enforcement process was clearly trying to reclaim the city's pro-business heritage.

The Growing Housing Crisis and Efforts at Housing Reform

Despite common perceptions of life in Los Angeles, the city has experienced an increasing housing crisis over the past several decades. From 1940 to 2000, the homeownership rate in Los Angeles has been at least 9 per cent below that of the U.S. as a whole, and owner occupancy in the city increased slightly during the post-World War II period, but began to decrease after 1960 (see Figure 1).

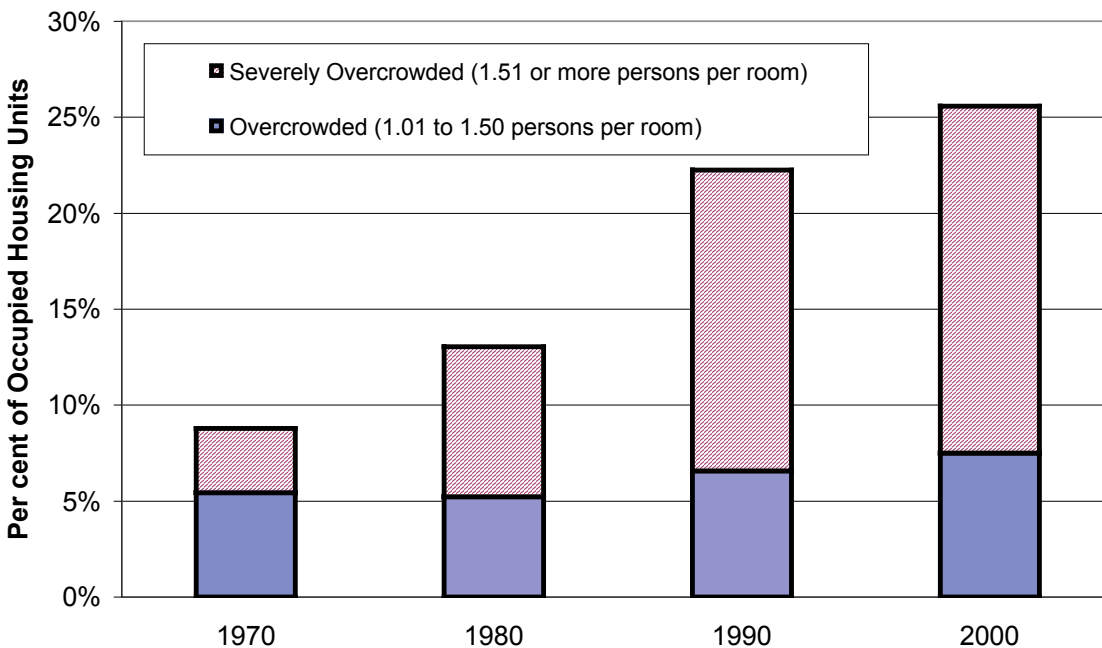
**Figure1. Owner Occupancy
City of Los Angeles and United States**



Today, only 39 per cent of housing units in Los Angeles are owner occupied, compared to 66 per cent in the U.S. as a whole and 50 per cent in the nation's central city areas. Unlike other major U.S. cities, Los Angeles developed relatively few public housing units throughout its history, as private real estate interests convinced local officials during the Red Scare era that

public housing was part of a socialist political agenda (Parson, 1982). With continued population growth and a decrease in new housing construction during the last half of the century, residents were left to compete for rental units, leading to rising rents and housing value, as well as severe overcrowding. Housing affordability has decreased steadily in Los Angeles, reflecting the high cost of real estate in the region. According to the 2000 U.S. census, about 37 percent of renters pay at least 35 percent of their income on rent, and 30 percent of owners pay at least 35 percent of their income on housing. As housing costs have increased, people have been forced to crowd into units, as shown in Figure 2.⁵

**Figure 2. Overcrowded Housing
City of Los Angeles**



Up until the 1980s, The Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) represented the city's only response to slum conditions. In line with federal urban renewal and "slum clearance" policies, the State of California's Community Redevelopment Act of 1945 enabled local jurisdictions to create local redevelopment agencies to carry out these efforts. CRA/LA was formed in 1948 to identify areas of physical blight and stimulate investment through geographically targeted programs.⁶ Armed with the ability to acquire property, through eminent domain if necessary, and to receive tax increment revenue from targeted areas, CRA/LA has been the city's primary means for addressing urban blight for the past fifty years. As the Bradley administration came under increasing criticism from community activists, however, the Mayor turned his attention to the housing crisis near the end of his term as mayor in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He proposed funding more affordable housing by increasing the tax increment funding available from the downtown redevelopment area, but local community and housing activists and the County government – which stood to lose revenue if the proposal were approved – were able to kill the deal (Goetz, 1993). As Sonnenshein concludes, "the city's redevelopment program eventually brought a great deal of business support to the liberal coalition, but later became the symbol of liberal disenchantment with the Bradley regime" (1993, p. 168).

