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Urban Growth with Limited Prosperity: A History of Public Housing in Laredo, Texas – 1938 to 2006

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Abstract

Public housing in the United States has been a controversial sociopolitical topic since the years of the Great Depression. The issue of appropriate and secure habitation for the country's "deserving poor" continues to be of great importance as government subsidies become scarce in the early 21st century. This dearth of support for public housing is even more evident and prominent along the United States-Mexico border of South Texas, a territory described as having a third world environment.

The dissertation is a narrative history of public housing in Laredo, Texas, a border community. Compiled from news media records and the archives of the Laredo Housing Authority, the study gives insight into methods used by this authority to achieve decent habitation for the underprivileged residents of one of the poorest cities in the United States. After a historical background of Laredo, the study follows a chronological development of federally funded housing through the six decades that began in 1938. The study accentuates the continuing need for such housing as its sponsoring federal agency; the Department of Housing and Urban Development fails to properly fund its subsidiary programs and projects. Principal governmental and nongovernmental sources substantiate the dearth of appropriate housing, with the author providing further insight to his native city's plight. The conclusion outlines how funding, together with higher upkeep and energy costs, will continue in a downward spiral and will lead to an increase in the underserved poor population.

Keywords: public housing, U.S.-Mexico border cities, poverty

Chapter One

Introduction

Laredo, Texas is situated on the northern bank of the Río Grande astride the terminus of United States Interstate Highway 35 and is the busiest inland port in the United States. Laredo's population tripled in size in the last three decades of the 20th century, expanding from 66,000 in 1970 to approximately 220,000 in 2005. With a population increase rate of ten percent per annum, Laredo was the country's second fastest growing city during the decade of the 1990s. Only Las Vegas, Nevada grew at a faster pace. The seat and only urban center of Webb County, this peripheral south Texas city's particular urban morphology may be described as representative of both a Northern Mexican city and a contemporary, albeit unique, United States city. Its recent demographic growth has been publicized as resulting from the extensive commercial trade boom between the United States and Mexico. Concomitant with brisk substantial increases in trade and population, rapid urban sprawl has wrought tremendous strain on health and education services, the environment, law enforcement, related infrastructure services and housing. With the Río Grande as Laredo's sole source of potable water, rapid population growth in the semiarid South Texas environment is rapidly diminishing the river's capacity to sustain a large urban population.

Intimately intertwined with rapid population growth and proximity to Mexico, is a poverty level so low as to impart third-world status on the burgeoning South Texas border area. According to the Border Low Income Housing Coalition, "Laredo is the poorest city in the U.S. Over 41 percent of residents on the border fall below the federal poverty line, compared to 18 percent statewide."[1] A polarization of haves and have-nots is manifested in social and economic practices in and around United States-Mexico border communities. Although criminal activity cannot be totally attributed to poor people, implicit with Laredo's urban growth quandaries are mounting crime rates that may be related to extreme poverty in Mexico and rigorous law enforcement along traditional Gulf of Mexico coastal points of drug and human contraband activity. Lack of adequate employment has tempted many otherwise law-abiding border residents to participate in high-risk high-income contraband activities. Augmented and militarized law enforcement has forced traffickers of humans and illicit drugs to seek easier points of entry, briskly funneling their activities via the Laredo sector of the international border and more remote desert crossing points upriver. This in turn has resulted in a vigorous binational municipal, county, state, federal and military anti-criminal patrolling of this area.

Laredo, Texas is contiguous with its Mexican twin city, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, which has approximately 465,000 inhabitants. Laredo's rapid growth has been unquestionably affected by this proximity to Mexico, which in turn creates a high poverty level affecting both countries' border areas. Socioeconomic and demographic dynamics of United States-Mexico border cities have created a "fourth North American nation" that arose from the melding of a distinctive *cultura fronteriza,* or border culture with unique characteristics not found in either nation's interior. Although Laredo and Nuevo Laredo are only two of many such twin cities along the border, they present idiosyncratic expansional situations and problems because of their geographical position and their status as the busiest inland ports of their respective nations. With four international bridges and approximately 9,000 commercial truck crossings daily,[2] Laredo continues to grow at a rate that alarms municipal, county, state, and national governmental agencies.

Low-income persons have streamed into Laredo to fill the hundreds of service sector jobs created by the boom in international trade and retail commerce. Many of these arrivals are non-citizens who participate in the informal economy where cash payments and incomes are not recorded. As a consequence of such conditions, many of these residents cannot qualify for government-subsidized rent or housing down payment assistance or legal residency, occupying substandard housing stock and living in crowded situations that frequently defy rarely enforced municipal housing regulations. Secure and sanitary housing is oftentimes just as difficult to access even for legal low-income residents. Further exacerbating the situation are a higher-than-national unemployment and under-employment rate, an abnormally large section of population subsisting on fixed or poverty incomes, plus government funding shortfalls that curtail delivery of adequate health, security, and public services, efficiency of infrastructure, and availability of affordable housing.[3]

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 45 percent of Laredo households are unable to afford the rent for a two-bedroom apartment.[4] The typical 2006 monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Laredo is $573. A worker would have to earn $10.30 per working hour 40 hours per week to afford a two-bedroom unit at Laredo's Fair Market rent, 187 percent of the hourly Federal minimum wage. Laredo is ranked as one of the least affordable homeownership markets in the country. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition 1999 report, *Out of Reach*, less than half of the new homes are considered affordable, ranking 177th out of 181 markets in terms of housing affordability.[5] In addition, nearly one fourth of all Laredo houses are in substandard condition. Of those that are substandard, 80 percent are deemed suitable for rehabilitation, while the rest would be judged as condemnable.[6] The Housing Authority of Laredo has attempted to alleviate the need for proper habitation for low-income residents since 1941, but has constantly fallen way short of providing that service due to population increase. These urban conditions indicate a need for informative, diagnostic, and prognostic responses.

Historical Background and Review of Literature

Notwithstanding local publicity and growth coalition pundits claim to the contrary, not all of Laredo's phenomenal growth has been positive; economic benefit from the city's much-touted rapid growth and development is not evenly distributed. Globalization and rapid urbanization encompass economic liberalization that has, with concomitant technological advances in areas of transportation, finance and communication, lowered trade barriers and enabled trans-border market growth. Lower trade barriers resulted in large gains at the corporate level and within a select group of entrepreneurial people with capital to invest. But, as described in the Texas State Comptroller's 1995 report, *Growth Without Prosperity*, globalization and free trade have had negative consequences along the Texas-Mexico border, including social alienation, poor quality of life, degradation of the environment, and inadequate housing. Census statistics, unemployment lists, housing data, and market growth statistics, plus government, non-government, and nonprofit agencies' data sources demonstrate socioeconomic and ecological stresses incurred by Laredo's rapid urbanization of the late 20th century and early 21st century. Evidence of ecological degradation is substantiated by local environmental studies and depicted by satellite imagery of Laredo's urban footprint and land use in over time.

According to Arreola and Curtis (1993), "The landscape anatomy of the border cities provides clues to cultural differences between Mexico and the United States."[7] This is true insofar as the physical description of the architecture and urban density of the earlier public housing developments in Laredo are concerned. When taken into account that Laredo's population is nearly 97 percent ethnic Mexican, a "study of the *urban morphology*, or city form, and the urban built environment…with an emphasis on the landscape anatomy"[8] of this unique border city is essential to describe the cultural dynamics that placed federally funded housing projects in their respective sites. Unlike other Texas cities during the Great Depression, where three separate public housing developments were built to house low-income residents based on legally endorsed racial segregation, no such practice arose in Laredo due to its almost mono-ethnic population.

A review of the history of national urban trends is necessarily a part of this study. Of immediate pertinence are data obtained from newspaper and government agency archives, United States Housing and Urban Department (HUD) and Laredo Housing Authority documentation, media and personal interviews of Laredo residents, present and former Laredo public housing residents, Laredo Planning and Zoning Department personnel, officials of the Department of Community Development, Laredo Environmental Services personnel and local university faculty.

The research will expand upon a comparative history of the development of public housing in mainstream American cities with that of the federal housing projects of Laredo, Texas. Professor Arnold Hirsch's urban history of the *Second Ghetto*[9], with its emphasis on racist community practices and de facto racial segregation in public housing serves as an example of a contrasting case in the development of government-subsidized housing. A historical degree of difference will evolve from the research depicting the absence of *Second Ghetto*-style blatant or veiled racism that relegated minority ethnic groups to "the projects."[10] Laredo's 96.7% ethnic Mexican population is unique among medium-size American cities.[11] This proportion of Hispanic inhabitants is the highest of any United States city with more than 100,000 population; not surprisingly, the municipal leadership reflects similar ethnic composition. The dissertation will tender that, since the inception of public housing during the Great Depression until the present, Laredo's leadership and residents have perceived federal housing as a social and economic advancement for the poor, rather than a program that consigns the disadvantaged to a peripheral social existence.

Laredo's history goes back to the 18th Century colonial settlement of *el despoblado*, the vast uninhabited arid and semi-arid land known to early European explorers as northern *Nueva España*, or New Spain. An insignificant civilian ranching hamlet, La Villa de San Agustín de Laredo was situated in 1765 at a low-water crossing on Río Grande, far from more important Spanish settlements in central and east Texas. Laredo was not a border town until the military defeat of Mexico by the United States in

1848, with its ensuing Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, arbitrarily established the international boundary at the Río Grande and divided this remote geographically uniform territory into the bureaucratically coterminous northern Mexican Republic and southwestern United States.[12]

Extensive literature exists on the physical and human geography, colonial and military history, and the socioeconomic development of towns and cities of this harsh peripheral landscape. The original epicenter of Laredo was located one city block north of the Río Grande and its geographical territory encompassed land on both sides of the river. The twin municipalities of Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas resulted from the aforementioned treaty that ended the Mexican-American War, whereby locals had to decide whether to remain in Laredo, Texas and come under the jurisdiction of the United States or move to the south bank and remain Mexican citizens. Since the original Spanish charter placed Laredo on the north bank, persons who chose to remain Mexican citizens subsequently petitioned and received a city charter from the Tamaulipas state government, founding the city of Nuevo Laredo in 1848. Twenty-first century aerial views of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo depict a single urban mass traversed by the Río Grande. The contiguous urban centers are arbitrarily demarcated by an international boundary that creates legal international political and economic divisions.

As the United States and Mexico begin the 21st century, their common border presents the precarious existence of a developing Third World country immediately adjoined to the world's most powerful industrial nation and foremost economic leader. This situation makes for unique social, economic, commercial and environmental predicaments, such as the profuse and uncontrolled migration of desperately poor

Mexican citizens to that nation's northern border cities and subsequent illegal immigration to the United States. This phenomenon, coupled with the rapid influx of job-seeking United States residents to the same geographical area, has led to the proliferation of multiple unregulated residential areas on both sides of the border. Lacking even the most basic of public services, the South Texas version of these blighted neighborhoods, called *colonias,* present a multiplicity of problems related to unhealthy living conditions wrought by poverty. Aggravating the unregulated housing situation along the border is the fact that Texas *colonias* are residential clusters located on county land beyond municipal jurisdiction.[13]

Sociologists and political analysts contend that the U.S.-Mexico border unites, rather than divides, societies into one uniquely peripheral culture, a people who share values and practices different from either national mainstream. Legitimized international partition recognized by sovereign governments is practically ignored by the *fronterizo*, or borderlander society. The United States and Mexican governments regulate immigration and commerce across their common border, but both national administrations appear to ignore the fact that a third constituency has developed on their adjoining peripheries, border denizens who view these statutes as mere inconveniences. Social and commercial intercourse, legal and illicit, has historically occurred across the border almost as if the demarcation was nonexistent. As recognized in the article *Living off Illegals* (*The Economist,* April 1997), "Their border has always been porous, and this has suited both countries."[14] Associated with this development, economic and cultural globalization has also affected northern Mexico's and southwestern United States' societies. As population along the border rapidly increased, this *fronterizo* constituency developed whose daily environmental and economic situations are dramatically influenced by trans-boundary and international administrative and regulatory decisions made in distant governmental nuclei or international corporate headquarters.

The cultural aspects of trans-boundary social and commercial intercourse and traditionally unique local social and business practices affect issues of housing for the underprivileged. As Dale Beck Furnish's contribution to Miranda's and Wilkie's compilation, *Border Laws and Other Artificial Constraints*, stipulated, "the network of relationship among individuals across the border- based on kinship by blood and marriage, on commercial connections, and on simple friendship makes up a society that overrides the political boundary."[15] Furnish's analytical narrative of the artificiality of the border, currency control, export-import management, and critique of immigration law pointed out the *fronterizo* society's ability of accommodation in the face of government-mandated regulation. Part of this adaptation involves circumvention of federal, state, county, and municipal housing rules evinced by overcrowded habitations, construction of substandard housing, and inadequate maintenance of existing housing stock.

Multiple and varied factors accelerated recent urban sprawl of cities along the U.S.-Mexico border, consequently increasing poverty levels in northern Mexico and South Texas. Economic globalization and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are among the principal driving forces propelling this ostensibly uncontrolled growth. Environmental problems, work place conditions, health issues, appropriate housing, and other vital human needs have been given inadequate attention or simply ignored by governments and otherwise remain unchallenged by profit-driven commercial interests. The authors of *Consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement for Health Services: A Perspective from Mexico* (March 1994) pointed out that Mexico lacks the modern health services necessary to respond to the demands of global competition.[16] Similarly distressing to the Texas side of the border is the lack of proper medical care caused by a large and generally underemployed indigent population. In 2004 a local hospital reported that 35.2 percent of Webb County residents were without medical insurance, indicating a total of 76,440 people.[17] At the end of 2005, patients were being held in emergency rooms from 24 to 48 hours before a hospital room was available for admission. Poor, unhygienic, and crowded housing conditions aggravate this precarious situation.

Contrary to optimistic newspaper commentaries about Laredo's economic growth, ample literature attests to a lack of economic vigor that actually accompanies the city's accelerated urban sprawl and population growth. Growth promotion organizations raved about the economic boom wrought by NAFTA. Texas A & M International University's publication, *NAFTA Digest* (April 2000), reported that job availability had increased since 1999. The spokesperson for the Laredo Manufacturers' Association pointed out in a local newspaper how commerce has increased job opportunities.[18] Other entities, however, poignantly disclose less exuberant situations. Physically, the appearance of large warehouses, tractor-trailer parks, and intense commercial road and railroad traffic may indicate extensive international transshipping activity "which might present the casual observer a false sense that abundant employment opportunities exist for unskilled and semiskilled labor. In reality, many companies are not Laredo based, and profits leave the area."[19] Many of the publicized service sector jobs fail to provide living wages, are not full time, and lack insurance or medical benefits. The 1995 Texas State Comptroller's Office report, *Growth Without Prosperity,* predicted increased borderland employment, but this have typically been low paying jobs and the population increase outstripped job availability, that is, the overall percentage of unemployment remains high along the Texas-Mexico border as the 21st century began. The State Comptroller's literature indicated that in light of diminished federal and state help to border municipalities, it is imperative that local governments develop aggressive initiatives to attract high-tech industry and provide the trained workforce to sustain it.[20]

Laredo and Nuevo Laredo have problems similar to other border twin cities, but their unique position as their respective nations' busiest inland ports astride the shortest, best developed, and most heavily utilized route between the two nations' populous interiors has caused the exceedingly accelerated population growth. Laredo doubled in population between 1980 (> 93,000) and 2000 (>193,000) and Nuevo Laredo grew 75 percent from 203,000 residents in 1980 to 355,000 in 1999.[21] Many residences lack a basic supply of potable water. As recently as 2005, Laredo Texas's municipal government notified several middle- and high-income neighborhoods that tap water should be boiled before being drunk.[22] The city's growth outpaced the municipal waterworks' ability to provide adequate water pressure, raising the possibility of stagnant or unsanitary water supply. This situation is environmentally taxing and has led to a quest for secondary water sources, particularly since the Environmental Protection Agency designated the Río Grande as the United States' fifth most polluted river; so distressed is this once-dependable river system that its flow into the Gulf of

Mexico at its mouth, 200 miles downstream from Laredo, has been reduced to a mere trickle as farmers extract its water for irrigation at an alarming rate.[23] The area around the two Laredos is semi-desert and lacks the renewable or sustainable natural resources to support the rapidly increasing human densities of the near future. The dissertation research will include comparative census data that confirm the lack of the basic lack of potable water, adequate plumbing, and sewer systems in the Laredos' peripheral neighborhoods and indicate the need for government intervention to provide adequate sanitary habitation and improve quality of life for this border city.

Poverty that has resulted from Laredo's unemployment and underemployment has worsened the scarcity of adequate safe housing. The official unemployment report is not reflective of the true rate of joblessness, which is grossly underreported since many persons do not apply for work at the local unemployment office due to their illegal residential status or other background check irregularities. Because of poverty and questionable residence status, many of these residents participate in the informal economy and are ineligible for housing loans. Many families "double up" in low quality rental houses with up to three generations of extended family residing under one roof in an effort to make ends meet. One extreme instance of such deprivation involved a family of four living in a portable tool shed with a dirt floor. Several garden hoses were joined end-to-end from across the street as neighbors provided the family with potable water. The inhabitants were illegal immigrants and their eviction presented an oft-repeated moral and legal situation.[24] In another similar situation, a nineteen-year resident of public housing told how his family with twelve children inhabited a three-bedroom residence. He recounted that during his childhood he and four of his siblings slept on the floor of the living room.[25] The author of this narrative has witnessed numerous such instances of “looking the other way,” whereby local officials, providers of services, or landlords ignored or circumvented legalities in order to expedite, ease, or smooth out uncomfortable life situations of local residents, native-born, naturalized, or otherwise.

Endemic unemployment and underemployment keeps thousands of Laredo Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) residents from qualifying for bank loans for house construction, improvement, or repair. This has impelled the creation of *colonias*, impoverished exurban neighborhoods, of which forty-one are identified in Webb County.[26] A November 2003 State Comptroller's report on border counties stated that approximately 25% of the state's border population subsists on non-wage earnings and that the average income of Texas border area households is 33% lower than that of the rest of the country.[27] Laredo’s proximity to Mexico, with a minimum wage one seventh of Texas’s, increases illegal immigration, consequently worsening the border’s economic opportunity and the housing situation.

Previously mentioned and pertinent to Laredo’s situation is the peculiar history of a *fronterizo* society far away from any attentive central government. Diverse cultures and interests resulted from the articulation of interrelations caused by a process of border growth, modernization and urbanization during the 20th and now the 21st centuries. This development is duplicated in all U.S.-Mexico border cities. Geographer Lawrence A. Herzog conceptualized the world of border cities, by the 1980s, as one of a "transfrontier metropolis" consisting of "a variety of spheres: crossborder family ties, consumer travel linkages, labor market and business ties."[28] With a combined population totaling 6.5 million in 1990, the United States-Mexico border includes a world of nine large metropolitan areas differentiated by a unique human use of space; highly integrated, transfrontier metropolitan areas. The unifying theme is that, despite a "constant oscillation between friction and good neighborliness, there is a need to keep the vision of cooperation and the forging of closer ties that are likely to overshadow confrontation on the borderlands."[29] The border's history is not just American, or Mexican, or Chicano, but a varied view of an area of study of a new borderlander constituency; a world of paradoxes, of decentered living in a "between" space. As a resident of this borderland, the researcher has witnessed, experienced, and participated in the phenomena described by the contributors; a life-view embedded by having lived in this environment for sixty years, of which the first twenty two were in a federal housing project.

Regional Impacts of U.S.-Mexican Relations, edited by Ina Rosenthal-Urey, presented useful information on the origins of current regional diversity in Mexico and how it affects relationships between the United States and Mexico. The essays' common concern was the disorganizing impact of modern capitalist development. Most of this impact comes from the United States, and several of the papers documented the extent to which United States private and government initiatives have fragmented Mexico's spatial economy. The Mexican government's attempts to centralize and gain control of internal social and economic development have been repetitiously hampered by the intended and unintended consequences of United States government and private businesses' involvement in their southern neighbor's affairs. Part of Rosenthal-Urey's book was relevant to South Texas's current quality of life controversies, depicting how restructuring of the Mexican rural economy led to increased migration to border cities, consequentially becoming the basis for the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) of the 1960s.[30] From *Regional Impacts* the researcher recognized the contributions that face-to-face interviews with decision- and policy-makers in government, volunteer, and commercial development leaders have on the clarity and validity of case study research.

Related to globalization of industrial practices, thousands of automobiles are assembled in Mexico for General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, Nissan, and Volkswagen for domestic and foreign consumption. A large majority of these vehicles enter the United States by rail through the Port of Laredo. Contributing to Rosenthal-Urey's book, Douglas Bennet placed the development of the Mexican automobile industry within the context of developments in the world auto industry. Originally, Mexico's auto industry, controlled from the beginning by multinational corporations, was located close to Mexico City, the nation's major center of consumption. As automobile companies began to develop worldwide strategies of production, exportation of parts became a significant component of Mexican industry, in turn making factory locations along the U.S.-Mexico border more attractive. Bennet's work added to the understanding of the rapidly increasing *maquiladora* automotive assembly plants in cities that were once considered secondary in regional importance. Plants such as the large General Motors plant in Silao, Guanajuato, the auto parts plants in Saltillo, Coahuila and the Chrysler, Packard Electric and GM twin plants in the Laredos demonstrate the effect of globalization of formerly rural or isolated locales. These *maquilas* have had coincident beneficial and detrimental effects on the border urban landscape, labor, transportation, economy, housing and quality of life.[31]

Borderlines/INCITRA's periodical article, *Population Growth in the Borderlands,* provided a listing of contacts and information sources for sustainable development along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, including access to government planning agencies in the two Laredos. These included departments that create binational plans to address the infrastructure needs and environmental impacts of growth.[32] Texas A&M International University's Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade journal, *NAFTA Digest*, presented information on labor relations, transborder law enforcement endeavors, technology and information exchange, transportation data, pro-business and pro-international trade issues, including articles on labor issues such as Mexican labor unionization, *maquiladora* working conditions, and worker sex discrimination cases publicized by the *Labor Law Journal,* the *Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network Newsletter,* and the *Campaign for Labor Rights Newsletter*.[33] Pertinent to Laredo's job market and economy, these newsletters supported workers' rights and brought labor abuses by *maquila* employers to light; exploitative conditions in Mexico that have had negative effects on U.S. jobs aggravated by NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

Laredo's increasingly important status as an entrepôt for international commerce has had the allure of prospective employment. The economic boost in tri-national trade (Canada, the United States, and Mexico) so much touted by the promoters of NAFTA has exceedingly impacted commercial traffic between the countries, but this has only enriched the commercial interests of a few locals while an inordinate portion of border dwellers remains underemployed at or below the U.S. Government-defined poverty level. Migration push factors include poor living conditions and a bleak economic outlook for countless people in central Mexico. The border offers opportunities otherwise unavailable in the Mexican interior's rural towns, where hunger is common, consequently leading to population increase along the border and an increased demand on the availability of proper and decent housing on border communities, including Texas cities.

Further pointing to the porosity of the border was the doubling of U.S. Border Patrol agents between 2002 and 2005 in the Laredo Sector alone. As of early 2006, there are over 600 federal border protection officers in the Laredo sector alone, a sector that covers approximately 1,000 square miles with 140 miles of actual national border along the Río Grande.[34] The number of detentions of illegal immigrants runs in the thousands per month in this area alone as destitute Mexicans and "OTMs" (Other-than-Mexicans, in Border Patrol parlance) attempt to achieve the American Dream. Many immigrants have successfully transitioned and achieved legal residence status, but a large contingent are undocumented and continues to subsist at or below the United States Federal Government-defined poverty level, and many are fraudulently dependent on the Texas welfare system as well as on the informal economy peculiar to this border area.

An important aspect of South Texas is the existence of the *colonia,* low density, unplanned exurban communities that have blossomed on county land beyond municipal jurisdiction. Reflecting poverty and the informal economy, many c*olonia* houses are typically constructed piecemeal over many months as availability of money dictates. Although state law prohibits the sale of private ranchland for the purpose of developing dwellings, families have bought plots ranging from a quarter acre to one or two full acres from ranch owners. Well beyond municipal jurisdiction, these parcels are declared *ranchito,*" or little ranches, and were not platted as part of any city or county housing subdivision; considered ranchland, most of these communities lack water, electricity, sewage, drainage and adequate law enforcement, fire protection, refuse disposal, or any other services deemed necessary to safe and healthy human habitation. The habitations typically begin as a ramshackle hut built from salvaged scrap materials or a used mobile home. Next to the shack or trailer the foundation for the eventual permanent dwelling may be laid months before any semblance of a room, kitchen, or bathroom is constructed. *Colonia* construction follows no specific building codes from city or county regulation and zoning. Low income dictates extended family and friendships as sources of labor. Rooms are added, usually one at a time, as money or building material becomes available. Use of discarded or second-hand building materials has created a scavenger *fronterizo* society that has coincidentally resulted in the environmentally sound practice of recycling. To alleviate poor living conditions along the border, the Texas state government has promoted funding for *colonia* home construction through micro-loans to qualified residents.[35]

On the Mexican side of the border, in an attempt to improve distressed living conditions, the State of Tamaulipas has initiated a voucher program to be used by qualified workers' families to improve habitation. These vouchers may be used at local building supply stores. The program requires proof of property title and a paycheck stub to qualify for the vouchers. Although a boon to the quality of life, the problem of appropriate housing availability in Mexico is only partially resolved because many residents are unemployed or underemployed squatters on private or public land who are unable to produce legal title to their sometimes illicitly settled plots.[36]

In Webb County, c*olonia* water for drinking, daily cooking, and cleaning is trucked in and stored in rooftop cisterns or plastic tubs. Prolonged storage of large quantities of water leads to de-chlorination, which causes an endemic incidence of digestive system disorders among *colonia* residents. Local school districts have at times required students to bring a change of clothes to school so they may bathe in the school gymnasium shower before returning home, where there is no running water.[37] Many c*olonia* residents dig their own outhouses or privies. Without appropriate flush toilets connected to septic tanks, an already high incidence of hepatitis, diarrhea, and other intestinal maladies in these peripheral communities is exacerbated. One incidence in Nuevo Laredo involved two deaths. A small child fell into the improperly covered septic tank and drowned in human waste. The mother likewise drowned as she was stuck in the septic tank headfirst trying to save her child. In other tragic instances, *colonia* residents have died by electrocution as they attempted illicit hookups to nearby power lines. Adding to already dangerous living conditions of unplatted and unpaved dusty or muddy streets, uninsured motorists in the South Texas unregulated neighborhoods drive unsafe automobiles in their everyday attempt to generate income, collect state aid, or scavenge food, appliances, or building material. These cars and trucks frequently cannot pass the mandatory state inspection and their owners lack sufficient income to afford liability auto insurance. Presented with a moral dilemma, traffic enforcement officers at times overlook residents' legal breaches, since depriving them of transportation negates access to their jobs.[38]

A scavenger culture has evolved along the border and subsists by participating in a uniquely Mexican-flavored informal economy. Construction, plumbing, electrical work, mechanical and auto repair are typically at much lower cost than that of legitimately established businesses. Many of these workers are in the United States illegally, and as a rule, locals look the other way. Housemaids, or domestics, a long-standing Laredo tradition, may or may not be in the country legally. Households of high, middle, and low incomes employ them. Many such domestic workers, gardeners, carpenters, and handymen possess a border-crossing card, which is not a work permit or "green card"; they may cross to the United States but are cannot be legally employed. They typically take two to four bus transfers and additionally may walk one or two miles to the residence where they will work for $25 to $30 per day cleaning house, baby-sitting, or groundskeeping, then reverse the bus trip home in the evening. Carpenters and handymen change clothing to avert being detected as workers by the Immigration and Customs enforcement officers at the border crossing. Others remain for months as live-in maids or caretakers, not daring to wander outside their employer's home for fear of being picked up by the U.S. Border Patrol.[39]

Adding to the border's unstable and precarious living conditions is the fact that Mexico is the major distribution center of illicit drugs into the United States, and Webb County ranks second among Texas counties as the point of entry of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and illegal pharmaceuticals. Many narcotraffickers come from impoverished backgrounds and are driven into a life of crime by lack of gainful employment and the lure of high-risk large payoffs. Human and narcotic contraband, with the concomitant incidents of violent crime, is part of everyday life along the Texas-

Mexico border. As of November 2005, Nuevo Laredo recorded 156 narcotraffic-related homicides. Drug gang-related kidnappings and disappearances are likewise notoriously numerous.

Peculiar to the United States-Mexico boundary area is the evolution over the last 150 years of the aforementioned "border culture," neither fully Texan nor Mexican. It is composed mostly of persons of Mexican ethnicity, with a significant mixture of immigrants from the interiors of both countries, plus a small minority from Asia and Europe. Compared to other Texas-Mexico border towns, Laredo has a history of good racial relations. With almost 97 percent of its population of Mexican descent, Texas A&M Associate Professor of Urban Geography Michael Yoder describes Laredo's culture as “more accepting of Anglos. Laredo is different than Brownsville, McAllen, or Del Río; here we have Hispanic, not Anglo, exploitation of Hispanics."[40] The language of Laredo-Nuevo Laredo commerce is primarily Spanish. The language of socialization quite often presents a unique blend of both English and Spanish within a single phrase, a mixture referred to as “Spanglish” in the United States, derisively called “pocho” by Mexican nationals, and popularly known as “Tex-Mex” to Laredoans. This is often a challenge to newcomers from the United States and Mexican interiors and administrative representatives of the *maquiladora* owners, who may be from the United States, Canada, Asia, or Europe. Being bilingual in English and Spanish is requisite for the administration of hundreds of monolingual Mexican *maquila* employees, but does not guarantee acceptance into local social circles.

As the twenty-first century begins, rapid and inadequately planned or controlled border urbanization presents multiple issues and problems that warrant in-depth investigation. Material reviewed in this dissertation, supported by bibliographic, demographic, and geographic resources, will provide a survey of positive and negative dynamics of United States-Mexico borderland urban growth, with particular focus on federally subsidized public housing of Laredo, Texas. The border conurbation at Laredo, Texas presents a unique cultural laboratory for a substantial case study of the built environment. The intention of the historical, analytical, and prescriptive study is to add to existing data; the dissertational objective is to provide assistance to future community planning by providing an historical assessment of government subsidized housing in Laredo, including a narrative description of public housing developments in this border city. The researcher's objective is to provide urban geographers, demographers, anthropologists, economists, and community planners with historical account that may be useful in addressing the future needs of Texas-Mexico border residents.

Objectives of the Dissertation

The dissertation research addresses the scarcity of decent affordable housing for Laredo, Texas's growing underprivileged population, using public and private agency statistics to posit predictive housing trend solutions for this city. The research, in the form of a case study, provides a chronological narrative history that describes the socioeconomic effects of the shortage of affordable housing in this South Texas city in view of recent population pressures and curtailment of government subsidy contributions

The study consists of five chapters supported by a combination of case study and archival data-supported descriptive historical narrative. The case study constitutes a qualitative method that is “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1989). One primary method of case study research is the personal interview, by which reality inheres in the perception of individuals with focus on meaning and understanding.[41] According to Mauch and Birch (1998), qualitative research has the following characteristics:

- Reliability is based on thorough and in-depth observations made by the prudent and conscientious researcher.

- The study of the ecology of human communities in particular requires the use of deduction by reaching conclusions or inferences from general principles to particulars.

- It is a form of research that seeks to provide full and accurate descriptions of phenomena in all their complexity in the attempt to discover and demonstrate the assumptions that underlie events or actions.

- Qualitative investigation deals mainly with statements and questions couched in words with detailed descriptions of settings and events, beginning with broad questions and then attempting to narrow them into small samples and uniqueness.

- Qualitative research takes into consideration the context of words and events as integral parts of the primary data.

- Significance of the research depends on the thoroughness and depth of reporting.[42]

The second method involves developing the overall descriptive historical narrative by conducting systematic evaluations of archival and government survey documents as data sources. Data pertinent to the research include:

- The creation of the Housing Authority of Laredo in 1938 that led to the construction of the Colonia Guadalupe Federal Housing Project, which opened in 1941.

