The patchwork of proposals worked out in the late 1970s for the revitalization of Over-the-Rhine by creating a racially and socioeconomically integrated neighborhood around Washington Park moved forward in 1980. The federal Department of the Interior in April 1980 funded the Planning Commission’s proposal for the development of a Washington Park historic preservation plan, and a month later city council adopted the new historic conservation legislation recommended by the Urban Conservation Task Force, a sign of support for Lazarus of the Cincinnati Business Committee, the Miami Purchase Association, and their allies. A month after that, council also approved an anti-displacement ordinance that contained elements of both the city manager’s and the Legal Aid Society’s drafts, a gesture of sympathy both for the manager, who had forwarded his draft over the opposition of his department heads, and the new community organizers in Over-the-Rhine, who applauded its passage but felt that it did not go far enough in the fight against gentrification.

Progress toward the development of the Washington Park plan stalled, however, because Buddy Gray emerged as the acknowledged leader and spokesperson for the Over-the-Rhine Community Council and skillfully manipulated the historic conservation/gentrification issue.
to build support for the separatist cause, the preservation of the neighborhood as an enclave for its poor and increasingly black population. Ironically, Gray, like most of Over-the-Rhine's other new community organizers, came from a white, middle-class background. He grew up on a small farm with a swimming pool near a town in Cincinnati's eastern suburbs called Mt. Carmel, a name associated in the Old Testament with Elijah, the zealous prophet of the one true God, a healer of ordinary people, a political as well as a religious figure. Stanley (Gray's given name) grew up in a Methodist family, attended Sunday school regularly, and earned a reputation among his adult neighbors as a "model boy—polite, intelligent, considerate."

That mild disposition turned hostile when, as a scholarship student in engineering at Purdue University, he participated in protests against the war in Vietnam. After two years of college he dropped out and returned to Cincinnati, where he moved to Over-the-Rhine in the 1970s to tutor poor children at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. There he came under the tutelage of the young Reverend Joel Hempel, a trained community organizer and an exponent and practitioner of confrontational tactics. In this context Gray let his beard and hair grow long and befriended two of the neighborhood's street alcoholics, both of whom froze to death one night while they slept unattended in an abandoned building. The incident haunted Gray and inspired him to make a career of alcoholic shelter work and community organizing on behalf of the poor, which in Over-the-Rhine in the late 1970s and after meant especially the African American poor.2

Gray described himself as "a hard-nosed radical, a street fighter for street people" who believed, no matter what city administrators, council members, or historic conservationists said, that they really wanted to run him, his alcoholic shelter, and the poor out of Over-the-Rhine and turn it into an "artsy-craftsy" neighborhood for the "urban gentry." He identified his Drop-Inn Shelter and "the struggle for low-income housing" as the "basic things" in his life, but refused to elaborate on the source of either his motivation or his income. When queried about his reticence he replied, "When you're out there punching in the front lines of social struggle, you have to expect to be attacked, and you have to draw a clear line of defense."3

Gray and his allies put on one of the first displays of their new
strength in February 1980 when they rallied some 250 protestors to a public hearing on the nomination of Over-the-Rhine to the National Register of Historic Places. The session began with introductory remarks from planning director Herb Stevens. A staff member of the Miami Purchase Association presented a slide show defining the boundaries of the district and illustrating its architectural and historic significance. Then seven diverse persons testified to the proposed district's eligibility for listing and stressed that designation would make available tax breaks as incentives for the production of low-income housing. These people included Joe Dehner and Mary Heller, executive secretary of the MPA, and also an officer of the Findlay Market Association, a member of the teamsters union, and representatives of the Over-the-Rhine Business Association, who described the neighborhood as a "natural extension of downtown" and an "irreplaceable architectural and historic resource" threatened by the kind of urban redevelopment that had flattened much of the city's West End and displaced thousands of people.  

The opposition featured twelve speakers, including Laura Goodell, a Gray ally and the new head of the Over-the-Rhine Community Council. Gray himself also spoke and, like all the speakers on his side, emphasized social problems and ignored the issue of the district's eligibility for inclusion on the National Register, the only criteria of concern under federal historic preservation legislation. Gray attacked Mitchell's slide show for ignoring "human issues," such as the closing of schools, poverty, alcoholism, poor housing, and unemployment. Joel Hempel then asked why Mitchell had not shown pictures of the 15,000 residents of the area and contended that the listing of Over-the-Rhine would bring gentrification and an urban renewal program that would yield "negro removal."  