Besides the redevelopment activities of CRA/LA, there was very little political reform in Los Angeles with regard to housing at all until rising tenant activism in the face of pressure in the rental housing market led to the passage of a Rent Stabilization Ordinance in 1979 (Heskin, 1983). Before 1980, housing policy in the city was largely taken from federal initiatives, as there was very little in the way of a nonprofit housing community or coordinated housing advocacy by neighborhood groups (Goetz, 1993). As CRA/LA came under increasing scrutiny by interest groups from across the political spectrum and rents skyrocketed as the city's population swelled through international immigration during the 1980s, however, local community and political leaders began to call for more municipal attention to the housing crisis. An investigative report by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1987 revealed that many immigrants were being forced to live in unsafe converted garages, estimating that there were about 42,000 garages housing 200,000 persons in Los Angeles County (Chavez and Quinn, 1987). Homelessness was also becoming more prevalent, leading one researcher to proclaim that "Los Angeles became the homeless capital of the United States in the 1980s" (Wolch, 1996, p. 390). In 1987, Mayor Bradley announced the appointment of a local housing advocate as his first-ever Housing Coordinator and declared that he would appoint a "Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee for Affordable Housing" to study the housing affordability crisis (Goetz, 1993, p. 148). The Blue Ribbon Committee's report led to the establishment of the city's Housing Department in the early 1990s to coordinate local efforts to develop affordable housing (Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee for Affordable Housing, 1988).⁷

At the same time as these municipal reforms, the nonprofit housing and advocacy community began to expand and better coordinate its efforts. Housing L.A., a loose alliance of housing developers and community activists, advocated for increased attention to the housing needs of low-income residents, and organizations such as the Southern California Association of Nonprofit Housing (SCANPH) and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) provided technical assistance to nascent CDCs (Goetz, 1993). The reform efforts of the 1980s and early 1990s focused primarily on stabilizing rents and developing incentives for increased development of affordable housing. As housing conditions in many parts of the city continued to deteriorate, especially after the 1994 earthquake and on the heels of a deep economic recession, the city's most important slum reform came in the latter half of the 1990s.

MULTIFAMILY HOUSING CODE ENFORCEMENT REFORM, 1996-2001

Code Enforcement Pre-1997

Prior to the code enforcement reform in the late-1990s, the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety (BAS) was charged with enforcing all building codes in the city, including permitting for new constructions and maintenance standards for existing structures. Moreover, BAS was responsible for inspecting both commercial and residential buildings. Up to 1974, BAS conducted regular inspections of buildings at least once every ten years, but this began to be replaced by a complaint and referral system during the 1970s and 1980s (Heron, 1997). The complaint and referral program meant that inspectors only saw buildings that were referred to them and that they inspected only the conditions named in the complaint. This cutback in code enforcement, of course, came during the population boom of the 1980s and resulting housing crunch. Housing reform during the 1970s and 1980s had focused primarily on stabilizing rents and building local capacity to develop affordable housing units through CDCs. Besides the furor over garage housing units at the end of the 1980s, small-scale tenant organizing, and the formation of a task force to deal with property abandonment after the 1994 earthquake, there had been very little political attention paid to slum housing conditions in the city.

Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing

On October 4, 1996, Nancy Mintie from the Inner City Law Center gave a talk on slum housing at the First Friday Forum at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) Law School. The monthly forums were organized by Father Donald Merrifield, vice chancellor of LMU and a well-respected civic leader. Also attending the lecture were Mike Keely, a former deputy to Mayor Riordan, and Mark Adams, a self-described “political animal” with a background in real estate finance and housing development. Listening to the talk, Adams thought to himself that with Mintie’s passion on the slum housing issue, Merrifield’s standing as a religious leader, Keely’s knowledge of the local political scene, and his own background and interest in political reform, the four of them could really “do something” to address the slum housing problem in Los Angeles. He conveyed his idea to the other three after the talk, which led to several informal meetings to discuss what they could do.

As the group met and discussed what course they should take, they decided that this needed to be a broad-based, high-profile effort that would capture the attention of the city council and mayor. The group began calling themselves the Blue Ribbon Committee on Slum Housing and inviting others to join the panel. A few public interest attorneys and longtime housing advocates were enlisted to participate soon after the first informal meetings. By December 1996, the group had formulated an initial strategy. In a one-page summary of their approach, dated December 17, 1996, they lamented that “the filth, the lack of proper sanitary facilities, rats, the absentee landlords and everything else which is associated with slum housing conditions have become a disgrace to the Los Angeles community.” They outlined a six-month strategy of convening a voluntary committee to meet regularly to discuss and take testimony on the slum housing problem and issue findings and recommendations to the media and political leaders. In summary, the document states, “the goal is to identify the causes of the problem and then to build public pressure for the proposed solutions to the problem.” During this early phase, several city council members and county supervisors were asked to recommend members for the committee. More housing advocates, business leaders and a representative from organized labor were brought in the first few months of 1997. With Merrifield serving as chair of the committee and Donald Mullane, Executive Vice President of Bank of America and member of the 1988 Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee for Affordable Housing, as vice-chair, the Blue Ribbon Committee on Slum Housing held its first official meeting on March 4, 1997.

The committee met every two to four weeks over the next five months to discuss the slum housing problem and work toward proposing solutions. They invited local housing experts to provide testimony on the most important housing issues facing the city. One of the early additions to the committee was Gary Blasi, a longtime housing advocate in Los Angeles and a Law Professor at UCLA, and he began to play a central role by overseeing research by UCLA Law and Urban Planning students into the current housing code enforcement activities in Los Angeles. This research team interviewed approximately 20 city staff persons and tenants, accompanied inspectors in the field, and reviewed city documents. This research was synthesized and presented concisely in a UCLA Urban Planning student’s Master’s project, which critiqued the code enforcement activities of the Building and Safety Department (Heron, 1997). This study, along with testimony heard by the committee and documentation of the slum housing problem in Los Angeles, would form the basis of a report outlining their findings and recommendations, their goal as outlined at the end of 1996.

