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Impact of a Community Association on Integrated Suburban Housing Patterns

Stephen J. Alfred* and Charles R. Marcoux**

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS—neighbors who join together in recognition of common interests and sometimes in pursuit of greater political influence—appear and disappear with the ebb and flow of local issues. Some community organizations have concerned themselves with installation of improvements, such as sidewalks and sewers; others, with the quality of municipal services, property maintenance, and compliance with building and zoning laws. More recently, however, such community organizations have sprung into life for the purpose of dealing with the emotionally-charged issue of racial integration in their neighborhoods. This paper will explore the development of *The Lomond Association*, a community organization committed to a belief in racial integration, and will trace its impact on housing patterns within its jurisdiction.

Birth of the Lomond Association

The Lomond Association serves a geographical area coterminous with the Lomond elementary school district in Shaker Heights, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. Shaker Heights long has been known as one of the finest residential areas in the nation. The Lomond area is the second largest of nine such elementary school districts in Shaker Heights, with over 2,000 families living within its boundaries. Almost 1,300 families in the Lomond area reside in single-family homes, ranging in age from 2 to 40 years and in price from \$22,000 to \$40,000. The average single-family home, however, is about 15 to 20 years old and sells for approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000. Over 800 families live in two-family homes, while an insignificant number inhabit the few, small apartment buildings in the area. An average of 130 homes, or just over eight percent, are sold each year and an equally substantial number of rental suites acquire new occupants during the same period. Although the neighborhood is entirely residential, the population is quite diverse in terms of age, education, religion, and income.

In the early 1960's, Lomond residents, like the rest of America, witnessed the emergence of the Negro and his problems as a force on the local and national scene. In the Cleveland area, Negro families were pushing out of the ghetto and moving towards the eastern suburbs.

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By 1962, Negroes had already purchased homes in the southwestern corner of Shaker Heights, including the nationally famous Ludlow community, whose elementary school district straddles the Cleveland-Shaker Heights boundary, and the older Moreland district, economically and architecturally indistinguishable from the adjoining Cleveland area. At the same time, the residential area of Cleveland adjacent to Lomond experienced a rapid turnover from all white to predominantly Negro homeownership.

By the beginning of 1963, it was apparent that Lomond would become racially integrated within a relatively short time. Foremost among the factors contributing to this belief were the existence of heavily-populated Negro neighborhoods immediately adjoining Lomond to the south and to the west; an abundance of attractive single and two-family houses then priced within the means of an ever-growing segment of Cleveland's Negro population; the national reputation of Shaker Heights for excellence in city services and in its school system; and, perhaps most important, the existence within Lomond of a white population whose social, educational, and ethnic make-up was sufficiently adaptable to accept change peacefully.

Faced with this inevitability, many Lomond residents were concerned about the future of their neighborhood. Reflecting this concern, the Parent Teachers Association of the Lomond School formed a discussion group on "The Changing Neighborhood." Stimulated by these discussions, a small group of residents continued study of this subject. They concluded that the advent of racial integration was not necessarily a first step which inexorably would lead to the neighborhood's becoming a Negro ghetto and ultimately result in its deterioration. While rejecting this popular hypothesis, they realized that strong, positive action would have to be taken to prevent their white neighbors from reacting as had so many other residents of formerly white neighborhoods in Cleveland. The Lomond Association was founded for the purpose of providing a formal organization which would address itself principally to this end. Today, some six years later, the Association's goals and its "modus operandi" have evolved to the point of being reasonably sophisticated and complex, but in the beginning the Association was armed only with a firm belief that action was necessary.

The Association's initial efforts were in the field of education. Neighborhood discussion groups were organized, led by trained discussion leaders who were thoroughly briefed on the facts of integration. Efforts were made to destroy the myths about integrated housing—declining property values, deterioration of property, and increased crime—and to emphasize that the facts which led the then-residents to purchase homes in Lomond—outstanding schools and municipal services, convenient transportation, and fine homes at moderate prices—had not

changed, were not likely to change in the near future, and could not readily be found elsewhere. In short, utilizing the "group dynamics" approach, efforts were made to supplant emotion and fantasy with realism and logic, for the purpose of eliminating feelings of concern and panic and of easing the way for the arrival of new Negro residents.

