

Housing Authority of Portland



The Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) was created in 1941 in response to the urgency of war preparations and the needs of thousands of workers who came to Portland to help build Victory Ships.

The need for workers' housing became apparent in the summer of 1941, when Portland and Vancouver were transformed into a shipbuilding center of the Pacific Northwest. The thousands of workers and their families who flocked to the region for work were unable to find housing and had to live in shantytowns of shacks and tents. In response, the Portland City Council created HAP on December 11, 1941, just four days after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Its mission was to rebuild the city's sprawl of rundown housing and to create new housing for the workers who were arriving from all over the country.

HAP started work in Vanport City, building apartment buildings in a neighborhood of shanties bordering the Columbia River and on land that Henry Kaiser had originally purchased on the Columbia Slough. At almost the same time, HAP started building Columbia Villa, a large neighborhood in North Portland, as well as other housing developments around the city. In just two years, the agency reportedly provided housing for 72,000 people who worked in the shipyards and related industries.

Like all public housing authorities, HAP owns and operates housing that is subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). One major HUD program is Section 8 rent assistance, which HAP offers to thousands of people in the Portland area through a voucher program. Section 8 tenants pay only a portion of the rent owed, and HAP pays the rest.

HAP sees its challenge as helping "improve the prospects of the community's most vulnerable citizens" in times of economic hardship. In its mission statement, HAP states that it "has a special responsibility to those who encounter barriers to housing because of income, disability or special need."

Oversight for HAP comes from a nine-member, appointed board of commissioners, which appoints the executive director. In 2008, HAP provided affordable housing to more than 33,000 people.

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Further Reading:

Sanders, Richard. *Glimpses from the Past, The Housing Authority: Fifty Years of Building a Better Community*. Portland, Ore.: Housing Authority of Portland, 1991.

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