

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

DRAFT

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Boston-Secor Houses

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

name of related multiple property listing N/A

## Location

street & number 3475, 3550, 3555 Bivona Street, 2175-2185 Reed's Mill Lane

not for publication

city or town Bronx

vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 005 zip code 10475

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national    \_\_\_ statewide    X local

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register                      \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register                      \_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
5	0	buildings
1	0	sites
		structures
		objects
6	0	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- DOMESTIC / multiple dwelling
- SOCIAL / meeting hall
- LANDSCAPE / plaza
- LANDSCAPE / parking lot

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- DOMESTIC / multiple dwelling
- SOCIAL / meeting hall
- LANDSCAPE / plaza
- LANDSCAPE / parking lot

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- MODERN MOVEMENT / Late Modern

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- foundation: CONCRETE
- walls: BRICK
- roof: ASPHALT
- other: STONE/Granite

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

**Summary Paragraph**

Boston-Secor Houses is a large, high-rise housing project built between 1967 and 1969 in the Eastchester neighborhood of the Bronx, Bronx County, New York. The development, which is situated on a 17.4-acre site bounded by the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Dyre Avenue Line, and Boller Avenue to the west, Boston Road to the north, Steinwick Avenue to the east, and Reed's Mill Lane to the south, consists of four contributing T-shaped towers (twelve-, thirteen-, sixteen- and seventeen-stories tall) and a landscaped site. Organized into two superblocks, Boston-Secor Houses was built for the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and designed in a simplified Late Modern style by the architectural firm Ames Associates and landscape architect Leo A. Novick. The 538-unit project's four discrete towers (one with a connected, one-story community center) are surrounded by active and passive recreations areas, three parking lots, and other formal and naturalistic landscaped areas. The buildings have been in continuous use as residences with a variety of community services since its construction. Few alterations have been made to the site and buildings and the complex retains a high degree of integrity to its original design.

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**Narrative Description**

*Location*

Boston-Secor Houses' neighborhood of Eastchester is the northeastern most neighborhood in the Bronx. Bisected diagonally from southwest to northeast by the IRT Dyre Avenue Line, Eastchester is divided between a residential northwestern half and a primarily light-industrial southeastern half, the latter being where this project is located. The neighborhood is predominantly low-rise, with attached and semi-detached single-family houses, auto repair garages, and one-story retail as typical building types.

Though Boston-Secor Houses is the sole public housing project in Eastchester proper, nearby housing projects include the Baychester Houses (1964) and Edenwald Houses (Rogers & Butler, 1953, NRHP Eligible) in the adjacent Edenwald neighborhood to the west. Two publicly funded cooperative high-rise projects—Mark Terrace (1966) and the much larger Co-Op City (Herman Jessor, 1971-73)—are located in the blocks to the south.

*Site Plan & Landscape*

A towers-in-the-park project, Boston-Secor Houses has an informally arranged site plan that is responsive to the irregular shape of the property. The apartment towers are situated along the east and west sides of the curving Bivona Street, an arrangement that creates staggered views of the buildings in relation to one another. West of Bivona Street, Buildings 1 and 2 (3475-85 and 3555-65 Bivona Street) form an arc parallel to the curve of the street; while east of the street, Buildings 3 and 4 (3550-60 Bivona Street and 2175-85 Reed's Mill Lane) are set at a 90-degree angle from each other to face the perpendicular intersection with Reed's Mill Lane.

The landscape is generally arranged with the spaces facing the street devoted to passive uses and the spaces behind the towers used for active recreation and parking. The four buildings are each generously set back from the street, with landscaped oak groves (today also planted with other tree varieties) filling in the space between

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the buildings and the street. The groves are bounded on their outer edges by broad walkways (doubling as fire lanes) that provide access to and between the four towers and are lined with non-historic sitting areas with simple scored concrete paving. (These sitting areas replaced original play areas ca. 2002.) A lawn at the northern edge of the property features a low, rocky ledge.