More than 600 persons participated in these discussion sessions in small groups during 1964 and 1965, and they proved highly effective. Participants expressed relief in discovering what their neighbors were thinking and particularly that most were not planning to move. Too often, a concerned resident who saw one "for sale" sign on his block or one Negro family move in thought that a dozen families were leaving and two dozen Negroes moving in. The discussion groups, supplemented by a steady flow of information through newsletters and a system of block representatives, tended to encourage understanding and moderation, rather than panic and fear.

The next major effort of the Association was directed toward the elimination of "for sale" signs, which have an adverse psychological effect on residents as well as prospective purchasers. An attempt to establish a voluntary ban on "for sale" signs was only moderately successful and in the end, the Association turned to City Council and secured passage of an ordinance eliminating all "for sale" signs in Shaker Heights.¹ This ordinance, the first of its kind in the suburban Cleveland area, was well-received by both residents and real estate brokers, and its impact on the integrating areas of Lomond was dramatic. Similar ordinances were subsequently adopted in several nearby suburbs.

Reversal of a Trend

The Association soon realized that the process of integration was simply a new force operating on the old economic principle of supply and demand, and that its efforts to affect the housing market through educational discussion sessions and the sign ordinance were dealing with only the "supply" side of the equation. Even if the Association's efforts to prevent panic selling, which produces an "oversupply" of houses on the market and thus a decline in selling prices, were successful, the normal "supply" of houses would still have to be matched by a continued, acceptable "demand."

The demand side of the real estate market in Lomond was affected by integration in two principal ways. First, there was a lessening of demand by white buyers: fewer white families are interested in purchasing a home in an integrated area than in an unintegrated one. This tendency was severely aggravated in the early and middle 1960's by white real

¹ Shaker Heights, Ohio, Zoning Ordinance ch. 4, § 4-1-(d) (1959), as amended by Ord. no. 63-150 (passed, 1964).

estate brokers who either declined to show homes to white families or seriously curtailed their efforts; by financial institutions which refused to grant mortgage loans or did so only after subtle efforts to dissuade the white purchaser failed; by parents and relatives of young married couples who discouraged such purchases; and by the inevitable rumors which circulated the white community outside of Lomond. Second, in the eyes of Negroes the desirability of the Lomond area of Shaker Heights grew as Negro families bought homes without incident and as Negro brokers increased their activities in the area. Moreover, the reluctance of some white brokers to sell to Negroes disappeared as more Negroes moved in. The result was an increasing Negro demand and a declining white demand, with only a negligible increase in supply. Absent any further forces affecting supply and demand, "integration" would be no more than the brief span of time between the arrival of the first Negro and the departure of the last white.

It was therefore perfectly clear to the Association that it had to increase the demand on the part of white buyers. At the same time, the Negro demand had to be diluted by making other areas available to them. Any effort to prevent Negro purchases in Lomond was rejected as basically immoral and contrary to the Association's concept of a truly integrated community: one in which both Negro and whites are freely moving in and moving out for reasons other than race.

To maintain and increase white demand or, more accurately, to insure a continuing influx of white buyers, the Association enlisted and trained a volunteer worker (called a "housing coordinator") whose function was to stimulate the efforts of white brokers by providing detailed information from a central file on homes for sale in the Lomond area. While this was helpful, its overall impact was slight. Sales figures showed that the percentage of homes sold to Negroes was increasing sharply each year: approximately 15% in 1963, 33% in 1964, and 50% in 1965. The Association recognized that substantially greater efforts had to be made to stimulate white demand and to make a more effective presentation to the available white prospects.

