DENVER HOUSING AUTHORITY

History of the Denver Housing Authority (DHA)

DHA has a long history of helping the Denver community find affordable and quality housing. It was founded in 1938 as the Housing Authority of the City and County of Denver. The first director of DHA was James Q. Newton. Newton was concerned about the lack of affordable housing in the area, which was only exacerbated by the Great Depression. Wendell Hedgecock, Denver's chief building inspector, had previously led an effort in the 1930s to clear out the shanty towns on the county's edge, mostly occupied by migrant farm workers. However, after the shanties were cleared, that housing stock was not replaced. Consequently, Newton and the newly formed housing authority set out a plan to use federal funds for slum clearance. But instead of leaving vacant land behind, the authority planned to build new housing made affordable by subsidized rents.

In 1946, Denver's mayor appointed a 6-member commission to guide the work of the housing authority. The commission's members were asked to serve without compensation to work together to solve affordable housing issues in the Denver area.

Eventually, the structure of the housing authority changed and became known as the Denver Housing Authority (or DHA). DHA is an independent entity and is not part of the City government, yet still works closely with many different non-profits and governmental bodies to solve Denver's housing issues.

Today, DHA is widely recognized as one of the most effective housing authorities in the United States. In fact, the Denver Housing Authority manages thousands of housing units, making it the largest such agency in the Rocky Mountain West and Denver's biggest landlord. What's more, DHA's efforts reflect trends to improve affordable living across Colorado and the nation.

Image 1: Since DHA was founded in 1938, it has worked to provide the City and County of Denver with a variety of low-cost housing options. For example, this 1921 bungalow in the Park Hill addition illustrates a DHA program that places affordable subsidized single-family homes alongside market-rate houses to create diverse neighborhoods. Photo c. 2021.