One of the most dramatic speakers against the nomination was the Reverend Maurice McCrackin, a pacifist, a well-known veteran Cincinnati defender of the downtrodden, and since the 1940s the pastor of a Protestant community church in the then white Dayton Street area of the West End. In that capacity McCrackin sought to integrate his congregation racially, participated enthusiastically during the 1950s in the fight against racial segregation elsewhere in the city, and acquiesced in the adoption of historic preservation legislation for the Dayton Street area. Now, however, he came down against efforts both to assure the success of racial integration in Over-the-Rhine and to use historic preservation as a
means of accomplishing it. To proponents of these ideas he offered an eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not manipulate thy brother or sister," and added for good measure that "the faces of people, not the facades of buildings" should be the major concern.  

In the midst of these passionate protests a representative of the state historic preservation office, Gretchen Klimoski, tried vainly to calm the fears of the dissenters. She contended that preservationists prevented displacement by using conservation grants and tax credits to provide low-income housing, and she argued that more displacement took place from deterioration and abandonment than from revitalization, with or without historic designation. She noted, too, that developers found historic areas of cities before their listing on the National Register and that displacement sometimes occurred without designation and did not invariably follow after designation. And she added that National Register listing, unlike local designation, did not establish design or demolition controls, and referred the audience to a preservationist handbook on anti-displacement strategies.  

Nonetheless, the anti-preservationist barrage persisted. Three letters opposed to the nomination brought new voices, all of them respectably religious, to the fray. The pastor of St. Francis Seraph Roman Catholic parish in Over-the-Rhine condemned the nomination as an effort "to preserve the past without concern for current residents" and excoriated it as "a crime and a moral injustice." Ted W. Sippel, president of the Prince of Peace church council, more calmly claimed that historic designation would reduce the number of rental units and increase rents in Over-the-Rhine and explained that his organization preferred to improve housing for residents "rather than providing either a face lift or transforming the area into an elite neighborhood."

The third new voice of opposition came from a source representing the largest single religious constituency in the Cincinnati area, the Social Action and World Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic archdiocese, an advisory body composed of lay and religious men and women in various fields of work. Its director, Archie Brunn, noted that Catholic social teaching called on all members of the church to speak and act on behalf of the poor and powerless, and that he wrote not out of simple opposition to historic preservation, "a value which the Commission in fact affirms." Brunn described the nomination as ill-timed because it would
add to the threat of involuntary displacement of poor residents, but
stressed that the Commission had consistently supported the poor of
Over-the-Rhine, most recently by publicly endorsing city legislation to
prevent the involuntary displacement of low-income residents.9

Clearly, Gray and his allies scored humanitarian points on culturally
individualistic grounds in this debate by painting a picture of poor
people about to be uprooted from their chosen homes against their
wishes. But their case sounded compelling not only because of the emo­
tional, religious, and cultural charge of their presentations but also be­
because the historic preservationists made no concentrated, systematic,
coordinated response based on higher principles than architectural and
historical significance. No one observed, for example, that wealthy
whites, unlike the residents of Over-the-Rhine, possessed the economic
resources to live anywhere they wanted and chose not to live in Over-the-
Rhine or areas like it. None of the historic preservationists brought up
the city administration’s study of gentrification that discounted it as a
threat anywhere in the city, which lost population between 1970 and
1980, just as it had between 1960 and 1970. No one noted that retaining
Over-the-Rhine as a separatist racial and low-income enclave violated
federal law and city council’s resolution in favor of racial and class bal­
ance in all neighborhoods. And no one remarked that the metropolis of­
fered rich pickings for people who chose to live in neighborhoods
segregated by race and/or class but only a small and dwindling number
of localities integrated by race and/or class for people who preferred that
style of living.