- The planning and construction of Laredo Housing Authority projects subsequent to Congressional housing acts of 1954 and 1961.

- The effects on Laredo's population of the end of the *bracero,* or visiting Mexican migrant agricultural laborer program. The post-World War II international agreement came to an end in the 1960s with mass deportations of Mexican farm workers. Many of the workers did not return to their homes in the Mexican interior, but remained in Northern Mexican cities, swelling the population and placing undue stress on border cities' infrastructures.

- The consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on Laredo's demographics, built and natural environment, quality of life, and availability of proper habitation.

- The globalization factors that define Laredo's political leadership's disposition toward commercial and public housing development and their resultant effects on Laredo in terms of increased poverty, wasteful infrastructure management, and uncertain future sustainability.

Chapter One

The introductory unit includes a demographic and ethnographic study of the municipality, with particular emphasis on its predominantly Mexican ethnic population and the social and economic causes of rapid population increased experienced in Laredo, Texas from 1970 through 2006. Various sources, including but not limited to the United States Census Bureau reports, Webb County Tax Assessor's Reports, City of Laredo New Construction Records, Laredo Manufacturers' Association Reports, Laredo Housing Authority data, and Department of Labor Statistics substantiate a narrative description of the causes of rapid urbanization in the late 20th century and early 21st century, the growth of a disproportionately large underprivileged population, and the resultant paucity of affordable housing.

Chapter Two

The second section constitutes the history of the 272-unit Colonia Guadalupe Federal Housing Project. Constructed under the auspices of the United States Housing Act of 1937, this development has had 100 percent occupancy since its inception in 1941. The 66-year-old Colonia Guadalupe has not deteriorated into the blighted or crime-ridden housing projects stereotypically depicted in mainstream American cities, but rather has remained a source of improved living conditions for Laredo's underprivileged Mexican American majority residents. The Housing Act of 1937 not only provided for housing and employment during the Great Depression, but mandated slum clearance. A short history of the site acquisition will include a local Housing Authority-mandated property surveys and consequent condemnation rulings.

Chapter Three

This section consists of research of the second phase of federal public housing construction in Laredo. From 1957 to 1963, 400 dwelling units in the form of three low-rise family housing projects and a downtown high-rise apartment for the elderly were erected. Although the low-rise projects were created to be accessible to general low-income families, the literature reflects a change in federal funding policy to provide housing for the elderly, who were construed by the federal government as a more orderly, manageable, and "deserving" clientele.

Chapter Four

This section constitutes an examination of the next phase of Laredo Housing Authority construction, during which seven new projects totaling 336 family units were added, reflecting changing attitudes and policies of the Federal Administration and Congress toward funding of public and affordable housing between 1980 and 1993. A review of political, legislative, and economic currents of that period is integrated to validate public housing funding trends.

Chapter Five

Data integrated into the dissertation in the final chapter point out Laredo's lack of capacity to provide decent and sanitary habitation for its low-income residents, a problem worsened by recent population pressures. Unlike mainstream American cities, government subsidized public and affordable housing have not relegated and concentrated Laredo's poor in blighted or "ghettoized" neighborhoods, but rather integrated them into spatially diverse lower and middle class neighborhoods.

The dissertation research submits that, since the inception of government-subsidized habitation in Laredo, the city's leadership and residents perceived federal housing as inclusive social and economic advancement for low-income residents, avoiding consigning the disadvantaged to a peripheral social existence, and that, although severely limited by lack of funding, local leaders continue to pursue this objective in the 21st century. With an estimated 205,000 residents in the U.S. Census-designated Laredo Metropolitan Statistical Area, of which a large contingency is considered at or below federally defined poverty level, the local Housing Authority oversees 1,008 traditional federally subsidized rental units in eight housing developments. This does not include the hundreds of Section-8 subsidized habitations in the private apartment and housing market. As the 21st century begins, the dire need for rent subsidy and affordable housing in Laredo continues to grow and a large section of its residents who qualify for such housing remain underserved.[43] The research maintains that the current shortage of housing has been exacerbated due to demographic and economic changes caused by increased legal and illegal immigration and recent trade and industry relations between Mexico and the United States. The researcher proposes that the dissertation provides predictive data that will potentially augment and advance novel methods of ensuring decent affordable habitation for residents of the United States-Mexico border.

Chapter Two

Initial Phase of Public Housing in Laredo, Texas: 1938 to 1949

> The United States Housing Authority has determined that the development and administration of the Project … will provide decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings within the financial reach of families who are in the lowest income group who cannot afford to pay enough to cause private enterprise in their locality or metropolitan area.[1]

The original plan to build Laredo, Texas's first government funded housing was promoted in 1938 by Henry Bartell "Pat" Zachry, a Texas A& M-educated engineer and construction contractor who had resided in the city since 1924. Cognizant of the slum-clearance and construction guidelines of the United States Housing Act of 1937 and meticulously prepared, H.B. Zachry, together with Laredo Chamber of Commerce executive vice-president and Laredo Morning Times columnist Gilbert Isaac Garretson, approached the Laredo City Council on June 6, 1938 with a proposal to raze six blocks of blighted property to construct "112 apartments in two-story buildings with one stairway per every two apartments."[2] According to the proposal, the city was to donate ten percent of the cost of an estimated $106,000 for slum clearance, land preparation, and construction. Zachry declared that "(t)he donation need not be in cash. It can be in the form of land, paving, sewerage, etc." [3] Half of the remaining ninety percent, or approximately $47,500 would be an outright gift of the federal government. The remaining half would be in bonds issued against the buildings themselves, which the federal government would purchase. Mr. Zachry estimated that with 85% occupancy and an average of $1 rent per week per apartment plus utilities, the buildings would be paid for in twenty-five years, after which the project would become city property.[4]

Supporting H.B. Zachry at the city council meeting was a Laredo Chamber of Commerce committee comprised of Mr. Garretson, local clothing store businessman Charles E. Richter Jr., Hector Cox, and C.O. Wilburn. As set forth by the United States Housing Act of 1937, State of Texas legislation authorized Mayor Albert Martin to form a municipal housing authority and he appointed "five men to be given complete control of the project."[5] Within three and a half minutes of the introduction of the proposal, the Laredo City Council, directed by Mayor Martin, approved the creation of the City of Laredo Housing Authority and appointed Henry B. Zachry, businessman and factory owner Matías de Llano, attorney Philip A. Kazen, lumber company and construction company owner Peter P. Leyendecker Jr., and Gilbert Garretson as housing commissioners with full power to research and direct the project.[6] The selection of the site was to be decided soon afterward.

The June 17, 1938 *Laredo Morning Times* column by Gilbert I. Garretson reflected the concerns by Laredo Independent School District Superintendent William P. Galligan and Principal Bill Lemoine that the proposed housing project was going to result in tenement-like congested inner-city slum dwellings. Mr. Garretson assuaged their fears by explaining that federal rulings and specifications dictated that the project would consist of low-rise single-family units with small front and back yards and green spaces, not the overcrowded urban blight depicted by the gentlemen's derision. Taking umbrage with negative comments concerning his status both as a member of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, a promoter of federally subsidized housing, and a journalist of the *Morning Times* staff, Garretson also affirmed that he was providing a public service and that his column, *The Measuring Stick,* was not a mouthpiece of either the Chamber of Commerce or the Housing Authority of Laredo. Directing his words at the detractors, he wrote that it was well to remember that the proposed housing project had the blessing of Mayor Martin and the City Council. Garretson wrote, “It is impossible for a man to be a friend of the underdog and not create some enemies.” [7]

During the summer of 1938 the Laredo Housing Authority hired eighteen young men home from college to survey residential areas. Such a survey was needed to comply with Housing Act regulations and earmark funds for slum clearance. W.D. Martin, manager of the Hamilton Hotel, provided a room at the hotel as the survey headquarters. The more affluent residential areas and the central business district were not canvassed.

The U. S. census indicated that Laredo had a 1930 population of 32,618, and the locally sponsored 1938 survey showed it at 38,326. The 4,183 habitations actually surveyed housed 18,862 people, or nearly half of Laredo’s population. Of these houses, 3,889 were occupied and 3,520 of these were badly in need of repair. The number of Individuals living in houses rated to be in fair condition was 1,790; those living in houses needing minor repairs was 7,503; 8,817 persons lived in houses needing major repairs; individuals living in substandard houses where family owns both land and house totaled 6,867. There were 412 individuals who owned the house only. Of the 3,889 occupied houses, 1,420 families owned both the land and the house; 85 owned the house alone. One family had lived in the same house for 75 years. Houses with outside flushing toilets totaled 128 houses while 264 houses had outside bathing fixtures. Housing more than 15,000 Laredoans, 3,265 households had no bathing facilities whatsoever; 36 households had hot and cold running water; 2,839 had cold water only; 773 households (3,773 individuals) shared a community faucet, while 539 houses had no water service at all. These amounted top 2,604 people with no water facilities whatsoever who "must beg, borrow, or steal water from their neighbors even for drinking purposes."

The survey indicated that 2,799 houses had open hole privies, this totaled 13,476 individuals who used old-fashioned open hole privy toilets, 1,085 families did not have the privacy of their own open hole privy and shared a toilet with neighbors; the average number of people using these cooperative toilets was 13; in one instance as many as 56 people were using one open hole privy.

The Housing Authority survey, as printed in the Laredo Morning Times, reported that 856 houses had electric lighting, 876 used gas lighting, and 2,147 households, or 10,413 people, still used old-fashioned kerosene lamps for illumination.

The newspaper account showed that 2,042 individuals in Laredo used a fireplace for cooking while 4,768 used wood for cooking, and 1,280 persons had no cooking facilities whatsoever. The average number of families per house was 1.085 and the average household held 4.85 people. The average family per house had 2.79 people, of which 1.76 were under 15 years of age. Houses had an average of 2.71 rooms and 1.33 bedrooms each. 171 houses had outside water. The floors of 1,879 dwellings were rated as good, 2,100 as poor, and 204 as dirt. Screen doors were found in 1,987 houses while 2,047 had window screens and 1,928 had no screens at all.

The listing of ethnic breakdown of households was 3, 828 Latin American, 46 Anglo Saxon, 15 Negro, and 1 Chinese. The average family income, ranging from families with no income whatsoever to those in which wages were earned by all members of the family, was $32.50 per month. The average income of wage-earning households was $20.75 per month.[8]

Mandated by the United States Housing Authority, the survey was necessary to justify slum clearance by making evident the unhygienic living conditions of the more impoverished areas. The removal of unhealthy habitat was promoted as beneficial for the entire city.

> Sickness, juvenile delinquency, diseases all run rampant under such unsanitary conditions. Flies from these open hole toilets bearing these deadly germs, deposit germs in the milk and the food of your babies and ours. Rats and vermin feed on the filth of the open toilets, pillage at night in the backyards of people of better living standards, leaving deadly fleas bearing typhus germs to infest your family and ours.[9]

Project proponents further touted slum clearance and Federal Government-subsidized housing as a solution to renters' late payments and property owners' tax delinquency. Feeling that the Federal Government would infuse large amounts of money into slum clearance and construction of new housing, city leaders promoted the project as the first step of a long-range plan to improve quality of life in Laredo, relieve high unemployment, and benefit the local economy. *The Laredo Morning Times* asserted that approximately 231 houses, or about 6% of "Laredo's so-called slums" would be eliminated. The homes surveyed averaged monthly rents of $4 to $5, with one household paying 65¢ per month. The survey demonstrated that the average family investigated in the projected area of demolition had an income of only $20.75 per family per month and there was an average of five persons to a family; people in the locality to be razed were subsisting on 18 cents a day.[10]

Upon reviewing the survey, Federal Housing Authority agent James T. Haile wired Washington informing the agency of his approval to remove slums and construct federally subsidized housing in Laredo. Assessing earlier successful applications for federal housing funds in Texas cities such as Corpus Christi, Brownsville, San Antonio, and Dallas, the Housing Authority of Laredo applied for $1,000,000, anticipating that they might receive half of that figure. This was deemed a reasonable amount, as Laredo's housing needs were assessed to have been as serious as San Antonio's and the money would help the local economy.[11] The public was advised that the construction of such housing did not constitute a federal government giveaway or charity. The local newspaper commented "Laredo's problem was not an entirely philanthropic problem as Laredo's average income must be sufficient to amortise the cost over sixty years." [12] By mid-August notification arrived from the U.S. Housing Administration that an initial grant of $600,000 was awarded to Laredo.[13]

Several changes in the membership of the Housing Authority of Laredo occurred in the interim between the slum clearance survey and the start of construction of the housing project. On September 6, 1938, Philip Kazen and Gilbert I. Garretson turned in resignations as housing commissioners to Mayor Pro Tempore W. S. Cantrell. By state law, Kazen was ineligible to participate as a member of the Laredo Housing Authority because of his new position as the city's tax attorney and Garretson was likewise disqualified to serve when he accepted employment as the Authority's executive secretary.[14] Cantrell appointed Father Dan Lanning from St. Peter's Parish and attorney Frank Y. Hill to the vacated positions. The Laredo Housing Authority and its promoters chose a member of the local clergy as Housing Commissioner from precedence set by the San Antonio Housing Authority, which had appointed public housing activist Father C. Tranchese.[15] In October Mayor Martin appointed Frank Y. Hill as city attorney, disqualifying him from remaining on the Housing Authority. Federal housing law specifically stipulated that no member of a Housing Authority could have any financial interest in any construction controlled by the Authority. Consequently, Peter P. Leyendecker, construction contractor and owner of City Lumber Company, and Pat Zachry, owner of Herring Price Lumber Company and H.B. Zachry Construction Company, stepped down in order to qualify to bid for the construction of the federal housing development. The consensus of the Authority was that the two men had accomplished the important preliminary work of securing federal funding for the project, so it was appropriate for them to resign. The Mayor Pro Tempore filled the three vacancies by appointing E.D. Salinas, Carlos Richter, and Ed Russell to the Housing Authority. He also appointed Matías de Llano, President of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, to act as chairman of the local Housing Authority.[16] Salinas was the former Assistant District Attorney and the president of the local League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Richter was the president of a local department store, Russell was the president of the Union National Bank of Laredo, and de Llano was the owner of a prominent hat manufacturing firm.[17]

On November 20, 1938, Laredo Housing Authority Executive Secretary Gilbert Garretson received a communiqué from Nathan Straus, Administrator of the United States Housing Authority in Washington, D.C., that, based on the Laredo Chamber of Commerce-sponsored survey of housing, a loan be contracted to construct a total of 270 houses instead of the original 180 as originally planned. The projected budget now totaled one million dollars.[18] In view of this, an ordinance was issued by the City of Laredo to amend the decree that created the contract between the City and the local Housing Authority. Subsequently, clearance of blighted property was expedited when "an emergency rule for reading of ordinances at three regular City Council meetings was suspended and called for the elimination of unfit dwellings and for the furnishing of certain services."[19] Garretson additionally commented in his newspaper column,

> Considering the cost of labor in South Texas we believe there will be no necessity for spending more than one million dollars for the construction of the houses. It includes architects fees, cost of the land, and the demolition of the houses on the land. The building of 270 houses will mean the demolition of at least 270 houses and probably more, as well as the buying of enough land. All of this will be paid for out of the million dollars.[20]

Federal guidelines for picking a site for the proposed housing project necessitated a minimum estimated size of eight contiguous city blocks, a fairly low sale price from individual lot owners, and that it be situated close to a school and church. The rules also specified that the number of habitations constructed must be at least equal to the residences demolished.[21]

The Housing Authority of Laredo publicized that the housing project was to be of permanent construction built to last at least sixty years. The materials and methods to be used would be of the latest superior quality. Members of the Authority had traveled to various cities and some had attended an international housing convention held in Mexico City to listen for ideas from European and Latin American public housing proponents, stating "European governments have been at it for years. The United States made a late start but has made tremendous headway."[22] At that Mexico City meeting the Laredo group developed the idea for the actual design of the proposed housing project after assessing Mexican government-subsidized home construction. The material of choice was steel-reinforced poured concrete floor slabs and roofs and walls of special hard-kilned hollow brick with a rough-ridged exterior and a smooth tile-like interior. This would "facilitate the tenants' cleaning chores and the maintenance crews could just hose down the units' interiors between renters." [23] Minutes of the local housing commissioners' February 1939 meeting reflected the following Federal stipulations:

> The low-rent character must be maintained by the Laredo Housing Authority or any other public body and no higher rentals than shall be found necessary to assume revenues…sufficient to (1) pay…the principal and interest on Bonds, (2) meet the cost…for maintaining and operating the Project, and the cost of insurance. The Project shall not be operated for profit or as a source of revenue to any public or private agency, will be safe and sanitary…only for families of low income whose income at the time of admission…does not exceed 5X the rental (including the value of heat, light, water and cooking fuel) of the dwellings to be furnished to the family, except in the case of families with 3 or 4 minor dependents, such ratio shall not exceed 6:1.[24]

The Housing Commissioners, as the members of the local Authority were called, placated the local public's concern that the housing project was a temporary measure because political pundits had predicted that the Congress would become more Republican in the upcoming 1940 election and they might deny funding for such New Deal projects. They pointed out, "The Wagner Steagall Act was passed by a non-partisan vote of Congress, passed by conservatives as well as new dealers. The housing project is here to stay. The federal Government is in the business of housing to stay whether we like it or not, whether we are Republican or Democrat." [25]

The architectural partnership of Jean Wagner and Trout in conjunction with the Leyendecker firm drew plans for Laredo's first public housing project, whose design totaled 272 residences. Touted as the lowest public housing rents achieved to date in the United States, monthly fees were predicted to range from less than five dollars for one-bedroom residences to less than nine dollars for the largest ones of four bedrooms.

The staff of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce worked for two months on the final loan application, which asked for $998,000 of Federal Funds and which local Housing Authority President Matías de Llano signed on December 5, 1938.[26] G.F. Sturgis and P.H. Stanford, presidents of the Laredo National Bank and Union National Bank respectively, were advised that their institutions were to be contracted as depositories for United States Housing Authority funds awarded for the construction of a local housing project.[27]

Selection of the location for Laredo's first federally funded housing project had the following requirements:

> The site must be within walking distance of the downtown district and work for the people who live there. There must be proper schools in the community. There should be churches nearby. It should not be separated by a main artery of traffic or a railroad. And the property must be secured at a reasonable price.[28]

The first site chosen comprised sixteen city blocks bounded by Callaghan Street on the north, San Eduardo Avenue on the west, Scott Street on the south, and the Arroyo Zacate on the east (See Map on Page 196). The project was named Colonia Guadalupe after Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Parish. The church façade faced south on the southeast corner of the 400 block of Callaghan Street, on the proposed site's northern edge.[29] Bruni Elementary School bordered the project on the west on the 1500 block of San Eduardo. Tentatively, eleven of the blocks were for construction of residences and the five that were in the arroyo would tentatively become a public park to be developed and beautified at a later time through a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project.[30]

At a special Laredo Housing Authority meeting with architects, an engineer, and United States Housing Authority project manager W. MacPherson present, it was decided not to pursue the acquisition of this area after a survey indicated that the land along the creek was on a flood plain that would require land build-up and a retaining wall to safely construct homes. The local Authority elected a secondary sixteen-block area north of the original site bounded on the north by Poggenpohl Street, west by Santa Ursula Avenue, south by Park Street, and east by San Leonardo Avenue (See Map, Page 198).[31] Fifteen city blocks were to be for housing with one block dedicated for a park. Real estate appraiser Lyle Perkins estimated that land acquisition would cost about $110,000 ± 5 or 10%. Laredo Housing Authority Commissioner E.D. Russell moved that the application for land acquisition federal funding be changed from the original request of $128,000 to $120,000.[32]

Following further land survey and appraisal, the Authority voted to acquisition ten city blocks situated two streets north of Guadalupe Church and bounded on the South by Park Street, on the east by San Leonardo Avenue, on the north by Gonzalez Street and on the west by San Dario Avenue (Area designated as “A” on map, p. 198). Two contiguous blocks were to be dedicated for a park and the administration, recreation, maintenance buildings. In keeping with the USHA trend, the recreation building was to be used for resident community self-improvement classes.[33] The City of Laredo agreed to pave and curb the aforementioned bordering streets as a WPA works project, but all paving, curbing, and sidewalks within the housing project property were to be done by the construction contractor.[34] Citizens were advised that the housing construction "employment was not the same class as WPA, or other forms of government relief, but contracted to private companies that submitted closed bids, hired competent people, and paid wages proportionate to average living wages of the area."[35]

Formal consent of the project construction site was approved by the LHA during a Special Meeting on December 6, 1939. Representatives of the Lawson and Libby Wagner architectural partnership, in cooperation with the Trout and Leyendecker architectural firms, presented drawings of the proposed construction jointly. At this juncture LHA commissioners proposed advertisement for construction bids. These proposals were categorized as

> Base Proposal A: Complete site development to include demolition, rough and finished grading, all mechanical work outside of buildings, all paving, curbs, gutters within the project lines, sidewalks, landscaping, recreational spray pool, garbage depots, etc. exclusive of building construction.
>
> Base proposal B: Complete general construction of all buildings, 84 dwelling units, administration building, recreation building, gas meter house, exclusive of site development.
>
> Base Proposal C: Complete project, including general construction of all buildings and all site development.[36]

At 10 a.m. on December 14, 1939, on the Garden Roof of the twelve-story Hamilton Hotel, the bids for developing the Colonia Guadalupe Housing Project were formally opened. Eight contract firms from as far away as Kansas City, Missouri, Oklahoma City, El Paso, Fort Worth, San Antonio, as well as from Laredo, had tendered bids. The Walsh and Burney Company of San Antonio was awarded the general demolition contract (Base Proposal A) with a low bid of $85,000, while H.B. Zachry of Laredo received the contract for general construction of all buildings and complete site development (Base Proposal C) with a low bid of $539,700. Proposal C included construction of all aforementioned buildings, including the proposed 272 low-rent dwelling units.[37]

In accordance to USHA guidelines, the land was surveyed and professionally photographed to determine blighted buildings to be razed. The city was expected to "plan or replan, zone or rezone to an appropriate site and neighborhood classification."[38] Resolution No. 39 of the Housing Authority of Laredo had affirmed earlier, "A necessity exists for the acquisition of that real property…lying within the area heretofore designated as the site for a housing project."[39] The peripherally situated land of Colonia Guadalupe Housing Project had many empty lots, eighteen habitations listed as substandard, and a few buildings within the ten blocks reported as being within housing standards. At the request of the LHA, the City Council passed an ordinance banning substandard buildings from being constructed in the vicinity of the project area and the city was to provide all municipal services and facilities to the public housing development without charge.[40] As required by law, public notices of meetings were advertised to advise property owners of monetary recompense for buildings to be condemned for demolition and lots to be procured by the Housing Authority. Eminent domain proceedings were scheduled for January 26, 1940 at the Webb County Courthouse as a "matter of formality in some instances, to clear titles in others, and to arrive at a definite value of other cases where the owners are minors and where no agreement as of the damages is made."[41] The Laredo Housing Authority received $96,000, making "possible the payment of cash for land secured under option on the project site east of Martin High School."[42]

Although the contract for clearing the property had the starting date as May 1, 1940, dismantling of buildings existing on project site was begun on April 24. The Authority was of the opinion that ample time was allotted to those persons who had not moved to do so and all structures had been evacuated ahead of the designated timetable.[43] Actual construction began on July 1. A total of $174,000 was deposited in the Union and Laredo National banks, half in each bank. The money was to be used for Laredo Housing Authority construction payrolls.[44]

In a move indicating that the federally-funded housing project was not to be in a peripheral slum area of the city, a unanimous vote of the seven-member Laredo City Council created a buffer zone stipulating that only standard houses be built within restricted areas two city blocks to the north and west sides and one block south of the housing project site. Lawson Libby Wagner and E.D. Salinas, LHA architect and attorney, respectively, stated that, “outside the housing authority project, this was an important step in the automatic and voluntary elimination of slums by Laredo itself.”[45]

By August two hundred men were engaged an average of forty hours a week, representing a payroll of $23,092.05, according to Laredo Housing Authority chief auditor Francisco Cardenas. Of this figure, unskilled labor, which averaged 30 cents per hour, represented 32% and semi-skilled labor comprised 9% of the payroll budget, respectively. Skilled labor such as carpenters and plumbers comprised 35% of the workforce budget and administrative and office workers, foremen, and timekeepers drew 24% of the payroll. Since much of the building material, especially the hard-kilned brick, originated in Laredo, the construction project was promoted as a boon to Laredo’s economy both through direct and spin-off employment.[46]

By late September 1940 the steel-reinforced concrete foundations had been poured and sixteen multi-dwelling buildings had been constructed. The United States Housing Authority reported that the savings on the Laredo project had not been exceeded anywhere else the government had built up to that time, and that this would lead to some of the lowest public housing rents in the country.[47] The administration, maintenance, and recreation edifices were to be built last. Construction consisted of one- and two-story buildings of two, three, or four residential units each. The interior brick surface resembled smooth, non-glazed tile, and would therefore be easy to clean. Units all had an open combined kitchen-living room area and one to four bedrooms of similar size, as well as one bathroom with the modern convenience of indoor plumbing fixtures consisting of a bathtub, commode, and wash sink with a wall mounted medicine cabinet. Every one of the 272 residences would have a gas range and gas water heater plus adequate outlets for electrical appliances.

Each individual habitation had a front and back yard, which were to be kept clean and trim by the renter with gardening tools borrowed from the project's maintenance building. A park located at the center of Colonia Guadalupe and consisting of an entire city block was provided to the LHA by the City of Laredo in exchange for another block that belonged to the Authority. This green space was to be landscaped and provided with sidewalks by the city as an "entertainment Mecca for the occupants of the housing authority structures."[48] The housing project incorporated an area of two by five city blocks for a total of ten blocks. The five-block length of Bruni Street that intersected the double row of city blocks between Park and Gonzalez streets was closed by city ordinance to more adequately accommodate what was considered an appropriate residential density for the planned 272 dwelling units.[49] The two conjoined center blocks would be the location of the park, the maintenance and administrative buildings plus “complete recreational facilities for dances and indoor programs plus a recreational building, with a spray pool for the enjoyment of the younger children who live in the project.”[50]

Designated by the federal Housing Authority as Project No. TEX 11–1, Laredo’s Colonia Guadalupe Housing Project set up an office for rental requests in Room 216 of the Hamilton Hotel in January 1941, with Mrs. Edith Clark Lowry in charge of tenant applications and selection. The first 63 of the project’s 272 dwellings were to be made available for occupancy within a few months after the initial announcement. Of these residences, nineteen were one-bedroom, twenty-eight were two-bedroom, ten were three-bedroom, and three were four-bedroom. Ms. Lowry afterwards reported that the multi-bedroom dwellings were in highest demand, as families with multiple minor dependents were anxiously “clamoring for accommodation which we cannot provide. The single units are hard to lease.”[51] Housing Authority Chairman Matías de Llano announced that, based on the initial high numbers of applications, more housing was obviously needed, but he also pondered if the USHA would provide more funding in light of the U.S. Congress’s recent appropriation of more money for national defense and less for funding more public housing.[52] Publicity in English and Spanish urged prospective renters to apply for dwellings and that “tenancy depended on not only income, size of family, employment record, stability, honesty, plus other factors, but also promptness in application.”[53] More specifically, renters were to be:

> A natural family or cohesive family group with dependent relatives or other dependents clearly established as an inherent part of a

family group, whose earnings are an integral part of a family group. They may not be comprised of two or more distinct family groups, lodgers or transient paying guests, unrelated working adults, or a person living alone.[54]

The following is a list of rent schedules based on the number of bedrooms, family income, and family size.

