



The Demolition of Bowen Homes: Atlanta's Public Housing Comes Full-Circle

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Ms. Jones is a seasoned executive with 31 years of experience providing program management, business operations management, and design / construction management consulting services to clients in the public and private sectors. She is an exceptional leader, widely recognized for taking on challenging leadership positions in complex environments and for consistently producing exceptional results.

In 1936, as a response to the Great Depression, Atlanta was the first city to build public housing projects. Less than one year from now, the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) will make Atlanta the first major city in the United States to have eliminated all its large public housing projects. In June 2009, a major step toward this goal was realized with the demolition of Bowen Homes.

Located off Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway, Bowen Homes opened in the 1960s at a time when public housing projects were hopeful solutions to the need for affordable housing. Over the next four decades, however, Bowen Homes became a symbol of failed public housing policy. Notorious for crime, drugs, joblessness, and poor academic achievement, the Bowen Homes community never realized the goals of its inception. Although originally created as transitional housing for low-income families, Bowen Homes — like other such large public housing projects — soon evolved into a reservation of despair and hopelessness.

In 1994, Renée Glover became executive director of the Atlanta Housing Authority. She embarked on a program that is known all over the country as the “Atlanta Model,” a national standard for community revitalization. As Ms. Glover has said, “During the Great Depression, it was in the finest American tradition to help our neighbors by building good housing for the beleaguered residents of that era. Likewise, it is in the country’s finest tradition to recognize the benefit of tearing down antiquated housing projects when circumstances have changed. Atlantans have learned that, to be successful, the ideas have to be bold.”

Following its Atlanta Model, AHA worked with all families affected by the Bowen Homes demolition to ensure that families find housing of their choice — housing that will meet their needs in diverse Atlanta neighborhoods. By using rental vouchers, participating families will pay no more for privately owned housing than they did when living in the public housing projects.

While gaining quality housing opportunities in neighborhoods of their choice, former Bowen residents are losing the crime, the poor job opportunities, the inadequate schools, and the stigmas that are associated with the projects. AHA clients have perceived this as a good bargain. In fact, in a forum held for Bowen residents prior to demolition proceedings, more than 95 percent of families stated that they wanted the opportunity to leave. Their stated intentions proved true when they found new homes and relocated nearly three months *ahead* of schedule.

Since Draper & Associates began its partnership with the Atlanta Housing Authority more than 13 years ago, we have helped the agency build momentum for AHA’s ambitious goals for the City of Atlanta and the Authority’s public housing residents. Draper & Associates is honored to continue to serve AHA in our role as program manager for AHA’s affordable housing portfolio.



For more information on our team of consultants, please visit us at www.draprandassociates.com.