By trumping architectural and historic significance with the gentri­
fication card, moreover, Gray and his allies caught the attention and sym­
pathy of planning director Herb Stevens, who decided to strengthen
Gray’s political position in the planning process. Gray now contended
that the Washington Park planning program, like the Findlay Market
renovation and the recent agreement by the city government to help the
Verdin Bell Company rehabilitate St. Paul’s Church for commercial use,
represented part of a scheme to divide and gentrify various parts of
Over-the-Rhine on a piecemeal basis. He proposed instead that the
Washington Park planning effort be folded into a process for developing
a plan for all of Over-the-Rhine. Stevens picked up on this idea, sold it
to both the Planning Commission and the city administration, and then
persuaded the state historic preservation office to accommodate the new planning program by postponing for six months a decision on the nomination of Over-the-Rhine to the National Register.10

This change in the process for dealing with Washington Park gratified Gray but exacerbated the growing concerns of Fred Lazarus about the lack of progress on the Washington Park plan, the timely completion of which the Queen City Housing Corporation regarded as crucial for its continued support for the effort to revitalize the area as a neighborhood with a socially and economically mixed population. Lazarus met with city manager Sylvester Murray about this problem and reiterated Queen City Housing's intention to avoid displacement by developing housing for low-income residents until all of the residents of the area had been located in properly rehabilitated and maintained housing. Murray replied "emphatically" that Queen City Housing should stay in the Washington Park arena and promised to meet with Lazarus in "a couple of weeks" to outline specifically what he would do.11

Gray and his allies responded to Murray's renewed pledge of support for Queen City Housing's treatment for Washington Park by trying to discourage Lazarus and the Cincinnati Business Committee about their prospects for success in integrating the area by using historic preservation subsidies and techniques. Jack Towe, now a member of the Housing Committee of the Over-the-Rhine Community Council, started the campaign by inviting Lazarus to a meeting. Lazarus agreed to come in the hope that he could secure the support of the Community Council, or at least of some key members of it. But Towe did most of the talking and delivered three decidedly negative messages. First, the Housing Committee would not accept any plan unless the Committee had been involved from the beginning in preparing the scheme, even if it approximated what the Committee wanted for the area. Second, the Housing Committee wanted to provide low-income housing in Over-the-Rhine not only for current residents but also for other low-income people who might want to move into the neighborhood. Third, Towe suggested that Queen City Housing and the Heritage Preservation Development Corporation should get out of Over-the-Rhine and that the Cincinnati Business Committee and the city should instead support a development corporation directed by the Over-the-Rhine Community Council.12
When Lazarus refused to back down, Towe set up another meeting and brought along the Reverend Joel Hempel, Buddy Gray's mentor in confrontational community organizing practices. Hempel announced that he distrusted the motives of the Cincinnati Business Committee and that he thought Lazarus himself had unidentified "ulterior motives" for his work in the area. Hempel then said that he opposed the provision of new and rehabilitated housing for middle-income people because it would attract more of the same and eventually drive out the poor. Hempel objected particularly to middle-income housing near the Drop-Inn Shelter because "middle income people would object to the derelicts from the Drop-Inn Shelter wandering around in the area." He concluded with a general attack on "wealthy people" and their power and proposed that Queen City Housing form a new corporation "governed by a board of directors appointed by the Over-the-Rhine Community Council," the only group that represented "the sentiments of the people of the area."

This session shook Lazarus, who now wondered if he could count on the city in the face of protests from an apparently united Community Council. He raised the question with city manager Murray and planning director Stevens at a meeting on what to do next to help Queen City Housing in its Washington Park project. In the course of the discussion Stevens indicated that it would take two to three years to develop a plan because the Community Council distrusted both Queen City Housing and the city due to a "lack of communication." Lazarus doubted that lack of communication explained the Community Council's attitude and reminded Stevens that Heritage Preservation could not wait two years to rehabilitate buildings it had already purchased on Race and Pleasant Streets, let alone to secure federal support for the creation of housing units for the elderly on the upper floors of the YMCA building on Central Parkway.