1 Bedroom	Rent + Utilities	Annual Income Limits
A (24 units)	$8.50	Less than $475
B (24 units)	11.50	476 to 650
B_X (0 units)	15.75	651 to 900
C (36 units)	19.50	901 to 1150
X (0 units)	24.00	1151 to 1400
2 Bedrooms		
A (34 units)	$9.00	Less than $500 (550)
B (46 units)	12.00	501 (551) to 675 (750)
B_X (0 units)	16.50	676 (726) to 950 (1000)
C (58 units)	20.50	951 (1001) to 1200 (1300)
X (0 units)	25.00	1201 (1300) to 1500 (1600)
3 Bedrooms		
A (10 units)	$9.50	Less than $550 (625)
B (14 units)	12.50	551 (626) to 725 (800)
B_X (0 units)	17.25	726 (801) to 1025 (1100)
C (18 units)	21.25	1026 (1101) to 1250 (1350)
X (0 units)	26.00	1251 (1351) to 1550 (1650)
4 Bedrooms	Rent + Utilities	Annual Income Limits
A (2 units)	$10.00	Less than $600 (700)
B (3 units)	13.00	601 (701) to 775 (875)
B_X (0 units)	18.00	776 (876) to 1075 (1200)
C (3 units)	22.00	1076 (1201) to 1300 (1400)
X (0 units)	27.00	1301 (1401) to 1600 (1700)

Amounts in parenthesis are maximum income limits for families with more than three dependents. (1) An additional .50¢/month for units with hot water heaters. (2) Additional $1.25/month for units with electric refrigerator and gas. (3) Additional 50¢/month for units with electricity or gas for privately owned refrigerator.[55]

The monthly rent for the one- and two-bedroom one-story buildings included water, electricity, and gas in 128 Category A and B units. All two-story Category A, B, and C units plus one-story Category C units had gas water heaters. All 116 Category C dwellings were furnished with refrigerators. Any excess of gas or electricity over the minimum allowed with the rent was to be paid by the tenant at the normal utility rates.[56]

Occupancy was to be for low-income families only and the rents were to be kept within the reach of families so identified. The lease agreements allowed no subletting or boarders. The tenant was to maintain the premises clean and sanitary, which included all janitorial work and the maintenance of the front and back yards. No illegal or immoral activities were allowed on the property. Tenants were to follow all rules and regulations and permit the management or its representatives to enter the premises during all reasonable hours. [57]

Four Colonia Guadalulpe units were opened as models on July 1, 1941. The public was invited to view the demonstration dwelling units, which were open until 10 p.m. every day, including Sunday. The fully equipped playgrounds, the park, referred to as a "typical Mexican plaza" and the children's spray pool, were also on display. Tenant Selection Manager Ms. Lowry reported that more than fifty applications had been turned in before noon that day.[58] In addition to the recreational facilities, it was announced that tenants could avail themselves of homemaking education and a medical dispensary. By mid-July 450 applications for the 272 dwellings had been submitted, and by opening day, which was September 2, close to 1000 prospective families had applied for housing.[59] On a sad note, Gilbert Isaac Garretson, who as a journalist and Housing Authority executive secretary is the source of much of the information in this dissertation chapter, died of cardiac and renal failure on July 2, 1941 at Scott and White Hospital in Temple, one month before his forty-second birthday and two months before the opening of Colonia Guadalupe. Together with contractor H.B. Zachry, Garretson had originally approached the Laredo City Council to lay the groundwork for establishment of the Laredo Housing Authority in 1938 and the construction of the city's first public housing project. Garretson, who was 6' 1" tall and weighed 360 pounds, had earned an MA degree in journalism at the University of Chicago and had headed the School of English and Journalism at the University of Oklahoma City. A world traveler, he headed a travel agency in Mexico City for two years before becoming the manager of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce and beginning his Laredo Times column, *The Measuring Stick,* in 1937. One of five brothers, he was buried in his hometown's cemetery in Salem, Iowa.[60] As a reflection of this man's beliefs and dedication to help others, it is worth noting that since its inauguration on September 2, 1941 to the present, Colonia Guadalupe has maintained 100 percent occupancy. Laredo's underprivileged families from then until now continue to need decent housing. At present, the typical waiting period for public housing rental is over one year.[61]

The dedication and formal opening of Colonia Guadalupe at 7 p.m. on September 2, 1941 was the greatest local fete of the year. The program for the festivity listed guests such as representatives from the Washington and Fort Worth offices of the USHA, local and Mexican dignitaries, and an entertainment schedule that included a joint concert of Laredo's Martin High School Band and the 100-piece WPA Symphony Orchestra from San Antonio. Reflecting the Mexican-American bicultural characteristic of the border community, the two music groups played both the *Star Spangled Banner* and Mexico's *Himno Nacional*. The WPA Symphony provided music for the outdoor dance held that evening at the project's Guadalupe Park, with Miss Carmen Quiñones, daughter of the Mexican consul at Kansas City, as the featured vocalist. Young local artist Blanche Flores was slated to perform Spanish dances and boys and girls were encouraged to "wear china poblana dress and charro suits for the occasion."[62] Greeting addresses were presented by Laredo Mayor Hugh S. Cluck and Regional USHA Zone 6 Director Marshall W. Amis. Dan Inglish represented USHA Housing Director Nathan Straus's Washington Office. The inaugural ceremony and dance were open to the entire community and Mayor Cluck had "ordered Clark Street (today's Park Street) completed as far west as San Francisco Avenue"[63] for the occasion. This was Laredo's widest street, which like the majority of local thoroughfares up to then, was unpaved. The finishing of this street "provided extra parking for the hundreds of cars bearing guests."[64]

During the inaugural dedication, at which the *Laredo Morning Times* reported 6,000 attendees, USHA Regional Director Amis commended the LHA for planning the most economically constructed housing project on national record. Colonia Guadalupe had not only met USHA building standards of sound and sanitary habitation, but also would be paid for from rent revenue without having to tax Laredo's citizens.[65]

Indicating and advancing the progressivist theme that there is "a capacity of the architectural environment to affect social behavior and moral development,"[66] the September 2, 1941 *Times* Spanish language section carried a Laredo Housing Authority advertisement soliciting tenants for Colonia Guadalupe. In particular, it addressed recently married couples and families with two to four children. It emphasized that all good husbands and fathers primarily should provide their partners and children with proper housing where their family would not be assaulted by winter weather and its pneumonias, colds, and other consequential illnesses. Sound and agreeable habitation guaranteed the well-being and happiness of the family. Since cleanliness is a virtue of distinguished persons, a good husband and father would assure that his family's home had sanitary bathrooms, such as those available at Colonia Guadalupe. Electric lighting would safeguard his family's eyesight and natural gas would lighten his wife's housework. The advertised total rent included utilities and would amount to three day's wages for a family with a $14 weekly income. With allusion to the living environment's impact on morals, the advertisement stated that if the reader had daughters whom one hoped to be the beautiful and proper young ladies of tomorrow's society, one should feel obligated to provide such a fitting environment as that available at Colonia Guadalupe. The commercial further pleaded with the reader to submit the names of anyone who would discourage a person from renting at Colonia Guadalupe through gossip of life-stifling authoritarian regulatory restrictions, as these were defamatory allegations that violated the law. The LHA avowed that such rumormongers would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. A renter and his family were expected to feel as if the Colonia's solid habitations were their own homes, with the liberty of planting flowers and trees in the front and back yards and the presence of amply equipped playgrounds for the physical and social development of their children. The Authority additionally emphasized the benefit of living within short distances from church and schools.[67]

Shortly after the opening of Colonia Guadalupe, the local newspaper informed that a public clinic providing free medical attention and minor surgery was to be constructed at the project site. It would be sponsored by USHA and administered by the local authority. LHA Director de Llano and Commissioner E.D. Salinas had initiated the plan for the clinic in conjunction with USHA Assistant Director Inglish and District 6 Administrator Amis and during the September 1941 inaugural ceremonies.[68] Further boosting the public's interest in the public housing project, the Laredo Housing Authority announced on September 30 the passing of Manuel de Jesus Flores, the Colonia's first resident to die,[69] and on October 5 the project's first newborn resident, a girl born to Roberto and Elva Hale.[70] Briskly growing in population, Colonia Guadalupe residents soon successfully petitioned the municipal government to open San Leonardo Avenue from Sanchez to Park to provide easier access to the housing project.[71]

Reflecting a progressivist theme of social and cultural advancement of low-income housing project residents and in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the American Red Cross, the National Youth Administration (NYA), Texas State Department of Education, and the USHA, LHA Chairman Matías de Llano announced that Laredo Superintendent of Schools W.P. Galligan would inaugurate adult education programs at Colonia Guadalupe. This would include, among others, "English and Citizenship Classes; Home Nursing; First Aid; Gardening; Food Preparation and Planning; Dancing; Sports and Athletics; Crafts; Men's Club."[72]

During the late summer and early fall of 1941 close to one thousand applications from prospective renters were scrutinized for discrepancies and submitted to the recently re-numbered Fort Worth USHA Region VIII Office for approval. A letter from

Regional Director Amis called attention to 269 applications judged to be in non-compliance and merited re-examination based on income and occupancy limits, listing of legal deductions, employers' letters, and citizen status forms. He answered LHA Chairman de Llano's request for an extended reasonable period to comply and offered to send a USHA representative to assist the local authority in correcting the violations.[73] Acting LHA Executive Director Jose Villarreal advised the authority that the re-examination of applications was almost complete, and under the direction of de Llano, LHA moved to hire legal counsel as necessary to investigate and render opinion in matters of such violations.[74]

In a Special Meeting, LHA Auditor Horace C. Hall read a letter from USHA Region VIII Assistant for Project Management Frank Fox announcing approval of the local authority's books and amending the original rent schedule with a special Tenants at Sufferance category for project resident families earning more than $2000 per year.[75]

When the United States entered the Second World War, LHA Commissioner Father Dan Laning left Laredo to serve as Army chaplain. Laredo Mayor Hugh S. Cluck replaced him by appointing former Mayor Albert Martin to the LHA. Other authority members at this time were attorney Woodie Y. Bunn, Ed. S. Russell, and prominent department store owner Carlos Richter, with executive secretary George F. Sturgis appointed as Temporary Chair. The national war effort led to the expansion of Laredo's U.S. Army Advanced Flying School and the resulting increase of military personnel and government employees produced a correlative need for housing. To this end, newly appointed Commissioner Martin proposed that under the 79th U.S. Congress's Lanham Act of October 14, 1940, the LHA was authorized to apply to the recently renamed Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA) for a contract to lease twenty-eight acres adjacent to the military installation for the administrative oversight of a Defense Dormitory Project. Locally named the McMillan Park Housing Project and officially designated War Housing Project Number TX–41424, the accommodations consisted of forty-five standard and fifty-five expansible trailers ranging from zero to three bedrooms, two laundry facilities, plus the office building. These were to house the projected increased number of civilian workers and military personnel working at the airfield during the war effort. The application was approved on March 1, 1943 and occupancy began one week later. George F. Sturgis was appointed project temporary director and, at a salary of $150 per month, Carlos Botello was given the position of Maintenance Mechanic for that site.[76] Occupancy limits for the trailers were defined; monthly rent would range from $24.50 to $36 for standard trailers and expansible units, respectively, with extra charges for furnished dwellings; gross rents included water, electricity, and gas; the LHA would "provide tenants with health, sanitation, safety, recreation, informal education, and child care"[77] services.

A simultaneous application was made to the FPHA for permission to construct an entirely new project of 204 new dwelling units, ranging in size from zero bedroom (efficiency apartment) to three bedrooms and designated TEX–41422, for the projected increase in the Flying School's civilian employees or other "indispensable, in-migrant civilian war workers, (prioritized) or military or naval personnel certified as eligible by the local commandant."[78] The federal housing agency authorized thirty-five acres to be leased at $100 per month from private landowners for McMillan Park and fitted with the 100 trailers. The local authority employed H.H. White as Manager of the War Housing

Project and Anne Spencer and Wilma Graff were the projects' bookkeeper and stenographer, respectively. George F. Sturgis was appointed Executive Secretary of LHA.[79]

Early in 1943, LHA submitted a proposal to FPHA for a schedule extension to raze blighted dwellings from the McMillan Park locality. The authority also reported that the vacancy ratio for low-rent dwellings in Laredo was decreasing, formerly abandoned unsafe or unsanitary dwellings were being occupied, the ratio of overcrowding in the city was increasing, rents were rising faster than the wages of low-income families, and that the removal of families from the slum areas would result in further overcrowding. The acute shortage in standard housing was cited as a result of the war effort's overall increase in wages in Laredo. Due to these situations, the rent schedule was amended "to make present tenants of Colonia Guadalupe eligible to remain in the Project and so that new tenants can be admitted with higher incomes than those previously provided for."[80] Addressing the continuing lack of adequate housing in Laredo, LHA contracted with FPHA to begin Project TEX–41657, consisting of 100 additional trailers at the McMillan Park acreage.[81]

Laredo Housing Authority held no meetings from October 1944 through the duration of the Second World War. Early in 1946, Ed. Mann was appointed LHA Chair for the unexpired term of Matías de Llano, who had died. It was at this juncture that the local authority entered Resolution No. 143, prioritizing admission of Veterans and families of Absent Servicemen as tenants. Reflecting the national phenomenon of large numbers of returning veterans due to military demobilization at the end of the war, veterans had to apply for rental units "within one year of the date of discharge and the discharge had to be other than dishonorable."[82] The resolution also stated that rentals to families of absent servicemen were limited to those who had children in the 4th through 7th grades at the time of admission to housing; this included "families of members of the Army, Navy, Marines, or Coast Guard, including Reserves, who died while serving."[83] McMillan Park was further restricted to "only distressed families of veterans or servicemen, and anyone who had served on or after 9-16-40 and (were) discharged (other than dishonorably)."[84] At this time LHA also determined that rent adjustments to be charged would be 22% of net income for families with less than three dependents and 18% of net income for families with three dependents or more.[85]

On May 20, 1946 a hailstorm destroyed 18 trailers and damaged roofs and windows at McMillan Park Projects TEX–41424 and TEX–41657. After replacement of destroyed units, repair of damage, and based on LHA continued reports of Laredo's acute shortage of decent and sanitary habitation, FPHA Region VIII Director Marshall W. Amis authorized the local authority to "open McMillan Park to others other than veterans who were in need of housing."[86] Amis also expressed a desire for the city to take over part of the U.S. Army installation at the local U.S. Army post, Fort McIntosh, for public services not required by the U.S. Boundary Commission.[87] Additionally, because the war had delayed removal of ineligible families and because returning low-income veterans and their families needed housing, LHA issued the Amendment to Management Policies-Project TEX 11-1 (Colonia Guadalupe), which stated that, no later than June 1947, all families deemed ineligible were to be to be notified and expected to vacate the dwelling within six months of notification. Failure to comply would result in forced eviction.[88]

Due to the end of the hostilities of the World War and the resulting military demobilization, a letter dated May 6, 1947 from FPHA Area Management Adviser Clarence J. Stengel and titled *Termination of Agency on Contracts Projects* formally announced that effective December 31, 1946 the federal agency no longer had administrative authority over the McMillan Park Projects designated TEX-41424 and TEX–41657.[89] These trailer projects remained under the LHA administration and H.H. White continued as their manager.[90]

An incident of discrepant or lax LHA management arose during the post-war years. Federal Public Housing Administration visitors called an informal LHA meeting to discuss a report of an inspection by Regional Housing Operations Assistant W.B. Coppage of fifty deprogrammed McMillan Park dwelling units, to clarify the most recent law on the disposition of War Housing, and to review the revised rent schedule for Colonia Guadalupe. LHA members present were Russell, Richter, Martin, Bunn, and Mann; PHA Region VIII Office members at the meeting were Director Amis, Assistant Director B.W. Carter, and W.B. Coppage. The latter reported that, in spite of federal law to the contrary, the fifty deprogrammed McMillan living quarters had been inappropriately and illicitly utilized. These instances included twenty-three that were being used by tenants and the project management as storage rooms; eighteen had partitions removed to illegally extend living area into adjacent units; four were being used as appliance repair workshops; one was a storeroom; one had been converted to an office with a drafting table and desk; two were being utilized as laundry facilities; and a tenant by the name of E.S. McGinnis was using her rental unit as a confection store. Coppage stated that Housing Project Manager H.H. White was in violation, that empty units should be for storage only, and that no extra charges had been made to those tenants availing themselves of the empty units. Evidence also indicated that during the investigation “White had visited tenants and asked them to change their statements that they had permission from him to alter the ‘empty’ units for use.”[91]

At the next regularly scheduled local authority meeting it was determined that, based on the FPHA report of a few days earlier, there was a need to appoint an Authority Survey Officer; LHA Executive Secretary George F. Sturgis was named to that post. In reference to the unauthorized use of the fifty deprogrammed units at TEX–41424, a letter from Region VIII Director Amis recommended that the project’s manager, H.H. White, appear before LHA commissioners and that Commissioner Russell should interview White to ascertain that he wanted to appear. Reconvening four days later, the LHA listened to White deny that he gave tenants permission to cut openings in dwelling units. He stated that his infrequent inspection of the McMillan Project was due largely to the lack of an assistant. During his testimony, White stated that a unit dedicated as a clubhouse for the Boy Scouts had been turned into a soft drink stand without his knowledge. He also indicated there was a problem of large turnover, with twenty-eight tenants vacating and thirty-three pending rental applications within a very short time. “I have stayed on the job and have accumulated over 100 days leave, even though I’m entitled to only 90 days.”[92] Commissioner Russell directed White to read the FPHA documentation and asked, “Do you wish to make any comments with reference to the last paragraph of Mr. Amis’s letter?”[93] White replied shortly that he did not wish to be terminated and was willing to follow instructions. He then withdrew from the meeting. After consideration, Russell recommended keeping White as project manager, subject to Regional Office approval. Commissioner Bunn suggested a month-by-month employment of White as McMillan Park Housing Manager at $250 per month salary. A unanimous LHA decision approved the recommendation.

The decade of the 1940s saw no additional construction or public housing activity, but an increasing low-income population led to the second phase of growth of the Laredo Housing Authority during the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations.

Chapter Three

The Second Phase of Public Housing Construction of the Laredo Housing Authority: 1950 to 1967

The second half of the 20th century brought change and fluctuations to federal public housing policy and practices. This era of the history of government-subsidized habitation in Laredo, Texas included transition during the Reagan Administration from full government funding of local housing authorities' construction loans to the more recent practice of subsidizing the rents of low-income residents. This chapter points to a continued shortage of adequate housing in Laredo evinced in the LHA's attempt to increase its rental units and services. The dearth of decent housing was exacerbated by population increase in the post-World War II years and the low quality of then-existing housing stock. During the decade of the 1950s Laredo's population grew at a moderate rate. In time the city would become the busiest inland entrepôt for trade between Mexico and the United States, but that status would not be achieved until well into the decade of the 1970s, a situation is addressed in Chapter 4 of this document. The 1950s and early 1960s saw the construction of Laredo's next three sizeable public housing developments, which almost tripled the number of subsidized dwellings available to low-income and elderly residents. While a significant portion of the city's population increase may be attributed to natural increase, substantial growth resulted from migration to the border area that increased in the post-WW II years when the U.S. Government-sponsored Bracero Program ended and thousands of Mexican agricultural guest workers chose to remain in the United States or migrated to northern Mexico's border cities. The main reason for this was the significant salary decreases that they would face when they returned to the Mexican interior and the possibility of attaching themselves to the American dollar possible by returning to the southern United States, legally or otherwise. As housing surveys of the Laredo Housing Authority and reports of local newspapers indicated during this period, a shortage of affordable, decent, sanitary dwellings persisted in this border community. This is attributed to the rise in population along the U.S.-Mexico border plus construction predominantly for middle- to high-income renters and homebuyers.

During the regularly scheduled Laredo Housing Authority meeting of December 1951, the organization's Executive Secretary, George F. Sturgis reported on a recent trip, during which he and other authority members surveyed new low-rent public housing being built in San Antonio. An informal discussion ensued relative to making applications for construction of a similar low-rent project in Laredo.[1] Earlier that year, a survey of the Laredo area added emphasis to an unremitting scarcity of proper housing for low-income families. That situation was determined to be due to several related and compounding reasons: (1) Studies indicated that an extremely high percentage of Laredo's total housing was substandard; (2) a large portion of the border city's growing impoverished population lived in overcrowded conditions; (3) 76 percent of dwellings needed major repairs or had no indoor toilet or private bath; (4) the lowest house prices and rents from private enterprise made it extremely difficult for Laredo's large disadvantaged population to find sound and sanitary habitation;[2] (5) the city was an important inland port and the United States' principal port of entry into Mexico since the Pan American Highway was now considered Mexico's lifeline for agriculture, commerce, tourism, and oil; and (6) 92 percent of Webb County's population was in Laredo.[3] The City of Laredo grew 32 percent during the decade of the 1940s, from a population of 39,274 to 51,910 in 1950; by 1960 the city had 60,678 resudents.[4] Utility connections increased between 1940 and 1950, but in dismal disproportion compared to the population increase due to the significant number of poor families who could not pay for the most basic services. Influenced by the approximately 400 civilians employed at Laredo Army Air Field, which was renamed Laredo Air Force Base in 1947, there had been new construction for owner-occupancy in the city's higher price bracket, however no new standard rental units had been built during the decade of the 1940s.[5]

Pursuant to the Laredo housing situation reports, Laredo National Bank Vice President and LHA Executive Secretary Sturgis met Mayor Hugh S. Cluck in January 1952 to address renewal of the Cooperative Agreement between the municipality and the Federal Public Housing Administration (FPHA) and to discuss creation of additional public housing in Laredo.[6] After submission of proper documentation, and at the behest of the municipal government, the LHA entered into a Loan Contract with the FPHA for the purpose of constructing a new low-rent housing project.[7] Construction guidelines referred to the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act to establish employment wages, which stipulated time-and-a-half would be paid for work over 40 hours per week. Additionally, only "manufactured articles, materials, and supplies…mined or produced in the USA, unless … impractical"[8] were to be utilized. The loan was not to exceed $50,000, with $10,000 awarded for preliminary surveying and planning.[9] A certificate of federal funding award for the new housing project was received in November 1952 and deposited at the Union National Bank.[10]

International relations in the years following World War II had a profound influence on the United States' domestic policies. In particular, cold war anticommunist demagoguery, limitation of civil rights, and suppression of dissent had spin-off effects on federal departments and agencies, including the Federal Public Housing Authority.[11] Anticommunist scare mongering was reflected in the form loyalty oaths for many occupations or recipients of certain services in the farthest corners of the nation, and Laredo institutions were not untouched. At Colonia Guadalupe it took the shape of a mandatory form that had its origins in the Smith Alien and Registration Act of 1940 whereby, under threat of legal prosecution, renters had to swear by signature that they or any other person they knew to occupy the Housing Authority's accommodations was not a member of any of a printed list of over 200 organizations deemed subversive by the Attorney General of the United States and authorized by Executive Order Number 10450. [12]

Proceeding from the national xenophobia aggravated by cold war propaganda, and as authorized by Public Law 455, Chapter 578 of the 82nd United States Congress, the LHA issued a policy for the "orderly removal of tenants other than citizens of the United States, with specified exceptions of certain Veterans and Servicemen, who are prohibited to live in the projects…"[13] These non-citizen renters were obligated to vacate the premises within six months of the date of notice. The LHA Executive Director would be allowed to extend the notice to twelve months under justified causes.[14] The rule was eventually modified to read:

> Occupancy shall be restricted to families who have resided in Webb County for at least six months. Ineligible tenants will be allowed six months to vacate, except families found to be ineligible because of

> membership in subversive organizations shall be evicted within the minimum time permitted by law.[15]

During this same time, LHA personnel policies evinced a modernizing trend and compliance with federal law by officially adopting a merit system for advancement and pay, a non-discrimination policy, anti-nepotism guidelines, and a rule prohibiting politicking based on the Hatch Act. The Authority's Administration and Maintenance Staffs achieved official organizational permanency and, as guided by the Labor Relations branch of the FPHA, employees were to be paid prevailing wage rates. Under new guidelines, the LHA Executive Director had the authority to appoint, promote, transfer, demote, and separate personnel, except Department Heads and Managers, whose positions were directly under of the local Authority's Board of Commissioners.[16]

Following ongoing assessments of low-income public housing needs, federal contributions for initiation of the newly proposed LHA project of $770,000 were received in January 1954.[17] This was augmented to total $940,000 the following month.[18]

In June 1954 a large section of Laredo was devastated when the Río Grande overflowed its banks. The eastern edge of Colonia Guadalupe is situated a half block from Arroyo Zacate, which is typically a dry creek bed except during occasional Laredo rainstorms, at which time the arroyo empties its effluent into the Río. That summer the creek's backflow inundated the four easternmost blocks of the Colonia. The development constituted ten Laredo city blocks and the flooding affected almost half of the project's 272 dwelling units. Damage to the edifices was minimal, but an extensive amount of equipment was ruined and required replacement. The Authority's Maintenance Department, hiring additional outside labor, worked seven-day weeks from

June 30 through August 16 to deal with the emergency, replacing 109 gas ranges, 50 refrigerators, 30 water heaters, and 25 gas regulators, all original equipment that was thirteen years old.[19]

In June 1955 the Federal Government officially transferred McMillan Park, the former military and civil service to the local Housing Authority. All vacancies at the project had been frozen as of April that year, and with 51 trailer dwellings occupied by 204 families, the LHA mandated that all tenants were to evacuate the premises by October. The McMillan Park acreage leases, which were initiated in June 1943, were terminated on April 1956 and the properties returned to the original owners.[20]

Proceeding with Federal Public Housing Administration (FPHA) authorization and funding for construction of a second public housing project, the Laredo Housing Authority presented a resolution to purchase a fifteen city-block tract in the city's Eastern Division. The new project was to include 200 new low-rent units and named it the Russell Terrace Subdivision Plat in honor of LHA Commissioner E. S. Russell. It was bound on the north by Ash Street, on the east by Logan Avenue, on the south by Plum Street, and on the west by Springfield Avenue.[21] (See Map No. 2) A notice of a General Fund deposited at the Union National Bank was published, designating $2,143,827 for purchase, development, and completion of Housing Project No.TEX 11-2.[22] A Request for Land Purchase Approval was authorized by the FPHA Regional Office in Fort Worth "for the acquisition of 33 parcels with options for a consideration of $62,695, 10 parcels by condemnation, and 5 parcels not yet approved for acquisition."[23] The final site eventually equaled twelve Laredo city blocks appraised and bought for $95,464, with $16,892 by condemnation.

The LHA approved and executed an Architect's Contract for the proposed Russell Terrace Project and designated Olin Boese of Fort Worth as architect and engineer for the development program.[24] Boese presented preliminary drawings and specifications for the project during summer of 1956.[25] All dwelling units were to be one-story duplexes of brick construction. The local Authority advertised for sealed construction bids, with bids to be opened on April 30, 1957.[25] On that date the LHA had a special meeting to "receive and open bids of general contractors for Construction of Project TEX–11–2 (Russell Terrace)."[27] With all Housing Commissioners except Ed Mann present, and about 175 persons in attendance, eleven bids, all from Texas firms, were opened by Project Architect Boese and read aloud by LHA Chairman Russell. Bids ranged from $2,360,640 to $2,906,000. Russell then summoned the Authority's members, architect, and Project Manager Olin Smith into executive session because the lowest four bidders were in excess of the architect's estimates and the Development Cost Budget, consequently meaning no award could be made. From the ensuing discussion, the issue was referred to Boese's firm and the FPHA for consideration and recommendation.[28] The LHA then sent a letter to all bidders rejecting all bids and returning all security bonds. At an LHA Special Meeting, Chairman Russell read a letter from Regional Director Marshall W. Amis, part of which stated:

> We have agreed that changes should be made in the plans and specifications to reduce the cost and then re-advertise for bids in an effort to obtain a contract for the construction of the project at a price approximately the amount of funds available.[29]

During this same meeting LHA Attorney Frank Y. Hill submitted Resolution No. 219 calling for replanning and replatting of Russell Terrace prior to awarding bids for construction.[30] At another specially called LHA meeting a month later, and in front of a large number of attendees, bids ranging from $2,030,000 to $1,947,000 submitted by four construction companies were once more opened and read. The three lowest bids were examined in detail. Project Architect Olin Boese recommended and the LHA members approve the lowest bidding firm of Victor Prassel and D.G. Janssen of San Antonio. Commissioner Albert Martin also moved and the Authority approved the appointment of LHA Executive Director and Secretary George F. Sturgis as Contracting Officer.[31] At that time Sturgis was the President of Laredo National Bank. Starting date for construction of the Russell Terrace Project was set for July 1 and completion was tentatively set for September 3 of the following year.[32] The 200-unit development has continuously had 100 percent occupancy since its inauguration until the present.[33]

The year 1958 saw implementation of LHA Resolution No. 236, repealing old policies and implementing new regulations governing admission and continued occupancy for its low-rent projects. Of significance was a new rule limiting the number of persons living in a dwelling unit based on the number of bedrooms. One-bedroom apartments were to have an occupancy of one to three persons; two-bedroom unit occupancy would range from two to five; three bedroom, four to eight; and four-bedroom could house a minimum of six and maximum of ten inhabitants.[34] To qualify for rental units in LHA projects, prospective tenants included persons who were at that time

> living in unsafe, unsanitary, or overcrowded dwellings or…displaced by another low-rent housing project, or urban renewal project, or through the action of a public body or court either through the enforcement of housing standards or through demolition, closing, or the improvement of a dwelling unit or units.[35]

Encouraged by the $2,142,000 in temporary notes granted by the Federal Government to assist in the development of Russell Terrace and an urgent and continuous need for low-rent housing for Laredo's disadvantaged, in 1959 the LHA proposed erecting a third development for 100 low-rent housing units, tentatively designated Project TEX–11–3, with a estimated development cost of $1,361,850. E. J. Foster offered a preliminary survey of the project site for $110 per block for a total of $770, which an LHA Board quorum approved.[36] The new units were to be of "modular design."[37] The LHA purchased seven city blocks from H.L. Jackson at a total appraised value of $80,128. The Authority approved a total of $82,350 for an optional one and one–half additional blocks contiguous to the selected land, but owned by two other proprietors.[38] Efforts to purchase the smaller parcel were unsuccessful when one owner could not be located and the other had no desire to sell. In accordance to Article 1269–K of Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes, the LHA proceeded to "adopt a resolution describing the property to bring condemnation proceedings."[39] Commissioner Albert Martin then introduced the LHA resolution for the new units to be built on this property located in the Western Division of the city.[40] The contiguous acreage was divided in three sections: Tract No.1, consisting of four city blocks, was bordered by Main Avenue on the east, Blair Street on the north, Santa Rita on the west, and Jackson Street on the south, except for an irregularly shaped semicircular property line indentation projecting eastward from Main Avenue; Tract No. 2, consisting of two city blocks, was bordered by Blair Street on the north, Davis Avenue on the west, Jackson Street on the south, and Santa María on the east. Tract No. 3 was one city block bordered by Davis Avenue on the west, Alamo Street on the south, Santa María Avenue on the east, and Frankfort Street on the north. (See Map, p. 182).[41]

Twenty-one companies submitted bids, which were opened at a special LHA October 1958 meeting. In attendance, besides local Authority Commissioners Russell, Martin, Mann, Bunn, and Executive Secretary Sturgis, were Project Architect Boese, plus FPHA Project Planning Director J.R. England, and Regional Architectural Representative Walter Smith. The construction contract was awarded to U.B. Uhlhorn, whose bid of $963,000 was the lowest. In conformity with precedence for high standard building material, Boese stipulated that brick should be of a specific standard, such as the sample offered by the Valley Brick and Tile Company or an equivalent. Since the Laredo Brick and Tile Company, which had won the previous two construction material bids, was now under new management and had offered a bid for the Richter Project, the architect recommend the latter only if it would meet comparable qualities.[42] Like Colonia Guadalupe and Russell Terrace before, the 100-unit Carlos Richter Courts project has had 100 percent occupancy since it opened in 1960 until the present.[43]

Of historical note, H.B. “Pat” Zachry’s company, which had deliberately and straightforwardly underbid all bidders in 1938 in order to acquire the Colonia Guadalupe Project contract and had moved its headquarters from Laredo to San Antonio in 1952 following a local politically-incited squabble,[44] competed for both the Russell Terrace and Richter Courts contracts but, at $2,396,530 and $1,039,500 respectively, had bid too high to receive any award.[45]

Pressed by Laredo’s expansion of population and housing needs, the LHA resolved at a specially called September 1960 meeting to consider a proposal to develop a fourth public housing project, designated as No. TEX-11-4, of 100 units to be located on six city blocks in the city's Eastern Division and bound on the east by Stone Avenue, on the south by Lyon Street, on the west by Hendricks Avenue, and on the north by Plum Street. The proposed site did not meet with all the commissioners' approval and deliberation followed to consider a more favorable site "in some other section of the city in a slum area."[46] Some members suggested sites in southeast Laredo's Montrose addition, a northern neighborhood near Baltimore Street, an area south of Fort McIntosh, or another area north of Saunders Street.

The reason that the Authority's balked at proceeding with developing public housing on the originally suggested site was directly due to an objection presented in a letter signed by Charles B. Dickinson, a Certified Public Accountant and the chairperson of the Citizens Committee on Public Finance. This letter also had the signatures of members of that organization's Coordinating Committee, which included Attorney Frank Y. Hill, physician Joseph G. Schneidler, and Laredo Independent School District (LISD) Business Manager Ernest Leyendecker. Although the newly proposed public housing project was deemed necessary to the greater Laredo community by some LHA board members, this citizens' group represented an association of property owners, or growth machine, who felt that such low-rent public housing projects tended to lower property values and were "requesting that the Authority postpone action on the building of 100 units already planned until it could be definitely determined by the Coordinating Committee that said 100 units would not in anyway jeopardize the school building program."[47] A growth machine is "a local pro-growth coalition of businesses, commercial land owners and rentiers (people who profit from rental income) that dominates urban politics."[48] In present-day "growth machine" terminology this anti-public housing movement would constitute a case of NIMBY-ism; 'NIMBY' is an acronym for 'not in my back yard', which indicates "an attitude typical of individuals who resist the siting of a source of negative externalities close to their homes."[49] The school building program to which Dickinson's letter alluded eventually became J.W. Nixon High School, Laredo's second public high school, which was eventually built immediately to the east of the proposed low-rent public housing site and three blocks from the main gate of Laredo Air Force Base (Former Laredo Army Advanced Flying School). The new school, the first Laredo public high school built since the 1930s, served what has been construed as a deliberately gerrymandered higher-income section of the neighborhoods served by Laredo Independent School District. During the 1960s, school-age residents of the mostly impoverished south side were bused to Martin High School on the west side, which was a considerably longer distance than the newer high school on the north. The urban growth coalition of commercial landowners, businessmen, and prospective landlords represented by the Citizens Committee on Public Finance effectively brought sufficient NIMBY-ism pressure to bring the proposal to a standstill, as reflected in a motion by the LHA to recess and meet with that entity's Coordinating Committee.[50]

Meeting with the LHA Board on May 25, LISD Business Manager Leyendecker explained that there was "difficulty encountered by the school board under its proposed building program in providing additional school buildings in the locality of a new housing project."[51] LHA Chairman Russell responded that the housing project had been included in a Development Plan in an effort to meet a June 30 deadline and that the site could be changed to any other place which would meet the approval of the LHA Commissioners, the School Board, and the Federal Public Housing Administration. He suggested meeting “with LISD Superintendent J.W. Nixon and Ernest Leyendecker in order that the Commission (the LHA) may have the benefit of any information available relative to a site for the Project. Russell then appointed all LHA Commissioners as a committee to meet with the LISD leadership.”[52] During the subsequent meeting School Superintendent Nixon stated that he, Leyendecker, and LHA Executive Director Sturgis had investigated a possible site for the new public housing project at the newly developing Retama Park Addition north of Saunders Street, where the school district owned four city blocks intended for new elementary schools. In his opinion “a low-rent housing project would not interfere with the school building program, but if located in any other section it would be necessary to acquire additional land, and at this time they did not have the funds to do so.”[53] At the regular LHA June meeting the general opinion of the housing commissioners was that the Authority wanted to cooperate with the public school board.[54] Concurrently during this meeting, a letter from realtor and apartment proprietor G.I. Gilliland offered the LHA 102 units that he owned on the Eastern Division of the City. The general opinion of the local authority was that construction of the units offered by Gilliland would not have complied with FPHA specifications. They further stated that the apartments would have been too close to the site originally proposed for Project No. TEX-11-4, which had not met the approval of the Housing Commissioners or the School Board. LHA Chairman Russell further said that since no action had been taken to approve the development program for TEX-11-4, further action should be deferred until the U.S. Congress passed the pending Housing

Bill of 1961.[55] Subsequent to Russell's suggestion to postpone any action on construction of new public housing, the board also noted that the "date by which the Development Program must be submitted to the FPHA is 100 days from the date of contract,"[56] which would have been December 6, 1961, a deadline that would not have been met in a timely manner. An additional fear that caused the LHA to request a six-month extension for submission of the application for permission to construct TEX-11-4 was that Laredo Air Force Base was tentatively scheduled for closure by the Federal Government and the consequential negative effect that the departure of this major employer would have on the community.[57] Laredo Air Force Base was eventually closed, but not until September 1973.