Knowing that for the report to garner the attention of policy makers and the public it had to be widely covered by local media, particularly the *Los Angeles Times*, Gary Blasi invited *Times* reporter Hector Tobar to one of his classes in the Law School and cultivated a relationship that would be mutually beneficial. Tobar “broke” the slum housing story with a front page, Sunday-edition article that described the horrible conditions of two of the worst apartment buildings in the city and the failings of the current code inspection system, lamenting “housing

conditions that belie Los Angeles' status as a modern city" (Tobar, 1997 July 20, p. A28). Supplied with data and information from the Blue Ribbon Committee's research, the article created a furor and anticipation of the committee's findings and recommendations.

Besides conducting research and attracting media attention, committee leadership lobbied elected officials for support. Several city council members had been involved in the expansion of the committee by recommending members in the first months of 1997, and the council consisted of a few natural allies who had long been supporters of affordable housing. Besides lobbying the council, the Committee's political strategists knew they had to get backing from the Mayor. Richard Riordan, elected Mayor after the 1992 civil unrest, was focusing on pro-business reforms to spur economic recovery and development, even more so after the 1994 earthquake. He was not viewed as a friend of the nonprofit housing community, even denying the existence of a housing crisis. As a result, he was often at odds with liberal members of the council, precisely those who were most likely to support a reform of slum housing. Mike Keely, who had been on Riordan's staff, began working in June 1997 to set up a meeting with the Mayor's office to alert them about the Committee's upcoming report and recommendations.

Gary Blasi and Mark Adams met with the Mayor's chief deputy on July 9, and were assured that the Mayor was considering endorsing their recommendations (BRC Memo, 1997 July 11). Just over a week later, they received word that "the Mayor's office has responded very favorably" to their request for support (BRC Memo, 1997 July 17). The Committee's PR subcommittee began working on a press conference to coincide with the release of the report and secured the Mayor's participation. Capitalizing on the attention brought by the *Los Angeles Times* just days before, the Committee issued its report on Monday, July 28 at one of the slum buildings highlighted in the July 20 article. After touring the slum building, Mayor Riordan stood with the chairs of the Blue Ribbon Committee and several city council members and declared, "slum housing can no longer be tolerated in the City of Los Angeles....the change begins today" (Tobar, 1997 July 29, p. B-1).

In the report, the committee outlined the scope of the slum housing problem in Los Angeles, reviewed the code enforcement program at Building and Safety, and proposed recommendations for substantially reforming code enforcement in the City (Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing, 1997). Using data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990 Census and 1995 American Housing Survey (AHS), as well as from city programs such as the Rent Escrow Account Program (REAP), the report estimated that about 10 per cent of the city's rental housing – representing about 150,000 units – was substandard and in need of major repairs, resulting in severe health, economic and social consequences for Los Angeles residents.⁸ The current code inspection program, according to the report, was incapable of addressing the slum housing problem because it was complaint-driven and was a very low priority for the Department of Building and Safety. Building and Safety dedicated a greater amount of staff and resources to inspecting new residential constructions, which provided a more than 50% of the Department's budget. Because of the inability of the Department of Building and Safety's code enforcement program to provide incentives for property owners to comply with building codes, the committee recommended revamping code enforcement in the city by moving to "routine, periodic inspections of all rental housing" funded by a rental surcharge.

Reaction and Policy Reform

The release of the report prompted an immediate reaction, and support for the committee's call to radically reform code enforcement in the city quickly gained ground. City council woman Jackie Goldberg, the council's most passionate housing advocate, introduced a motion to invite the Blue Ribbon Committee to report its findings and recommendations to the council, and the council formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Substandard Housing made up of the

chairs of five council committees, as well as a representative of the Mayor's office (Los Angeles City Council Files, Doc. ID 97-1303). The *Los Angeles Times* editorialized several days after the report was issued that the Mayor and City Council had to "get tough on negligent landlords" and welcomed the "new interest in eradicating slum housing," though the editorial questioned the proposed rental surcharge as unfair to good landlords. Political leaders were practically falling over one another in trying to address the issue: the Mayor called for an additional inspectors to a pilot program to address slum housing, and two City Council persons proposed an ordinance that would give landlords only 48 hours to respond to orders for urgent repairs (LAT, 1997 August 3).

The Ad Hoc Committee on Substandard Housing quickly elicited more detailed recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Committee and city staff. With Gary Blasi taking the lead, the Blue Ribbon Committee outlined a more detailed plan for "periodic, routine inspections" of multifamily rental units funded by a \$1 per month per unit fee, though it did not take a position on where the enforcement program should be housed (BRC Memorandum to Ad Hoc Committee, 1997 September 17). Less than two months after the release of the Blue Ribbon Committee report, the Ad Hoc Committee unanimously approved a plan to create a unit in the city dedicated to routine inspections of apartments (Tobar, 1997 September 18). The Ad Hoc Committee's report was adopted by the full council several days later and directed the Housing Department to take the lead in convening meetings with representatives from the Blue Ribbon Committee and various city departments – including Fire, Building and Safety, and City Attorney – and report back to the Ad Hoc Committee within 30 days (Los Angeles City Council Files, Doc. ID 97-1303). Several representatives from the Blue Ribbon Committee worked closely with LAHD staff in convening these meetings.

Dissent toward these proposals came primarily from the Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles (AAGLA), a landlord advocacy organization made up mostly of owners of small, "mom and pop" apartment buildings. AAGLA claimed that the program would unfairly target the vast majority of landlords who are not slumlords and contested the veracity of the Blue Ribbon Committee's findings. AAGLA's general counsel argued that the inspection program would be a waste of resources. In an article in AAGLA's September 1997 magazine, their Legislative Analyst disputed the Blue Ribbon Committee's interpretation of American Housing Survey data and accused "pro-tenant and anti-landlord" activists on the Blue Ribbon Committee pulling "off the con-job of the century" (Fleck, 1997, p. 34).

