

Interviews

Rural Homelessness

10-7-1999

Interview with Paige Price

Anne Smetak

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.kenyon.edu/rh_interviews

Recommended Citation

Smetak, Anne, "Interview with Paige Price" (1999). *Interviews*. 6.
https://digital.kenyon.edu/rh_interviews/6

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Rural Homelessness at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

RH-AS-A100799.A

Anne M. Smetak

Interview with Paige Price of the Knox County Planning Office
115 East High Street, Mt Vernon

A. Smetak: This is October seventh, I'm here interviewing Paige Price in the County Planning Office of Knox County. I'm just going to start with a few background questions. How long have you lived in Mount Vernon?

Ms. Price: Actually, my husbands from here. I lived here five years, after going to Ohio State, living in Columbus, and then went back to graduate school. And I just came back...just over two years ago. So, about seven years on and off.

AS: Do you think you'll stay in the area?

PP: Probably, because my husband's a veterinarian, and he's probably going to be a partner in a local clinic. So...they're building a clinic, so I don't think we're going anywhere for a while.

AS: How long have you worked here?

PP: Two years.

AS: What position do you hold here?

PP: The director of regional planning.

AS: Have you always held that position?

PP: Um hum. It's the first...there wasn't really that position before, and after the completion of Focus 2100 (the comprehensive plan for the county), it was kind of...stimulated by that plan to sort of form this position. So I'm kind of the first person to ever have it. So it didn't really exist before.

AS: What do you think of when you think of rural housing?

PP: G-d, can I be totally honest? Manufactured housing, modular construction, which are two different things actually, now. That's becoming more and more the trend I think, is the prefabricated homes, that you see brought in in pieces. Different construction methods in a few of them, but very similar. Primarily I think that's because of the affordability of it. A lot of these places...I mean it's almost like they're their own banks, they provide the financing. I don't know if you've ever driven to 71 through 229 to Marango, that way...there's one right there off the highway. I mean they have a huge sign up that says, whatever, 6.99% financing. So if you can get your piece of property, it's quick, convenient, and with some new legislation, there are some new definitions for manufactured housing. It's considered the same as a stick-build house

now in the state of Ohio as far as how it's taxed, how it's zoned. So the lines are becoming a lot closer.

AS: So would you consider prefabricated housing in the same line as mobile home housing?

PP: No. Mobile homes are different. Mainly because, there's exact definitions for all of those, but really the mobile home that we think of - the old aluminum with the wheels and stuff - I think they stopped making those in about 1972/1974. So there are still a few of those around that exist, but I think the affordability of some of these new types of housing has kind of replaced that. I don't even think...well they don't make them anymore. So unless someone buys a used one or moves it from somewhere else or buys it in a mobile home park, you don't really see that as much. But some people might consider, you know people have different versions or what they think is a manufactured home, a trailer. But if it's on a permanent foundation and everything anymore, that's pretty much considered a house.

AS: Do you think there is rural homelessness in Knox County?

PP: I really don't have a good handle on that. I think there's a disparity in housing types. I think that it's usually one end or the other. There's the really high end housing or more of these affordable types of housing. But I think there's not a lot of in-between stuff going up. As far as rural homelessness, I really wouldn't have...I think there's a lot of poverty, and different stages of poverty, what people would call as rural poverty. Maybe because people still work, they may not be on welfare per se, but I think there's a lot of working poor. I don't know about homelessness.

AS: What exactly does your office do in the county?

PP: We are basically, I'd like to compare it to the public library of planning and land information. So we're kind of a service-oriented office for the townships, the villages, and the city of Mt. Vernon. We keep track of all the zoning. We keep a record of it even though everybody...it's their own responsibility, but we keep a public record of it here. We also do flood plain management, as far as the county's under the federal emergency management - NFIP - which is Nation Flood Insurance Program regulations. So if you're going to build a house in any type of a flood plain, or any type of structure, you would need to go through a permit process with this office to make sure it's built at a safe level, as safe as possible to kind of prevent damages and things like that. Other than that, we offer comprehensive planning services to the townships and villages as far as completing comprehensive plans, land-use plans, and helping with zoning, rewriting zoning books and new regulations and things like that. But the local control remains - we don't have any legislative or police power per se. We're just basically service-oriented.

AS: I'm guessing that your office doesn't have a set definition of rural homelessness.