In an opportune distraction from the aforementioned NIMBY-ism, LHA Chairman Russell suggested changing from proposing a low-rent program to development of 100 apartments for Laredo's elderly, which was in relation to a national trend since building for the elderly was less controversial than new construction for low-income families. Former Mayor and Housing Commissioner Albert Martin had met with Sister Mary Adele Fuchs, R.S.M., Administrator of Laredo's Mercy Hospital, then located at 700 Juarez Avenue in the central business center adjacent to Jarvis Plaza. Sister Adele had conveyed the option to sell the downtown property expired November 21, after which the Sisters of Mercy would be willing to sell it to the LHA for $200,000. Based on the recent postponement of a new project for low-income families, the LHA requested permission from the FPHA to proceed with construction of 100 apartments for the elderly.[58] The LHA approved the Development Program for Project No. TEX-11-4 early in 1962,[59] and executed an architect contract following the FPHA standard.[60]

At the time that construction of the Richter Courts Housing Project had begun, recently elected Laredo Mayor Joe C. Martin, nephew of former Mayor Albert Martin, appointed local manufacturer and businessman Matías de Llano, Jr. as a new Housing Authority Commissioner.[61] Shortly thereafter, Mayor J.C. Martin met with LHA Chairman Russell to pursue over $1 million in federal loan funds for construction of a senior citizens' apartments at the old hospital site. Additionally, Russell stated in the local newspaper "Laredo would be one of the first cities in the Southwest to provide a downtown social center open to all senior citizens."[62]

The *Laredo Morning Times* communicated that as of 1961 there were 2,655 persons living in the three Laredo Housing Authority projects, of which 1,543 were children, with Colonia Guadalupe's 272 dwelling units accommodating 1,117 tenants. The newspaper also indicated that the city's annual average income was $1,900 and that, based on public housing's low-income and low-rent nature, rental revenue was not sufficient to cover Laredo Housing Authority's existing housing units cost and operation.[63] The United States Government made up for the deficit with a yearly subsidy known as the Annual Contribution, which in February 1962 had totaled $1,509,165.[64] The newspaper further publicized how local authorities constructed by contracting with private builders and explained that the LHA owned the housing projects and operated them with its own managerial staff. Restricted by law to making capital loans and paying the Annual Contributions, the Federal Government reviewed local housing authorities' actions for compliance with federal law. Federal and State statutes also stipulated how the local authority determined need for low-rent public housing and how the authority proved that low-rent housing needs were not being met by private enterprise. The FPHA would make a small loan to cover local housing planning and the local housing authority had to approve the loan application. The local authority likewise determined the site, had it approved, selected the architects and engineers to prepare the plans, made estimates for construction and operating costs, as well as entered into cooperation with the local government to provide tax exemption and to eliminate substandard dwellings in the chosen locality. The report communicated that minimal monthly rent at the time was $16, which included all public utilities needed to ensure safe and sanitary quality of habitation for the tenants. Based on a rental schedule adopted locally, LHA monthly rental ceilings ranged from $50 for a one-bedroom apartment up to $75 for a four-bedroom dwelling.[65]

In May 1962 Sister Mary Adele accepted a $200,000 check from the local Housing Authority for the former hospital site of one city block situated in the city's central business district. Longtime health care providers for Laredo, the Sisters of Mercy had built what was then a third, larger and more modern medical facility on Logan Street in the Heights area on the city's east side.[66] The former hospital building on the west side of Jarvis Plaza at 700 Juarez Avenue was to be razed and replaced by a multi-story edifice to provide100 low-rent apartments for Laredo's elderly residents. According to the local newspaper, the one- or two-bedroom units were to have a full kitchen and would house mostly retirees who were on pensions or living on social security benefits. Admission to the new senior citizen apartments imposed a minimum age requirement of 62 for female and 65 for male tenants. At this time the LHA listed about forty residents as qualified and prioritized for tenancy at the proposed downtown location. Colonia Guadalupe, Russell Terrace, and Richter Courts totaled 572 units and since 200 to 300 hopeful young couples, some with children, were on a tenant waiting list at the time, justification for seeking out mature persons living at these public housing projects to move to the proposed downtown apartment building was the liberation of dwellings for young families.[67]

Following established guidelines, LHA Board Chairman Ed. S. Russell opened twelve bids from diverse firms from seven Texas cities ranging up to $1,642,868. With no contender from Laredo, the construction contract for the Laredo Housing Authority's Senior Citizen's Home was awarded to the lowest bidder, Jaffe and Martin Builders of San Antonio for $1,432,870 with the stipulation to tear down old Mercy Hospital and erect the new seven-story apartment building within 400 days. LHA Executive Director Sturgis declared that the rent would approximate that of the authority's other housing units.[68] In the early 1960s, rents in Texas's local Housing Authorities were based on 20 percent of annual incomes of families with two or less minors and 16.66 percent for families with three or more minor dependents. Public housing residents were described as normal families of small earning power. These were young families just starting out, as well as some families whose members were afflicted with chronic illness or headed by disabled persons. One of five public housing residents were elderly, two out five single parents, one out of five received welfare aid, and two-thirds were children.[69] Unlike other Texas municipal housing authorities, such as those in Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Dallas and Houston, the Laredo Housing Authority's projects were not subject to legal Jim Crow racial segregation.[70] This peculiarity resulted from Laredo's overwhelmingly large percentage of Mexican ethnicity of almost 97 percent, of which the city's poor and disadvantaged constituted the prevalent majority, making construction of public housing projects along racial lines prohibitively impractical. The LHA's renters represented a percentage of Mexican ethnicity nearer to 99 percent compared to the city's census at the time.

The LHA met informally with Regional Federal Public Housing Authority Director Marshall W. Amis on June 12, 1962 to discuss Chairman Russell's earlier proposal to establish a Community Center at the new Senior Citizens Apartments in September 1961. Amis advised that before the FPHA approved such a center there had to be "definite commitments from organizations and clubs to provide leadership and sustain activity."[71] Commissioner Russell declared that no club or organization would agree to undertake such leadership, to which Amis responded that the FPHA could provide building space and would finance construction for a Community Center if the LHA would eventually comply with the prerequisite commitment. Emily Dalrymple, FPHA Community Facilities Officer, architect Olin Boese, and his associate Gilbert Patrick were in attendance and offered their expertise on the matter, which was put on hold for future consideration.[72]

Olin Boese presented preliminary sketches of proposed Project No. TEX-11-4, the Senior Citizens Home, to the LHA in July[73] and these were approved the following month.[74] Bids on erection of the downtown structure were received and opened in June 1963, but with the lowest of $1,432,870 in excess of the amount budgeted, no contract was awarded. Revised bidding was resubmitted with the firm of Darragh and Lyca, Inc. receiving the award for $1,206,850 in November.[75]

In accordance with regulation changes of the Housing Act of 1961 and adjustments and increase in LHA operations, Tomás Botello was appointed LHA

Maintenance Supervisor[76] and Raul L. Treviño was made temporary Executive Director.[77] Reacting to national inflationary trends, the local authority's Resident Eligibility was of necessity updated in 1964 with the repeal of LHA Resolution No. 236 and its replacement by Resolution No. 321, which stipulated that a tenant's net assets were not to exceed $3,000 ($5,000 for residents of the Senior Citizens Project). Part of the revised regulations was a new Order of Preference for Regular Family Projects, which prioritized (1) families displaced through action of a public body or court; (2) families of veterans and servicemen not qualifying as displaced families; (3) families in dwellings which are unsafe, "unsanitary," or overcrowded; and (4) elderly families or single elderly persons not qualifying as living in substandard dwellings. Among those identified in Categories 1 and 2, first preference was given to families of disabled veterans and second preference to families of deceased veterans whose death was service-related, with third preference given to other veterans and servicemen. Next in line of preference would be persons that the LHA tenant admissions office deemed as having the most urgent housing need.[78]

A separate special Order of Preference was developed for the senior citizens residential development. Priority was given to (1) disabled veterans and their families where the disability was service-connected; (2) families of deceased veterans or servicemen; (3) other families of veterans or servicemen; (4) families of persons displaced or about to be displaced through action of a public body or court; (5) families or persons living in unsafe or unsanitary dwellings that are detrimental to the health, safety, and general welfare of the family; and (6) other eligible applicants with the most urgent housing needs with first consideration to persons who had resided in the City of

Laredo for twelve months prior or more.[79] A motion by Housing Commissioner Albert Martin was passed by the LHA stipulating that rent for the elderly was not to exceed $20 per month.[81] During the regular LHA meeting of February 1965, Project No. TEX-11-4 was officially named the Laredo Senior Citizens Home.[81] A letter from the Fort Worth Office of PHA Regional Director T.H. Callahan directed that "one year residency in Laredo was to be used as a preference factor and not as an eligibility requirement for applicants seeking admission to the Laredo Senior Citizens Home."[82] To date, the city's first public housing project for the elderly has maintained 100 percent occupancy since its inauguration.[83]

As of April 1965, with the senior citizens project 96.5 percent completed, the Laredo Housing Authority had 672 low-rent units and a staff of eight employees.[84] The following month the LHA received a letter from Earl D. Buttington, Assistant Director for Management of the Fort Worth FPHA Regional Office which advised that the "combined annual salaries shall not exceed $35,100 for eight full-time employees to operate" the 672 dwelling units. The local authority had estimated that upon opening the Senior Citizens Apartments, a minimum of two more employees would have been needed and responded to Buttington, reminding him that the "Executive Director and his staff have additional responsibility, that of making the projects an integral part of their surrounding community."[85] The matter of hiring and keeping qualified employees became more acute when the LHA reported that two project office managers left for better pay, several workers were leaving due to low wages, and that there were approximately 1,000 pending applications for admission to the housing projects.[86] The Housing Commissioners collectively agreed that more employees, higher wages, and more dwelling units were needed. Authority Vice-Chairman Albert Martin motioned to have the Executive Director travel to Fort Worth to apprise the Housing Assistance Office (HAO) of the situation and try to work out a more realistic salary schedule, one more in line with the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), and the duties and responsibilities of the local Authority. The motion carried unanimously,[87] and the matter of hiring the needed personnel at competitive salaries was resolved in due course as new federal policies for funding developed in the decade of the 1960s.

Embracing the Johnson Administration's Great Society and its War on Poverty program, and consequent to the U.S. Congress's Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the LHA Commissioners resolved "to support the establishment of a Community Action Program (CAP) for Laredo for the purpose of vocational, recreational, daycare, health, home demonstration activities and other related projects."[88] The CAP allowed citizens more involvement and control over administration of local organization of federally funded antipoverty services. Congress also passed the Housing Act of 1965, which created the cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).[89]

Correspondent with recent growth, the Laredo Housing Authority submitted a request to HUD for funding construction of a new Central Office at the downtown Senior Citizens Home. The local authority consequently proposed that the needed office space be constructed as a remodeling project of the original Administration Building located at 2000 San Francisco in the Colonia Guadalupe.[90] The Fort Worth HUD Office agreed with the LHA proposal, but directed that an entirely new Administration Building be constructed adjacent to the existing one, since by their calculation, the decision to forego remodeling would save $37,000. Uncommitted funds from the Senior Citizens

Home would be used for the new edifice, which would exceed the space allowed by HUD, and a special application had to be submitted to allow for it.[91] The lowest of two bids was submitted by the Marshall Henman Company for $61,313, but the amount of the lowest bid was considered in excess, so no action was taken by the LHA pending discussion with the area HUD Office.[92] Following the LHA's submission of required documents, Wallis Wade of the HUD Planning Section in Fort Worth approved that the contract be awarded to the Henman Company. Ed. Russell of the LHA moved that the contract be awarded without delay due to the expiration date of June 6, 1966 for labor rates.[93]

Subsequent to federal civil rights desegregation legislation of the 1960s, changes in renter application regulations were enacted in which applicants could state preference for housing project location where he or she wished to obtain housing.[94] This was in reaction to the practice of steering members of certain races to federal projects housing renters of that same race, which would not have been the case in practically mono-ethnic Laredo.[95]

President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty program and Congress's Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, led to the creation of "Volunteers in Service to American (VISTA), a domestic Peace Corps that recruited Americans, many between 18 and 25, to work on neighborhood projects in areas of urban … distress to try to reduce illiteracy…and lack of social services."[96] On June 6, 1966, LHA Secretary Russell informed the housing board that about 40 VISTA volunteer workers had been assigned to Laredo. Sponsored by the local Community Action Program, which had also been "established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, they would work with the poor and develop programs concerning health, education, and recreation."[97] Some VISTA workers had already been assigned to the local public housing projects, and Russell added that their work would be of more benefit if some of the volunteers would be allowed to live in Laredo public housing at special rents. After discussion by the LHA board members, it was agreed that the VISTA workers would be charged "a special rent of $30 per month including utilities for these VISTA volunteers and their families."[98] This LHA decision was "not approved by the U.S. Public Housing Authority until further justification."[99]

Although new federal funding programs had remedied the previous problem of retaining LHA employees during the Johnson Administration years, inflation and cost of living kept rising. In 1967 two Housing Project office managers left for better pay.[100] More LHA employees were reported leaving due to low wages in November 1967, to which Vice-Chairman Albert Martin moved to have the Authority's Executive Director to travel to the Fort Worth HUD Area Office to "convey the situation to the Housing Assistance Office to try to work out a more realistic salary schedule; more in line with cost of living, duties, and responsibilities."[101] In conjunction with a report that approximately one thousand persons had applied for admission to the projects, the motion carried unanimously.[102]

The 1950s through the early 1960s witnessed curtailment of funds to develop federally funded public housing projects in the progressive tradition of the Franklin Roosevelt Administration and Great Depression and Post World War II Congresses. Following the Kennedy Presidency, with its unfulfilled promises and untimely end, the era of President Lyndon B. Johnson's New Society and its War on Poverty programs, introduced new impetus as a more activist federal government endeavored to correct America's socioeconomic shortcomings through numerous new funding sources. The last major construction project in Laredo, the Senior Citizens Home, evinced what can be perceived as a move more toward providing shelter for elderly or incapacitated residents, considered by members of the Administration and Congress as a more docile and controllable part of society who would require less playgrounds, wear and tear on buildings, or parking spaces than housing traditionally younger, low-income family dwellings.

The years from the late 1960s through the end of the 20th century also saw a newer, more progressivist political scenario, with the elimination of old fashioned machine politics and the involvement of activist politicians. As the following chapter will illustrate, this new era would also usher two population booms for Laredo and the development of innovative ways to create and fund housing the increasingly larger numbers of low-income residents of this south Texas border city.

Chapter Four

The Third Phase of Federal Housing in Laredo, Texas: From the Great Society's War on Poverty to the First Decade of the 21st Century, 1968 to 2006

In January 1968, the Laredo Housing Authority held and informational meeting at the Senior Citizens Home during which representatives from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) informed Laredo real estate dealers and homebuilders of the Leased Housing Program under the HUD Act of 1965. George Karseboon and Philip Watson from the Fort Worth HUD Regional Office informed those present "a program of federal assistance was enacted in 1965 to aid local housing authorities in providing quarters for low-income families in dwellings leased from private owners."[1] The meeting was attended by Laredo realtors Rex Shanks, Royle Wright, John Snyder, Herman Bohme, as well as Frank Guerra of Herring Price Lumber Company, Edward Leyendecker of City Lumber Company, and Isaac Epstein of David Lumber Company. This newer type of housing assistance was known as the Section 23 Leasing Program because it was the 23rd section of the 1965 Amendment to the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, the basic law authorizing federal assistance for low-income families. According to the federal housing officers from Fort Worth, "President Johnson had asked HUD Secretary Robert C. Weaver to double the number of housing units that would be made available for occupancy by low-income families the next year. For several years previous the production rate has been approximately 35,000 units; our goal for the twelve-month period ending September 30, 1968 will be 70,000 units."[2]

Because of the time factor involved in the construction of new units, production plans were to rely primarily on the leasing program to attain the declared goal. This leasing program would eventually be known as the Section 8 program. The HUD officials further stated "(we) are aiming at 30,000 units to be leased and made available for occupancy prior to October 1, 1968. This means that by then all units programmed and under Annual Contract will be have to be placed under lease. It will necessitate a substantial acceleration of leasing rates experienced during past months."[3] Karseboon and Watson further indicated:

> The Leasing Program is designed to (1) enable and encourage private real estate interests to participate more directly in meeting the housing needs of low-income families, (2) provide homes for those in need more rapidly than new housing can be built, (3) help localities make better use of their housing stocks, and (4) encourage the physical upgrading of neighborhoods. The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 authorizes funds to permit leasing of at least 10,000 dwelling units during the fiscal year that began July 1, 1965. The total number of dwelling units is to be increased to an estimated 40,000 by the end of the four years covered by the 1965 Act. Any legally constituted housing authority may now seek authorization for a leased-housing program. The local governing body must by resolution approve such a program. There must also be enough dwelling units available so that the program will not put a strain on the total housing supply."[4]

Section 23 operated through local Housing Authorities just like conventional housing assistance programs, but was considered a far simpler program and could be placed in operation more quickly. Various types of agreements were proposed and made available through Section 23. A lease could be arranged between the local Housing Authority and the owner, with a sub-lease to the tenant, or a contract could be made between the local authority and the owner guaranteeing payment of a certain rent for certain dwellings, the actual lease being between the tenant and the owner. Arrangements for rent payments took different forms. The tenant could pay his share directly to the local housing authority, which would in turn pay the property owner the rent agreed upon in the lease contract. Other options were that the tenant and the local authority could pay their respective shares directly to the owner, or the local authority could send its share through the tenant, who would then include it with his payment to the owner. The difference between what the low-income tenant could afford to pay for rent plus utilities and the actual cost was to be made up by federal contributions. The federal share could not exceed the federal contribution that would be made available for a newly built housing project designed to accommodate comparable numbers, sizes, or kinds of families.[5]

Under the Leasing Program the "owner" did not have to be the legal titleholder to the property. The "owner" could be a profit-motivated "middleman," such as a private real estate broker or property management firm, or a non-profit religious, labor, or other organization. According to the HUD officers, in some instances, leasing housing for low-rent use could have distinct advantages over constructing or acquiring it and leased housing was seen as being useful to a community as short-term supplements to the basic supply of housing owned by the local housing authority. Reading from HUD regulations, the federal officials enumerated some specific needs that were to be served by the Leasing Program, such as:

> (1) Relocation for displaced low-income families and individuals; (2) the upgrading of privately owned, deteriorating residential properties since the incentive of an assured rental income over the period of a leasing agreement encouraged private owners to bring up to standards and maintain their property in standard condition; (3) housing low-income families who did not like to live in federal housing projects and preferred to live in private apartment buildings, two-family houses, or single family homes; (4) continuing to house tenants whose incomes rose above low-rent eligibility limits, but who did not to move. If both parties agreed, such tenants could either become regular tenants of the landlord or eventually

> purchase their home. Finally, (5) there would be a continuation of properties on local real estate tax rolls, whereby private landlords continued to pay their property taxes.[6]

The local Housing Authority would initiate the leasing program by surveying the local rental market to determine the number and rental rates of available units. In so doing, the local authority sought the cooperation of local real estate brokers and their agents. Other sources of information about vacancies and anticipated vacancies were also appraised. The owners of available housing, or "middlemen" acting for them, were then invited to make one or more of their dwellings available for use by the local authority. The leasing program was an entirely voluntary one. The right of condemnation, or eminent domain, was not permitted. The local authority inspected housing offered in response to the invitation since all apartments and houses to be leased had to be "decent, safe, and sanitary, or improved to that condition by the owner prior to leasing. In general, to be acceptable, the accommodations must at least have met code requirements and be situated in satisfactory residential neighborhoods accessible to public transportation, schools, and shopping districts."[7] According to federal guidelines, rents had to be moderate, since "even with federal assistance, high-rent housing (could) not be brought within reach of low-income families."[8] The rent to the owner could not be higher than the amount of the federal assistance plus the amount the low-income family could afford to pay, which was determined to usually be between 20 and 25 percent of its income. If the rentals to be charged were deemed proper and economically feasible, the local Housing Authority would then approve the units and leasing contracts could be entered into.[9]

The standard lease form prevailing in the community was used to the extent possible and the contract could provide that the owner, or his agent, select the tenants, or if the owner preferred, the local Housing Authority would be fully responsible for tenant selection. Tenant eligibility was determined by the local authorities, which generally were to be families in the lowest income group who could not afford to rent or buy decent private housing. Regardless of the type of tenant selection process instituted, the local Housing Authority retained the sole right to give a tenant notice to vacate, but it would consider complaints or other representations from owners related to termination of tenancy. A contract between the local Authority and an owner had to be for a term of no less than one year nor more than five years and the agreement between the owner and the local Authority had to include a provision that the owner would not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, creed, or national origin.[10]

After the informational session by HUD officials Karseboon and Watson, the Laredo Board of Realtors passed a resolution requesting "that the Laredo Housing Authority apply for the Leasing Program as set out in Section 23 of the 1965 Amendment to the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, for the benefit of low-income families by leasing from private individuals."[11] It was the consensus of local realtors that this program would benefit Laredo low-income families, have a positive economic effect on the local rental housing market, and offer alternative solutions to low-income housing. Furthermore, according to Emily Dalrymple, Community Services Officer for HUD's Fort Worth Regional Office, "community involvement (would have) to be part of the program and involve the health, education, and welfare of the tenants. Leasing Program renters (would) be invited to share their ideas to improve the living conditions of the dwellings in an effort to make better housekeepers with better homes." [12] Consequently, LHA Commissioner Albert Martin made a motion to have Authority Executive Secretary Raul Treviño contact tenants to obtain suggestions, comments, and advice on modernization of proposed Lease Program dwellings.[13]

Merle C. Warren, HUD Housing Assistance Office Representative, stated that he and LHA representatives, including the Executive Director, were to survey the Colonia Guadalupe Housing Project, which had been targeted for modernization, and its management practices. Warren also indicated that the Section 23 Leasing Program included a modernization project that required the LHA to hire an architect, to which all Authority board members pointed out that Olin Boese from Fort Worth was employed as the LHA Architect. Housing Commissioner Russell commented that a local architect could have been employed, but a time constraint did not permit that. Mann further added that the modernization project funding should have provided for improvements to make Colonia Guadalupe more livable, and not solely for the purpose of change.[14]

Part of the modernization project necessitated revision of the LHA's personnel policies, rent schedules, and administrative policies to bring them up to date in conjunction with the upgrading of low-rent public housing. Architect Boese distributed copies of lists of items in need of renovation and suggested that vacated residences should be "frozen" and not reoccupied as residents left voluntarily. He estimated that this would allow twenty-five units to be freed for renovation work at all time so that the modernization project would be completed in a timely manner. At this time the LHA queried Boese about his architect's certification, after which he was unanimously chosen to continue. The architect's itemized list of the Colonia Guadalupe improvements amounted to $1,727,000, which included $80,000 as a contingency fund.[15]

Part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society's War on Poverty was a federal urban aid program authorized by the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, which stemmed from various factors, including bureaucratic difficulties in the first years of the War on Poverty that led to calls for reform of federal programs. From this 1966 legislation came the Model Cities Program that created a new program at HUD intended to improve existing urban programs and provide additional funds for local plans. The program's goals emphasized comprehensive planning involving not just rebuilding but also rehabilitation, social service delivery, and citizen participation.[16] Consequent to this, City of Laredo officials met with federal government officials, including HUD Regional Director W.W. Collins, and the municipality applied for a planning grant for the federal government's Model Cities Program in anticipation of certification of a workable program. The Laredo Housing Authority in turn held a Special Meeting in March 1968 and a discussion ensued concerning the urgent need for additional conventional public housing construction for Laredo.[17] Additionally at that meeting, a letter from HUD officer Earl D. Bullington indicated that $1,975,684 had been approved for the LHA Modernization Project budget. Much of the funding was directed for modernization and rehabilitation of Colonia Guadalupe's buildings and grounds, the involvement of tenants in the planning and modernization programs, changes in management policies and practices, plus expanded services and facilities.[18] A call for bids for the modernization of Project TEX-

11-1, Colonia Guadalupe, was held and R.M. Wells Company, Inc. of Quanah, Texas, with the lowest bid of $1,513,000 was awarded the contract.[19]

Bullington's message also addressed "expansion of community service programs and community facilities where needed to meet program requirements, intensification of efforts to assist low-income families to realize their potential for economic advance, and increased employment by the local Authority of low-income tenants."[20] Ensuing from a HUD communiqué addressing expansion of community service programs, a special session of the Laredo Housing Authority was called on July 26, 1968, where a letter signed by six Authority personnel was read in which they complained that they had not been considered for the position of Community Service Coordinator. The LHA board unanimously agreed to follow Chairman Russell's recommendation that he would address each of the complainants individually in writing.[21] Alma Peña Ruiz, who was not one of the appellants, was eventually employed by the LHA as Community Services Coordinator at $8,000 per year.[22]

The Decade of the 1970s

Relative to government aid for low-income family housing, the decade of the 1970s is characterized by the Laredo Housing Authority's intensified search for much needed additional housing for Laredo's disadvantaged families, a need exacerbated by the large number of these families living in low quality housing, changing federal housing statutes, and the closure of Laredo Air Force Base, a main source of local employment. In 1971, during the routine submission for renewal and HUD approval of the Cooperation Agreement between the LHA and the City, an amendment was entered in attempt to attain federal funds to construct 300 additional Public Housing dwellings. HUD's Legal Section questioned the validity of such an entry and rejected it.[23] In 1972, LHA Chairperson Ed Russell requested from Authority Executive Secretary Raul Treviño a progress report on the status of the application for additional low-rent housing. Treviño stated that he was advised by Alton Foote of HUD's Production Section that priority for construction was being given to smaller cities and towns that did not have subsidized housing and that Laredo's application, among others, would have to wait for funding for a later time. The Executive Secretary affirmed that he had "reiterated to Mr. Foote that there was a terrific need for additional public housing as evidenced by pressure from applicants and that the local Authority wanted to emphasize this situation for consideration by the Department of Housing and Urban Development."[24] Housing Commissioner Albert Martin motioned and fellow Authority member Albert H. Magnon, Jr. seconded a resolution to transmit to U.S. Congressman Abraham "Chick" Kazen, Jr. that the LHA had a dire need for the requested construction funds for 300 additional housing units and asked the Congressman to assist the local Authority in its endeavor to provide the much-needed additional housing units. The motion carried unanimously.[25] At the regular May 1972 LHA meeting a resolution was unanimously passed asking "Congressman Kazen to intervene on behalf of the people and in behalf of the Laredo Housing Authority to obtain necessary funds to provide for decent low-rent housing."[26] It was noted that Mayor Joe C. Martin, nephew of former Mayor and LHA Commissioner Albert Martin, had already communicated on behalf of the South Texas Development Council for such funds.[27] Authority Commissioner Magnon moved that the LHA visit with the representative of the HUD Area Production

Section Office in Fort Worth to further discuss the local Authority's urgent application for 300 new units.[28] In October 1972, City of Laredo Engineer Paul Garza, Jr. spoke of the HUD Turnkey methods of housing development at the regular LHA meeting, emphasizing to the Authority that according to his estimation, "the need for additional public housing is more than twice than that being applied for."[29]

Early in 1972, the Mother Cabrini Neighborhood Council brought a request to the LHA to "improve an LHA-owned vacant lot at Richter Courts and make it a playground."[30] The neighborhood association was named for the nearby Mother Cabrini Catholic Parish. The LHA made it known that HUD would accept creating a playground from the 86'X250' lot, which was adjacent to the Richter Courts project, as long as any improvements belonged to the local Housing Authority. The Richter Courts Resident Council in conjunction with the Mother Cabrini Council applied for funding jointly through the Corpus Christi Diocese and the Community Action Agency.[31] The CAA is a nonprofit and public organization established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight the what the Johnson Administration called the War on Poverty.[32]

The year 1972 ended on a sad note for the Laredo Housing Authority when long-time Commissioner and former Mayor, Albert Martin passed away.[33] In a specially called LHA meeting in February 1973, his nephew, Laredo Mayor Joe C. Martin, Jr. appointed Andres R. Ramos to serve the remainder of the deceased commissioner's term in the Authority's board.[34]

As the decade of the 1970s continued, a development that led to curtailment of federal funding of low-income public housing was indicated in an LHA discussion of the Brooke Amendment in relationship to the local Authority's solvency. This 1968 federal housing legislation sought to protect low-income earners from local housing authority rent hikes by mandating that public housing households pay no more than one-third of their income in rent – but also required them to pay no less than that third. One of the unintended consequences of this law was that it "drove from pubic housing the remaining working families, whose rents suddenly shot up when they had to pay a third of their incomes to the housing authority."[35] The LHA Executive Director and Secretary were instructed "to continue to pursue occupancy of a cross section of families' incomes in order to maintain a higher level of Operating Receipts and thus avoid any financial problems experienced by other Authorities by the effect of said Brooke Amendment."[36] A few months later, a letter from HUD Area Director Finnis E. Jolly reduced the LHA's hope to meet its declared need for additional low-income housing units, stating that "the suspension for the Low Rent Housing Program, announced by HUD, prevents this office from continuing the processing of the subject application for low rent housing."[37] A point raised by the local Authority that addressed the dearth of low-income housing was the recently announced closure of Laredo Air Force Base (LAFB), which, while a sad note for Laredo's economy, was seen as an opportunity to acquire four hundred recently constructed brick veneer duplex frame houses plus forty-nine trailer homes vacated by military personnel. Looking into the matter was of high concern because of the low LHA occupancy turnover rate and a backlog of 1,790 applications on file at that time.[38]

Subsequent to the declared and validated acute housing shortage, the LHA requested that HUD apply to the United States Department of Defense (DOD) for LAFB housing to be transferred to the local Authority for use as low–income housing. Since LAFB was formally closing on September 30, 1973, the LHA addressed a letter to HUD

Area Director Jolly with a sense of urgency, stating that local Housing Authority should have first priority concerning the DOD decision for final disposition of the base housing.[39] Members of the President's Interagency Economic Adjustment Committee (PIEAC) met with local elected and civic leaders in a conference chaired by Mayor J.C. Martin, Jr., where it was announced that the DOD could not transfer housing until the base officially closed. Members of the Pentagon's Office of Economic Adjustment advised that the LHA would have to take up the issue with the City of Laredo. Mayor Martin opined that the municipality should not oppose the LHA decision. The LHA experienced a change of events when, on November 19, 1973, it received a letter from James K. Windsor, Director of the Real Property Division of the Government Services Administration (GSA) Region 7 in Fort Worth, stating that federal agencies having interest in Laredo Air Force Base property should contact the GSA before November 27. The LHA contacted Paul Flynn, Realty Officer of the GSA's Public Buildings Service, who replied that a transfer could not be made directly to the local Authority, but if HUD requested and acquired the LAFB homes, then HUD could transfer them to the Authority.[40] In a follow-up letter, Flynn advised the LHA that the Air Force would continue to use ninety to one-hundred of the units and that his office "(could) not give favorable consideration to the Laredo Housing Authority's request to acquire base housing for low-rent housing."[41]

Early in 1974, the discussion concerning the final disposition of unutilized Laredo Air Base housing continued. The LHA made every effort to attain this housing through official requests for consideration from the offices of Texas State Representative William "Billy" Hall and United States Representative Abraham "Chick" Kazen. Adding further emphasis to its pursuit of low-income housing, the LHA recommended that Authority Executive Secretary Raul Treviño contact retired former LAFB Commander, Brigadier General Harold Knowles to seek his influence in communicating to the GSA and the Department of Defense the reaffirmation of the Authority's interest in the base dwelling units.[42] At this time the response from Realty Officer Paul T. Flynn of the GSA's Public Building Service concerning the sought after base housing was read, in which he stated that "under Section 414(a) of the HUD Act of 1969, the disposal agency is the GSA and it is the GSA's discretion as to transfer of real property to be coordinated with Opportunity Laredo, and under existing planning for the disposal of the base, such a request from HUD is not likely to receive favorable consideration."[43] Opportunity Laredo was an ad hoc group of Laredo business and community leaders formed to enhance economic opportunity locally in view of the recent closing of Laredo Air Force Base, which had been a mainstay of Laredo employment for over three decades.