AAGLA's objections, however, could not overcome the momentum for reform already in place. A few issues of contention did surface among the city council over the next couple months. Council and Ad Hoc Committee member Richard Alarcon objected to funding the program through a rental surcharge paid by the tenant, as it would be a "regressive tax," and the Mayor's office thought that the program should be funded by existing departmental budgets (Tobar, 1997 September 18). A related issue was whether the proposed monthly assessment to fund the program would be in violation of state Proposition 218, which had been passed by California voters in November 1996.⁹ Following in the vein of the state's "taxpayer revolt" that had passed Proposition 13 in 1978 to limit local governments' ability to raise property taxes, Proposition 218 further restricted the revenue generating tools available to local governments. Some argued that a monthly assessment to fund the code enforcement program would be in violation of Proposition 218's restriction of property-related taxes and assessments.

Despite the objections, the plan passed the City Council on an 11-1 vote on November 12th (Tobar, 1997 November 13). There was still contention over the \$1 monthly rental surcharge, which passed 8-4 and would result in \$7 million for the program, but council members agreed to approve the program "in concept" and work the details in the ensuing months. Even the *Times* reversed its earlier opposition to the monthly fee in order to support the program (LAT, 1997 November 14). After getting legal opinions from the City Attorney's office and pro bono work from several prominent legal firms, the Blue Ribbon Committee

proposed assessing the \$1 fee on the landlord – which could then be passed on to tenants – allowing them to avoid a special election on the grounds of Proposition 218, as it could be argued to be a business expense and not a tax. Tenants testified at committee hearings that they were willing to pay even more than \$1 a month if it would result in improved housing conditions. By the end of the year, even the Mayor’s office had decided to support the \$1 fee. Meeting with several members of the Blue Ribbon Committee in early December, the Mayor committed to supporting the fee and the program. On December 19, with members of the Blue Ribbon Committee present but not out front in the agenda, the city council authorized initial funding for the program and directed the General Manager of LAHD to begin hiring inspectors for a pilot inspection program. The full program was set to begin in July 1998.

Over the next several months, the Blue Ribbon Committee moved even more to the background, as the city bureaucracy created the necessary job descriptions and planned for the addition of a new unit in the Housing Department. The Blue Ribbon Committee, however, did not remain entirely inactive. Gary Blasi continued to be involved in meetings on the design of the program, and Mark Adams was organizing a “Lenders’ Summit” to get banks to commit to providing financing for cleaning up slum properties. The Committee also secured funding from a local foundation to hire a staff person to help monitor progress and work on the Lenders’ Summit. A press conference was held on May 20, attended by banking executives, Mayor Riordan and several members of the city council and Blue Ribbon Committee, to announce a five-year \$150 million program to provide loans to owners to help clean up properties (Newton, 1998).

The enabling ordinance officially passed the council less than one year after the release of the Blue Ribbon Citizens’ Committee initial report, creating a new code enforcement unit in the city’s Housing Department and authorizing the hiring of 50 inspectors for the program (Fears, 1998 July 5). The *Times* called it the “most important anti-slum reform in Los Angeles history,” and Mayor Riordan declared when signing the ordinance that “every human being in the city has the right to live in quality housing” (Tobar, 1998 July 15).

Early Implementation of SCEP at LAHD: Successes and Growing Pains

The Systematic Code Enforcement Program (SCEP) was established in the Los Angeles Housing Department (LAHD) “to ensure that all residential rental living space with two (2) or more units on parcels within the City of Los Angeles are safe and habitable” (LAHD, 2000). As might be expected for a new program with an \$8 million budget, SCEP went through some significant growing pains. Several months after the program was in place, tenants were demanding meetings with LAHD administrators to discuss how SCEP could be more responsive to their complaints (Trejos, 1998 December 20). They continued to step up the pressure, arguing that the city had not allocated sufficient money to deal with complaints, and city staff pointed the finger at each other as to who was to blame (Fears, 1999 March 17). Even the co-chairs of the Blue Ribbon Citizens’ Committee joined in the chorus of criticism, claiming “official inattention and bureaucratic infighting” by Building and Safety, LAHD, and the mayor were making the situation in some ways “now worse than before” (Merrifield and Blasi, 1999 February 10). Initially, the Mayor’s office was opposed to use of any money from the General Fund for hiring complaint inspectors, but eventually the council and Mayor negotiated using \$175,000 from block grant savings to supplement \$370,000 from a reserve fund to hire 31 inspectors to handle complaints (Fears, 1999 March 31; Los Angeles City Council Files, Doc. ID 97-1303-S8).

Approximately a year and a half after the program began, it became clear that LAHD would not be able to meet its goal of inspecting all 750,000 apartment units in the City within three years. Besides the problem of not initially hiring inspectors to deal with complaints, the program suffered from logistical challenges such as finding qualified inspectors and setting up

an efficient billing system, as well as from legal challenges to the monthly surcharge to fund the program (Berbeo, 2000 March 15). The Tenant Outreach Program, modeled on San Francisco's innovative outreach program, also suffered from conflict and took a while to implement. Originally, the Housing Department had hoped to have a landlord group as one of the contracted agencies, as in San Francisco; but tenant advocates lobbied to exclude AAGLA because it was perceived to be obstructionist and no other suitable contractor was found. The city council approved contracts with six tenant and legal services organizations in November 1999 to receive complaints from tenants and conduct conflict resolution (Los Angeles City Council Files, Doc. ID 99-2036). A little more than two years after the inception of SCEP, LAHD had only inspected a quarter of the City's apartments and estimated it could take six years to inspect them all. The AAGLA president was demanding that the city prove that SCEP was doing anything to improve housing conditions (Lambert, 2000). The department reorganized its various enforcement programs into one unit, hoping that this would allow SCEP to run more efficiently and speed up the inspection process (Kondo, 2000 November 29). LAHD overcame its last major hurdle when the State of California Supreme Court upheld the \$1 monthly fee in January 2001. The surcharge had been challenged by a group of landlords as violating the state's Proposition 218, which was passed in 1996 and requires voters to approve property-based fees. The court upheld the City's argument that the monthly fee is a business expense and thus not subject to voter approval.