PP: No, because we have another...there's a couple different agencies that are kind of multi-county based that handle things like that. One's called Kno-Ho-Co, I can't give you the it's K-N-O-H-O-C-O. Do you know the...Knox Homes Coschocton County, but they handle different

issues related to how...related to providing different housing types - senior citizens. They do emergency shelter programs for people that may have lost their jobs, and kind of a transition period that need assistance or need a place to stay. And then there's also Metro Housing Office, which handles...subsidized or low-income places to rent or housing for...I don't know if they serve the whole county or not, I'm assuming they do. They're located on the Service Center of County Office building across the street. So they might be a good source to talk to. We work with them...we're a clearing house for public grants, as far as the regional planning commission which is made up of different members of the townships and villages. As far as giving...it's kind of a public hearing process for grant monies that come into the county and those agencies are two agencies that often receive different federal money and things that...we kind of provide recommendations about, but we don't decide whether they get it or not or anything. They'll call me frequently as far as needing information to complete grant applications to get money for different programs.

AS: When you're working with people that are coming in, have you noticed any sort of influx of people moving in from Columbus?

PP: Yeah, I would say that most of the people moving in are moving either from Columbus or, actually Cleveland/Akron area, depending on what part of the county you're in. Then you have Apple Valley, and that's a big attraction especially for retired people. If they retire from their jobs it doesn't really matter, but their coming kind of from everywhere - depending on what ties they have to the county. They might have kids that are going to school here or something like that. Yeah, we're seeing a big traditionally agricultural communities, now are having...what they want to call the outsiders. Before you would go, there would just be people that have lived there all their lives. But now we're really starting...especially the trustees tell me...the township trustees say that's something new that they're having to deal with, because it's a different set of problems - the conflicts between people who have lived here forever and then people that just moved here. It's becoming a strong enough influence that they're having to really address that problem. People are used to different services, if they moved from Columbus or one of the suburbs, then they may be used to out here.

AS: A lot of the information I've read says that when people move in from urban areas, land prices are increased, and the cost of housing in rural communities. Do you think that's true in Knox County?

PP: Oh definitely, because agriculture is actually...has a very low value as far as the taxable value or resale value. There's the highest or best use of the land...and usually development is considered the highest and best use of the land if that's physically possible. If you go look at what someone pays for a 200 acre field, what they pay per acre in taxes now, if it's in agricultural production as opposed to, if they sell of that one acre lot for a house, it's going to be a lot different, the appraised value of those two different things. What you see is most farmers are people holding on to property just based on that fact of what they're eventually probably going to be able to sell it for development. They're not sitting around waiting, "Oh, I'm going to be able to sell this farm to some 25 yr old farmer and be able to retire". That's not...I would say the majority of them do not look at it that way. It's kind of...most agricultural land - I mean it's very sad - is kind of in holding for...it's being held in speculation for development.

AS: Do you see the farmland moving into more rural areas, or do you think it's just disappearing?

PP: I think a lot of it...a lot of farmers are elderly, or they're getting ready to retire, and they usually...their kids are either doing something else, or they have no interest in the farm. So it's kind of...and with the land prices there's no one to buy that for a farm because nobody can afford to do that. So most people, unless they're going to keep farming or they have a son or daughter that's going to continue, I mean that's what's going to happen to the property. Because most of those farmers have all of their assets tied up in that business, that's their business is the land. So it's a hard problem.

AS: Do you know what sort of government support is available for farmers?

PP: There's a lot fewer programs than there used to be, I know. And probably if you talk to someone at the farm service agency here in the county, which is USDA, Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, he would have an idea of the current programs, but I know there are a lot of programs that are involved like Set Aside, kind of price support - a little bit here and there for commodities and for damages like if there is a flood or a bad drought. But other than that there's really...compared to what we've traditionally provided for other businesses and industry as far as tax breaks, tax abatements, incentives to stay in business or relocate. We really don't provide the same thing for agriculture. I guess part of, the state's starting to look at, is starting a purchase of development rights program. Actually trying to put some money back into keeping people farming by trying to stabilize land prices. So a farmer in exchange for putting an agricultural easement on his property and making the commitment and this land will stay in farming whether I'm farming it or not, or whether I sell it to someone else. Paying him that difference between that agricultural value and that value for building a house per acre. It's kind of a concept that's very strange to other people, but if you think about all the money, that public money that's gone into big business or industry over the years, it's really only fair that if you want to keep agriculture as an industry that you need to put some money back into it. Then that would then allow that farm to remain at it's farm value and if a younger person wanted to get into farming they would realistically be able to finance it and do it. This idea that the free market is running everything isn't the right idea because it's not. Things are being dictated. And you look at all the programs out there for first time home...if you build a house you get all these breaks. And sometimes it becomes almost more of a financial advantage to get a home loan and build a new house out on, wherever, than it does to, let's say buy a house in downtown Mt. Vernon and renovate it. You're deal, and you're money and all of your incentives are to go build this certain house with this certain square footage.