Related to the LHA's solvency, a discussion ensued concerning House Bill HR 8987 (Senate Bill 2182), a proposed amendment to the U.S. Housing Act, which would create a new minimal rent schedule and change the definition of family income that would advance the federal government's efforts to make federal housing projects more self-sustaining.[44] A coincidental announcement was made during this LHA meeting that Frank Y. Hill was retiring as the Laredo Housing Authority Attorney. William "Bill" Allen replaced him in that capacity.[45] Further related to the LHA's solvency and sustainability, oilman A.R. "Tony" Sanchez of the Southwest Exploration Company offered to lease Authority property's mineral rights for a five-year period. Housing Commissioner

Magnon made a motion, which carried, for authorization of such gas, oil, and mineral lease.[46]

At an LHA Special Meeting in October 1974, a HUD communication was read which stated that the 1968 “Brooke Amendment” to the Housing Act, which required low-income households to pay up to thirty percent of their income towards rent, would no longer be applicable to Public Welfare recipients. During this meeting, LHA once more pursued the annexation of 300 dwellings consisting of Laredo Air Force Base housing by initiating another application to HUD Area Director Finnis Jolly. HUD had returned the original application in 1973 because of a federal government moratorium on low-income housing. The LHA maintained that the GSA should release the now-vacated units to them since they had been declared surplus by the Air Force. Most Opportunity Laredo committee members concluded that this would be the best manner to increase availability of low-income dwellings due to the housing market conditions aggravated by the base closure. Some committee members objected however, citing that the air base housing’s low density made it undesirable. Still most Opportunity Laredo members felt that since the LHA had a waiting list of 1,400 rental applicants, the result would be a vacancy of very low quality “shacks” which would not harm the local housing market. These committee members also expressed a preference for the vacancy of such poor housing rather than a worsening deterioration of the housing market that would be caused if the Air Base surplus housing went to the private market. The LHA Commissioners realized that appropriation was limited for the conventional Housing Program in the new act, but they were of the opinion that, since Laredo was faced with an unfavorable economic and housing problem, the city should have been included in the few hardship and exceptional cases allowed under the conventional Housing Program.[47]

In 1975, the Laredo Housing Authority's quest for additional low-income dwelling units had not achieved encouraging results. The Federal Administration and Congress did not include Federal Budget funds for additional conventional housing; therefore additional units were no longer possible. LHA members explained that the Community Development Act of 1974 provided low-income housing under the Section 8 leased housing program, but funding would be allocated only for existing vacant standard housing, and there was "no longer a substantial supply of private vacant standard housing in Laredo, so this alternative (was) not possible."[48] According to LHA members, the only possible alternative would be new construction under the lease program utilizing Laredo Air Force Base housing. Adding impetus to the Authority's resolve to acquire former Air Force housing, a letter was submitted to the LHA via Mayor J.C. Martin's office and the Laredo City Council, which read, "the Laredo Deanery of 13 Catholic Churches, with three representatives from each parish…recommends to this Council to look into the possibility of another low-income project. We have over 1,500 families on a waiting list. We also have a great amount of elderly people that are in dire need of a good home."[49] At the regular LHA monthly meeting of April 1975, an additional letter from Authority Director and Executive Secretary Raul Treviño addressed to Mayor Martin was read, in which he stated that "Section 8 funding allocation for Webb County…is exclusively for vacant standard housing at the present time. We no longer have a substantial supply of private vacant standard housing in Laredo, and therefore cannot go this route either."[50] The Housing Authority commissioners felt that the “remaining possible alternatives would be (1) new construction, or (2) utilization of Laredo Air Force Base housing once the GSA disposes it to private ownership.”[51] HUD Area Director Jolly responded by stating that Webb County could be eligible for approximately 300 units of existing housing under the Leased Program. The HUD officer further wrote a request for information from Mayor Martin’s Office concerning “available standard rental housing to determine a suitable program mix for Section 8 housing… as an integral part of the Housing Assistance Plan in your Application for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).”[52] The CDBG program is “a flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of community development needs. Beginning in 1974, … the CDBG program provides annual grants on a formula basis to … general units of local government and States.”[53]

At the regular LHA meeting in July 1975, LHA Executive Secretary Raul Treviño reported that HUD was processing an application for Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments for Existing Housing and that the application was prepared in cooperation with the City of Laredo through their Community Development Office. A total of 267 units were being requested, 70 of which would be for the elderly and 197 for typical families. It was noted that the city would require approximately 100 of these dwelling units to relocate Laredo residents displaced by the extension of Interstate Highway 35 into the city and the construction of a new international bridge project at the expressway’s terminus. The continued dearth of decent habitation for Laredo was reemphasized during this meeting when the Authority’s Leasing and Occupancy Coordinator, Virgilio Gonzalez, Jr. explained the methods employed in processing applications for admission in accordance with established policies. Gonzalez stated that there was a backlog of 1,900 applications for rental units.[54] Additionally, Executive Secretary Treviño said "the LHA was being more selective in an effort to maintain the financial solvency of its housing developments, and that the screenings were not inconsistent with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and HUD regulations."[55]

One positive result of the Laredo Housing Authority's persistent quest for subsidized housing for low-income families, a need much touted through housing market surveys and the large number of applicants for such housing, was that HUD authorized 328 units of Section 8 units. Although this brought some relief, more units were needed to cope with new demands. The local Authority maintained "standard rental housing remained scarce as families were forced to live in trailers and makeshift homes."[56] The housing shortage situation heightened as a recent petroleum and natural gas "mini-boom" caused the local population to surge, and the LHA believed that a great number of applicants would still be left unhoused.[57] In July 1976, Blas Martinez and Carlos Villarreal from the local Community Development Agency (CDA), report at an LHA special meeting that "the GSA had set aside 148 dwelling units from a total of 412 former Laredo Air Force Base officers' homes for the City of Laredo to use to relocate low–income families dislocated by the building of the second international bridge."[58] These houses had been constructed in 1968 by the Department of Defense. The City of Laredo would provide seed money, but wanted to know if the LHA could obtain the units for use as low-income housing. These 148 duplex homes consisted of 50 two-bedroom, 68 three-bedroom, and 30 four-bedroom dwellings. Martinez stated that the GSA valued these at $1,460,000, including the land, but not mineral rights. The

City could deposit $460,000 and finance $1,000,000.[59] By October 1976, LHA Executive Director and Secretary Treviño reported that 93 buildings had been leased to low-income families through Section 8 and that he anticipated that the 148 homes at the former Air Base would be available before the end of the year.[60]

Due to HUD elimination of income limits for qualification to rent government-subsidized dwellings, discussion about the possibility of the city or county establishing income limits for continued occupancy proceeded in 1977.[61] LHA Commissioners were of the opinion that if a family's income had increased such that the monthly rent based on 25 percent of the total family adjusted income reached or exceeded the Fair Market Rents as published by HUD for the area, management would notify the family of their non-assistance need for low-income housing. The notice would specify that "the family would remain in occupancy by payment of increased monthly rental until such a time as a decent, safe, and sanitary dwelling of suitable size at a rent not exceeding 25 percent of the family income is found by either the management or the tenant."[62]

By 1977, the Laredo Housing Authority Commissioners were Matías de Llano, Jr., Ed. Mann, Rodolfo Santos, with Alberto H. Magnon as Chair and Andres R. Ramos Vice-Chair. In the October LHA meeting, John Peter Montalvo, U.S. Postal Worker and President of Laredo Council 624 of the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), read a letter he had mailed to the Secretary of HUD in Washington alleging discrepancies concerning renters' application processing and assignments. LHA Commissioners declared that the allegations were not specific and that there was an understandable problem of low turnover and non-availability of housing units to take care of the large numbers of applicants and very long waiting rolls for the public housing program. At this point, the Commissioners discussed the need for additional public housing units and the possibility of funding becoming available in the near future. The board of LHA voted to notify HUD of the desire to apply for 300 additional units of public housing.[63] A motion was submitted at the end of 1977 reflecting the previous months' discussions of the dire need for additional low-rent housing units in Laredo. The application for financial assistance from HUD included the aforementioned proposal for 300 new units and a preliminary loan of $60,000.[64]

At the end of their December 1977 regular meeting, the LHA issued a Resolution of Appreciation of Services of Commissioner Ed. Mann, who had served the Housing Authority since January 30, 1946, when he had been appointed by Mayor Hugh S. Cluck.[65] At this juncture, a HUD communication was read that informed the LHA of the availability of funds for only 146 units for the three-county area, which determined that the previous application for 300 public housing units had to be reduced. The LHA response to the federal agency's communiqué, written by Authority Executive Director Raul Treviño to the HUD Area Director, consisted of resubmission of an application for the 146 new units.[66] The number of units was derived from the consolidation of two earlier HUD invitations, one of 25 units of New Construction and one for 121 units of Rehabilitation of Existing Housing.[67]

For more than seven decades of the 20th century, Laredo's and Webb County's politics had been dominated by a political machine known as the Independent Club. During the 19th century this group of powerful men had been colloquially called the *Botas*, or Boots, and during the 20th century as *El Partido Viejo*, or "The Old Party". Their political opponents were accordingly named the *Guaraches*, or "Sandals" in earlier times, evolving into the Reform Party, *El Partido Nuevo*, or “New Party” of the 20th century. The year 1978 began with a change in the political scenario as the Independent Club’s former hold on Webb County and Laredo waned. Aldo Tatangelo, an Italian-American businessman from the East Coast had been elected mayor of Laredo. Deemed a change agent, especially after an FBI investigation of previous Mayor Joe Martin resulted in a federal conviction for mail fraud, Tatangelo began introducing more liberal governmental changes and political appointments than the previously entrenched power structure. Foreseen changes could be reflected in a letter of resignation from Housing Authority from Commissioner Matías de Llano to newly elected Mayor Aldo Tatangelo, which stated, “I have thoroughly enjoyed my work with the Housing Authority… However, I believe the new Mayor and the new Member of the City Council should have absolute freedom to name their own appointees and it is for this, along with some personal reasons, I felt it necessary to submit this, my resignation.”[68] The following handwritten note by de Llano was attached to the February 1978 LHA meeting minutes:

> Beto, Mr. Mann, Andres, Rudy and Raul – I’m sorry, but I better quit while I have a good reputation (good “batting average”). It’s been nice serving with you, and sincerely hope I remain your friend anyway – Matías.[69]

The changes in federal public housing policy direction in 1978 included HUD’s rejection of all Section 8 New Construction requested by the Laredo Housing Authority.[70] Reflecting the changing face of politics in Laredo, the Mayor appointed the first female Housing Commissioner, Ana María Lozano in July 1978. Besides Lozano, the LHA members included Matías de Llano, Jr, Alberto H. Magnon, Jr., Andres Ramos, Ed. Mann, and Rodolfo Santos. Raul Treviño had the title of LHA Secretary and

Executive Director, Samuel Hinojosa was Manager of the Colonia Guadalupe Housing Project (TEX–11–1), Teresa Lozano managed Russell Terrace (TEX-11-2), Delia Ortiz managed Richter Courts (TEX–11–3), and Lilia Mora was the Laredo Senior Citizens Home (TEX–11–4) Manager.[71] It was also in 1978 that local LULAC Council 624 applied for 85 housing units of New Construction for the elderly and handicapped under Section 202.[72]

At a special meeting in August 1978 the LHA announced that proposals for Turnkey Project TEX–011–5 were to be received no later than September 15. Turnkey housing is the term denoting dwelling units produced by private interests and sold to a public agency, typically a local housing authority.[73] The designated breakdown for the construction of the 146 units were to be 13 one-bedroom, 69 two-bedroom, 56 three-bedroom, and 8 four-bedroom dwellings. During this meeting, Río Vista, Inc. submitted Section 8 New Construction proposals for two sites on the western section of Laredo and the Alfred Hughes Corporation entered an application for a New Construction project to be located at Sandman Street and Cherry Hill Avenue on vacant land that had previously been Laredo Air Force Base. Likewise at this time, Friedman and Associates applied for Section 8 New Construction units at Milmo Avenue and Chestnut Street in the Santo Niño area of south Laredo, while the L&T (Lee-Jackson Turner) Development Company solicited permission for similar dwellings at 1400 N. Gust, within the site of the former air base. These last two projects were to be one-story duplex homes. At this point it was noted that the Laredo Housing Authority had been authorized for 384 Section 8 units under the Housing Assistance Plan (HAP) and yet this number was deemed grossly insufficient to meet the demand of 2000-plus applicants. The LHA membership emphasized that large numbers of subsidized units were needed to house local low-income families, a situation compounded by the scarcity of vacant rental units in Laredo.[74]

Although Housing Commissioner Andres Ramos had entered a motion to approve Friedman and Associates' proposal for Section 8 New Construction and his motion was approved by LHA in August 1978, that company's proposal did not meet HUD criteria. The site selection lacked infrastructure and was determined to be too far from basic services and businesses. Commissioner Mann then moved that LHA approve L&T Development Company as the next best proposal pending HUD approval.[75]

In October 1978 the local Authority received a letter from United Independent School District (UISD) Superintendent Don G. Hughes indicating that a new school facility would be planned for the area of the new 146-unit Turnkey Project. The Superintendent of Laredo's second school district had previously met with Mayor Tatangelo and the letter had been written at the request from architect James L. Humphries. It was also at this juncture that the LHA received correspondence from Thomas B. Waggoner, vice-president of the Hunt Building Corporation, which proposed to provide one low-density site for 146 family units on 21.5 acres adjacent to the northern periphery of the Hillside Terrace subdivision on both sides of Springfield Avenue on Laredo's north side. The hunt proposal stated that the site is on a plain not subject to flooding, had not been zoned, and would not house displaced families. This vacant land would have a population density of 7.5 dwelling units per acre, and Waggoner proposed 74 buildings, 73 duplex family units and one management-maintenance building. Gas, water, and overhead electricity were available to this area.[76] An additional letter from Waggoner further informed the LHA that the owner of the proposed project site was willing to negotiate and accept $633,700 for the 21.5 acres, which included water and sewer systems, a price of $1.24 per square foot.[77] A letter from Zuñiga Engineering was consequently introduced to the LHA stating,

> The Hunt Company is in direct violation of Laredo's Master Plan because it would block Springfield, a major thoroughfare. Additionally, it would place low-income housing immediately adjacent to $125,000 to $175,000 new homes with only a chain link fence dividing the properties. This would have a very serious devaluating effect on these new homes, with reduced tax income to the city, county, and UISD. The sewer system is already overburdened with the Hillside and Regency developments. Location of Federal Housing Projects is intended to benefit the location, not hurt its development. Locating this project in South Laredo will have a positive impact in that area.[78]

In what may be construed as another case of NIMBY–ism,[79] eight pages of signatures on a petition that had been circulated in the Hillside subdivision were attached to the Zuñiga letter.[80] At that time prioritization of proposals by the Housing Authority, Mayor Tatangelo, and City Planning Engineer Jose Ruiz were in the following order: (1) Alfred Hughes, (2) Lee-Jackson Turner (L & T), and (3) Hunt Building Corporation.[81]

At an informal LHA meeting in November 1978, with Housing Commissioners Albert Magnon, Andres Ramos, Ana María Lozano, and Abraham Rodriguez in attendance, as well as the presence of Authority Executive Director Treviño, Mayor Tatangelo, CDA Director Carlos Villarreal, and City Planning Engineer Ruiz, a discussion once more ensued concerning the pressing need for additional low-income family housing. The dialogue involved the pros and cons of siting federally subsidized housing projects in north Laredo versus south Laredo. The majority opinion was to send representatives to HUD to voice a strong support of the City's wishes for the south Laredo site. It was decided that Abraham Rodriguez, architect Willy Cavazos, and LHA Director Raul Treviño would speak for the Authority and Carlos Villarreal and Jose Ruiz would represent the City of Laredo.[82]

At a special year-end LHA meeting lasting two days, with the Alfred Hughes Corporation represented by Jerry Salinas and Hunt Building Company by James Humphries, a HUD letter dated December 4, 1978 was read that supported the three sites originally prioritized by the LHA and the City. The LHA membership "expressed disappointment with HUD's decision on the north Laredo site in view of justification already furnished HUD on improvements and development plans for the (south side) Santo Niño site."[83] At this point a discussion followed where it was decided that the Authority had no recourse but to accept HUD's ranking. LHA Chairman Magnon introduced a letter from developer Alfred Hughes with documentation indicating that his proposed site in Laredo's Loma Alta Subdivision was a flood zone area and that it should be reconsidered. The LHA decided to resubmit Hughes' proposal for HUD reassessment. At that point Abraham Rodriguez made a motion that the Authority should accept the HUD decision for the north Laredo Hunt proposal based on time limits and alternatives. The meeting recessed until the following day pending a telephone call to HUD. Upon reconvening, the exchange of ideas continued and it was noted that the HUD ranking of the construction site proposals was not based on the issue of flood plain, but rather on the quality of neighborhood and lack of amenities; they were low-rated on merits as sites and neighborhood alone, without regard to flooding considerations. After further debate of possible repercussions from Hillside Terrace residents regarding the placement of government-subsidized housing adjacent to their neighborhood and the notification of utility companies, Commissioner Rodriguez moved that in view of the circumstances, the board accept the Hunt north Laredo proposal. The response was all “ayes,” with LHA Chairman Magnon refraining.[84]

In early 1979, the LHA authorized Thomas Waggoner of the Hunt Building Corporation to make a developer’s application to build 100 units on the city-owned property consisting of 8 to 9 acres situated near Nixon High School in northeast Laredo. During that meeting, Housing Commissioner Magnon referred the Rauscher-Pierce plan for financing home-ownership loans for moderate-income families. Two representatives from this Dallas-based financial firm explained that the proposal plan called for the Housing Authority to use its tax-exempt nature to assist in state financing of home-ownership loans. Magnon said that as of January 25, 1979, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development had received only two proposals for the 88 units of New Construction that had been re-advertised by that Department, one by the Hunt Building Company of El Paso and the other by the Hughes Corporation of Round Rock, Texas. It was noted at this time that Waggoner, vice-president of the Hunt firm, requested a letter from the LHA to support the tax-exempt nature covering the 88 units of Section 8 New Construction. The Authority voted unanimously to a motion entered by Commissioner Rodriguez to provide such a letter.[85]

Additionally at this time, the LHA Chairperson informed the Board that he had received notification from HUD for additional Section 8 Existing Housing Units that authorized a total of 941 total dwellings. A motion by Commissioner A. Ramos for LHA to apply for 100 units of Existing Housing passed unanimously.[86]

A discourse followed during the February 1979 meeting regarding Housing Assistance Program (HAP) contracts with owners of Section 8 units who leased to their sons, daughters, and parents. Members of the Authority decided that, while federal regulations did not prohibit owners from leasing to relatives, the LHA would prefer not to accept HAP contracts from those owners leasing or wishing to lease homes in parent-children relationships. The Authority called for the Section 8 Administrative Plan to exclude parent-children leasing and to provide notification of “30, 60, or 90 days or more, as needed, to transfer these families to other Section 8 dwellings.”[87]

This early 1979 LHA meeting additionally brought attention to rising crime in and around the housing projects. Commissioner Ana María Lozano suggested inviting Laredo Police Department (LPD) Chief Victor García to attend to the next LHA meeting, stating that there were problems with police responding to calls in the projects.[88] Authority Executive Director Raul Treviño was instructed to also invite the Webb County Sheriff.[89] Since the 1979 publicity about the increase in illicit activities in the Colonia Guadalupe vicinity, the LPD maintains a police workstation in a public housing dwelling located across the street from the LHA Administrative Building. During the 1980s, police foot patrols effectively diminished reported crimes in the older large projects. Officers interviewed at the workstation stated that, because of LPD presence, criminal activity is seldom from housing residents, but rather from the surrounding neighborhood.[90] Another aspect of the recent years of reduced crime in the projects is the Authority’s “zero-tolerance” policy, which specifically calls for eviction when any public housing resident, whether the actual renter, a resident family member, or other cohabitant, is involved in criminal activity.[91] Shortly after the 1979 publicity of illicit activities in the area, LPD Chief Victor García notified the LHA that police foot patrols were ordered for Colonia Guadalupe.[92]

In February 1979 the LHA board included recently appointed members Ana María Lozano, Juanita Luera, Abraham Rodriguez, Jr., and Rafael Hernandez, as well as longer-serving Commissioners Alberto H. Magnon, Jr. Board member Andres Ramos had been previously appointed but was as then not confirmed. A discussion at a specially called LHA meeting that month concerned the disputed appointment of an additional Housing Commissioner, Rodolfo Santos. Consequent to the discussion, Santos was not confirmed. Present at this meeting were Assistant City Attorney Ricardo de Anda plus financial auditors Alfonso Cuellar and Fred Martinez of the Accounting Firm of Alfonso Cuellar, C.P.A. Indicative of the low-income status of public housing residents, the auditing firm recommended that the $30 deposit not be raised since “tenants have a hard enough time paying it, even in installments.”[93]

Adding to the dismal low-rent housing shortage situation, a HUD notice was read during the meeting that listed Webb County with only 36 dwelling units of which 29 were for New Construction and 7 for Rehabilitation. In a discussion that followed, the LHA members agreed to apply for 100 units instead of the 36 listed. Their expectation was that HUD would approve to as many as possible. Questioning this approach and the possibility that the federal agency might summarily disqualify the LHA for applying for 100 units, Commissioner Rodriguez suggested contacting HUD first to determine if the request for that number was appropriate, and stated that otherwise the Authority should nevertheless apply for the original 36 units.[94]

The perceived threat of land devaluation of private property due to the proximity of a public housing development continued to be voiced by homeowners of the north side Hillside Terrace subdivision. At a special LHA meeting in March 1979, which included all Authority members except Magnon, and also attended by Housing Authority Secretary Raul Treviño, attorney Ricardo de Anda, Tom Waggoner and Mike Hunt of the Hunt Building Corporation, various representatives of the Hillside Terrace subdivision, plus members of the press, the debate continued concerning the aforementioned Turnkey Project TEX–011–005. Hillside representatives adamantly promoted building HUD-subsidized housing in Laredo's less affluent southern area, insisting that such public housing would effectively improve the quality of life for that area, as opposed to diminishing property value if placed in the more economically prosperous northern district. Intense deliberation followed about alternative sites, HUD evaluators, HUD policy, deconcentration of economically disadvantaged minorities, proximity of shopping facilities, school bus routes, Hillside Terrace's emerging middle class, location of housing projects related to children's safety, preference of applicants for dwelling location, quality of existing applicants' homes versus project homes, the quality of south Laredo homes versus the north side, the relocation of families due to public action, and zoning. It was pointed out at this meeting that HUD was not in agreement with the Hillside Terrace residents' committee estimation and that the Hunt proposal had the most merit points. The LHA then proceeded to pass Resolution 499, approving the Hunt proposal, as approved by HUD.[95]

In a follow-up to the previous HUD invitation to apply for 36 units of Section 8 New Construction, LHA was informed that the number now advertised by the federal housing agency was 43, which Jerry Salinas of the Hughes firm prescribed as suitable for a two city-block area north of and adjacent to the previously proposed Hughes site and appropriate for the construction of 11 one-bedroom, 18 two-bedroom, 12 three-bedroom and 2 four-bedroom duplex-type dwellings.[96]

In April 1979, Roberto Gomez of the Community Development Agency explained the procedures to apply to HUD for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).[97] Reflecting changes in federal housing policy of the Republican Nixon Administration (1969-1974), the objective of CDBGs was to allow localities to take spending decisions on the basis of local knowledge. The amalgamation of several individual programs into a block grant consolidated categorical grants, including those for urban renewal and the Model Cities Program.[98] Gomez proceeded to display census tracks, stating that Tracks 2, 3, and 12 of the Arroyo Zacate area were included in the Housing Assistance Plan (HAP) proposal. He stated his belief that HUD was no longer approving high-rise construction. Commissioner Abraham Rodriguez recommended conferring with HUD about high-rises in view of high land costs. Gomez reminded LHA members that elderly residents should be housed on the first floor of buildings having no elevator, if possible. Gomez also pointed out that 100 units were slated for new public housing and 200 for Section 8 New Construction, but noted that no assisted housing was included in intended HAP development in the area west of Interstate 35, adding that, although substantial rehabilitation loans and grants for homeowners were now available, land availability was still a major problem for Laredo housing.[99]

In April 1979, LHA architect Willie Cavazos and Hunt Building Corporation's architect James Humphries presented a progress report on the Hunt development firm's application, stating that changes to the original proposal exceeded HUD minimum construction specifications and that the new homes "were to be better than most homes then currently being built in Laredo."[100] This report was timely, since present at this special LHA meeting were attorneys Jorge Juarez and Bumper Hornberger representing the Hillside property owners. Also in attendance were Assistant City Attorney de Anda, City Planner José Ruiz, members of the press, and various interested spectators. All Housing Commissioners, except Magnon, were at hand. As a reaction to projected traffic congestion through their residential subdivision and what could have been construed as consolation for having the now-inevitable low-income neighborhood in adjacence, Attorney Juarez affirmed that Hillside Terrace landowners were willing to donate land to open streets west to Interstate 35 and east to McPherson Road with a 60-foot right of way. LHA members stated that, although it was late in the planning schedule to consider the landowners' proposal, their proposal could be achieved through a Change Order pending HUD approval.[101]

A dialogue then followed concerning a United Independent School District (UISD) lawsuit in State and Federal Courts against the Laredo Housing Authority, some of its individual members, and the Authority Executive Director in connection to Turnkey Project TEX–011–005 in north Laredo. LHA members decided to discuss the case in executive session. In this suit, entitled Civil Action Number L-79-27, *UISD vs. City of Laredo*, it was the consensus of the LHA members that the "defendants acted under and pursuant to the municipal authority, as prescribed by Texas law in that the City

Council granted permission and authority to decide the location of federal housing projects within the City of Laredo."[102] A counterclaim offered that the plaintiff, United Independent School District, was not legally a Texas school district, nor practicing racial discrimination, nor violating the 14th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Education Opportunity Act of 1974. Listed in addition to the aforementioned defendants were the Laredo Planning and Zoning Commission, which included Daniel Farías, Alejandro de Luna, Rogelio García, Cecilia Garza, Joseph Dryden, Jr. and Juan Rangel, as well as the Laredo Municipal Housing Corporation, the Community Development Agency, and City Planner José Ruiz.[103]

Continuing with the much-sought low-income family housing, the LHA announced in May 1979 that the Alfred Hughes firm from Round Rock, Texas would build 88 units for HUD on a site inside the former Laredo Air Force Base. Construction was to begin within 60 days. Tenants were to pay 25 percent of the adjusted family income, and unlike previous housing projects, these units were to have window air conditioning units. Although a population density problem was perceived in terms of the definition of public housing, the Laredo Planning and Zoning Department gave preliminary approval for this construction. The project was insured through Section 221 (d) 4, which, in case of default, would pay and then HUD and an anticipated non-profit extension of LHA, the Laredo Housing Corporation would take it over. Hughes was required by the LHA to certify through a Certified Public Accountant that he would make no profit from the construction and that he could not sell the project. Ninety percent of the rents were to pay for debt service. Hughes would be receiving approximately $70,000 tax refund as tax shelter, this being the reason that developers owned Section 8 homes.[104] It was noted that Hughes owned similar Section 8 New Construction projects in the Lower Río Grande Valley and that he had expertise handling HUD projects exclusively. Due to the tight money situation and high interest rates, Hughes was using Section 221.14 programs, which were innovatively specified for ownership by private corporations. In attendance at this meeting was Joe Hancock of the financing firm of Hancock, Joseph, and Daniels, who explained that Hughes was attempting to utilize tax-exempt government financing. Hancock's firm would handle financing of $2,450,500 mortgage for the 88 proposed units and the LHA could be the legal body that would create a housing corporation; the vehicle by which tax-exempt money could be financed.[105] Hughes would eventually build 33 federal housing projects, and this is the only type of construction ventures to which he dedicated his efforts. He felt at the time that the 7½ percent interest was getting out of proportion, and that properties around such projects would not devaluate; the needy needed housing and construction projects were a source of employment. At this juncture Housing Commissioner Rodriguez made a motion to create a non-profit Housing Corporation. This was followed by a deliberation concerning obtaining a Section 8 Rehabilitation Program for LHA ownership of homes in different areas of Laredo, as this was a new opportunity offered by HUD's Section 8 and few homes had been offered for this type of program.[106]

The Authority members brought up the fact during their June 14, 1979 meeting that the Laredo Planning and Zoning Commission had still not approved the 88 units of the Hughes construction on Cherry Hill within the grounds of former Laredo Air Force Base. The June LHA meeting agenda reflected the next step toward the realization of the north Laredo public housing site next to the Hillside Terrace subdivision, as the

Authority introduced and passed “Resolution No. 504, adopting a Development Program for Turnkey Project No. TEX–011–005 to develop 126 units of low-income housing.”[107] Reflecting the increased number of dwellings and activities in public housing engendered by changing federal guidelines, a debate followed that resulted in the formation of four LHA-member committees: (1) Budget; (2) Grievance; (3) Occupancy; and (4) Operation, each of which included one tenant representative from each of the Authority’s housing projects.[108]

The LHA June 26, 1979 regular meeting also demonstrated an attempt by Webb County to become involved in public housing, something that up to then had not occurred. This was perceived by some as vying for available federal funds with the LHA, but by others as an opportunity for cooperation and mutual gain, both in federal financial assistance and in construction of new housing for disadvantaged Laredoans. Authority members Lozano, Rodriguez, Magnon, Luera, and Hernandez were all present, as were Executive Secretary Treviño, Assistant City Attorney de Anda, Section 8 Manager Virgilio Gonzalez, Jr., South Texas Development Council (STDC) Planner Armando Castillo, members of the press, various public spectators, and, representing the Hillside Terrace homeowners, Ron Forsyth and attorney Hornberger. Representing STDC Director Oscar Chavez, Castillo officially announced at this meeting that the county was interested in providing low-income housing for areas lying outside the city, further adding “LHA had traditionally dominated the operations of government-assisted housing within the city. Persons in outlying areas could be best served by a County Housing Authority, and county officials wanted to know the future intentions of LHA towards the utilization of outlying city areas for government-subsidized housing.”[109]

Saying that Webb County would compete for CDBGs for HUD-funded projects and if a Webb County Housing Authority was approved (Castillo admitted that the county did not have the capability to operate such a Housing Authority), they would possibly want to contract with the Laredo Housing Authority in outlying areas.[110] Housing Commissioner Rodriguez commented that LHA wanted to utilize the territorial limits of the city in order to qualify for Section 8 Existing Housing goals. Section 8 developers could operate New Construction utilizing Farmers Home Financing without the need to form a separate county housing authority. Castillo indicated that Webb County officials were interested in providing low-income housing in the outlying areas of the city's territory and Rodriguez assured him that it was the goal of the LHA to provide additional assisted-housing units and that it was his intention to cooperate with Webb County officials to discuss utilization of land within the city's territorial limits. Rodriguez moved to meet with county officials to make them aware of housing problems and to discuss the question of the additional 100 Section 8 units about to be made available to the Authority. At this point, attorney Hornberger asked Executive Secretary Treviño if Section 8 being considered for outlying areas was intended for new construction in the Del Mar area, an unincorporated moderate- to high-income residential subdivision situated just north of the Laredo city limit. Authority Secretary Raul Treviño replied that the Section 8 Existing Housing Program was not for new construction, but only for subsidized rental of privately owned existing housing.[111]