ANALYSIS

The few civic leaders and housing advocate who began meeting informally in the Fall of 1996 to discuss the slum housing problem in Los Angeles likely could not have imagined the influence they would have on code enforcement in the city over the next two years. Both members of the Blue Ribbon Citizens' Committee on Slum Housing and city staff whom I interviewed struggled to remember a reform effort that had so quickly resulted in such major policy change in the city. They identified many factors, both intentional and unintentional, that contributed to the success of the reform effort. I have grouped the most common and salient factors into three major areas, which all were necessary but alone unlikely to be sufficient to support the policy change. First, there was the issue itself, slum housing, which provided "slumlords" as easy, identifiable targets. Second, there were several aspects of the social and political context that made it possible for the policy change to occur in Los Angeles, despite its pro-business regime and heritage as a "developers" city. Finally, the work of those advocating for slum housing reform was highly effective in a way it had never been before.

Why was it successful?

- *The Issue Itself*

As in the days of tenement reform, when accounts like Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* provided vivid descriptions of slum conditions in 19th century New York, it was relatively simple in this case to communicate the horrible conditions of slum housing to both the public and policy makers. The *Los Angeles Times* articles, the Blue Ribbon Committee report, and testimony by tenants of slum housing all demonstrated the individual and social costs of deteriorated housing conditions. This resonance became especially strong because it was possible to identify people responsible for these squalid conditions, namely the owners of slum properties. The most common response from the persons I interviewed to my question of why the slum housing reform effort was successful was, "No one wants to defend slumlords." According to several city staff and members of the Blue Ribbon Committee I interviewed, even

council members who normally were not viewed as sympathetic on matters of housing or social justice supported – and even advocated for – the policy change because they viewed it as a moral issue. Even council members who were traditionally supportive of landlord interests could support this reform because something had to be done about the slumlords. Similarly, a couple prominent developers and property owners were on the Blue Ribbon Committee and supportive of the policy change because the “slumlords are giving the rest of us a bad name.” Slum housing became a moral issue, then, and an important component of this issue framing was the religious leadership on the Blue Ribbon Committee and in the advocacy community. The genesis of the Blue Ribbon Committee was a lecture at a First Friday mass, and much of the committee leadership remained Catholic. In addition to leadership of Father Merrifield as chair, vice-chair Donald Mullane and political strategist Mark Adams were lay Catholics, and the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Monsignor Terrence Fleming, was also on the committee. According to several observers, Mayor Riordan, another prominent lay Catholic, was affected by the moral argument in favor of this slum housing reform.

- *The Social and Political Landscape*

The moral issue of slum housing was clearly not enough on its own, however, to effect major policy change. Another important set of factors had to do with the context in which the code enforcement reform took place. When the Blue Ribbon Committee was forming, Los Angeles was recovering from an economic recession and depression in the real estate market. It was still recuperating from the 1992 civil unrest and 1994 earthquake, which had resulted in billions of dollars in property damage and the new phenomenon of housing abandonment. In response to the rising abandonment problem, a task force in the city had conducted research on the stages of property abandonment and recommended policies to prevent property decline. Research at UCLA explored processes of housing disinvestment in Los Angeles and showed that financial disinvestment was a precursor to property deterioration (Krouk, 1996). With landlords deferring maintenance due to the economic recession, there was a rising fear that property decline would spin out of control, opening the way for a proactive, preventative approach such as systematic code enforcement.

Another important part of the landscape at the time was the politics of the city council and the Mayor. Several city council staff persons I interviewed remarked at how quickly the council came to a consensus on the policy change, and they attributed it to the fact that much of the council had worked together for several years. Council members from across the political spectrum came together on the issue, partly due to its moral value but also because they – and their staffs – had strong working relationships. Clearly some council members were stronger advocates on the issue than others, but one council staff person described there being a surprising amount of “collegiality” in this instance, as council members did not try to steal the spotlight from one another. The council often worked together in opposition to Mayor Riordan, who was trying to increase the power of his office through charter reform; but in this case the mayor coalesced with the council. Mayor Riordan, besides promoting a pro-business agenda, had long been a philanthropist and certainly the moral argument was persuasive in this case. In addition, at the time of the reform effort, he was in his second and final term, which one person I interviewed speculated may have given him more liberty to speak out on social justice issues such as slum housing.

A third component of the context for this reform effort was that the city’s code enforcement program at the time was weak and ineffective. Several persons I interviewed referred to it as “a broken system,” and this was clearly documented and communicated in the Blue Ribbon Committee report and the *Times* articles. The Blue Ribbon Committee research showed that the Department of Building and Safety gave higher priority to inspecting new housing construction than code inspection, as construction inspections generated 40 times

more revenue than code enforcement. The report characterized code inspection cases as a “black hole” and documented how difficult it was for citizens to make complaints to the department.¹⁰ The high-profile article by Hector Tobar provided examples of the lack of coordination in code enforcement:

With prevention placed on a bureaucratic back burner, many inspectors concentrate only on their narrow responsibilities--plumbing or electrical inspections, for instance. Only infrequently do they tip off other inspectors and agencies about a related problem. Asked what he would do if he encountered a vermin infestation, building inspector Roy Daniels answered: "I'm not interested in roaches. That's not my job. It's the health department." (Tobar, 1997a, p. A28)

These stories clearly provided an embarrassment to the city, and several city staff persons whom I interviewed characterized council members as being so upset with the findings regarding Building and Safety that they demanded radical policy change.