AS: So it pushes towards new development.

PP: Yeah, more incentives I think are given to that than anything else. And there's actually, I don't have a copy of it, there's actually a bill in congress right now where they're trying to create a big tax incentive for people that renovate historic or older properties in certain neighborhoods. So if you have a designated, within a village or municipality, historic district or an area of historic importance, you can then be compensated for moving to that area and get some tax

breaks for working on those properties. So I think it's not just the farmland, but other incentives like that for people who are looking for housing, to make some of these urban areas get rehabilitated also.

AS: Is there any push to develop low-income housing in the area? Perhaps using Low-Income Housing Tax Credits?

PP: Here, in Knox County I don't know of any. But I know in other places, especially in the east, some of these farm land preservation efforts have also revolved around more dense developments if you are going to develop. Then let's develop more dense developments and try to preserve more open space. And part of these developments should also include a certain amount of different types of housing, not just the traditional suburban housing is the same income level, the same price of houses. And I mean if you look in the Columbus paper, it's like houses from 150 - 200,000 and that's what every house is in the development. And the push has been, especially in the east because they're more densely populated, it's become more expensive, especially if you want to live around Washington or parts of Maryland.

Low-income housing isn't really the right definition. Someone who's just like a single school teacher can't afford to live, you know to have a home. So I think when we think of, I think people generally think low-income housing means you have to be on welfare or something, and I think what we need to start talking about is affordable housing for all different types of people: maybe the widowed retired person, the single person starting out and they may be a professional but. So the idea is mixed uses and trying to push for that and not just different income levels and different types of people but also different uses, trying to put some commercial nearby where you can walk to it so you're cutting down on people driving. So there's a push for that in like Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia area. But it's kind of a really new concept here because people think, there's this stigma of what low-income housing means. And as soon as you try to propose something like that, people have this image that it's going to be like gangs, ex-drug dealer people, the thing you see on tv, and in an urban area, and that's the image people get. And I think it's just an education process about...I like affordable housing so much better than low-income because everybody's coming from a different background and has different income levels and it doesn't really define who you are. Everybody's not defined by how much money they make, I guess that's the thing, so they should have the same opportunities.

And I actually just went to a conference in Columbus and they's actually a non-profit groups, especially stemmed through churches. The catholic church, the diocese in Columbus, it's either in Columbus or Cleveland, and actually I think the organization's called Bread. And they're pushing towards this type of idea; providing different housing types, not segregated off, but mixed in. And how that's part of solving the problem of this whole urban sprawl thing. There's a lot of talk about it right now, but doing it is a different thing. I guess we've only scratched the level. I mean in New Albany it's like, "Well, if you put duplexes in that are however much they are within our Georgia mansions that that's providing different types of housing and I think we need to look at it in a broader picture.

AS: I think we've covered just about everything. Can you think of anything else I haven't brought up about rural poverty, rural homelessness, rural housing?

PP: Just that I think the whole issue of, rural poverty I think, like I said I think there's this stigma

that you think of like the appalatian region and these children living in shacks. But I think that there's a wider spread, like the working poor. And even some of the people involved in agriculture, if you really took it down to the numbers they're kind of almost at a poverty level, except that they have the benefits of where they live and what they do for a living that kind of enhances their quality of life, but I think it's hard to put statistics on it. That's one thing I get so mad about when you hear somebody running for president or something and you think, "Oh, we have this many more people working", or when you hear about a new business being brought in as industry that's going to provide this many jobs. But they don't talk about, well what are these people going to be paid, are they going to be 200 \$5/hr jobs or whatever. Is it going to be really beneficial to families, is somebody going to be able to support a family off this so-called job that you're bringing to the community. So I think it tends to get covered up in rural areas 'cause it's like, "Well, everybody's got jobs out here". But their quality of life and their, the poverty level is there it's just [not quite noticed].

AS: And that's what I'm trying to bring out...

PP: I just, I don't think the research has been done on it. And I don't know if it has anything to do that we don't have, there's not the racial minorities aren't as high in rural areas so it's like, "Well, it's just middle-class white people", or if there's just a misconception about it. Like I said I went to that one seminar and they have all these statistics on different races on urban areas, and where they tend to be located as opposed to suburban, but they don't really talk about rural. No one really had addressed that. I'd be interested in the white poor in rural areas, what are the rates of that? Or different income levels, and I don't think the research has been done.

AS: Would you be willing to talk to me again if I come up with some more questions?

PP: Sure. I might be able to come up with some people for you to talk to that might be able to help you more.

AS: Thank you very much.