Continuing the discussion for the Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program, the LHA board voted to apply for no more than 100 units. Answering a question concerning the definition of adequate minimum bedroom size for government-subsidized residences, Commissioner Abraham Rodriguez suggested guidance from City of Laredo housing standards. At this point of the meeting, Hillside Terrace residents' representative Ron Forsyth offered to give a 30-minute presentation on how the LHA could save a million dollars of federal money. He officially requested a list of all Section 8 owners and was told by the LHA board that any decision for such a request would be reached pending legal advice. Attorney Bumper Hornberger then asked for the number of units proposed for the Hillside Project. Secretary Treviño advised him that the number was 126. Hornberger additionally requested the land cost for the project and was told that that figure was not immediately available, but he would consequently receive it. HUD had approved $4,874,318 for the Development Program for the project. Assistant City Attorney de Anda explained the contract of sale, by which the LHA agreed to purchase the 126-unit project from the Hunt Building Corporation, which Hunt had agreed to construct. The contractor also agreed to utilize as much local labor as possible. HUD approved Hunt Building Corporation to build 126 units at $4,583,165, the actual final cost of Project TEX–011–005. As of June 1979, the Housing Authority operated 672 units of public housing and 484 units of Section 8 Existing Housing.[112]

Once more, evidence of the need for cooperation between recently created sources of federal funding became evident when, in a special LHA meeting on July 24, Commissioner Rodriguez urged contracting with the CDA for access to Section 8 Rehabilitation Program dwellings. This, he emphasized, would require more communication from CDA leaders to develop additional housing programs and to provide technical assistance to the Housing Authority. After an ensuing debate, the LHA moved to apply for at least 50 units of the Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation

Program. At this time an announcement was made that the groundbreaking for the Turnkey Project was to be on July 31. The federal housing agency also sanctioned an additional 100 units of Section 8 Existing Housing.[113]

At a special August 1979 LHA meeting, attorney Ricardo de Anda explained the creation of the non-profit housing development corporation. It was mainly to finance Section 8 New Construction projects through the sale of tax-exempt revenue bonds; it would be a Federal Housing Administration (FHA)-Insured Loan and the non-profit corporation, not the LHA, would issue the bonds. The corporation would shield the Housing Authority from liability if the developers failed and no LHA property would be put in jeopardy in this endeavor. Revenue was to be used exclusively from the development of the project. Issuance of bonds by the corporation would have to be reviewed and approved by the parent corporation, the LHA. The non-profit corporation would not have administrative capacity; its main function was to issue bonds. The developer maintained the right to administer the project. HUD's Annual Contribution Contract (ACC) incorporated the HAP and the LHA would collect administrative fees to administer a Section 8 New Construction Project. Housing Commissioners Rodriguez and Lozano questioned the appointment of the corporation's three-member board of directors as possibly constituting a conflict of interest because these persons were current LHA board members. De Anda explained that the Housing Authority was to appoint the corporation directors. Rodriguez requested that the attorney find out if at least one LHA board member could be in the non-profit corporation board and if Authority Executive Secretary Treviño should be that board's secretary.[114] At a consequent August LHA special meeting the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws for the non-profit corporation were introduced, attached thereto was a list of three non-LHA candidates for directors, Gabriel Palacios, Lazaro Dovalina, Jr., and Antonio Castillo.[115]

Concurrent with the above-mentioned development, In October 1979 the LHA announced the creation of the "Laredo Housing Development Corporation No. 1 (LHCD), organized under the Texas Non-Profit Corporation Act, Article 1396, Vernon's Annotated Texas Civil Statutes, as amended, for the limited and purely public and charitable purposes of assisting in the provision of decent, safe, sanitary living accommodations for persons of low income…including assistance by borrowing or lending funds."[116] HUD determined that the Corporation constituted a public housing agency and its board members were Chairperson Ana María Lozano, Vice-Chairperson Abraham Rodriguez, Jr., Albert H. Magnon, Jr., Juanita Luera, and Rafael Hernandez. By LHA resolution, the Corporation issued Permanent Obligations, Series 1975, of $2,460,500 for the Cherry Hills Apartments Project. This resolution followed the letter of "Section 8 of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, which authorized HUD to make housing assistance payments on behalf of low-income families and persons of newly constructed or substantially rehabilitated housing."[117]

It was also at that time that HUD approved an 88-unit low-income housing project (Project Number TX 59-0021-001) owned by Cherry Hill Apartments, Ltd. would be leased through a Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments contract (HAP Agreement). The Alfred Hughes Corporation of Round Rock, Texas was the General Partner at 5 percent and Cherry Hills Apartments Project was the Limited Partnership at 95 percent, with the partnership property subject to HUD rules and regulations. Laredoan Ricardo de Anda was legal counsel for the Authority and Round Rock attorney John R. Carter represented Alfred Hughes. After one year, 1 percent the net cash receipts was to be distributed to the General Partner and 99 percent to the Limited Partner. The new corporation issued $2,460,500 of Permanent Obligations, Series 1975 for the project. Cherry Hill contractor and partner Alfred Hughes commented that "most Public Housing Authority Directors favored limiting the number of larger bedroom sizes because the "hard beating the units would receive by the use of larger families."[118] The LHA board responded that local needs should be considered at any rate, and that those needs had to be made known to HUD for future invitations. A motion was then entered by Commissioner Rodriguez to apply with HUD for the balance of 100 units of Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation units.[119]

In a special-called LHA meeting on November 26, 1979, Architect Willy Cavazos announced that Project TEX–011–005 , designated Cherry Hills Apartments, was 30 percent finished with tentative completion by May 1980. During that meeting LHA Executive Secretary Treviño also reported "12 out of 100 new units had been leased under the Section 8 Program, adding that progress had been slow due to many cancellations on current authorizations due either to lease expirations or ineligibility and applicants not being placed fast enough."[120] Earlier that month LHA Executive Director Raul Treviño had met with HUD Area Director Finnis Jolly and other HUD officials in San Antonio to determine why the local Authority was not funded for 50 units of Moderate Rehabilitation. Treviño indicated that miscommunication between HUD departments had resulted in adverse publicity about the Laredo Housing Authority. This negativity stemmed from allegation by Roberto Gomez of the local Community Development Agency (CDA) that the LHA was not fully cooperating with his office by not taking care of their relocation cases. LHA Executive Secretary Treviño responded that these cases had not moved forward because Gomez had insisted that all housing applicants be accepted without proper screening. Jolly stated, “it was unfortunate and unfair that information was published by the Department of Housing and Urban Development alleging poor management and incompetence in the Section 8 Programs as reasons for non-selection of the application. The Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program was offered to large numbers of housing authorities, all of which could not be funded.”[121] At this point attorney Ricardo De Anda added that the City had the moral responsibility to house the families being forced out of housing by condemnation programs and that the Monterrey Apartments, located at 2301 Monterrey Avenue and consisting of approximately 70 small units, would soon be eligible for rent and use of the Section 8 Program.[122]

During a special Housing Authority meeting in December 1979, it was proposed that, in light of a HUD advertisement the previous September that notified of fund availability for Project TEX–59–0025 , the Department would accept proposals for newly constructed family units and older substantially rehabilitated residences under the Section 8 Program. It was also noted in LHA Proposal 522 that Laredo owned land in its northeastern sector adjacent to Nixon High School that the City had designated for assisted multi-family housing units for low-income families and that developers were interested in this project. The local Authority officially notified the municipality of a request for the option to lease this city-owned land.[123] In the LHA Lease Proposition the Authority offered to pay the city $31,000 to rent the land for the proposed project, and that the LHA would not be involved in decisions concerning closing of city streets to plan and accommodate these new dwellings.[124]

The Decade of the 1980s

The decade of the 1980s saw the persistence of acute shortages of low-income housing and distressing funding problems for the Laredo Housing Authority. In a special LHA meeting in January 1980, two proposals for Section 8 New Construction were evaluated. Present in the audience were developers Alfred Hughes and Jerry Salinas of Meadow-Park Corporation, attorney Antonio Alvarado representing the Hunt Building Corporation, members of the press, and various spectators. LHA Chairman Ana María Lozano stated at that time that no HUD funds were available, as Section 8 funds had already been assigned elsewhere. The record shows that Architect James Humphries had notified authority Executive Secretary Treviño that Tom Waggoner of HUD reported the unavailability of funds. Subsequently, Treviño immediately had called Walter Carter, Chief of Section 8 Program in San Antonio and found out that funding had been prioritized elsewhere. At this time developer Alfred Hughes informed the LHA that HUD had priorities for larger inner cities' housing projects; San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Austin were chosen and funds had consequently run out. Hughes had known about this situation a month before but it was confidential information and had therefore not been disseminated. LHA member Magnon declared his "dissatisfaction with the manner that LHA was notified through a developer instead of directly from HUD."[125] The local Housing Authority presented an official resolution directing submission of application to HUD for the development of a low rent 40-unit Housing

Program on 12 acres of the previously mentioned city-owned property next to Nixon High School. The resolution proposed that this land was to be acquired "either through deeding to LHA for a small consideration or by purchase at fair market value."[126] It was the opinion of Authority members that if the LHA had control of the site it would have a better chance of winning HUD approval.[127]

The shortage of available housing in Laredo was again noted in February 1980 when Adriana McKendrick, Administrative Assistant to the Community Development Agency, reported that the Section 8 existing program was slow in placing qualified tenants due to the unavailability of existing homes. LHA Executive Secretary Raul Treviño added that the problem was that many existing homes did not meet the HUD quality standards while otherwise qualifying available units were renting at higher than HUD-approved rents. It was during this time that official notice was given of a new housing project being constructed next to the Hillside area in northern Laredo on land granted by the City to the LHA for $10.[128]

At the regular March 1980 LHA meeting, a letter from the Hunt Building Corporation estimated the completion date of project TEX-011-005 was between late March and early May of that year. It was anticipated that fifty percent of the units would have applicants certified for rental by the opening date.[129] Located on Calton Road on former Laredo Air Force Base property, the 126-unit housing development consisted of one- and two-story duplex residences and was officially named "Cherry Hill Apartments."[130] An LHA report indicated that 290 applicants had been processed between October 1979 and April 1980, that only 19 vacancies existed at the time of final inspection of the newly constructed dwellings, and that there had been four relocations of families to smaller units and nineteen transfers to comply with HUD dwelling occupation standards. The report also noted that large families rarely moved and that most families that needed relocation were large and beyond the Housing Authority's occupancy standards. LHA did not have four- and five-bedroom units. The total number of applications on the housing waiting list in spring of 1980 was 2,323. The report included a list of 32 families who had been displaced by construction of Interstate 35 as it approached the bridgehead at International Bridge Number Two and by the clean-up project that was razing substandard dwellings along the city's Arroyo Zacate. It was suggested that these dislocated families should be housed in Section 8 dwellings or in the new Cherry Hill Apartments. Some LHA members suggested the use of trailer homes to house the families dislocated by the IH-35 right-of-way and Arroyo Zacate projects, but HUD would not approve such rentals due to high utility bills. An additional memorandum was read at this time from Section 8 advising that 519 units out of 584 evaluated had been authorized for occupation. It was also noted that HUD had only approved $40,000 for the modernization of Colonia Guadalupe. [131]

The 1980s Laredo low-income family housing shortage situation was somewhat alleviated when Section 8 rental and leasing were added by means of the Housing Act of 1974, which provided quicker housing after the Nixon Administration's moratorium on construction of low-rent public housing; Section 8 provided leasing of existing housing, rehabilitation of existing housing to bring them up to specification, and funding of new construction for leasing. Laredo had received its first Section 8 allocation for 584 units in 1975. Applicants certified for Section 8 rent subsidy were given authority to go out to the private market and shop for a standard rental unit suitable for his or her need. The problem was that certificate owners were not able to find standard rental units at all in Laredo. The LHA reported that if certificate holders did not find rental units in a timely manner, HUD could take back the allocations. The Authority emphasized that the shortage of standard rental housing was critical and that it was still financially difficult for the few families who no longer required rental assistance to move from public housing units. Section 8 over-income families did not have to move from their dwellings but their rental assistance would be stopped, and since the unit they lived in continued to be occupied, the new certificate holder had to find another unit. The problem was the scarcity of available standard rental housing due to construction that could not keep up with the demand for housing.[132]

Adding to the woes of the LHA's attempt to provide proper housing for Laredo's underprivileged residents, in April 1980 the office Laredo's new mayor, Aldo Tatangelo received correspondence from HUD that brought attention to adverse publicity concerning alleged questionable operation of the Section 8 Program. At the special Authority meeting, at which Community Development Agency Director Carlos Villarreal was present, the Authority membership conveyed that the CDA Director should not have appeared before the Laredo City Council and commented on matters pertaining to the LHA. The LHA statement made particular reference to the CDA's Housing Assistance Plan (HAP). Entries had been submitted in a HAP application expressing that there was no new construction-assisted housing in Laredo. The Authority further declared that if HUD made funds available and no new units were shown in the HAP plan, the application would be subsequently rejected by HUD, depriving the LHA of federal funding. According to LHA members, the "CDA demonstrated a lack of concern for the extent of LHA cooperation and work with CDA and the housing needs of LHA."[133] Although invited to LHA meetings, neither the CDA Director or a representative had ever attended an Authority gathering.

At that point, LHA member Abraham Rodriguez reiterated the acute demand for low-income family housing in Laredo. He then referred to a CDA report submitted by Agency Director Villarreal to the City Council on the matter of relocation of families displaced by the Zacate Creek cleanup project, construction of Interstate Highway 35, and the development of that thoroughfare's terminus at International Bridge Number Two. The CDA Director reported that he was aware of the possibility that not all of the LHA's housing units would be utilized for relocation of families because of hardship cases, but that his department was not getting many of these cases. He also indicated that LHA forms informed relocation applicants that they had to wait twenty to thirty months, which he judged was inappropriate. Housing Authority Commissioner Juanita Luera advised the CDA Director that the waiting period notice was typical on all LHA forms for ordinary applicants and not solely directed toward relocation cases. Villarreal maintained that his organization "preferred to house dislocated families in colonias or regular housing projects."[134] Luera advised him that the admission policies prioritized displaced families, but that there were very few vacancies and turnovers. Commissioner Rodriguez re-emphasized that the Housing Authority continued to be in dire need of additional housing. Villarreal agreed that there was a definite need for more public housing and made reference to the Hillside Project battle. Housing Commissioner Ana María Lozano further commented that the LHA had been applying for units since 1970 and that those 126 units were the only public housing units, other than the 88 units of Section 8 New Construction at Cherry Hills Apartments, since 1965. Executive Secretary Raul Treviño added that collecting past due accounts was difficult due to Laredo's unemployment and under-employment.[135]

Continuing to address the need for improving the quality of life for underprivileged Laredoans, LHA Chairman Rodriguez announced in July 1979 that Mayor Aldo Tatangelo had communicated to HUD some months prior requesting pre-approval for the acquisition of a 12-acre site adjacent to the Nixon High School campus in Laredo's northeastern sector. Tatangelo had stipulated that the land was valued at $400,000 for all 12 acres and was intended for 38 low-income family dwelling units. Any balance could be utilized later subsequent to a HUD Notification of Fund Availability (NOFA).[136] Additionally, announcements were made of a Declaration of Trust for the 126-unit Project TEX–11–05, Cherry Hill Apartments, and the Option to Purchase Real Property at $400,000 for the 12-acre site near Nixon High School.[137] This was followed by revelation that the City and the LHA proposed to construct a housing project on Blocks 771 and 840 in Laredo's Eastern Division on the eastern corner of Meadow Avenue and Plum Street, which bordered the eastern edge of the aforementioned 12-acre site. The additional property was for the construction of 30 new dwelling units for elderly and disabled residents.[138]

By early 1983 the local Housing Authority consisted of Ana María Lozano, Rolando Herrera, José Medina, Raquel Gonzalez, and Alberto Magnon, Jr. Former Housing Commissioner Abraham Rodriguez, Jr. was the new Authority Secretary and Executive Director and Ricardo de Anda was the LHA attorney.[139] That year the Authority was responsible for 904 public housing units and 584 Section 8 dwellings, which were all at 100 percent capacity. The HUD-sponsored Comprehensive Improvements Assistance Program (CIAP) began in April of that year. Maintenance and repairs of existing edifices were part of the LHA budget, such as a $215,500 contract to replace all doors in the then-42-year-old Colonia Guadalupe. The Authority also proposed setting aside $100,000 to purchase land for construction of a 30-unit project for elderly and handicapped residents. The construction bids were to be submitted 30 to 60 days after the land was purchased.[140]

The new Meadow Housing Project designated TEX–008 and TEX–010 was opened spring of 1983. A $50 deposit was required for a renter to secure a dwelling. This new housing project was situated at 1641 Elm Street; its construction deadline was on April 15, with occupancy beginning a week thereafter. At the May 1983 LHA meeting, with Housing Authority Chairman Alberto Magnon, Jr, Vice-Chair Ana María Lozano, members Raquel Gonzalez, Rolando Herrera, and José Medina in attendance, LHA Housing Executive Secretary Rodriguez used persuasive language to report on the ailing economic situation in Laredo and the resultant drastic need for housing, reiterating that an attempt to achieve additional housing must be made again. Present at this meeting were also Meadow Housing Project Manager Victoria Tayles, Community Services Coordinator Blanca Martinez, Mayor Aldo Tatangelo, and Laredo City Council members José Valdez, Santos Benavides, John Peter Montalvo, and Andres Ramos.[141] Shortly thereafter the LHA announced the acquisition of “a parcel of land 4.5121 acres in the Eastern Division, including all of Block 771 and all of Block 840, except 1250 square feet.”[142] This site was just west from the Meadow Housing Project, bordered by Meadow Avenue on the east, Plum Street on the south, Loring

Avenue on the west and East Locust Street on the north. Bordered on its northern boundary by the Catholic Cemetery, this plot was specifically targeted for 30 units of elderly and handicapped housing. Seven construction companies bid on Project TX59-P011-009, as the new plot was designated. The firm of G.G. Salinas submitted the lowest bid at $753,300 and was awarded the contract.[143] Today this development's designation is Meadow Acres Elderly.[144]

Applying for funds through the Comprehensive Improvements Assistance Program (CIAP), the Senior Citizens Home, now twenty years old, received a new roof in 1983. Likewise, Colonia Guadalupe underwent a change as each of its 272 residences had individual electric meters installed. This was considered a money-saving conversion to retail services. Colonia Guadalupe residents also received new cooking range hoods, water heaters, and individual backyard utility sheds. Russell Terrace also attained individual water and electric meters, as well as new range hoods, landscaping, repair or replacement of defective gas ranges, and renovation of sewer and water lines. HUD furthermore awarded the LHA 120 Section 8 Existing Housing units and the Authority explored the possibility of buying the 1600 block of Locust where it intersected with the 3100 block of Mendiola north of the Meadow Project for the purpose of closing the streets for residential use.[145]

Early in 1984 the LHA authorized a resolution to apply to HUD for 50 units of Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation for a project designated TX59P–011–004.[146] During this period the LHA advertised for bids for an LHA Depository Contract. Only one bank, the Union National Bank (UNB) had answered the bid, to which LHA attorney de Anda suggested that it was permissible to open the one bid and the Authority could then decide to either accept or reject it.[147] This bid was eventually rejected by the board, which then proposed readvertisement for the Depository Contract.[148] In a follow-up March special meeting, again only one bid had been submitted, but this time it was from local Commerce Bank, which was awarded the Depository Contract at a 10 percent annual rate.[149]

In April 1984 the LHA reported that $50,000 were needed to complete the CIAP project at Colonia Guadalupe, to which Executive Secretary Rodriguez recommended that the money be taken from Section 8 reserves; he stressed that every effort should be made to not use LHA reserves. The Authority passed this motion.[150] The following month, with Section 8 staff present, a letter was read from the HUD Area Office that addressed the Laredo Section 8 Program. Rodriguez advised that the HUD Management Review was in the commissioners' packets, and then proceeded to explain corrective actions for certain administrative shortcomings. One instance of reported discrepancies stemmed from tenant complaints about the poor conditions of rental units and appliances at privately owned Mapus Properties, a Section 8 participant company. The owner, G.A. Mapus, declared that she wished to cooperate with the Authority. Rodriguez reported that tenants were getting a basic utility allowance and then being charged five cents per kilowatt-hour over the allowance. The LHA passed a motion on Rodriguez's recommendation that the Authority charge tenants regular (actual) cost.[150]

During discussion of budgetary matters during May 1984, the subject of retaining employees arose once more. The proposed LHA budget indicated that $500 to $550 across-the-board per year pay increases would be appropriate for the majority of its staff except the "upper echelon," who were to receive over $1,000 raises (6 to 7 percent increases) each. Commissioner Medina explained that there had been oversight in prorating the costs of the Authority's different programs and as a consequence the board proposed $500 across-the-board pay increases for several administrators.[151]

Attached to the LHA May meeting minutes was a communiqué from HUD Area Manager Hubert W. Dutton. It listed a summary of actions to correct of the February Management Review of Laredo's Section 8 Existing and Moderate Rehabilitation Programs. Part I of the list mandated that (1) the applicant waiting list should reflect a first-come, first-served practice; (2) revisions and corrections to Housing Quality Standards; (3) security deposits of $50 by Section 8 property owner participants would not be permitted; (4) the Board of Realtor should be contacted to formulate Laredo area rent reasonableness; (5) Section 8 property owners should provide documentation of cost of unit rehabilitation; and (6) Section 8 staff should be apprised of the requirements for HAP terminations. Part II of Dutton's letter was directed at the local Section 8 New Construction Program and called for (1) a schedule for annual inspection of all New Construction units and (2) supporting documentation for damage payments. Several cases were mentioned, including one in which a participating owner was overpaid. It was noted that that particular individual was to reimburse the LHA. Part III of the HUD letter called for (1) deletion of the flat 5-cent per kilowatt-hour rate for electricity charged Section 8 tenants, to be replaced with a flat average rate to be charged to each project; (2) revision of policy to alternate transfers with admissions; (3) detailed listing of all CIAP items; and (4) implementation of an overhead cost allocation plan.[152]

In June 1984 the topic of security against crime, originally raised in 1979, once more came to the fore and this time included all three of the original housing projects: Colonia Guadalupe, Russell Terrace, and Richter Courts. Board members stated that budget constraints limited police security and authorized Authority Executive Secretary Rodriguez to seek funds from the Laredo City Manager, with the possibility of using CDBG money by going through the CDA.[153]

Seeking to meet the urgent need for low-income family housing, LHA member Magnon recommended that Director Rodriguez contact Mayor Tatangelo plus Congressmen Chick Kazen, Lloyd Bentsen, Henry B. Gonzalez, John Tower, and Alberto Bustamante to lend official support. He further stated "All segments of the media will be used, referral agencies will be contacted in a coordinated effort, and our on-going system of application will be continued. The need far exceeds the housing stock, so there will be no lack of applicants."[154] Following this HUD Application entry, the LHA submitted another application, this one for a 50-unit project to include $30,000 as a preliminary loan. This new request was for 25 three-bedroom and 25 four-bedroom semi-detached units. Shortly after this, Executive Director Rodriguez informed the Authority of a letter from HUD indicating that LHA funds were to be recaptured by the Federal Government, including target investments, other income, and operating subsidies. The commissioners expressed deep concern, requesting Rodriguez to contact the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) about legal assistance and to inform HUD that the LHA was not in agreement with the notice.[155]

Laredo has hardly ever lacked for colorful political controversy during election times. One example arose when Josephine Edwards, a private citizen non-LHA resident, complained at an LHA meeting that personnel from the Hot Meal Program of the Community Action Agency (CAA) were campaigning for political votes while working at the Senior Citizens Home. The LHA formed a committee of board members Medina, Magnon, and Director Rodriguez to investigate the matter.[156] The subsequent report on the issue was that the CAA Elderly Feeding Program was being efficiently managed and the accusation of politicking stemmed from a personal conflict.[157]

The matter of purchasing the two streets abutting Meadow Housing Project Phases 1 and 2 continued. LHA Director Rodriguez reported that the City Manager requested that Rodriguez speak to CDA Director Carlos Villarreal, who then advised him that the property was currently still under negotiation.[158] A subsequent communication from the CDA Director stated that the streets in question had already been sold by the city. The Housing Commissioners expressed concern that the Authority had received no communication regarding that matter, and LHA attorney Ricardo de Anda advised the Board of the possibility of taking legal action. The Board then directed de Anda and Director Rodriguez to look into the matter.[159]

Early in 1985 the LHA submitted an application to HUD to fund 100 Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program units. To substantiate the application, Abraham Rodriguez provided the Board a list of interested Section 8 qualified owners.[160] In a subsequent but separate motion, the LHA selected an architectural firm to begin designing a 36 HUD-approved low rent unit development to be located at 3501 South Arkansas. Commissioner Raquel Gonzalez resigned from the Authority pursuant to

Article 1269k, Section 6 (b) upon declaring that she was the owner of property being considered for this south Laredo low-rent housing.[161] Roxanna Guerra was to serve the remainder of Gonzalez's term.[162] With a sense of urgency for approval of the 36-unit site or seek an alternate site, the LHA went into executive session on August 30, 1985. Upon reconvening to open session, board chairperson Herrera declared that former board member Raquel Gonzalez's property price was "beyond available construction funds" and an alternate south Laredo site owned by Ed. Jessie Dryden and the First Federal Savings and Loan Company was approved.[163] This project, designated TX59–P011–0 11 and described as "bound by South Arkansas Avenue, New York Avenue, and the original Laredo city limits,"[164] was eventually named South Laredo Project.[165] Ed. J. Dryden received $275,000 for the property[166] and construction of South Laredo Project was to begin summer of 1986.[167] At the beginning of July, four bids for construction of South Laredo Project TX59–P011–011 had been submitted, with Kiolbassa and Associates the lowest at $1,170,920. Commissioner Magnon questioned Kiolbassa's qualifications and suggested investigating that company's background. Authorization for the award was shelved pending the background check. A week later the company was awarded the construction bid for the development, which was now proposed to total 50 units. With 25 dwellings to be of three bedrooms and the other 25 of four, these units were planned for larger families, a plan strongly supported by Mayor Tatangelo and the CDA.[168] In a move to augment the number of low-rent units in south Laredo, in August 1987 the LHA "authorized the purchase of a tract adjacent to the South Laredo Project not to exceed $80,000."[169] Bids for construction of an additional 20 low-rent units, named South Laredo Phase II, were not requested by the LHA until

January 1992. The lowest bid then was $891,218, which was $163,090 over the construction budget. Authority members suggested that the LHA architect review the plans for possible cost savings, at which time Director Rodriguez recommended that no action be taken and the item was tabled pending revision.[170] In March 1992 the LHA passed a motion to award the construction contract for South Laredo Phase II to the Kiolbassa firm contingent of HUD funding of over-cost.[171]

Continuing the quest for additional housing, and championed by the Mayor, the Authority proposed construction of low-rent housing in the Eastern Division of Laredo "to provide affordable, year-round housing to the community's farm workers."[172] Mayor Tatangelo and the City Council committed to provide the Farm Labor Housing Project with paving and utilities to cut the Development Cost to the LHA.[173] Ms. Bonnie Rodriguez Texas Migrant Council representative, officially declared her eagerness to start on several related projects.[174] Now named the Aldo Tatangelo Farm Labor Housing, the program provides job training, job placement, adult education, food vouchers and travel expenses for residents. In addition to these services, the program also provides resident families with rental assistance, appliances, security and maintenance services plus a Head Start program for residents' children.[175] In March 1987 the "U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers Home Administration made available $1,641,850 to aid in financing federally-defined low-rent housing, of which $1,477,300 was a grant and $164,500 was obligated as a loan to construct a Farm Labor Housing Project in Laredo."[176] Bids were opened on February 1988 for construction of the Migrant Housing Project and the lowest bid was $1,666,744 from the Hoover Building Corporation, which was $192,000 over the budgeted amount, so the board, unable to agree on a solution, postponed the item.[177] The construction contract was eventually awarded to the Hoover firm for $1,515,900, which was still $28,708 over the initial budget.[178]

New rules changes for LHA residents reflected economic inflation of the times when in September 1986 the board stated that effective January 1987, tenants would pay the gas bill directly to the Entex gas company. It was announced that individual dwelling conversions had been completed and that tenants were to receive utility allowances based on their individual need. New tenants were now to pay $100 family security deposits, but elderly renters' deposit would remain at $60.[179] Additionally, Authority Executive Director Rodriguez announced the "Affordable Housing Initiative", which "entailed forming a corporation which would then exert efforts to develop single family housing."[180] Applicant regulations for Section 8 now required birth certificates for authentication of renters' family composition. LHA staff had proposed eliminating the birth certificate requirement since HUD did not require it. However, LHA board members suggested implementing the requirement on a re-examination basis as contracts were being renewed. Commissioner Magnon entered a motion to require birth certificates for all new applicants and that all Section 8 participants eventually be required to present birth certificates upon re-examination. The motion passed.[181]

The issue of economic inflation and Cost Of Living Allowances (COLA) for LHA employees arose once more in 1987 when Housing Director Rodriguez suggested a 5 percent increase, with some positions excepted. Commissioner Magnon moved that the increase should be 3 percent, and the motion passed. Board member Rolando voted against that motion, and wanted the minutes to record that he had wanted the 5 percent COLA.[182] A year later Executive Director Rodriguez suggested "a 4 percent across-the-board raise for all except for two or three employees."[183] He also stated that LHA Comptroller Jesus Cedillo made a mistake and had overpaid some employees. Board members expressed great concern, directing Rodriguez and Cedillo to recover the overpayments. Recessing the meeting for a week to allow time to develop the overpayment recovery strategy, members announced that, although the amount was not great enough to cause concern, an explanation should be prepared.[184] The employee pay raise was not approved. In 1989 Rodriguez again proposed increasing workers' wages, this time a 5 percent across-the-board salary increase for all LHA employees. He was of the opinion that together with health insurance coverage, this raise would compensate for the board's previous year's negation of employees' pay increase.[185]

In a related topic, this time concerning Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez's salary, a survey of Public Housing Authority Directors (PHAD) salaries indicated that Public Housing Authority Directors responsible for 700 to 900 units typically received $40,000 to $50,000 annually. At that time Rodriguez oversaw over 2000 units. Consequently, reconvening after an executive session, LHA board members gave all Authority employees the 5 percent pay increase; Rodriguez received an 8 percent raise commensurate with his responsibilities.[186]

In 1988 the LHA's Senior Citizens Home was a quarter-century old and in need of rehabilitation. Seeking federal aid, the Authority was informed that HUD would only provide such funding through its Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Plan (CIAP) if the LHA would lower its reserves by 70 percent, which the board so approved.[187] In an amendment to its Annual Contract, the LHA approved and committed $187,000 of its reserves to CIAP.[188]

The Decade of the 1990s

As stated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the decade of the 1990s brought a tremendous population growth to Laredo, with a growth rate of 10 percent per year that doubled the city's population between censuses to nearly 200,000. The face of the Laredo Housing Authority underwent change also as Mayor Tatangelo replaced Albert Magnon, Jr. with John Peter Montalvo on the Authority board, construction of South Laredo Project Phase II adjacent to the Farm Labor Project began, and HUD delivered a CIAP grant of $1,884,402 for Springfield Acres Project while simultaneously cutting the Authority's Administrative expense budget from $281,340 to $275, 408. The cut was applied based on a new HUD "rule of thumb" based on the ratio of units to staff positions, but HUD also recommended increasing the allotment of expenditures charged to the Section 8 Program.[189] Consequent to the HUD cutbacks, two previously LHA-approved positions were denied and two housing manager positions were eliminated.[190] HUD also mandated that the LHA and the CDA should cooperate to construct affordable housing.[191]