Murray responded by pledging his continued support to Lazarus. Specifically, he asked Heritage Preservation to continue its low-income housing work on Race and Pleasant Streets and with the YMCA. He also told Stevens that he should proceed promptly with the plan for the Washington Park area. And Murray said that he would attend the next meeting of the Over-the-Rhine Community Council and offer it an
opportunity to create its own development corporation, which the city would provide with financial planning assistance but not with funds to pay staff members.\textsuperscript{15}

Murray subsequently made a strong effort to placate the leaders of the Over-the-Rhine Community Council. He not only encouraged them to start the development corporation (which they did, naming it Owning the Realty, Inc.) but also gave them favorable terms in drawing up the comprehensive plan for the neighborhood. Murray agreed to create an Over-the-Rhine Planning Task Force and to charge it with both writing a plan and reviewing all other planning activities in Over-the-Rhine, including work already started for the Findlay Market and Washington Park areas, the Mohawk area in the northwestern section, and the Pendleton area in the eastern section of Over-the-Rhine. The Task Force would consist of nineteen representatives of Over-the-Rhine residents and businesses—ten of them recommended by the Over-the-Rhine Community Council and at least eight of them residents of Over-the-Rhine—and nine persons appointed by the city manager, at least two of them residents of Over-the-Rhine. The distribution gave a one-seat majority to residents of Over-the-Rhine.\textsuperscript{16}

Gray now controlled both the Over-the-Rhine Community Council and the Planning Task Force. These positions, given city council's long-standing deference to neighborhood autonomy, forced others also to try conciliation with Gray in hopes of working out a compromise between him and the historic conservation advocates. The Ohio Historic Sites Preservation Advisory Board took a step in this direction by postponing action on the Over-the-Rhine nomination for an additional six months but requested in return the extension of some form of protection for the neighborhood's historic resources.\textsuperscript{17} City council obliged by extending the Interim Development Control district protection for Findlay Market and Over-the-Rhine from three months to an additional nine months,\textsuperscript{18} and by adopting an ordinance extending the Washington Park IDC district for six months (to May 1981), by which time it thought the Task Force would have completed the Over-the-Rhine comprehensive plan.\textsuperscript{19}

But the Over-the-Rhine Planning Task Force soon bogged down in controversy. At its first meeting the Task Force decided that city hall officials could not speak at its meetings until granted permission by the Task
Force. Then a nasty squabble developed between resident and business members over the makeup of a committee to help select a consultant for the planning process. After the resolution of that problem the resident faction not only expressed its opposition to the designation of Washington Park as either a national or local historic district, but also persuaded the Task Force to establish a Housing Subcommittee, chaired by Father William Schiesl of St. Mary's Catholic Church, to seek alternatives to historic preservation for financing, protecting, and increasing the number of low-income housing units in Over-the-Rhine.

That rocky session set the tone for the planning process, which bumped along slowly and contentiously thereafter. During the winter and spring of 1981 the Task Force spent a great deal of time and debate on the Findlay Market area plan, particularly a dispute over what to do about the intention of Catanzaro & Sons to demolish residential structures so it could expand its food produce warehouse. The Task Force also wrangled with city officials over which agency would report on which sub-area planning activity, when the Task Force should review plans for sub-areas, and the status of a three-year-old Community Council request for community development funds for low-income housing. The Task Force seemed especially determined to find a way to both protect and encourage the development of additional low-income housing without using historic preservation subsidies and regulations.

In April, a frustrated Sy Murray tried to speed up the process. He sent the Task Force a memo asking it to focus exclusively—and more effectively—on planning. To expedite matters in city hall he directed Charlotte T. "Tommie" Birdsall, the Planning Commission's staff coordinator on the project, to push the appropriate city departments and agencies to quickly prepare statements of policies and goals for the Task Force's consideration. The Task Force, Birdsall told her city hall colleagues, might modify some of the goals but they would at least provide a framework for her dealings with Buddy Gray and his allies.