A final contextual variable that clearly contributed to the success of the code enforcement reform effort was the absence of a strong opposition. Several of the housing and tenant activists I interviewed gleefully described landlords who testified against a new systematic code enforcement programs as “our best allies.” At one hearing, a landlord referred to council members – several of whom were Jewish – as “Gestapo” for considering the program. Outlandish comments like these, even if made by renegades, did not help the property owners lobby. AAGLA, by all accounts, entered the policy discussion too late to mount a successful campaign against the reform. According to several persons I interviewed, AAGLA had alienated many of the council members in previous policy discussions, such as opposing many of the reforms proposed to deal with rising housing abandonment after the 1994 earthquake. Even Harold Greenberg, current President of AAGLA, admitted that they were a conservative group at the time of the code enforcement reform and had strained relationships with several city council members. According to a city council staff person, AAGLA waited too long to begin lobbying the council and speak out on the program; by the time they formally opposed it, he told them “the train has already left the station.” AAGLA did successfully lobby one council member, Nate Holden, to oppose the program, but he was often perceived as the “loose cannon” on the council and was not able to speak persuasively on the matter. Reflecting back on the process and why AAGLA was not more effective in opposing the program, several members of the Blue Ribbon Committee wondered if AAGLA did not mobilize more effectively because they were overconfident of their legal challenge to the monthly fee on the grounds of Proposition 218. As one observer put it, instead of formulating a political strategy to fight to reform effort, AAGLA “put all their eggs in one basket” by focusing on the lawsuit, which of course they ended up losing.

- *The Work and Strategy of Advocates*

Even the combination of the resonance of the slum housing issue and the social and political context were not enough to lead to major policy change without the work of advocates from both within and outside of the municipal governmental structure. For me, the most fascinating part of this story of slum housing reform is how the coalition of advocates was broadened beyond the traditional scope of housing activists. Public interest attorneys, tenant organizers, community activists, and some city staff persons had worked for years on effecting similar changes, usually with limited or mixed results. In this case, however, these traditional activists were part of an alliance that included high-profile civic leaders and representatives from the business sector, the nonprofit community, and organized labor, as well as housing advocates from within the city. In an article about the fragmented nature of Los Angeles politics

published the year the Blue Ribbon Committee began to form, Schockman claims that “present-day multiethnic, polycultural Los Angeles lacks the mediating institutions across socioeconomic communities that are needed to sustain consensus building and coalition politics” (1996, p. 60). In the case of code enforcement reform, however, relative consensus was reached due to a strategy to take a broad-based approach to the issue of slum housing. According to Mark Adams, the committee decided that in order to not allow the debate turn into a fight between landlords and tenants, they had to make the case that slum housing affected the “LA community” in general. Issue framing has been recognized as an important component of collective social action and urban regime formation (Stone, 2001), and framing the slum housing issue as a “community” matter was critical in securing buy-in from across the political and socio-economic spectrum. Therefore, rather than relying just on moralistic arguments, the Blue Ribbon Committee provided the Mayor with facts that would appeal to his interests, such as estimates that the program would create 250 permanent construction jobs through increased property repairs (BRC Memo, December 4, 1997).

Illustrative of this broad advocacy coalition was the fact that probably the two most important “behind-the-scenes” members of the Blue Ribbon Committee represented two major factions of the committee. Gary Blasi, who took the lead in the research that led to the report and in designing what a new code enforcement program would look like, represented the more traditional housing advocates, such as public interest attorneys, tenant groups, and liberal members of the city council. Mark Adams, who led in the political strategy and public relations, had strong ties to the chair and vice-chair of the committee and several of the private sector members of the committee. Traditional activists brought passion and experience to the issue, political connections to liberal members of the council, and a grassroots base that would show up for public hearings. Past work on housing abandonment and disinvestment led them to advocate for a systematic approach to code enforcement, and tenant groups organized rallies and turned out hundreds of tenants at council hearings. The “civic and business leader” group provided connections to additional members of the council and the Mayor, as well as a knowledge of how to get things done in the city. For example, they knew that fiscally-conservative Riordan would be opposed to any new taxes, explaining why from the beginning they promoted the monthly fee as a method for financing the systematic program. In contrast to past efforts to initiate slum reform, the high-profile nature of the Committee’s leadership enabled them to “go past the middle guy,” as Rod Field, a housing activist and member of the Committee, explained. Because of the diversity of the BRC, they were fairly inclusive in allowing different perspectives to be raised and invited various interest groups – including AAGLA – to participate in meetings. Thus, as Mark Adams explained, they “took the sting out of the issue” by allowing people to raise concerns, no matter how minor, along the way and letting them disappear on their own.