In April 1990, Executive Director Rodriguez announced a new partnership that would be established in accordance to HUD authorization between the City of Laredo, a banking institution, and the Laredo Housing Authority to develop 128 single-family units for ownership by moderate-income families. The City would provide the land at fair market price, the Community Development Agency would provide infrastructure for the site through a CDBG, the LHA would provide a no- interest loan for interim construction through Section 8, and the banking institution would provide permanent financing. The federal law authorizing such a development stipulated that half of the initial 14 units would be made available to public housing low-rent project residents who met the requirements for ownership. HUD cleared the Section 8 reserves for this project and directed the LHA to cooperate with the Affordable Housing Program.[192]

At the end of 1990 the LHA had 421 Section 8 Housing units certified for refunding or continuation. Criminal activity continued to plague public housing sites as a new Laredo Police Department sub-station was considered for the Russell Terrace Project. At that time Senator Phil Gramm notified the LHA that it had been awarded $250,000 as part of the Drug Elimination Program. It was noted that this money was to be used for "doing some things at Russell and other projects."[193] New developments that year included the purchase of a portable building to be placed at Colonia Guadalupe for Project Head Start, a pre-school educational program sponsored by the Community Action Agency. The LHA would provide the building while the CAA would deliver the services. Head Start was deemed as vital to the local Authority in implementing an economic development program funded by CIAP. The single bid for the portable building came from Morgan Building and Spas, which was awarded the sale at $69,521.[194]

That year the Authority recognized Mayor Aldo Tatangelo for his contributions in meeting the city's housing shortage needs, as he announced his retirement from office after serving eight years. Although progress had been made, the need for housing continued to grow at an alarming rate and Executive Director Rodriguez asked that every possibility to meet this demand be explored.[195]

Budgetary matters in early 1991 once more reflected a problem with hiring and retention of Authority employees as Director Rodriguez recommended a 5 percent across-the-board salary increase for all LHA staff. He also recommended a similar pay increase for Section 8 staff. After executive session, Commissioner Montalvo moved that budgets for the Low-Rent and Section 8 Project staffs be approved, but that the Director be paid $55,000 annually; the Finance Director $40,000; Operations Deputy $30,000; and Bookkeeper II $17,000 annually. The motion was officially entered by Commissioner Raquel Gonzalez and passed unanimously.[196]

Subsequent to government changes in fiduciary practices, early in 1991 the Authority awarded a $97,400 contract to NelRod Company for "management improvement, updating organizational and managerial plans, policies, procedures, staffing, procurement, occupancy, budget and fiscal control, resident management and security."[197] Drafts of the resultant new LHA Policy Manual were distributed to Authority members within a few months. Corresponding to the need to review and approve the Policy Manual, Executive Director Rodriguez invited the LHA members to a three-day workshop on Occupancy and Housing Quality Standards. The Policy Manual consisted of three volumes: (1) Housing Management; (2) Personnel Matters, Finance, and Administration; and (3) Procurement and the Dwelling Lease. For the meantime, a legal requirement of 30 days for tenant review of the Policy Manual kept it from being approved by the LHA.[198] Consequent to changing federal public housing guidelines and curtailment of funds, HUD had notified the LHA of the availability of funding through a newly developed Self-Sufficiency Project. This federal program, to be coordinated with all local agencies, was to provide housing certificates or vouchers that would bring a family from dependence on public assistance to self-sufficient status after a maximum of five years. The LHA accordingly submitted an application for 50 units of Section 8 Certificates or Vouchers.[199]

During an early 1992 meeting, the LHA viewed a report concerning the non-profit Laredo Housing Development Corporation (LHDC), which was negotiating for 56 dwellings that would be under control of the City of Laredo. Attorneys had been reviewing the LHDC status to determine if its funding source could lead to new construction, acquisition, rehabilitation, and first-time home ownership. LHA Executive Director Rodriguez explained to the board that these new sources needed to be explored in view of the lack of federal funding for public housing.[200] The Director contacted the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) legal staff to determine if LDHC could be used to either manage or develop housing for low- and moderate-income families in Laredo. Upon receiving this information, the board members then passed a motion to enter into an agreement with SAHA for legal services. Rodriguez also notified the board of a new federal program called the Comprehensive Grant Program (CGP), under which the Authority would receive up to $1,600,000 a year for the following five years to conduct modernization activities that would assure the long term viability of LHA developments.[201] Subsequent to learning about the CGP, the LHA held an emergency session and approved to enter the Public Housing Management Assessment Program (PHMAP) certification needed in order to receive the $1.6 million HUD funding for modernization work. The evaluation of LHA by HUD would be based on (1) vacancies, (2) uncollected rents, (3) unit turn-around, (4) outstanding work orders, (5) annual inspections and conditions of units and systems, (6) tenants accounts receivable [TARS], and (7) resident initiatives.[202]

New HUD policies were implemented in 1993 by LHA, including guidelines for Section 8 applicant screenings. Tenant approval or non-approval would depend on verifiable data based on background checks by the Laredo Police Department and Webb County Sheriff's Office plus letters from previous landlords. At that time, Section 8 Program representative Tony Cruz was asked by the LHA board to submit a report on evictions due to criminal drug violations and damages by vacating renters. HUD now also required a project-based accounting system; each housing project was to develop its own budget reflecting revenues and expenditures. HUD also required implementation of a Residents Initiatives Policy, to which the LHA complied. Housing Authority Occupancy Administrator Carmen Contreras also informed the board that applicants were given two weeks to provide updated information to qualify for a unit and would have their applications cancelled after they refused a unit offer for a second time. The LHA membership maintained that all applicant documentation should already be on file at time of such notification.[203]

At the December 1993 LHA meeting, board member Raquel Gonzalez inquired about the future of new housing for low-income residents. Director Rodriguez told the LHA that there were going to be long range initiatives to acquired and rehabilitate dwellings and start a homeowners program.[204] That year also saw the initiation of the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation. A subsidiary of the Housing Authority, this agency's efforts in the housing arena involved new construction development and homebuyer education and counseling.[205] In April 1994 HUD allocated $25,000 to the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation to develop affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families.[206] Following Director Abraham Rodriguez's recommendation that the Metro Corporation was to be another vehicle available to continue the Authority's efforts to develop low- and moderate-income affordable housing, the LHA approved a $300,000 loan to the Housing Corporation for two projects: Gallagher Gardens Apartments, a 56-unit tax credit development that would provide rental housing for low-income families, and Retama Apartments, an Acquisition and Rehabilitation Project.[207]

In May 1994 the LHA voted to replace Colonia Guadalupe's 56-year-old water system, using $883,763 out of a proposed total $1,648,572 cost for dwelling improvements throughout the Authority's projects. Of this quantity, $168,487 would be allocated for improvements at Russell Terrace, $95,408 for Carlos Richter Court, and $46,998 for the Senior Citizens Home.[208] That year the LHA also contracted SER-Jobs for Progress (Service, Employment, Redevelopment-Jobs For Progress, Incorporated), a private, non-profit corporation established in 1965 to address employment and economic concerns and inequities among Hispanics.[209] The Housing Authority committed $100,000 to have this organization to provide GED high-school equivalency diploma training and English as a Second Language (ESL) education programs to housing project families.[210] Following this commitment to raise public housing residents' quality of life, the LHA submitted an application for a Comprehensive Grant Program contribution of $1,882,483 and also scheduled $690,000 for improvements at

Colonia Guadalupe. Part of the CGP requirement involved employing LHA low-income residents to work in the housing projects.[211]

In July 1995 the Housing Authority approved and certified the Public Housing Management Assessment Program (PHMAP) for the 12 months from April 1, 1994 to March 31, 1995 and authorized Interim LHA Director Peter H. Vargas to submit the PHMAP to HUD. Vargas explained that the PHMAP implemented Section 502(a) of the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 (NAHA) and evaluated the performance of Public Housing Authorities in management operations, which controlled or monitored possible fraud, waste, and mismanagement.[212]

The year 1995 brought both positive and negative developments to Laredo public housing. At this time the Farm Labor Housing Project had been in existence for six years, its 48 units had been continuously occupied, and its 1995-1996 Operating Budget had been approved, but HUD did not select the LHA 1995 Fiscal Year Public Housing Drug Elimination Program for continuation. In fact, several such federally funded programs were to be eliminated by 1996. In an issue related to changing federal housing policy, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) had audited the Housing Authority and recommended changes in personnel, travel, and discipline policies.[213] Enacted by the Inspector General Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-452), the OIG is a branch of HUD that "conducts independent investigations, audits, inspections, and special reviews of federal programs to detect and deter waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct and to promote integrity, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in HUD operations."[214] The OIG also recognized that salaries at the LHA were low and indicated that a Personnel Department needed to be created. It additionally suggested that the LHA retirement policy should mirror the City's.[215] Board member Raquel Gonzalez went on record as not agreeing with the IG Audit findings. During this time Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez was on a one-year administrative leave and the Interim Director was Peter H. Vargas, who questioned the future role between the City and the LHA Board. He requested that LHA board members consider transitioning the City out and finding a replacement entity.[216]

During fall 1995 former Mayor Tatangelo continued to be actively involved in providing Laredo's low-income residents with decent habitation. Requesting information concerning the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation, he was advised by Cynthia Collazo, a Housing Authority manager, that Metro had a separate board from the Authority and that she was Metro's president. LHA board member Raquel Gonzalez requested during this meeting that the LHA Staff keep the board informed of any and all public housing activities. She also questioned why the OIG had been visiting during the previous days. LHA Attorney Ricardo de Anda advised Collazo that she could answer Gonzalez's question, upon which she stated that the IG had visited for several days and copied Low Rent Housing and Personnel files. LHA board member Delia Vasquez told those present that the OIG audit of Metro "came out clean." The board moved to invite representatives from the Office of the Inspector General to their next meeting.[217]

During the October 1995 Authority meeting, Juan Patlan, realtor advisor to the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation announced the goal to build a 56-unit multifamily housing complex and that Metro had been awarded $350,000 from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA). The advisor added that Federal National Mortgage Association (commonly known as Fannie Mae, the acronym derived from blending the initials FNMA) also supported the venture and had awarded Metro $1,710,000 under a low-income tax credit program.[218] Created in 1938, Fannie Mae was a government sponsored enterprise (GSE) that established a secondary market for mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).[219] The development of the housing project also required an environmental impact study which would cost $25,000 and Patlan requested that the LHA Board release this amount from Section 8 reserves. The board passed a motion to fund the needed study, but board members Vasquez and Montalvo abstained from voting on this motion because they both were on the Metro board. LHA Attorney de Anda advised that Vasquez and Montalvo were allowed to vote since the board did not compensate them and there was no conflict of interest. The two board members abstained nonetheless.[220]

At this same October 1995 meeting the LHA announced that it was no longer taking applications for housing since it used up valuable staff time and HUD allowed closing the waiting list when an adequate pool of applicants had been reached.[221] An item that had been previously tabled rose anew during the meeting concerning the future roles of the Housing Authority and City of Laredo. Former Mayor Aldo Tatangelo and board member Guerra all publicly declared that they felt the City-LHA relationship was mutually beneficial. Newly-elected Mayor Saúl Ramirez agreed that the affiliation should be continued, stating that the city was not to dictate, but to offer resources to ensure housing for Laredo’s underprivileged residents, and felt they should remain close at least until the audit was completed.[223]

Voicing his opinion openly, as he was wont to do, former Mayor Tatangelo stated that he did not like the “interim” staff and preferred a permanent Executive Director. He also wanted to know why Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez, whom he had appointed because of his qualifications, had taken a one-year administrative leave.[224] Subsequent to the former mayor's query, a discussion about Rodriguez's request for leave resulted in the Executive Director's return, stating that he was glad to be back and looked forward to working with the LHA board. The record reported that HUD had issued Rodriguez a Limited Denial of Participation based on five allegations that had been brought against him, but since he had provided HUD with evidence that proved these allegations false, he now felt vindicated. The Director also said that the process used by HUD was wrong, lacked thought, and was easily abused; it did not offer a person due process, which made one guilty before proof is presented. Rodriguez stated that he planned to address Congress and that if he was guilty of anything, it was of helping people, emphasizing that he had always dedicated himself to helping people in his work and in his life. Commissioner Vasquez welcomed Rodriguez, declaring that she lived in Housing and was very proud of her fellow residents, "many of who had gone on to become professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, and nurses."[225]

During the January 1996 board meeting Carmen Contreras, LHA Leasing and Occupancy Officer, was questioned about collecting rents that were in arrears. She reported that these were usually not more than two months tardy and that residents' lease contracts were terminated when they were two months late. Board members commented that $14,706 was a large amount of uncollected rent and reflected units whose tenants had left without paying for one or two months. Contreras said that suing for non-payment in small claims court had been unsuccessful. Board member and former Mayor Tatangelo asked how much time back the amount represented. The

Occupancy Officer replied that it went back to October 1993. Tatangelo opined that 5 percent was not bad, to which Contreras informed that HUD allowed for 10 percent in arrears. Director Rodriguez then said that the Laredo Housing Authority should not be in the practice of writing off such large amounts. Board member Gonzalez declared that she wanted a report from the Leasing and Occupancy Officer explaining her system of overseeing the housing project managers and rent collections, adding that Contreras was responsible from then on and that everyone should be more efficient. Gonzalez stated that many vacancies existed at Russell Terrace due to maintenance and transfers and that according to the OIG Audit, transfers had priority. The board member cited that units should be repaired as they became vacant, and the record indicated that one unit had been vacant for 57 days, to which Tatangelo added that, with a waiting list of over 1,000, this situation was not acceptable. Contreras added that the large number of transfers occupied and delayed maintenance crews, and that another reason for failing to fill some vacancies was that a HUD regulation for income limits was $30,000 per year, negating units to otherwise qualified renters. At that time board member John Peter Montalvo asked Contreras if tenants were moving in without signing lease contracts, to which she answered in the negative. Commissioner Montalvo asked the Occupancy Officer if she was sure, to which she admitted that there were some. Authority Director Rodriguez and Commissioner Vargas had advised Contreras that they would not sign tenants' contracts if they were not properly filled, to which she stated that it would not happen again.[226]

In a related issue, Norma Leal, Site Manager for the Aldo Tatangelo Farm Labor Housing Project for six years, was questioned by Montalvo why Unit 19 of that project hand been vacant for 59 days. Leal responded that it was a three-bedroom unit and not many qualified applicants requested that size unit, plus there were many applicants who did not qualify and were denied housing. She added that there were four vacancies in total at the project, but many applicants did not qualify because, after consultation with several community agencies, such as Centro Aztlán, Motivation Education Training (MET), the Laredo Migrant Council, and the Gateway Community Health Center, it was her opinion that the Authority guidelines were too stringent. The prospective lessees' income within the prior twelve months had to be from 50 to 65 percent migrant farm work.[227] The issue of the perceived persistence of unfilled vacancies reappeared two years later with improved results when Commissioner Vasquez asked why there was a large number of empty units at Russell Terrace Project. The Occupancy Officer stated that there were only three vacancies at the time and Director Rodriguez advised the board that he had just signed three leases for the project that same day. Commissioner Montalvo then asked that a vacancy report be submitted to the LHA every two weeks.[228]

Upon reporting what she observed as the unsightliness of Colonia Guadalupe unit front and back yards, Commissioner Raquel Gonzalez commented in January 1996 that tenants should take better care of their yards appearance. She was informed that this appearance was due to the individualization of water meters per unit; low-income residents did not want to pay for excessive water usage.[229] Related to this situation, Executive Director Rodriguez reported that HUD mandated that all Public Housing Authorities (PHA's) were to charge a minimum rent between $25 to $50 per month. LHA Resolution 96-R-02 set the minimum rent at $25 per month and Resolution 96-R-03 set the same rent for Section 8 lessees.[230]

Reflecting the nation's inflationary trends, Director Rodriguez recommended that the Authority raise the amount of funding for the Section 8 Voucher Program to the level considered Fair Market Rent (FMR) for Laredo because the local Section 8 had depleted its reserves. Board member Montalvo inquired how much money had been used up, to which Rodriguez declared $500,000 had been depleted during his one-year absence. Montalvo commented that since Antonio Cruz was in charge of Section 8, it should have not happened; he should have been aware and done something a long time before, that "Cruz should have been on top of things and had dropped the ball."[231] Following this discourse, the LHA passed Resolution 96-R-04 to raise the Voucher Program to FMR. Another financial issue addressed at this time was the Authority's 1996-1997 Fiscal Year budget, in which board members decided to limit to a 3.5 percent COLA with no other salary increases.[232] In a related matter, the LHA had been notified that it had scored poorly in the PHMAP survey of budget controls and that HUD had denied a delay waiver.[233] The HUD PHMAP was based on several indicators for assessment, including (1) the percent of vacancies, (2) the percent of turnaround, (3) rent collection, (4) work orders, (5) compliance with annual inspections, (6) housing quality standards, and (7) the number of units.[234] The PHMAP score for LHA had been a "D", which Director Rodriguez interpreted as being "very low and tremendous improvement is needed within five months." Examples of discrepancies noted by HUD were an instance of a Russell Terrace unit being ready for rent for 60 days before it was occupied, the issue of unaudited LHA financial statements, and the dire need to improve rent collections.[235] Compounding the issue of federal funding shortfalls, the Authority was notified of Congressional cutbacks projected for the following five years. The reductions would be $1.4 million on year one, then $1.5 million, $1.6 million, $1.6 million, and $1.2 million for each consecutive year thereafter.[236] By spring of 1997 the LHA's only low score from the PHMAP was the unit turnaround rate.[237] In June 1997 the LHA reported that the PHMAP for the twelve months between April 1996 and March 1997 "looked good enough to earn an "A."[238]

In June 1996 Metro Affordable Housing Corporation requested a $50,000 loan to develop the proposed 56 units of multi-family housing. The non-profit subsidiary of LHA had purchased property for this development for $300,000 through a loan from the Authority. The LHA was also notified that in order to qualify for a Comprehensive Grant, it had to submit an annual statement to identify problems in building improvements and management improvements. These had to include records of resident meetings, public hearings, and the proper reporting forms.[239]

Some commentaries of note late in 1996 included former Mayor and now LHA Commissioner Tatangelo's statement about numerous yard sales that were being held on the front lawns of Russell Terrace residences. He felt these were inappropriate behavior and had summoned the City Council to address it. During this venting of opinions, Senior Citizens Home resident Raúl Rodriguez quoted two newspapers, *The South Texas Citizen* and *El Mañana*, as alleging that that project was being run like a jail. Local television had also carried such comments, but he presented a document with many residents' signatures attesting that they were pleased to live at the Home. Director Abraham Rodriguez had spoken to a large group of residents from the elderly apartments and they had all expressed contentment with their housing, so the negative comments may have stemmed from the personal disagreements of one or two disgruntled renters and not from any repressive practices by the management.[240]

Resulting from a salary comparability study In the spring of 1997, Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez reported to the Authority members that 17 percent of LHA employees were receiving wages lower than similar positions elsewhere. Of these employees, one third were in the Executive Department and one fifth in the Housing Management Department. Maintenance personnel were par with like occupations. Furthermore, based on an organizational study conducted by the Nel-Rod consultant firm, the LHA should be organized into five distinct departments: (1) Executive, (2) Administration and Finance, (3) Modernization and Development, (4) Housing Management, and (5) Maintenance, with a ratio of six subordinates to each supervisor. The consultants suggested that the Finance Director should be the Director of the Administration and Finance Department and that the duties of the Low-Rent Occupancy Director should be distributed over two positions, that of Public Housing Area Manager would oversee Project Managers and that of Leasing and Occupancy Technician II would manage Administration and Technology. Nel-Rod furthermore recommended a 3.2 percent salary increase to all LHA employees to meet comparability levels; each employee was to receive different increases based on their field or specialty. The consultant firm also developed a new employee performance evaluation system with its pertinent forms.[241]

Continuously seeking methods to fund additional low-rent housing, when LHA board members learned in 1997 that the Community Development Agency was having public meetings to determine how to spend a CDBG, they submitted a proposal for

$500,000 of potential investments that the City could make by partnering with LHA or another non-profit entity. That year also saw the approval of a Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Modernization, including Physical Needs Assessment, a Comprehensive Grant Annual Statement, and a Five-Year Action Plan as required by HUD.[242] As of July 1997, the LHA Unaudited Financial Statement status went on record as Very Good, and $4,517 of uncollected rent from tenants account receivable was removed, which was considered acceptable since this was less than 1 percent of the more than $1 million collected in rent for the year.[243]

In early 1998 Section 8 Program Director Antonio Cruz explained to Authority members the main differences between Section 8 and LHA properties, saying that his program dealt with landlords and subsidized rents and that a Section 8 Certificate had a maximum rent that could be charged while a Section 8 Voucher was identical to a Certificate but that program's units typically had extra amenities. The LHA oversaw the operation of the Section 8 Program, which had recently acquired 50 additional units.[244] That same year the LHA demonstrated its support of the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation by providing resources and personnel. Metro applied for tax credits and promoted a program in education in home buying. The non-profit housing organization's board consisted of one LHA board member, three residents, and one businessperson-volunteer.[245]

Matters related to budget and unit occupancy kept recurring in 1998 when Norma Castro of the Farm Labor Project informed the LHA that although four units were being prepared and two were ready for occupancy, qualified families could not be found to lease these units. Board member John Peter Montalvo questioned the number of days it took to work on the units, to which Castro responded that she had only one maintenance worker and that families incur heavy damage on the units. She stated that she inspected the units annually, to which Montalvo suggested quarterly inspections.[246] Concerning the budget, Director Rodriguez announced at this time that HUD was allocating $280,000 to the LHA for the Drug Elimination Program, [247] and Sylvia Romero from the U.S. Census Bureau informed the board members of the importance of accuracy in the upcoming census count to substantiate federal funding.[248]

In 1999 the LHA was notified that it had to comply with policy changes initiated by the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998. The board members elected to contract the Nel-Rod consulting firm to help with compliance. HUD also announced that effective August 1999, the minimum rent would be $50 per month and lowering the utilities allowance. At this time the proposed Fair Market value rent in Laredo was determined to be $401 for a one-bedroom apartment, $479 for two bedrooms, $632 for three bedrooms, and $685 for four bedrooms. [249]

Further reflecting policy changes to help public housing residents, in summer 1999 Doris E. Peña, Coordinator of the Resident Initiative Program announced that 14 scholarships had been awarded to housing project resident children. Commissioner Montalvo added to the good news by announcing that LHA's PHMAP score had been 99.5 percent. The Commissioner and former Mayor Tatangelo then emphasized that the amount of substandard housing in Laredo had increased, that there was still a great need for low-rent housing, and that the LHA had demonstrated it could do a good job. Tatangelo informed the LHA that he had related to the City Attorney that the Authority was as much a part of Laredo as any other entity, but the former mayor expressed concern that the municipal government was not amenable to the Authority in relation to land the city owned.[250] Tatangelo continued to emphasize building of new housing developments and to that end, with the help of José Ceballos, the new Residents Initiatives Coordinator, presented the board with a list of city-owned properties.[251]

Following a late year Budget Workshop, the LHA was informed that water consumption had diminished considerably since individual water meters had been installed at each unit. At that point Director Abraham Rodriguez suggested that, based on that year's income and subsidies, LHA could afford a 4.5 percent salary increase even though the Authority was above the HUD wage scale.[252] A year later the Authority projected dwelling rent collections at $1.5 million, utilities costs at $5,000, and included Rodriguez's proposal of the 4.5 percent COLA.[253]

The last year of the century brought the announcement of a new Resident Work Training Program that indicated changes in federal policy to discourage low-income residents from economic dependency on government programs. Program representative Rodrigo Garza stated that his program was necessary in order to bring the LHA into compliance with the new provisions of HUD's Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Program. New HUD regulations obligated Housing Authorities to provide services, job training and jobs; they also required residents to perform community service hours if they were not already employed. The Central Resident Council, comprised of resident representatives from all LHA projects, would be the main vehicle of implementation. Garza announced that he expected feedback and participation from the male resident population, reiterating that those residents not working would be required to do volunteer work in the projects. The LHA unanimously approved this motion. At this time Mr. José Ceballos, now Director of Special Projects, announced that his department was working on community services agreements with the local courts and the Laredo Independent School District (LISD) and that 14 volunteers had been recruited.[254] Ceballos would soon thereafter become responsible for the Authority's Special Programs, Resident Initiatives, Elderly/Disabled Services, Drug Elimination Program, and Economic Self-Sufficiency Program.[255] A few months later he reported that the Resident Initiatives Program had implemented a beautification campaign and that the Drug Elimination Program (DEP) had funded summer youth activities that included swimming, skating, field trips, safety instruction, drug awareness classes, and an Avery Johnson basketball camp. Johnson was at that time a very popular San Antonio Spurs basketball star player.[256] In February 2001 Ceballos announced that the LHA was granted $388,300 by HUD for the DEP.[257]

In 2000, Authority board member Raquel Gonzalez motioned to name Springfield Acres, Project TX–11–5 adjacent to the Hillside Terrace subdivision, in honor of former Housing Commissioner Ana María Lozano. Tatangelo seconded and the motion passed unanimously. [258]

At the March 2000 LHA meeting Director of Modernization and Development Rodrigo Garza gave an update on the Resident Training Program. He stated that it was not only a good idea, but the Program allowed the LHA to comply with the aforementioned Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act and provided construction trade training; general carpentry in particular. Garza informed the Authority members that the Resident Training Program would submit a proposal to the Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS) for a grant to assist people receiving aid from the

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Another positive development was that the LHA established an Interlocal Agreement with the Texas Municipal League to receive employee benefits from the Intergovernmental Employees Benefits Pool.[259] The Pool's mission was to provide Texas municipalities and other units of local government a stable source of risk financing and loss prevention services through its Workers Compensation program.[260]

In 2000, approximately 172 individuals in Laredo had been identified as homeless and the LHA received a request for $700 as startup money from the Laredo Homeless Coalition. The money was needed for the Coalition to obtain an IRS 501 (c) non-profit status. The Authority was also attempting to implement a Lease to Purchase program, working with the City to provide 20 lots in Los Obispos subdivision in Laredo's south side; families would lease for three years and thereafter assume the loan to become homeowners. The property was to initially belong to the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation.[261] The Metro Affordable Housing Corporation had an interagency agreement with the Laredo Housing Authority. The two entities shared the same mission, which was serving the low-income community by providing safe, decent, sanitary and affordable housing as well as self-sufficiency counseling.[262]

The 21st Century

The first year of the 21st century continued to reflect implementation of federal housing regulations that mandated accountability and more resident participation for the appropriate disposition of funding. The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 required Public Housing Authorities to involve residents in the public housing planning process; therefore a Resident Liaison position was created, funded by the Public Housing Drug Elimination Program (PHDEP), and under the Director of Special Projects. A Grant Writer position was also created by a unanimous LHA motion, and funded at $30,000 per year through the Authority-based Voucher Assistance Program.[263] Two physical changes to the Colonia Guadalupe Housing Project visibly altered the facilities in 2001. These were the construction of a new 9,500 square foot office building adjacent to the original Administrative Office and, as a visible sign of the project's community improvement function, a Little League baseball field, funded at $1,025,000, was built on the area adjacent to the Maintenance Building on what originally was the Colonia Park at 2100 San Francisco Avenue.[264] As solicited under the PHDEP for Fiscal Year 2000, LHA Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez was authorized to negotiate and contract for the best qualified provider of recreational services and substance abuse treatment.[265] Consequent to a Budget Workshop early in 2002, Rodriguez gave no COLA recommendation for the year, but the Drug Elimination Program would continue to be funded. The Director indicated that he would propose step increases or salary adjustment schedules since staff salaries were judged to be above average. There would be no step increases or salary adjustments for Section 8 staff.[266] An increase in LHA utility allowances for qualified tenants was announced, and continuing with its role in community involvement, Authority Director Rodriguez announced that the Authority would enter into contract negotiations with Serving Children and Adolescents in Need (SCAN) to comply with PHDEP solicitation.[267] SCAN is an community advocacy organization funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The federal money is made available to the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities.[268] Another position created to lessen dependency of low-income housing residents was the Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator, supervised by Jose Ceballos and funded by specifically designated HUD vouchers.[269]

According to a report on the project-based Voucher Assistance Program, Section 8 tenant and unit eligibility was subject to having at least 75 percent of families admitted whose incomes did not exceed 30 percent of the Laredo area median income. In February 2002 two proposals for low-income housing were submitted to the LHA, one by the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation and another by Hamilton Housing Partners, Ltd. The Authority recommended 7 vouchers for Metro and 20 for the Hamilton firm. Hamilton Housing Partners had restored and converted the former Hamilton Hotel, a 12-story building at 815 Salinas in the Central Business District (CBD), into a residential apartment building for elderly low-income residents. Constructed in the 1920s, the renovated hotel is located across Jarvis Plaza one block from the LHA's Senior Citizens Home.[270]

During the March 2002 LHA meeting Executive Director Rodriguez informed the board about the "Weed and Seed Program" funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. The Authority was the fiscal agent and partnered with the City, the Police Department, the Webb County Sheriff's Office, LISD, and UISD to "infuse a designated area with local law enforcement to weed out the bad element and come in and seed good activities such as education, drug prevention, mentoring, and rehabilitation of houses."[271] The 40-block area described was bordered by IH 35 on the west, Lane Street on the south, Meadow Avenue on the east and Saunders Street on the north.[272]

In summer 2002, Authority Director Rodriguez proposed a resolution to increase the Section 8 payment standard so that rents would go up with time. He felt that raising the rent standard would help more families and provide opportunities for families to move to higher-rent neighborhoods and enjoy better living conditions. The LHA approved the resolution. Rodriguez also sought and received LHA approval to negotiate and contract with a provider for a Curriculum-Based Prevention and Intervention Youth Groups Program under the PHDEP. That same year saw new LHA board membership in the persons of María del Carmen Rodriguez[273] and Arabella Peña, appointed by recently elected Betty Flores, Laredo's first female mayor.[274]

In view of a rapidly increasing Laredo population, Authority board member and former mayor Aldo Tatangelo again recommended that the Authority pursue acquisition of city-owned land to build a new housing project for low-income families similar to the 1990 project built when he was mayor, stating that he perceived LHA residents were appreciative of their housing and were taking good care of the facilities considering that some of the buildings dated back to the 1930s.[275]

In an early 2003 LHA Budget Workshop it was projected that, based on the previous five years' records, the Authority budget derived from rents and HUD subsidies would fail to cover expenditures. HUD would subsidize the differences. Authority Director Rodriguez informed the board that the projected 3 percent COLA was contingent on HUD funding and that he would rather cut expenses than use up LHA reserves. He additionally stated that Congress was appropriating monies to HUD but the Secretary of HUD Mel Martinez was not requesting additional funds to make up for the 2002 budget deficit, and instead the Secretary was taking from the 2003 funding and cutting the subsidy at 70 percent at the national level.[276] Adding to the LHA budgetary woes, the board voted to write off uncollectable rent accounts upon hearing that tenants would get behind payments even after making special arrangements, and not being able to keep payments up, would simply leave the unit and move elsewhere.[277] Director Rodriguez further announced that Drug Elimination Program funding ended in December and that HUD was eliminating all anti-drug funding, negatively impacting staffing and services.[278] Even though HUD was eliminating DEP, it still required Public Housing Authorities to report and track incidents of drug-related violations, document them, and process consequent evictions.[279]

By spring 2003 the Laredo Housing Authority membership was comprised of former mayor Aldo Tatangelo, Celso Sanchez, María del Carmen Rodriguez, and Arabella Peña. At that time the board proposed resubmitting a request for rent increase at the Farm Labor Housing Project on Laredo's south side because the rent schedule was considered too low for a Section 8 subsidized development. Board members agreed that raising rents would not impact the project's tenants because the additional rent would be subsidized and the additional revenue would serve to make improvements to those units.[280] A few weeks later the LHA approved a pro-rated Maximum Rent for mixed families in all of the Authority units at the 95th percentile, which equaled $325 per month, as requested by HUD's Pro-Rated Rent regulation. "Mixed families" meant that at least one member of the lessee family qualified for assistance and receive the pro-rated subsidy on their rent. HUD required a Maximum Rent to be established for units serving mixed families, which the LHA established at $325 per month based on 929 occupied units. This would be implemented on October 1.[281]

