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A MESSAGE BY MAYOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY TO THE CITY COUNCIL
CONCERNING THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AN EMERGENCY
HOUSING PROGRAM BY THE CITY COUNCIL
DECEMBER 28, 1945

The housing crisis in Minneapolis continues to intensify at a most alarming rate and the need for immediate and effective action becomes more and more urgent with the passage of each day.

The War Housing Bureau reports that approximately 10,000 families are seeking living quarters and most of them are forced either to occupy sub-standard housing or to double and triple up with friends and relatives. Vacant stores and unheated places are being used for living quarters, and in some instances families have even sought shelter in automobiles and public places.

The desperate nature of the problem is resulting not only in great hardship to thousands of veterans and their families but is constituting a dangerous threat to the health standards of the entire city and the stability of family life itself.

Nor have we experienced the full impact of this emergency. Every day will bring to this community men who are returning from the armed services until the housing problem will approach the proportions of a community-wide catastrophe.

Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that the emergency aspects of this problem be recognized by the Council and that proper and effective action be taken by the Council to deal with the problem on an emergency basis.

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The Mayor's office has devoted a major share of its time and resources in seeking some solution, or at least partial alleviation, of the problem. Unfortunately, however, the Mayor's office, operating with very limited resources in terms of budget and

personnel, has been unable to carry out the type of program that is required by an emergency of such proportions.

For the information of your body, I would like to recapitulate the activities ~~in which~~ my office has engaged to date in its efforts to solve the problem:

(1) On August 28, 1945, I established a Mayor's Housing Committee, which includes representatives of federal and municipal governmental agencies, labor, business, the building industry, veterans, and social agencies.

The Committee has been operating without funds or other necessary resources except as the Mayor's Office has been able to make available.

The Committee has met regularly and considered many proposals which include the following:

- (a) The purchase of state owned properties at Camp Savage and Shakopee which are under the jurisdiction of the Custodian of State Properties. The Committee found that these units could be purchased only at tremendous cost and, being without funds, was unable to bid on them. Meanwhile, all the units have been sold.
- (b) Conversion of public buildings, such as fire stations and vacant school buildings. The Board of Education advised the Committee that it would lease on a gratis basis unused school properties for housing purposes. However, the cost of reconversion, heating and maintenance proved prohibitive in view of the Committee's limited resources.
- (c) Investigation of demountable dwellings. These units can be obtained from the federal government on a loan and lease basis and my office has been assured by the federal government that, under terms of new federal legislation, Minneapolis can obtain a sizeable number of these units. However, the Mayor's Office, operating independently with the Mayor's Committee on Housing, is unable to obtain these units.
- (d) Purchase of Quonset huts, prefabricated garages, and other temporary types of emergency units. Here again the cost of such undertakings proved prohibitive because of the absence of financial resources.

- (e) Establishment of the trailer project. The Committee was able, despite its limitations of money and personnel, to establish the trailer colony including 107 units at 50th and Lyndale Avenues North. The trailer colony was established with the very splendid cooperation of your body in granting permission to use city property for the site of the camp. The housing project will provide homes for 107 families of returned servicemen.

In establishing the trailer camp it was necessary to form a non-profit corporation, the Minneapolis Veterans Trailer Housing, Inc., which has obtained the trailers under lease from the federal government. The corporation has also obtained, with your cooperation, the use of the top two floors of the Detention Home and the 14 room house on the Detention Home property. This will provide a few additional homes for Minneapolis veterans.

The establishment of the Trailer Project has placed an unusually heavy administrative burden upon the Mayor's Office. The federal government insists that its transactions be made with the governing body of a municipality, and consequently it was necessary for me to confer personally in Washington and in Chicago with various federal authorities in order to receive special consideration and approval of our plans. In addition, establishment of the camp has required a vast amount of legal and detail work to fulfill requirements set forth by the federal government.

- (2) The Mayor's Office, in addition to guiding the activity of the Committee, has worked actively with the various individual social agencies in an effort to assist them in finding homes for acute distress cases.

So desperate has the problem become that my office has been literally besieged by returned servicemen and their families seeking assistance in their search for living quarters. While we have limited means for assisting them, we have in many individual cases extended direct aid to distress cases.

- (3) Recognizing the need for maintaining rent controls on living quarters so that exorbitant rents are not added to the present hardship of the shortage itself, the Mayor's Office has worked actively with the Office of Price Administration in an effort to

maintain rent ceilings and to adjust any injustices that may arise under the Control Program. We have received excellent cooperation from the Local Rent Control Office and from the Washington Office.

(4) Repeatedly, I have appealed to Minneapolis residents who have living space in their homes beyond their immediate need. These appeals have elicited some response but there are still many thousands of homes in the city which ought to be opened on a sharing basis with returned servicemen. What is needed is an all-out campaign to impress upon the more fortunate residents who have unused living space the necessity for opening their homes to the veterans. Our repeated appeals are certain to have only a limited effect.