Another way in which the work of advocates contributed to the success of the reform effort was the research and “hard numbers” that documented both the failure of the Building and Safety code enforcement program and the extent of the slum housing problem in Los Angeles. Several observers from both inside and outside the city government highlighted the research conducted and written up primarily by UCLA students and Gary Blasi as critical to initiating the policy reform. Mike Keely highlighted Blasi’s “impeccable research” and ability to “tell a story” as fundamental factors in why the issue captured the attention of policy makers and the public so quickly. Several persons I interviewed pointed out that community activists commonly use anecdotal evidence such as stories to illustrate the need for policy change, and while these were used by the BRC at times, the fact that their report had “hard numbers” to back up these stories was viewed as critical. According to city government insiders, it was commonly known that Building and Safety was not satisfactorily inspecting housing, but the committee’s research showed them just how poor a job they were doing. The Blue Ribbon Committee’s use of the American Housing Survey estimate of 150,000 substandard units, for example, was an

appalling and easily-remembered number that policy makers could grab on to. That, plus the fact that, as one person I interviewed pointed out, no one really had the time to debate the numbers, meant that city council members, even the most conservative ones, could not deny that Los Angeles had a slum housing problem and that the Building and Safety code enforcement program was not adequately dealing with the problem.¹¹ Of course, the advocates' use of the media to get out their research and recommendations was also a critical component of the process. In the 1950s and 1960s the *Los Angeles Times* played a largely civic booster role, avoiding discussion of slums and promoting the interests of the downtown business regime (Banfield and Wilson, 1963)¹²; but during the growing housing crisis of the 1980s it had played an activist role, calling for municipal reform to attend to the problems of rising housing costs and overcrowding (Goetz, 1993). The articles that they wrote on the slum housing problem and the Blue Ribbon Committee's findings clearly was a factor in producing consensus on code enforcement.

Issue-framing, coalition-building, and research would likely not have been enough to complete the reform effort if advocates had not been extremely diligent in keeping the process moving forward. After the BRC report was issued and the committee shifted more into the background as the city council's Ad Hoc Committee and municipal staff began to take the lead in designing how the city's code enforcement program would be revamped, several BRC members, in particular Mark Adams and Gary Blasi, remained very involved in meetings and sought to hold the city bureaucracy accountable to the committee's recommendations. Other BRC members were brought in as necessary, and tenant activists organized their own meetings and hearings. As Mark Adams explained in a memorandum to the BRC just about a month before the reform was first passed by the city council, they had to move the process along as quickly as possible:

I have been pursuing a strategy of keeping the pressure on under a theory that the worst enemy of volunteer reform efforts such as ours is TIME. As the clock ticks, the momentum dissipates and people get sidetracked onto other issue. I am surprised that we have not yet faced a big risk of such a strategy: people get angry at the pressure. There has been some grumbling, to be sure. But no one has called for a halt to the process. (Adams, BRC Memo, October 10, 1997)

The BRC had quickly gained enough clout to call meetings of city staff and other interest groups; and the meetings were well attended by department and organization leadership because, according to Adams, "they were afraid not to." Advocates for reform from within the municipal structure, such as city council and departmental staff, also played important roles in these meetings and in keeping the momentum going. According to James Santa Maria, who was staff person for the chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Substandard Housing, there were several key city staff persons who kept on top of the details and kept the momentum going. For example, when there was some unease on the part of several council members regarding the new code enforcement program before the council's first vote in November 1997, the staff convinced them to agree to accept them "in concept," which they did in order to allow for more time to work out more specific details on the monthly fee and other issues. Staff from the Housing Department's Policy and Planning Unit provided vital technical assistance on documenting various proposals and conducting research on program alternatives. City staff worked closely with the BRC and other advocates in the process, which was an important factor in why the reform moved through so quickly.

CONCLUSION AND AFTERWORD

The story of multifamily housing code enforcement reform in the City of Los Angeles challenges conventional wisdom and perhaps holds some lessons for those seeking housing reform in similar contexts. Despite the dominance of private sector interests in the history of the city's governing regimes and a limited history of housing reform, Los Angeles undertook a highly regulatory policy change to deal with multifamily housing deterioration. Conventional urban regime theory would not predict that such a reform effort would be successful in a context like Los Angeles, but the politically fragmented nature of Los Angeles means that it does not conform to traditionally monolithic regime typologies. As Purcell (1997) has demonstrated in studying the issue of secession in the city, Los Angeles is home to several types of regimes each reflecting differentiated interests. As Goetz (1993) documented, the housing movement in Los Angeles was relatively late in developing, and it lay somewhat dormant during the early years of the Riordan administration. Earlier attempts to create policies to address housing deterioration were largely unsuccessful. In this case, however, this major reform effort was successful because of certain economic and material conditions, but also because of a broadening of the advocacy coalition to a more broad-based alliance.

The work of the Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing and other housing advocates from both within and outside the city was successful in that it resulted in a complete revamping of the city's multifamily housing code enforcement program, one designed to deal with current slum housing conditions and to prevent future deterioration in the housing stock. Whether it is adequately meeting its goals is an open question. Administrators of SCEP claim that the program has led to approximately \$450 million of investment in repairs as a result of inspections over the past four years. However, the program clearly has not met its goal of inspecting all apartments in the city within three years. An audit commissioned by the City Controller found that the program would need seven times the current number of inspectors to meet its goal three-year goal.¹³ Using data from recent inspections AAGLA continues to dispute the Blue Ribbon Committee's argument that there is a substantial slum housing problem in Los Angeles. Another critic of the program I interviewed argued that the program unfairly targets landlords and will have dire consequences for the supply of affordable housing in the city. Finally, two aspects of the reform effort itself have ultimately not been successful. The Lender's Summit organized in 1998 to provide financing for repairs to slum buildings resulted in a commitment from banks in word only. Mark Adams, one of the organizers of the event, admitted that the initiative was a failure, due to a lack of follow up from both the BRC and the city. The Tenant Outreach Program, after less than two years of operation is being phased out by the end of 2002 because it has not sufficiently lightened the load of the city inspectors. Advocates of the program argue that the city never sufficiently promoted the program and worry how the code enforcement program will perform without the mediation component.