At this point what had been an in-house spat became a public issue that deepened divisions all around. A Cincinnati Enquirer reporter learned about the Task Force's slow progress and interviewed two of its members. Kathy Laker, a commercial developer in eastern Over-the-Rhine, pinned most of the blame on low-income housing advocates who refused to consider parking, zoning, street improvements and lighting,
or housing for “young professionals” until after the settlement of the low-income housing question. But Buddy Gray blasted city administrators as “tiny power brokers, each vying to develop Over-the-Rhine on a piecemeal basis” by pouring millions of dollars of local and federal tax revenues into the creation of apartments and townhouses for middle- and high-income persons—“the Music Hall crowd,” as Gray put it.24

That same day, coincidentally, a new actor, Genevieve Ray, the city’s first urban conservator under the recently adopted historic conservation legislation, tried to break the logjam on the Task Force. Ray was a former VISTA volunteer organizer in Harlem, newspaperwoman, and executive director of a not-for-profit development corporation in York, Pennsylvania. She and Mary Asbury of the Legal Aid Society met with the Housing Subcommittee of the Over-the-Rhine Planning Task Force to discuss historic conservation issues. The subcommittee still associated gentrification with historic districts, so Ray and Asbury unveiled a low-income “housing preservation” ordinance from Seattle, Washington, that seemed a way of preventing that outcome and asked the city solicitor to draft a version of it for review by the Over-the-Rhine Planning Task force.25

The city solicitor, however, expressed reservations about applying the Seattle ordinance to Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine. Part of the difficulty stemmed from the preamble to the ordinance, which justified the law on the basis of a severe housing shortage. The solicitor doubted that such a condition could be demonstrated for Cincinnati and especially in Over-the-Rhine, where the population had dropped by 60 percent in twenty years while the number of housing units had decreased at less than half that rate. He expressed concern, too, about the feature of the ordinance that established a fee for the demolition of low-income housing units to generate funds for the construction or rehabilitation of replacement housing. Ohio law provided that fees could be used only to cover the cost of administering a law, and the idea of loosely interpreting that restriction remained untested in Ohio courts. The solicitor thought, however, that the city might issue certificates to rehabilitators of low-income housing that then could be sold to other developers seeking demolition permits for other purposes, the proceeds from which could be used only for the creation of new or rehabilitated low-income housing.26

The solicitor’s cautious response to the Seattle ordinance produced
more discussions in the Task Force, annoying Murray, who once more pressed it to focus exclusively on the business of planning. This time, moreover, he sent along the city’s goals for the area, including the preservation of subsidized housing units, the creation of new subsidized and market-rate housing, the establishment of a socially and economically mixed population, the application of local historic conservation zoning to parts of the neighborhood, and the development of new commercial and industrial ventures at appropriate locations. Murray described these goals as a response to those Task Force members who ascribed to the city a hidden agenda, but he emphasized that he wanted the Task Force to come up with its own “final goal statement,” which, he said, “you can do . . . with or without referring” to his list.

This initiative by the city manager did not inspire the Task Force to either step up its pace or change its direction. Instead it recessed for July and August and instructed the Housing Subcommittee to hold brainstorming sessions during the summer months on legislating to protect low-income housing. At the first of these sessions the subcommittee noted that the Washington Park IDC district would expire in six months and asked Birdsall to secure support in city hall for the Seattle ordinance. She came back with bad news. She reminded the subcommittee of the solicitor’s reservations and reported that the city manager did not like the idea because it involved additional bureaucratic regulations. And she indicated that the Planning Commission doubted that it could secure in six months the passage of an ordinance of such “magnitude.”

Genevieve Ray, however, saw this plea for support from city hall on the Seattle ordinance as an opportunity to hold talks between preservationists and Buddy Gray’s forces in an effort to work out a compromise. She persuaded planning director Stevens to sponsor an Over-the-Rhine charette, a two- or three-day conference of all parties to the conflict supervised by a professional facilitator to negotiate an agreement on replacements for expired IDC districts in Over-the-Rhine, especially the Washington Park district. The Community Council approved the idea in July and agreed to participate, although it reserved the right to oppose whatever proposal might emerge from the charette and indicated that it wanted the process to produce an ordinance protecting low-income housing in the area.

Meanwhile, Ray’s charette organizers, a steering committee that
included members of the Housing Committee of the Over-the-Rhine Community Council, sent out invitations to representatives of twenty-four organizations and agencies in real estate and finance, government, and social service work, and to all members of the Over-the-Rhine Planning Task Force. The organizers called the charrette a “Meeting of the Minds” and defined its objective as compromise. They also described the problem as the desire to replace the IDC districts with something to prevent the demolition of buildings and to encourage their use for low-income housing, and to discourage the displacement of current residents of Over-the-Rhine. The solution, said the organizers, had to take those goals into account but also recognize that business and “historic preservation people” had goals that would affect the solution and the decision of city council.