(5) I have called upon the Governor of Minnesota to summon the State Legislature into special session for the purpose of adopting enabling legislation to permit the cities of the state to establish public housing authorities which could undertake, with federal assistance, extensive projects which would provide low cost housing for low income groups. A special session of the Legislature could also re-examine the state Building Code and other laws governing occupancy to determine whether a revised and modernized code might not open additional housing units and prepare the way for an extensive residential construction program.

(6) In addition to urging a special session of the Legislature, I have worked actively with the National Housing Administration and other federal agencies in an effort to make full use of existing federal legislation. Unfortunately, under present arrangements, it is impossible for my office to take action which, without specific authority from your body, would permit us to take full advantage of existing federal legislation.

It is absolutely imperative at this time that the City Council recognize and officially declare the existence of a housing emergency in Minneapolis. The present facilities of the Mayor's office and the present legal arrangements with which we have to deal with the problem are inadequate. I wish, therefore, to request of your body, that it give consideration and provide immediate action concerning the following:

(1) The Council should, for the purposes of obtaining immediate and effective action, declare the existence of a housing emergency in the City of Minneapolis and take immediate steps to provide proper machinery for handling the emergency.

(2) Mr. John F. Bonner, Assistant City Attorney, has provided my office with an extensive analysis of the Charter provisions setting forth the powers of the Council in an emergency of this type.

It is the Attorney's opinion that it is "necessary for the City Council to take action establishing a method of dealing with the housing emergency." Mr. Bonner states that under the General Welfare clause of the City Charter the City Council has authority to cope with the present housing emergency and that two opinions by the Attorney General have held that cities "may expend public monies to rent houses and portable trailers in an attempt to alleviate the housing shortage which exists in those cities."

Therefore, I wish to request that the Council, after declaring the housing emergency, place the general supervision and administrative control of the emergency under the Board of Public Welfare. In Mr. Bonner's opinion, the delegation of this responsibility is consistent with Charter provisions.

The Board of Public Welfare is the logical agency to administer the functions dealing with the emergency. It is equipped with adequate personnel and facilities and operates in the field of public welfare, of which the housing problem is a natural part.

(3) With the declaration of the emergency and the delegation of responsibility for its administration to the Board of Public Welfare, it will be necessary to provide adequate finances in order to engage in needed undertakings. I wish to request, therefore, that the Council consider arrangements which will be suitable to place at the disposal of the Board adequate funds for the execution of needed projects.

Some of these projects ought to be undertaken immediately. A delay of even a few days would be most unfortunate in this desperate situation. Some of the projects calling for immediate action are:

- (a) Demountable housing. The federal government is making available to municipalities 100,000 demountable dwelling units. The Mead resolution, recently passed by the United States Congress, appropriates \$190,000,000 for the purpose of demounting and shipping units in former heavy war industrial centers to points where there is acute shortage of living space.

Minneapolis can obtain a sizeable number of these units. They are to be made available on a grant basis and the city would be called upon only to provide sites and managerial services and to supervise the gradual liquidation of the homes once the emergency had passed. In this matter, immediate action is essential because there is certain to be tremendous competition for these units with other localities. I have already conferred with the Washington and Chicago offices of the National Housing Administration and have forwarded a request for not less than 500 units. This action was taken in order to assure a priority on the first available units.

- (b) Vacant public buildings. A survey should be made immediately of all vacant or partially vacant public buildings, such as schools and fire stations. Adequate means should be provided for the conversion of such space into living quarters. The Board of

Education has offered to permit use of its unused space and with adequate funds a large number of living quarters could be developed through reconversion of such space.

- (c) War Housing Bureau. This Bureau has been maintained by the Council of Social Agencies as a service to persons seeking living quarters and others wishing to place such quarters on the rental market. The Bureau is scheduled for liquidation. This will be a most unfortunate development and some means ought to be found to establish the Bureau as an official function of the city. We owe this much at least to the many persons who are seeking a home.
- (d) Unused space in private homes. The most promising possibility of developing additional dwelling units is to be found in private homes now occupied which have space beyond the immediate needs of the families occupying such homes. There are thousands of homes of 10, 12 and 14 rooms which are occupied by one or two persons. Appeals to residents to open their homes on the basis of patriotism have not been successful. The Council might well give consideration to an official survey to determine extent of unused space with the objective in mind of developing techniques for opening such homes to returned servicemen

(4) It is imperative that the Council consider an over-all review of existing health, zoning and building ordinances which are limiting the conversion of present properties. Many homes of a sub-standard nature are being occupied today and the community's health and living standards are being jeopardized. The building ordinances prevent conversions which would provide living quarters superior to many now occupied and, as a result, a hardship is being worked upon residents who comply with the building ordinances.

I wish to request that the Council undertake a survey of existing ordinances in order to examine the possibilities of opening new dwelling units.

Again may I stress the overwhelming need for immediate and positive action by your honorable body in declaring the existence of a housing emergency and in providing means, which only your body can provide, for successfully coping with the problem.

Respectfully submitted
Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey



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