Despite these shortcomings and remaining questions about the effectiveness of the program, the advocate-led reform effort that generated this substantial policy change was clearly the most significant endeavor in the city to address its slum housing problem. In addition, the effort provided the impetus for further housing reform in the city. In September 1999, the City Council convened a Housing Crisis Task Force to study the crisis of housing affordability in the city and develop recommendations for addressing the supply of affordable housing.¹⁴ The Task Force issued a report in March 2000, recommending that the city create several mechanisms, including a Housing Trust Fund, to preserve and develop more affordable housing in the city. This year, after two years of organizing and the election of a more housing-friendly Mayor, the establishment of a \$100 million Housing Trust Fund for the city was announced (Roderick, 2002; Dreier and Candaele 2002). The alliance which had formed for code enforcement reform a few years earlier, while not directly related to this new effort, laid the

groundwork for increased attention to the housing needs of low-income residents in the City of Los Angeles.

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ENDNOTES

¹ From 1900 to 1930 the population and land area of the City of Los Angeles grew more than ten times – from 43 to 442 square miles and from about 100,000 persons to over 1 million. During this period of tremendous growth, however, Los Angeles did not develop a master city or regional plan, as had other large U.S. metropolitan areas such as Chicago and New York, supporting the portrayal of Los Angeles as lacking in planning vision.

² From 1950 to 2000 the city's population increased at annual growth rates below 3 per cent, compared to the average annual rates of more than 30 per cent from 1900 to 1930.

³ For example, approximately 6,000 people were evicted in the Bunker Hill redevelopment project in downtown Los Angeles during the 1960s (Haas and Heskin, 1981). Local Latino activists referred to CRA/LA as the "Chicano Removal Agency" (Parson, 1982).

⁴ Keil (1998) traces several popular movements that have resisted the tendency toward development. Pulido (1996) has looked at the environmental justice movement in low-income minority areas of Los Angeles. Davis (1990, ch. 3) and Purcell (1997) document the influence of homeowners and the "slow-growth movement" in Los Angeles.

⁵ While less than 10 per cent of housing units in the city were overcrowded in 1960, about a quarter of all housing units in the city today are overcrowded, the majority of these being "severely overcrowded." The U.S. Census Bureau defines a housing unit as "overcrowded" if there is more than one person per room (excluding bathrooms and including kitchens) in the unit and "severely overcrowded" if there are more than 1.5 persons per room. The proportion of units overcrowded in Los Angeles increased from 6.6 per cent in 1990 to 7.5 per cent in 2000, and the proportion of severely overcrowded units increased from 15.7 to 18.1.

⁶ See Beatty et al. (1994) for more information on the California Community Redevelopment Act of 1945 and Parson (1982 and 1985) for more background on CRA/LA.

⁷ Among the committee’s findings were that 40,000 families in the city were living in converted garages, 150,000 were paying over half of their income for housing, and 10,000 people were homeless (Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee for Affordable Housing, 1988). The report also outlined a lack of coordination on housing in the city, as 11 separate agencies were responsible in some way with housing. Therefore, the committee recommended coordinating the city’s housing agenda through one centralized agency.

⁸ Using 1995 AHS data, the report estimates that 40,000 units had “severe” physical problems, 131,000 units were without working toilets in the previous three months, and residents in about 100,000 units had seen signs of vermin infestation in the previous three months.

⁹ For more information on Proposition 218, see the State of California Legislative Analysts Office’s publication, *Understanding Proposition 218*. It is available on the LAO’s website: http://www.lao.ca.gov/understanding_prop218_1296.html

¹⁰ One of the law students conducting the research spent 2.5 hours at the BAS offices trying to figure out how to lodge a complaint. Perhaps even more surprising for a city like Los Angeles was the fact that it was not until the end of the complaint process that she was able to find someone who could take her complaint in Spanish.

¹¹ As mentioned above, the BRC numbers were contested by AAGLA’s legislative analyst (Fleck, 1997), but these arguments did not resonate with policy makers.

¹² According to Gottlieb and Wolt (1977, pp. 259-62), the *Times* led the campaign against a proposal to build 10,000 public housing units in 1951, partly on land that was later part of CRA/LA’s most lucrative redevelopment project, Bunker Hill. The Gottlieb and Wolt book provides a vivid portrayal of the *Times*’s vast influence on the history and politics of Los Angeles.

¹³ The audit is available on the City Controller’s web site at: <http://www.lacity.org/ctr/audits/scep.pdf>

¹⁴ The Task Force Report and other related materials are available at: <http://housingcrisisla.ucla.edu>

APPENDIX - PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Name	Position/Interest Group	Date of Interview
Gary Blasi	Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing	5/23/2002
Mark Adams	Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing	7/26/2002
Mike Keely	Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing	8/5/2002
Rod Field	Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing	8/6/2002
Rev. Donald Merrifield	Chair, Blue Ribbon Citizens Committee on Slum Housing	8/28/2002
Richard Bobb	City of Los Angeles, City Attorney's Office	7/30/2002
James Santa Maria	City of Los Angeles, Council Staff	7/30/2002
Mirta Ocaña	City of Los Angeles, Council Staff	8/6/2002
Sally Richman	City of Los Angeles, Housing Department	7/24/2002
John Lee	City of Los Angeles, Mayor's Office	8/26/2002
Harold Greenberg	Landlord Advocate, AAGLA President	8/6/2002
Maria Arroyo	Tenant Activist	5/17/2002
Enrique Velasquez	Tenant Activist	7/24/2002
Larry Gross	Tenant Activist	8/16/2002
Sister Diane Donoghue	CDC Director	8/12/2002