

Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Records 11012013.CDURR.MCDF

Finding aid prepared by Meghan Courtney and Dominique Fuqua

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

December 24, 2013

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Chicago Public Library: Harold Washington

11/01/2013

400 S State St

Chicago, 60605

(312) 747-4875

specoll@chipubliclib.org

Table of Contents

<u>Summary Information</u>	3
<u>Historical Note</u>	4
<u>Scope and Contents note</u>	5
<u>Administrative Information</u>	5
<u>Related Materials</u>	6
<u>Controlled Access Headings</u>	6
<u>Cited Sources</u>	7

Summary Information

Repository	Chicago Public Library: Harold Washington
Title	Chicago Department of Urban Renewal Records
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1940-1980
Date [inclusive]	1891-1992, bulk 1940-1980
Extent	83.0 Linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Chicago Department of Urban Renewal (DUR) was created in 1962 and continued Chicago's existing policy of land clearance and redevelopment. In cooperation with the Chicago Housing Authority, the Department of Urban Renewal facilitated the rapid expansion of high-density public housing projects in Chicago. In 1992, the City of Chicago combined the Department of Urban Renewal with the Commercial District Development Commission to create the Community Development Commission.</p>

Historical Note

The Chicago Department of Urban Renewal (DUR) was created through the combination of the Chicago Land Clearance Commission and the Community Conservation Board in 1962. This merger was the result of the State of Illinois Urban Renewal Consolidation Act of 1961, which required municipalities to create departments of urban renewal to manage projects and funding related to land clearance and redevelopment. However, Chicago's long-standing interest in addressing the structural and demographic makeup of the city extends earlier than the creation of the DUR, as evident through a 1939 Works Progress Administration enumeration study that documented dwellings by homeownership and racial demographics. These studies continued through the 1940s and 1950s.

Though the city continued to study land use and demographics, new building slowed drastically as attention was shifted to the war effort from 1939 to 1945. In the years immediately following World War II, Chicago faced new housing and development challenges. As suburbs developed, white, middle class residents moved out of the city limits in record numbers, resulting in lower property tax incomes and growing fear of "white flight" within the city limits. City planners worried that rapidly changing population demographics and dilapidated neighborhoods, especially those close to the downtown business center, could pose a threat to a city's economic future. Although the African American population had grown steadily throughout the Great Migration, from the 1920s to the 1940s, the vast majority of African Americans in Chicago lived in a limited area known as the "Black Belt" located on the city's south and west sides. Overcrowding and lack of sanitation plagued many of these residences. After World War II, a national housing crisis exacerbated the urgent need for improved urban planning. Urban renewal became a solution to these issues; city planners argued that if unsafe dwellings and objectionable businesses were removed, they could be replaced by improved buildings and raise property values at the same time.

Federal, state and local government created legislation meant to safeguard the value of business centers and property tax bases while providing more modern structures for the city's residents. The State of Illinois passed the Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act and the Relocation Act in July of 1947. These bills gave municipalities broader rights of eminent domain and created state-level funding sources to demolish old buildings and construct new buildings. The United States passed the Housing Act of 1949, assigning financial support to urban renewal projects and slum clearance, and was amended in 1954 to add funding for the rehabilitation of existing structures. The DUR (and its predecessor, the Chicago Land Clearance Commission) chose many neighborhoods as "study areas." After collecting data and photographs, the DUR declared some areas "blighted" as a result of dilapidated buildings, overcrowding and outdated sanitation facilities. Some buildings in more stable areas qualified for conservation, which provided owners government funds to update structures. Areas deemed "slum" or "blighted" were often razed and replaced with public housing, private development or university expansions. In cooperation with the Chicago Housing Authority, the DUR facilitated the rapid expansion of high-density public housing projects in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s.