A comprehensive program toward this end was developed in late 1965 and an appeal for necessary funding made to The Cleveland Foundation. Grants made to the Association in 1966 and again in 1967 were used in part to hire a full-time, paid housing coordinator and to provide her with necessary tools. The coordinator's functions were threefold: (1) to seek white prospects through advertisements in newspapers and magazines; through contacts with employers, with particular emphasis on Cleveland's law firms and eleemosynary institutions; and through solicitation of Lomond residents, both owners and renters; (2) to acquaint such prospects with the community, its residents and its facilities, in far greater detail than would be done by a traditional real estate

salesperson who did not live in the community and who more often than not had little understanding of integration and less liking for it; and (3) to maintain close communications with sellers, both present and prospective, and other residents of the community in order to obtain accurate information on sales activity and to keep residents apprised of housing market trends.

In addition, a part-time rental coordinator was hired to provide similar "prospecting" services to some 400 owners of two-family homes in Lomond. The rental coordinator's specific responsibilities also included the preparation and maintenance of up-to-date lists of available suites and the "matching" of rental prospects to the right suite. The rental coordinator talked to hundreds of persons each year about living in Lomond and became, more than anyone else, the "voice of Lomond." This rental program was, and is, particularly important because of its effect on sales efforts, since many Lomond renters ultimately become Lomond buyers.

The Association's overall program of "making integration work" in Lomond was essentially sales oriented. Virtually every effort of the Association and its coordinators was designed to "sell" Lomond to prospective white purchasers as well as to its existing residents, white and black. Lomond was and is blessed with many outstanding physical features and governmental services, but the community also has a special quality of spirit that has added considerably to its "marketability." This spirit is one of friendliness and cohesiveness in the community engendered by the common effort of Negroes and whites through the Association. These virtues were described and extolled in brochures and pamphlets prepared by Lomond residents and distributed to prospective purchasers in direct mailing campaigns and otherwise. Advertising was placed in local and national newspapers and magazines. Numerous letters were sent and calls made by the coordinators to the many new families coming to Cleveland each year. In all of this effort, the countenance of the Association and of its coordinators was always positive—always optimistic.

The root problems of any integrating neighborhood, the fear of white homeowners and prospective purchasers, was attacked with liberal, and sometimes unfounded, doses of optimism. It worked. In 1966, the dramatic three-year decline in the percentage of white purchasers of Lomond homes was virtually halted.

The employment of a paid housing coordinator coincided with a breakthrough in the Association's relationship with the other integrating communities in Shaker Heights—Ludlow, Moreland and Sussex—and with the City government. The associations in late 1965 were in the process of formulating a unified, comprehensive plan for making integration work in their areas when the Shaker Heights Citizens Advisory Commission, composed of five civic leaders appointed by the City Coun-

cil and the Board of Education, announced that it was offering its good offices to induce white real estate brokers to renew their dwindling efforts in the integrated communities. After considerable and sometimes difficult negotiations, an agreement was signed early in 1966 by sixteen brokers dealing in the Shaker Heights area, the Commission, and the four community associations. This agreement, editorially hailed by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*,² envisioned a closer working relationship between the brokers and the associations, resulting in more white sales for the associations and greater financial return for the brokers. The Commission's role was to provide central office space, telephones, secretaries for the associations' housing coordinators, and a full-time executive secretary to facilitate implementation of the agreement.

The Brokers' Agreement lasted for only one year, but during that time it provided a basis for the beginning of cooperation between the community associations on the one hand and the real estate firms and City government on the other. During its life, several vital principles were demonstrated: special techniques, such as those developed by the associations, are required to sell houses to white families in integrated neighborhoods; houses located on predominantly Negro blocks can be sold to white families; and many white families are positively seeking integrated housing. Moreover, the agreement provided a forum for the periodic exchange of ideas among the associations, the brokers, and the Commission, which ultimately led to greater understanding of viewpoints which were often disparate. This foundation has enabled the associations and most of the brokers to continue and, in some cases, even expand their cooperation over the years.

Assistance from the City Government

In many ways, 1966 was a turning point for the Association. Not only were sales to blacks and whites brought into balance but, in addition, the Association's role in both the Lomond and the surrounding communities was accepted and its place secured. The Lomond district was the subject of short studies on successful suburban integration on both local and nationwide television news, after receiving favorable mention in a *Newsweek* magazine report.³

During the following year, 1967, two steps of even greater significance were taken. First, as a means of assisting Negro families seeking to move into all-white areas in other eastern suburbs of Cleveland, the Association founded and helped to finance a group called "Suburban Citizens for Open Housing." This group, acting under the aegis of the names of many prominent Cleveland business and professional men,

² *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Jan. 21, 1966, at 10, col. 1.