The charrette itself lasted three lively days and produced no meeting of the minds. But it inspired a sustained effort by Ray and her staff to devise legislation for a new kind of zoning district, one that would combine historic conservation techniques with regulations to preserve low-income housing units and financial incentives to create more of them. The legislation went through several drafts and at one point contained a demolition fee for tearing down low-income housing. By the time it emerged from negotiations involving Legal Aid Society lawyers, the Planning Task Force, and Stevens, this provision had been replaced by the certificate scheme suggested by the city solicitor. The proposed law also set up stiff criteria for granting demolition permits and banned rehabilitation projects that would lead to “significantly increased” rents. In addition, the ordinance contained historic design review regulations and established a building permit review board consisting of two representatives of the community (one a resident and the other a property owner in the district) and three representatives of the city (one from the Historic Conservation Board, one from the Department of Neighborhood Housing and Conservation and one appointed by the city manager).

The proposal got a cold shoulder everywhere. Gray refused to accept its historic preservation provisions, which prompted Ray and the Historic Conservation Board to withhold their support. The Planning Task Force then suggested that Stevens reintroduce demolition fees and strip the legislation of its historic conservation content, which he did.
But Sy Murray rejected this version of the law, now called the neighborhood housing retention enabling ordinance, as too complicated and too stringent. In addition, the Planning Commission staff discovered that the proposed ordinance violated the city's Housing Allocation Policy (HALP) for the dispersal of low-income housing and would require the passage of five amendments to that policy to permit additional subsidized low-income housing in areas already containing concentrations of such housing.

The Planning Commission reacted to this confusing situation by approving the neighborhood housing retention enabling ordinance and postponing the question of weakening the city's policy for the dispersal of low-income housing. Stevens defended these steps by noting that federal officials under President Ronald Reagan interpreted loosely the regulations on dispersing low-income housing and by invoking the name of Anthony Downs, the consultant who helped the city devise both its balanced neighborhood and HALP strategies. Downs, said Stevens, had now changed his mind and regarded "slums" as necessary for providing low-income people with decent housing.

Trouble developed when the Planning Commission considered the application of the neighborhood housing retention enabling ordinance to the Washington Park area, a step that required separate legislation. Only four members attended the meeting and two of them, including Murray, voted against it, which killed the motion. That infuriated the Over-the-Rhine Planning Task Force, which urged Murray to call for a reconsideration of the question so all Planning Commission members could vote on the issue. Murray agreed to this, and both the motion to reconsider and the law itself passed (the ayes picked up two and the nays but one additional vote).

These actions cleared the way for city council's consideration of both the neighborhood housing retention ordinance and the proposal to make the Washington Park area the first such district. In an effort to placate as many sides as possible, council amended the legislation to give demolition review authority to the Planning Commission and eliminated the certificate scheme and the ban on significantly increasing rents. This version of the law went back to the Planning Commission, which voted it down. That forced council to pass it by a two-thirds vote, which it did,
although the enactment of this version of the law disappointed Buddy Gray, who complained that it gave him only half of what he wanted, stiff anti-demolition rules but no incentives to create more low-income housing.41

Council’s action also displeased some advocates of racial and socio-economic integration, who saw the ordinances as additional steps toward legal separatism, the de facto definition of Over-the-Rhine as an enclave for poor African Americans, alcoholics, and their community organizers. Under these rules persons who demolished low-income housing had to pay a fee of $25 per unit up to a maximum of $250 per building, wait a year after filing an application for a demolition permit, demonstrate that they tried to secure a subsidy to rehabilitate the dwelling for low-income occupancy, and show that denial of the application would deprive them of economic return on the real property. And the ordinance rested on the explicit premise that many low-income residents preferred to live in pockets of poverty for social, economic, or aesthetic reasons, although no one had done a scientific opinion survey of the residents of the city’s low-income areas on this issue or conducted a study of voluntary geographic mobility out of the neighborhoods.42