Opponents of Urban Renewal claimed that the city's pattern for redevelopment consolidated wealth and removed poor and minority residents from valuable real estate near downtown business districts at taxpayers' expense and noted that public housing sites were chosen in racially segregated areas. In

Chicago, activists such as Faith Rich of the Chicago NAACP's Housing Committee questioned the criteria used for defining blighted areas and argued that slum clearance did not solve housing problems for those removed. Jane Jacobs's 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, critiqued the urban renewal movement as a continuation of existing racial and logistical problems in city planning. In 1963, author James Baldwin assigned Urban Renewal the pejorative nickname "Negro Removal."

The DUR oversaw site clearance selection and assigned rehabilitation funds, but it did not retain ownership of cleared land. Sites were transferred to the Chicago Housing Authority or private organizations at a subsidized price after the DUR approved proposed plans. In 1974, the federal funding program supporting urban renewal ended and was replaced by the Community Development Block Grant program.

In 1992, the City of Chicago combined the Department of Urban Renewal with the Commercial District Development Commission to create the Community Development Commission.

Scope and Contents note

The Department of Urban Renewal Records (DUR) range from 1891 to 1992, with the bulk of the material ranging from 1940 to 1980. Documents were created and collected by the DUR, its predecessors, and other Chicago city departments. The DUR recorded the state of structures and neighborhoods in Chicago through studies, photographs, and DUR-designated "study areas." After collecting this information, the department decided whether an area would be conserved through subsidized remodeling projects or cleared for redevelopment and new construction.

The majority of the collection includes photographs, negatives and slides of Chicago neighborhoods considered and targeted for improvement. There are also documents related to the administration and documentation of the DUR land clearance and redevelopment initiatives such as correspondence, memorandums, brochures, magazines, articles, maps, land use surveys, reports, schedules and press releases, reel to reel recordings and audio cassette tapes.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Chicago Public Library: Harold Washington 11/01/2013

Processing Information note

Processed by CLIR funded Black Metropolis Research Consortium "Color Curtain Processing Project."
By Meghan Courtney and Dominique Fuqua November 1, 2013.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

DeWitt Beall Collection. 1966-1971. Chicago Film Archives. Chicago, Illinois

Faith Rich Papers, 1820-1992. Chicago Public Library, Special Collections

General Records of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1931-1987. Record Group 207.
National Archives and Records Administration

Hilberseimer, Ludwig Karl Papers, c.1885-1995. Ryerson and Burnham Archives, School of the Art
Institute of Chicago

Lincoln Park Conservation Association (LPCA) Records, 1955-2005. DePaul University Special
Collections and Archives Department

Mead, Mildred. Photographs, 1947-1962. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago
Library

Metropolitan Planning Council records, 1934-2000. Special Collections and University Archives,
University of Illinois at Chicago

Controlled Access Headings

Personal Name(s)

- Mead, Mildred

Subject(s)

- Chicago Land Clearance Commission
- Chicago Plan Commission

- Chicago, Illinois
- City Planning--Illinois--Chicago
- Community Conservation Board (Chicago, Ill.)
- Public housing--Illinois--Chicago--20th Century
- Urban renewal--Illinois--Chicago--20th Century

Cited Sources

Congressional Quarterly. Urban Issues: 6th Edition, London: Sage Publications, 2013. Page 74.

Hirsch, Arnold R. Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Jacobs, Jane. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. New York: Random House, 1961.

Rast, Joel. "Regime Building, Institution Building: Urban Renewal Policy in Chicago, 1946-1962." Journal of Urban Affairs. May, 2009.

Rich, Faith. "Faith Rich to Ludwig Hilberseimer. Chicago, Illinois. July 12, 1949." Hilberseimer, Ludwig Karl Papers, c. 1885-1995. Ryerson and Burnham Archives, School of the Art Institute at Chicago. http://www.artic.edu/aic/resources/resource/1570?search_id=1

Robinson and Cole. "Urban Blight: An Analysis of Blight Statutes and their Implications for Eminent Domain Reform." National Association of Realtors. October, 2007.

Rossi, Peter H. and Robert Dentler. The Politics of Urban Renewal: The Chicago Findings. Glencoe: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.

Standley, Fred L. and Louis H. Pratt. Conversations with James Baldwin. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989.

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD Historical." Last Accessed November 4, 2013.