³ Checkerboard Communities—Pattern for Living, 67 *Newsweek* (Apr. 25, 1966), at 86, 89.

clergy, and government leaders, supported the principle of open and fair housing for Negroes. Considerable effort was expended in contacting white home sellers and persuading them to list their houses on the open market. The results were encouraging, if not spectacular, and increased during the period that Operation Equality⁴ was participating in this activity.

Second and perhaps more immediately important, the City Council and the Board of Education of Shaker Heights finally agreed to the associations' proposal that the City and School Board assume financial and supervisory authority over the paid housing coordinators of the associations. In a sense, this was a logical outgrowth of the preceding year of joint effort between the associations' housing coordinators and the Citizens Advisory Commission's executive secretary. This cooperative effort appeared to have potential, but it was hindered by duplicated efforts and confusion as to lines of authority. The executive secretary, paid by the Commission, found it difficult to exercise responsibility over housing coordinators employed by the associations. In addition, the associations were deeply concerned about the continued heavy financial burden of such paid housing personnel. The new program commenced in mid-1967 when the Citizens Advisory Commission hired most of the associations' housing coordinators and placed them under the supervision of a new director in office facilities which came to be known as the Shaker Communities Housing Office. Funds needed to operate the Office and to conduct an active prospecting campaign were made available.

The initial policies and operations of the Housing Office were essentially the same as those of the associations. Principal efforts were directed towards obtaining sufficient white buyers for the integrated communities to insure stabilized integration. Negroes seeking Housing Office assistance were advised that housing in integrated areas could be obtained without difficulty through normal commercial channels without any need for special help. However, if the inquiring Negro family were interested in an unintegrated area, they were referred to Fair Housing, Inc., a real estate firm specializing in assisting Negroes to find housing in such areas, or to Operation Equality.

Gradually, the Housing Office assumed its own identity as the coordinators and the director worked together closely. Close liaison was maintained with the associations, however, through both the coordinators and the association presidents, and regular policy-planning meetings were held by the latter with the director. At the suggestion of the director in one of such meetings, The Lomond Association's Housing Com-

⁴ An organization established by the Urban League and Fair Housing Council with Ford Foundation funds and dedicated exclusively to improving the quality of housing available to blacks.

mittee made an extensive study of advertising practices of all of the associations for the purpose of developing an advertising program for the Housing Office. The result, a comprehensive and detailed proposal calling for considerable national and local advertising, was well received and adopted for 1968.

Expanding Role of the Association

By the end of 1967, the future of Lomond as an integrated community looked bright. Its financial burden had been shouldered by the City and School Board and the latter had made a firm commitment to join with the association in helping to make integration work. Moreover, despite a 10% increase in the total number of homes sold during the year, more whites purchased homes in Lomond than Negroes.

These favorable developments made it possible for The Lomond Association to focus its attention on other activities necessary to make a successful integrated community. These activities included the Welcoming Committee, which extends a welcoming hand to all new residents through packets of information, coffee klatches, and periodic evening cocktail parties; the Program Committee, which regularly sponsors a number of social events, such as bike parades, family fairs, and dances, designed to bring the races together not only during the event, but in the planning stages as well; and the Zoning and Maintenance Committee, which seeks to preserve and improve community standards and encourage compliance with the City's building and zoning codes.

Of particular significance was the secondary financing program. Despite favorable trends in the sale of homes, the Association found that many whites seeking housing in Lomond were relatively young professionals whose earning capacity was excellent but whose available cash was often quite limited. Hence, in January 1968, after considerable debate within the organization, the Association decided to seek funds, primarily from residents of the area, to be used for loans to young white families interested in purchasing homes in Lomond. In a very short period, over \$3,000.00 was collected, mostly in \$100 pledges or even smaller contributions. These funds, together with other funds held by the Association, were used to make several short-term loans to whites to purchase homes on heavily integrated blocks. Even more important was the fact that the mere availability of these funds was an instrumental factor in the sale of many other houses. Prospects with limited cash resources were assured of financial help before they inspected homes. When it came time to make an offer to buy, it often turned out that the necessary funds were available elsewhere, frequently from relatives. While not all members of the community approved of the secondary financing program, it did prove a valuable tool in increasing white sales.