To comply with HUD's Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Program, in 2003 the LHA board approved and implemented new regulations. According to new federal regulations, housing residents would now be able to keep pets and to qualify for the elderly-assistance program, residents would have to spend eight hours a week performing community service. At a midyear board meeting, Commissioner Raquel Gonzalez made a motion to approve Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez's contract for three years as per HUD guidelines until August 2, 2006, at which time his contract would be extended two additional years pending board approval. At that same meeting the LHA board approved Rodriguez's termination of Antonio Cruz as director of the Section 8 Program.[282] Shortly thereafter Director Rodriguez invited the board to tour the new Laredo Housing Authority administrative office building, located at 2000 San Francisco Avenue.[283] By October 2003 José Ceballos had been appointed Section 8 interim director and was working on a Corrective Action Plan due to a management review report from the Nel-Rod technical consultant firm. The review had pointed out several indicators of deficiencies concerning staffing, budget restrictions and availability, and program constraints. Ceballos informed the board that HUD allowed setting rent payment standards from 90 to 110 percent of Fair Market Rent payments.[284] The interim Section 8 director provided an update of the Program's Administrative Plan. The Housing Authority had to review this plan yearly to be in compliance with federal regulations. The LHA also needed to provide updates on the pre-application process, including correct identification, criminal record, HUD allowances and deductions, and report on Program integrity.[285]

In regard to Ceballo's administrative duties in other federally-funded programs, he reported that two hot meals were being provided from 4 to 8 p.m. for school children "in and around the projects."[286] A new program specifically directed at youth, Project Safe Neighborhood, was to be introduced, and by necessity created a position for a new employee. Executive Director Rodriguez further informed the board that the LHA Five Year Plan included adding 160 units of multifamily housing and the initiation of the Home Buyer Program targeting ten to twenty families.[287] Rodriguez also entered a request to the board for the acquisition of Blocks 1713 and 1714 of the City's Eastern Division to create new low-income housing, in keeping with the LHA mission to develop affordable housing for homeownership as well as rental. He reported that rental housing was getting scarcer and there was an urgent need for action; the demand was obvious based on the Authority' s large waiting list. Former Mayor Aldo Tatangelo, still active in public service, had identified the city-owned property that could be utilized to provide additional low-income housing. The main issue was the cost of land, and Rodriguez proposed that the LHA could acquire this real estate through leasing, purchase at a low price, or donation.[288]

In January 2004 Interim Section 8 Director Ceballos presented the Quarterly Report of the Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) to the Authority. The corrective action directed since the report of deficiency items was 80 percent completed, and mostly concerned employee training. It was also reported that there had been no qualified applicants for the position of the Section 8 Housing Manager, who was to work directly under the Section 8 Administrator. This position was vital in view of the extensive waiting list of applicants, which indicated that no one was being placed in housing at that moment. The LHA was developing a database – beyond HUD requirements – that would help to compare housing units in different categories. Ceballos informed the LHA members of HUD's Determination of Adjusted Incomes formula, stating that this formula would indicate how Public Housing Authorities calculate rents being paid to owners and how much assistance the client was receiving. He also explained the Opportunities Indicator, by which the Federal Government wanted Public Housing Authorities to expand opportunities to tenants. However, many tenants chose to live in certain areas of the city and the government stipulated expansion to areas that have no Section 8 tenants, which in this case would be Laredo's northern sector. But north Laredo rents were higher than Section 8 would pay; over 10 percent over what the Federal Government stated they should be for the city. Ceballos suggestion was to "reach out" to landlords to consider a possible solution. He also reported that 35 vouchers were available, stipulating a required condition that families who entered the Program would be led to self-sufficiency. All 35 slots had been filled at the time.[289] A few weeks later Interim Section 8 Director Ceballos reported that the SEMAP report needed to be approved by the LHA for submission to HUD. The previous year LHA's Section 8 had a score of 31 and 60 was the minimum needed to become a "standard performer." Ceballos said he was expecting a score of 80 for that year. Authority Director Abraham Rodriguez additionally reported that the Section 8 and Low-Rent Programs had been expected to receive a 100 percent score on Management Assessment, but scored a zero because the report had been submitted after a mandatory deadline. This had been the case because the accountant preparing the report had been in the hospital and the Authority Finance Department did not have access to pertinent information; Section 8 and Low-Rent were consequently designated as “troubled” and now HUD was hiring a private consultant firm to investigate the Authority’s Finance and Maintenance Departments.[290]

In June 2003 an over-leasing situation arose in Section 8, which had resulted in the use of all the Program’s reserves. Approximately 35 families had their lease contracts cancelled due to the local Section 8 loss of revenue and beginning that July rental renewals were to be on a month-by-month basis.[291] A few weeks later Authority Director Rodriguez reported that the Farm Labor Housing Project had been operating without an approved budget and rents had not been increased since 1997. Some of its operations had been supported through the Low-Rent Program, but he proposed that rents should be raised as of October 2004 in order to make the Farm Labor Project self-sufficient.[292]

The Executive Director also informed the LHA members that Public Housing Authorities had experienced a very lean year because the Federal Government and Administration had been consistently cutting funding to public housing for development. There was no HUD program for construction of public housing, therefore Housing Authorities had to consider alternative activities to develop low- and moderate-income family housing. The LHA had authorized the creation of the Metro Affordable Housing Corporation, under which more than 200 units of multifamily housing have been developed and 20 homes under a lease-to-purchase program were developed. Ten new such units were being developed in fall 2004. The City of Laredo had donated ten blocks to Metro Corporation and the LHA had communicated with Fannie Mae and the State of Texas to explore viable options. The Director also indicated “new non-profit initiatives should be explored by the Authority; not only development, but revenue generation to put income back into the Metro Corporation to develop seed money or development money to be used in different combinations of housing and community development and social services."[293] The Laredo Management and Development Corporation was consequently created by the LHA under the Texas Public Facility Corporation Act and Housing Authority board members would serve on its Board of Public Facility.[294] The incorporation of "the new non-profit corporation was to assist the local Authority in furthering acquisition, ownership, creation, financing and managing of low-income housing."[295]

The LHA budget planned for Fiscal Year ending in March 2006 indicated that Authority employees would receive no Cost of Living Adjustment for two years.[296] María Luisa Cardona was appointed as a new LHA Board member in spring 2005; María del Carmen Rodriguez was reappointed and Arabella Peña was chosen LHA Chairperson. At that time Executive Director Abraham Rodriguez informed about HUD's recommendations for LHA's Finance Procurement and Maintenance as directed by a Corrective Action Plan. The last PASS score for finance procurement was 100 percent; the Maintenance scored "Standard Performance." Adding a note of comparison, Rodriguez mentioned that the Housing Authority of Zapata, Texas had been declared as "troubled" by HUD and consequently could no longer effectively administer their Section 8 Program. HUD officials in San Antonio and members of the Zapata Authority approached the LHA to take 118 Section 8 vouchers, at which time the Laredo board voted to accept said vouchers.[297]

The first years of the 21st century have presented a continuation of the nation-wide constraint of federal funding for public low-income family housing. The dire necessity of raising south Texas residents' quality of life may be accomplished by providing decent habitation. As evinced in this and the previous three chapters, the need for such housing persists in the south Texas border city of Laredo, and the Housing Authority of Laredo continues to function in spite of being subjected to budget shortfalls from a federal administration that urges such public housing entities to become more and more self-sufficient. There is an imperative to seek and develop novel initiatives to provide suitable housing for Laredo's low-income residents.

Chapter Five

Current and Future Public Housing Trends in Laredo, Texas at the Beginning of the 21st Century

"This is not your father's Colonia Guadalupe anymore."[1] This remark was made to the author of this document in January 2007, who, as a Colonia resident from 1947 to 1969, found it to be an appropriate comment to lead to the culmination of findings and data of the previous three chapters. The author of this narrative has witnessed the growth and transitions of Laredo, Texas's public housing. Public records since its inception more than six decades ago have allowed such information to be written in chronological sequence, casting a clearer depiction of many officials' altruism and dedication toward the improvement of low-income residents' quality of life and enhancement of these indigents' economic opportunities. Questions of the future of public housing in this south Texas border city remain to be answered. This final chapter is a summarization of archival findings and potential indications of future trends for Laredo's public housing.

The transformations since 1938, when the Laredo Housing Authority was organized, are demonstrated not only as structural or physical characteristics, but also in expansion and diversity of services, plus budgetary, procedural and policy alterations, all guided by changes in federal administrative and legislative directions. Changes in management policies of public housing have occurred over time, as reflected in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this study; policies dictated by altering political scenarios and the Federal Administration's and Legislature's budgetary revisions that have resulted in reduction of funding of domestic programs, and consequently include government subsidized low-income family housing. One purported objective intends to make public housing more self-sustaining and less dependent on federal funding, with a very possible elimination of subsidized public housing developments altogether over time. Even as the gap between a very wealthy minority and an underserved poor population increases, the numbers of Laredo's underprivileged inhabitants grow at an accelerated rate.

According to media archives and public records, these housing projects were not originally intended as repositories to concentrate and isolate the poor, but rather to provide decent, sanitary habitation for Laredo's underprivileged residents and to improve the city's quality of life. Yet many of today's public housing and Section 8 renters in Laredo are unemployed, under-employed, or on fixed incomes from Social Security or government supplements. National media have focused almost exclusively on severely troubled public housing developments in Chicago, St. Louis, or other similar large American cities, and "this media attention has created an image of public housing among the general public which is highly distorted."[2] Media publicity of crime-ridden inner city public housing scenarios has created a stereotypical view of project resident families as dependents of government handouts by "a society that places ideological value on individual homeownership and the unfettered operation of private markets."[3] In 2005 the Brookings Institute reported that "(b)y the mid-1990s, a general consensus had emerged that in too many instances, public housing failed to provide quality, affordable housing to the nation's neediest families. The nation's worst public housing developments warehoused poor, minority families in isolated blocks of high-rises or overwhelming concentrations of low-rise buildings."[4] Concerned with the image of public housing renters, Laredo Housing Authority Director and Executive Secretary Abraham Rodriguez stated, “The news media depict public housing in cases of wrongdoing.”[5] He add that “What we need is a form of funding to advertise or promote all the positive things the Authority accomplishes for the poor people of Laredo.”[6]

As stated in the introductory chapter, Laredo, Texas is readily distinguished from mainstream midsize American cities’ public housing because of its large majority Mexican ethnicity. During the 1990s, the number of Texans of Mexican descent grew 30 percent, adding 1.2 million to the previous 3.9 million officially reported in 1990; the total identified as “Hispanics” in Texas in 2000, which is defined as ethnicity and not race, was 6.7 million.[7] The 2000 United States Census indicated that Laredo residents approximated 96 percent Mexican ethnicity, a percentage higher than any other United States-Mexico border city, regardless of size. In this sense, and unlike other Texas cities, Laredo’s public housing has never served to segregate urban populations based on race. Based on current U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, Laredo’s underprivileged, of which public housing renters would constitute a majority, reflect an even higher average representation of this ethnic group.[8] In the opinion of local Authority administration, it is this fact of cultural ethnicity, with its traditional family values of respect of law and for public property that has permitted preservation of the LHA’s housing stock.[9]

Published media commentary and the Laredo Housing Authority meeting minutes asserted that the initial public housing projects constructed between 1938 and 1963 were to provide decent, safe, and sanitary habitation for low-income residents; not to relegate poor people to a peripheral existence. The placement of the city’s first three projects, Colonia Guadalupe, Russell Terrace, and Richter Courts was in typical low- to moderate-income residential sectors. Originally situated at a distance from the city's center and resulting in a higher than typical urban density, these older projects were touted as improvements of quality of life for hundreds of Laredo's low-income families. Unlike mainstream American urban public housing projects, these well-maintained habitations are of low-rise design, with Colonia Guadalupe the only one to have both one- and two-story buildings with three to four residences per structure; the two subsequent projects consist of one-story duplex design. The fourth project completed during the Housing Authority's early construction phase is dedicated to qualifying elderly residents. The Laredo Senior Citizen Home is a seven-story 100-apartment edifice sited on one block of the Central Business District (CBD). Except for housing for the elderly, Texas has no high-rise public housing projects.[10] Laredo's four initial projects house 462 families and continue to have a 100 percent occupancy rate, low turnover and very long applicant waiting periods as of 2007.

The six smaller Laredo Housing Authority (LHA) housing projects built between 1980 and 1989 added 336 low-income family residences. Currently these also maintain complete occupancy and a long applicant waiting list. Similarly, Section 8 subsidized rentals provided habitation for hundreds of Laredo families and claim 1,500 prospects on the waiting list.[11] Laredo's population exploded during the last two decades of the 20th century, with a correspondingly large increase in the number of impoverished, unemployed or underemployed residents that typically defines large sections of United States southern border cities.[12] Consequent to this phenomenon, the LHA renews its waiting list on a yearly basis; an administrative task that removes applicants that may have moved outside its jurisdiction, no longer wish to enter into a rental contract with the Authority, or no longer qualify for such rentals under HUD regulations.[13] Many low-income residents cannot afford fair market home rental, much less home ownership. The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service website states, "The private sector has not and will not be able to serve…huge and growing low income families' housing needs. The lack of decent, low-cost housing in Texas consigns hundreds of thousands of Texas families to deplorable living conditions and crippling rents."[14]

A 2006 National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) report estimated the median income for a Texas resident at $32,890, while the estimated median income for a Laredo household is $21,324, or 65 percent of the state median.[15] The 2000 Census indicated that 34 percent of Laredo households rent their dwellings.[16] Since 1998, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has described "affordable" rents as the standard of spending no more than 30 percent of income on housing and utilities.[17] The 2007 Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a modest two-bedroom Laredo residence is $573 per month, which according to the HUD formula would constitute 66 percent of an area family's median income. Another way of depicting this situation is that approximately 2.15 full time minimum wage incomes would be necessary to afford a modest two-bedroom residence at Laredo's FMR. According to Erasmo Villarreal, Director of the City of Laredo Planning Department, "approximately 45 percent of the Laredo area is eligible for program assistance."[18] The plight of the local Housing Authority is to fulfill its original mission to provide affordable rentals or access homeownership for the large numbers of underprivileged residents.

Housing problems are most common, and most damaging, among the poorest families. These persons are forced to cut back on food, clothing, transportation, prescription medications, and other vital necessities in order to pay for housing and utilities. Furthermore, incomes of lower-income families have not kept pace with housing costs. When adjusted for inflation, incomes have decreased by .4 percent while overall rents increased an average of 7.5 percent and utilities by 12.9 percent.[19] The private housing market cannot provide housing for the poorest families and attempts to increase income, such as raising the federal minimum wage, may make housing more affordable, but would prove insufficient. Federal assistance programs would help by subsidizing the difference between rent that underprivileged people could afford and current market rents.[20]

In the face of generally rising housing costs across the nation, the federal government has additionally begun to decrease funding of domestic programs. These shortfalls include budget cuts or freezes of federal housing assistance programs for low-income families. The Historical Tables that accompany the Budget of the United States Government for Fiscal Year 2008 indicate that HUD allocations did not keep up with realistic low-income subsidized housing needs from 2001 through 2005, increasing in small increments from 32.3 million dollars to 34 million dollars for those years. Although HUD received 52.4 million dollars in 2006, there was a decrease to 33.7 million dollars the following year and the estimated HUD allocations for Fiscal Years 2008 through 2012 are projected to stay between 36 million and 37 million dollars.[21] If these projections hold true, there would be an actual increase in the numbers of underprivileged families living in substandard housing conditions or actually lapsing into homelessness. As it is in Laredo, with a large underemployed population with additional under-reported numbers of illegally immigrant residents, families are in the practice of “doubling up” or taking in family members or acquaintances in order to have the necessary numbers of incomes that will insure tolerable living conditions.[22] According to a 2006 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), “funding cuts have already contributed to the loss of more than 150,000 Section 8 housing vouchers and weakened efforts to rejuvenate and preserve the nation’s supply of public and private assisted housing for low-income families.”[23] The CBPP narrative adds that “(i)n 2006, funding for HUD’s affordable housing and community development programs was $3.3 billion (8 percent) below the 2004 level, adjusted for inflation. These cuts come at a time when funding increases will be needed to merely continue to avoid cuts in the number of low-income families served.”[24] Further defining the dire situation, during the last ten years “170,000 existing public housing units have been lost to deterioration and decay, and much of the remaining public housing stock has substantial repair and rehabilitation needs that must be met if public housing is to be revitalized and preserved.”[25] If the funding of public housing continues to decrease, attempts to meet this public housing challenge will be severely hindered. Without new funds, “the remaining 1.2 million public housing units, about half of which are home to people who are elderly or have serious disabilities, will continue to deteriorate.”[26]

Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) receive two annual grants from HUD, the Operating Fund and the Capital Fund. The Operating Fund pays for operating costs that exceed the rental payments collected from residents. Operating costs include building maintenance, utilities services for residents and PHA employee salaries and benefits.[27] A 2007 U.S. House of Representatives funding bill is predicted to result in the "deepest shortfall in public operating subsidies in more than 25 years. The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee passed a version that provides some added funds but still falls far short of what is needed."[28] Information from the Consumer Price Index points out that utility prices increased by 16 percent from December 2004 to December 2005, and the Department of Energy projects that utility prices will continue above 2005 levels. HUD did not request funding for fiscal year 2007 to reflect growth of utility costs since the start of 2005, which means that House appropriations would provide only about 79 percent of public housing subsidies to which PHAs are legally eligible under federal funding guidelines. LHA Administrative Assistant Romy Dovalina stated, "It's been the practice of Congress to provide housing authorities with about 80 percent funding of our projected needs and to expect us to operate within that budget. This is not possible without having us cut back services."[29] Some PHAs have responded by raising revenues, cutting operating costs, or using other sources to make up for the shortfall. Some housing authorities draw on their reserves or improve their administration's efficiency. Although at present Laredo Housing Authority renters receive a utility credit with their rent subsidy,[30] a problem arises when a housing agency passes higher utility charges to their low-income tenants who are already having a hard time to make ends meet. Other agencies rent more of their housing units to higher-income tenants who, although qualified, will leave the poorest residents on the waiting lists or force them to persist in low-standard housing. Still other PHAs may cut budgets for maintenance, which would result in unsafe living conditions for their tenants or deterioration of units to the point of making them uninhabitable and subject to condemnation, thereby eliminating otherwise available dwellings.[31] Although many of renters thus afflicted would tentatively be picked up under the Section 8 Program voucher system, funding for this program is also predicted to be inadequate in view of inflation, increasing numbers of low-income families, and the rise in utility costs. "The economic fact of life is that there is virtually no economically feasible housing alternative for the (poorest) public housing residents outside of public housing."[32]

Public housing residents have expressed feeling powerless and alienated, asserting that as the poorest section of society they have least voice in government, the housing authority, and the environment they inhabit. Because these poor cannot afford fair market rentals, they have no place else to stay.[33] One approach to alleviating the unbalanced relationship between public housing residents and housing authorities is to give those residents a degree of ownership and control over the place they inhabit. A Texas Low Income Housing Coalition report states that former HUD secretary Jack Kemp introduced the HOPE program (Home Ownership for People Everywhere) during the 1980s, through which he sought to turn residents of public housing into homeowners by selling them their apartments, but the HOPE program did not work because of three reasons:

> (1) The apartments were sometimes in poor condition and required lots of money to repair and maintain – more money than public housing residents had; (2) management and collective maintenance of existing large multi–family public housing developments required centralized authority instead of individual ownership; and (3) selling public housing units to low-income residents and then withdrawing the public financial support for the maintenance, utilities and operation of the housing did not work because it did not reflect economic reality. The incomes of most of the public housing residents are too low for them to pay for all the required maintenance, modernization, ground work and utilities.[34]

Resident participation in public housing resulted through the establishment of resident councils within some, but not all, public housing developments. The Clinton Administration gave up on the HOPE program. Their HOPE VI provided funds to raze and rebuild public housing projects. HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros, followed by Secretary Andrew Cuomo, advocated demolition of old higher density developments, rebuilding lower density habitations, and then moving higher income residents into the newer housing. Their goal was to replace the older housing with modern developments that would house mixed-income tenants. The idea of having residents of both low and moderate incomes in the same area is ideal, but reality demonstrates that most American communities are economically segregated.[35]

In 1993 the LHA created the non-profit subsidiary Laredo Metro Affordable Housing Corporation, which partnered with Fannie Mae, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, a local banking entity, and private housing builders to provide housing for low-income families in an innovative program. Metro completed a 56-unit Low Income Tax Credit Project named Gallagher Apartments, which provides low- and very low-income families a market-level apartment at an affordable rate, as dictated by the state housing agency. In late 2001, Metro also completed ten of twenty planned single-family homes under a unique Lease Purchase program that made owning a home possible to public housing and Section 8 program participants.[36] More recently, the LHA likewise successfully guided a cooperative effort to provide mixed-income residences through the Metro Corporation, partnering with the International Bank of Commerce, and Ryan Oaks Home Builder to make funding available to private local builders who agreed to construct single family homes, under a reduced profit margin, for no more than $70,000 for low-income first-time home buyer families. These families must be traditional public housing or Section 8 renters who qualify and agree to transition to homeownership after attending mandatory financial counseling provided through the LHA. On property provided by the City of Laredo and with no demolition of existing public housing units, the 160-unit mixed-income Clark's Crossings Apartments community was completed in 2003 and offers 25 percent of its one, two and three bedroom dwellings to the regular market.[37]

According to the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service, "Economic diversity, demolition and new design alone will not solve the problems facing public housing. These are cosmetic solutions for systemic problems."[38] Based on the reality of economic segregation of residential areas, it stands to reason that in order to admit moderate-income renters into public housing it would be necessary to keep low-income families out of those developments. Since turnover in public housing is traditionally very low, this would cut off low-income families' access to public housing and make the waiting lists of these persons even larger and more prolonged. Extreme examples of low-income federally-assisted housing tenants in Laredo include one family of six who, which under HUD poverty guidelines rent a four-bedroom residence for $50 a month.[39] Families like these could not possibly rent standard housing at the area's prevailing fair market rental rates without rental subsidy and other financial assistance. The traditional target population of public housing would be subjected to substandard or unsanitary habitation, less opportunity, and more poverty.

The history of the Laredo Housing Authority has been one of continuous service to the community's low- and very low-income residents since it opened its first public housing development in 1941. As the Authority proceeds into the 21st century, the needs of rendering decent habitation within a safe and secure community for its client population have grown in tremendous leaps. Notwithstanding the expectation by the Congress and Administration that public housing operate with less funding; the local Authority continues to offer diverse services to tenants of all ages. Designated “Kid’s Café”, there are LHA-sponsored neighborhood learning centers where school children can attend after school and avail themselves of computers with Internet connections to aid their schoolwork. Additionally, these Authority-supervised centers provide a hot meal for the school children while they wait for a parent or other adult to arrive home. Many of these youngsters would otherwise be latchkey children, at home without adult supervision.[40]

Laredo Housing Authority Director since 1980, Abraham Rodriguez persistently works to serve the original mission of providing decent habitation and living conditions for the city’s needy residents. Evidence of his professionalism and advocacy is the quality and maintenance of the authority’s housing stock, which he attributes not only to responsible personnel and adherence to HUD regulation, but the residents’ preponderantly Mexican ethnic culture, the local respect for public property, deference to authority, belief in the American dream of eventual homeownership, and a persistence of the importance of a nuclear family and respect for their elders. But he also perceives that detrimental characteristics attributed to mainstream American society, as seen in increased gang and illicit drug activity, single-parent families, latchkey children, teen pregnancies, a general lower respect for education, a self-centered individualism that de-emphasizes community, and other such instances are insidiously creeping into Laredo's border culture. One way of addressing these unfavorable issues has been implementation of the "Weed and Seed Program," a Department of Justice cooperative initiative which targets Laredo high-crime neighborhoods for more police surveillance and law enforcement, housing stock improvement in cooperation with the local Department of Community Development, and various other services under the auspices of HUD. This program has been underway for about two years and has met with measurable success. Although the local media persists in sensationalizing crime, the illegal activities are not necessarily restricted to Laredo's poorer neighborhoods, and the 40-block residential area outlined in the "Weed and Seed Program" has seen a reduction in the targeted activities.[41]

Questioned about the future of low-income housing in Laredo, LHA Director Rodriguez, who by statute is also the Authority's Executive Secretary, stated that he wishes to fulfill and guide a final career objective that would enhance the quality of life in Laredo's poorest *barrios*, or neighborhoods. This "Infield Housing" program would entail the LHA purchase of single housing lots in the city's most crime-ridden residential areas, on which a Housing Authority subsidiary office would set up and offer services such as the Kids Café, Weed and Seed Program, home repair aid, plus homeownership counseling to take back the barrio from the effects of the criminal element. The stakeholders for this initiative would be the Housing Authority partnering with non-profit organizations and community service agencies. As local residents cooperatively rehabilitate their housing stock or build anew, the subsidiary office would eventually be sold as a residence to a HUD-qualified first-time homebuyer. The Infield Housing initiative would subsequently be repeated in other similarly identified Laredo *barrios*, with the objective of improving the quality of life in Laredo's poorest residential areas.[42] Housing initiatives such as the one advocated by Rodriguez would be viable only if the U.S. Congress and Administration's give them life through conscientious and honest budgetary considerations.

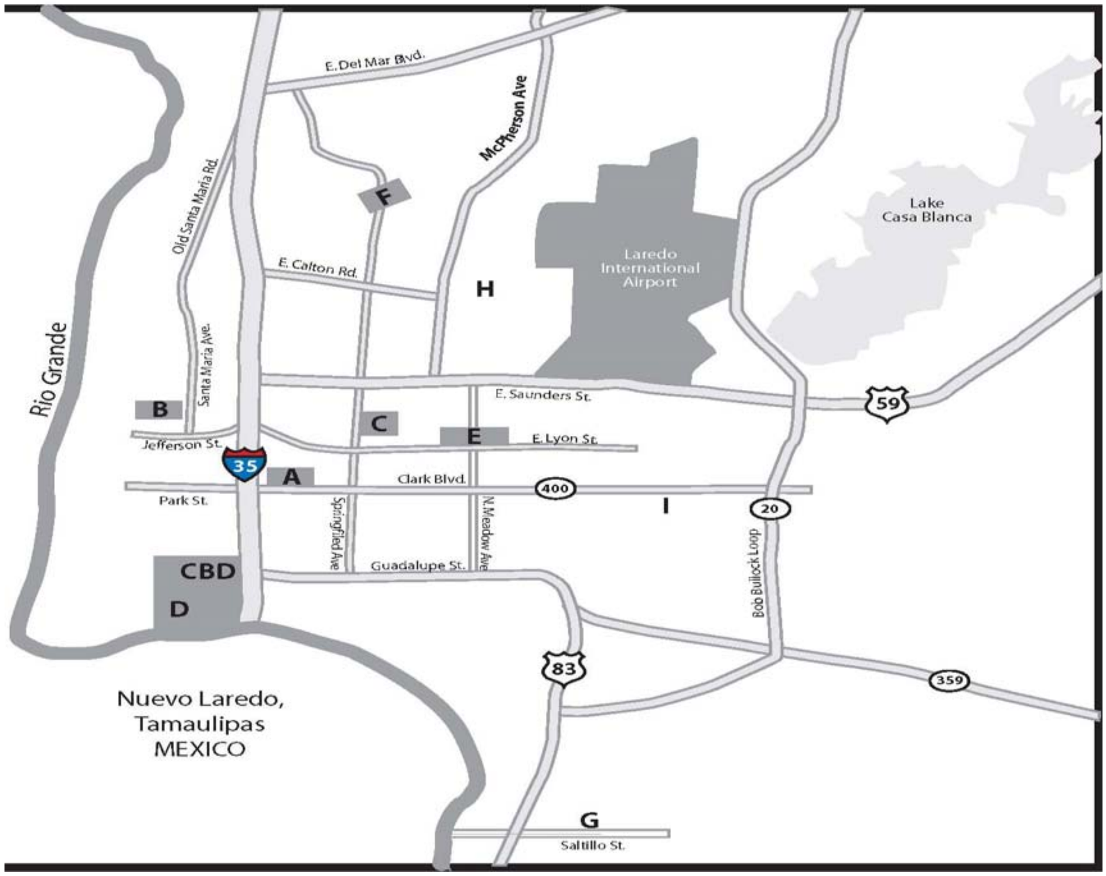
Although federal low-income housing assistance makes housing affordable for many underprivileged families, the costs of such programs is quite small when compared with the tax deductions and credits the federal government provides to housing owners and builders. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the four largest housing-related tax breaks for homeowners cost $157 billion in 2006, more than three times the total expenditures for all HUD programs that year.[43] The ones who benefit from these tax deductions and capital gains exclusions are households averaging over $100,000 annual incomes. Although less than two percent of the federal budget is indicated for low-income housing assistance, about 5 million low-income families use federal rental assistance to live in decent affordable habitation.[44] "Congress and the President bear responsibility for most of this change: more than two-thirds of the budget deterioration since 2001 has been due to legislation enacted by Congress and the White House. The tax cuts have been the single largest contributor to the budget deterioration, accounting for nearly half of the cost of all legislation enacted since 2001."[45] Moreover, "the Administration has chosen not specify the funding levels that the President is proposing in discretionary programs for years after 2008."[46]

The future American public housing will ultimately be decided when and if Congress, the Administration, and HUD embrace additional reforms. If recent funding levels for housing programs persist, budgetary constraints will result in contraction of government-subsidized habitation for underprivileged families. More data must be collected and used as a tool to inform and enable Congress to maintain market and social improvements that will provide housing for low–income families. Congress could avoid the harmful consequences described above by providing the funds to adequately pay for the recent steep increase in utility prices and by appropriating the total amount deemed necessary in the housing subsidy formula. Policymakers could better address the needs of the ever-growing numbers of low-income families and the country's budget deficits by "placing *all* of the budget – including tax cuts, special-interest tax breaks, and various programs that are protected by powerful constituencies – on the table, and reaching bipartisan agreement on a balanced mix of reductions in projected spending and increases in revenues."[47] Powerful local growth machines typically result in the "commodification of land and the decentralized nature of American government go a long way to explaining why there is no decent housing for low-income people in the United States; it is the pressure of local growth coalitions that create both concentrated areas of low-income housing and resistance to decent public housing."[48] Otherwise, the nation's public housing developments and low-income families who rely on them for habitation will continue to bear the ever-growing price. If the persistence, or worse, an increase, in the gap between the wealthy sector of the nation's population and the increasing numbers of low- and very low-income families continues to grow, it could spell economic disaster to the nation within the next few decades. Of immediate and future concern for Laredo is that "(t)he most needy of the families experiencing a housing crisis in the border region cannot be served by the private sector housing market. They are too poor."[49] The original general intent and objectives of public housing was to provide safe, sanitary, and secure habitation for those least able to afford it. This can be ensured in the 21st century through enactment of realistic, positive, and fair budgeting legislation that will ensure adequate funding for maintenance of existing public housing, rent subsidies, and new construction of habitation for low-income families, improve quality of life through enhanced economic opportunity, and thereby reduce the large gap that presently separates the upper- and middle-class from the extremely indigent.

POPULATION OF LAREDO, TEXAS: 1920 TO 2006

1920	22,710
1930	32,618
1940	39,274
1950	51,910
1960	60,678
1970	69,024
1980	91,449
1990	122,899
2000	176,576
2006	215,484 Est.

Laredo, Texas
Area Map



A. Colonia Guadalupe
B. Richter Court
C. Russell Terrace
D. Senior Citizens' Home
E. Meadow Acres
F. Ana Maria Lozano Project
G. Aldo Tatangelo Housing
H. Cherry Hill Apartments
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