Proof of Success

In 1968, the associations' joint efforts with the Citizens Advisory Commission on the Shaker Communities Housing Office were extremely successful, as many of the kinks of the new program were worked out. As a result of this success, the City Council and School Board agreed to a new budget proposed by the associations which called for substantially increased funding and several additional coordinators. The year closed with the dramatic disclosure that the number of white sales in Lomond, after leveling off at approximately 50% of total sales during the three prior years, had risen sharply to 61% of all houses sold, notwithstanding a 5% increase in total sales.

In 1969, this trend continued as 68% of the houses purchased in Lomond during the first six months were bought by white families. This favorable trend was matched by another vitally important development in mid-1969: the Citizens Advisory Commission announced that it was adopting the policy of providing services through the Housing Office to Negro prospects seeking homes in the unintegrated parts of Shaker Heights. Instrumental in this decision was a proposal by the Lomond and Ludlow associations that Suburban Citizens for Open Housing assist the Housing Office in serving those Negro families seeking housing in substantially unintegrated areas. Both Lomond and Ludlow pledged funds to pay the salary of a full-time housing coordinator for Suburban Citizens. This represents the beginning of an organization which it is hoped will be as successful in obtaining homes for Negroes as the Lomond and Ludlow associations have been in stabilizing their neighborhoods.

After 6½ years of integration, Negroes continue to move into Lomond with relative ease, while the flow of white buyers has been maintained at a high level. Approximately 20% of the homes in Lomond are now owned by Negroes and a number of additional Negro families rent suites in two-family homes. The Negro population at Lomond School is approximately 25%. The statistics on sales during the 6½ years of operation of the Association may be summarized as follows:

Year	Negro Sales	White Sales	Total Sales	Negro %	White %
1963	13	74	87	15%	85%
1964	43	85	128	33%	67%
1965	59	60	119	50%	50%
1966	58	56	114	51%	49%
1967	65	66	131	50%	50%
1968	53	83	136	39%	61%
1969	17	46*	63*	32%	68%
Totals	308	470	778	38%	62%

* Six months' figures

These statistics indicate an extremely successful pattern of integration. White families in large numbers continue to move into Lomond every year, while Negroes experience no undue obstacles in buying or renting there.

But the statistics do not tell the whole story. The Lomond community has accepted integration in a mature fashion. There have never been any "incidents" or even opposition groups. There is, however, more than the absence of negative factors. Negroes live on virtually all of Lomond's twenty-one streets in harmony with their white neighbors. Negro and white families participate together to achieve jointly determined goals in such community activities as the Association, the P.T.A., and the various scouting groups. Negro children have served as student council presidents at Lomond School, where scholastic achievement is higher than ever. Lomond Elementary School was selected as one of the nation's ten top elementary schools by a panel of educational experts, as reported in the September 1968 *Ladies' Home Journal*⁵ and noted by Congressman Charles A. Vanik in the Congressional Record of September 4, 1968.⁶

Conclusion

Racially-integrated housing patterns can be accomplished in other communities, and with far greater ease now than in 1963, when The Lomond Association was formed. Integration in residential areas has much greater acceptance now than only a few years ago, not only by white homeowners, but also by real estate brokers, lending institutions, and Negro prospects. This improved attitude is the result of increased understanding, the demonstration that integration can occur successfully, as in Lomond, and the passage of fair housing laws by state and national governments. It is to be hoped that the progressive pattern established by The Lomond Association can be implemented with similar success in other communities.

⁵ Ten Top Elementary Schools, 85 *Ladies' Home J.* (Sept., 1968), at 72, 74.

⁶ 114 Cong. Rec. No. 142, E7661, E7662 (1968) (remarks of Congressman Vanik).