The areas outside of the perimeter formed by the four residential towers are used for various recreational amenities and resident parking. The large open space west of Buildings 1 and 2 includes a softball field, basketball court, and two parking lots, while the smaller open space east of Buildings 3 and 4 includes a play area, parking lot, and non-historic sitting area. The primary playgrounds for the complex are located between Buildings 1 and 2 and Buildings 3 and 4. These two main playgrounds feature non-historic play equipment but retain the location of the original main playgrounds. While the footprint of the large playground between Buildings 1 and 2 has been somewhat modified, the playground between Buildings 3 and 4 retains its historic curving shape centered upon a sprinkler feature. Originally, the project also included two shuffleboard courts which were replaced by a sitting area and a fenced-off space circa 2002.

A small, utilitarian, detached maintenance garage faces the parking lot to the rear of Building 3. Although it does not appear on the 1966 site plans, the garage has matching exterior finishes to the rest of the project that support its originality to the site; the garage is contributing. The garage is clad in an identical buff-brick to the residential towers and features aluminum parapet flashing and two corrugated stainless-steel roll-down garage doors. On its north side, the garage is accessed by a utilitarian steel door flanked by two steel windows protected by steel grilles.

The street frontages and walkways of Boston-Secor Houses are both lined by non-historic picketed steel fencing; entrances to the walkways from the street are bracketed by non-historic decorative steel newel cages. Historically, the street frontages and walkways were lined by chain-linked and post-and-chain fences, respectively. The street frontages and walkways are also dotted with evenly spaced tree plantings, while the fenced-in lawns and groves have naturalistic tree plantings.

*Exterior*

The four buildings of Boston-Secor Houses are all clad in a matching buff-brick masonry with select areas of glazed white brick. Though each of Boston-Secor's four towers share a T-plan configuration with identical footprints, the towers vary in height, with Building 1 having sixteen stories, Building 2 seventeen stories, Building 3 twelve stories, and Building 4 thirteen stories. Built of reinforced concrete, the apartment buildings feature simply designed, symmetrical primary facades with an alternating pattern of slightly recessed and protruding bays to maximize light and air. The exteriors are clad with buff brick except at the recessed bays where the spaces between the windows are finished with glazed white brick, providing a vertical emphasis to the buildings. The center section of each tower forms a shallowly-projecting pavilion with the main residential entrance at its base; the center pavilion itself is lined by narrow side-facing bays of small double-hung windows.

The rear elevations of each tower each feature a central ell three bays long; as on the main facade, this central projection is flanked on either side by recessed bays accented with white brick. At the intersection of the central ell and the flanking white-brick bays, a corner projection features corner windows at each floor.

The main residential entrances for each tower are recessed within a single-story portico. The residential entrances are the most richly finished areas on the exterior, with black and grey granite-faced square columns and grey granite entry surrounds. The entry infill itself is non-historic, with NYCHA-standard stainless steel and glass, and is covered by a historic raw-concrete canopy.



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Windows throughout the towers are a mix of non-historic aluminum double-hung windows of varying size; these appear in both ganged and non-ganged configurations. The windows all have a bronze-toned finish and retain their historic slate sills. Though the historic windows were also aluminum double-hung, the original full-size windows had a two-over-two configuration with a single horizontal muntin bisecting the upper and lower sashes.

Building 2 is unique among the Boston-Secor ensemble for housing the project's water tower atop its roof. The water tower is housed within an octagonal buff-brick bulkhead (originally with glazed white-brick decorative panels, since removed) that cantilevers above the rectangular, smaller-footprint elevator machine room, which is two stories tall and present atop all of the towers. Each building's roof is lined by a historic roof rail composed of aluminum-pipe posts and rails with stainless-steel chain-link infill.

Boston-Secor's community center (3540 Bivona Street) is located within a historic first-story wing extending south from Building 3. Covered by a concrete canopy with a stainless-steel fascia, the community center's entrance is located south of Building 3's residential entrance. Atop the canopy are freestanding historic stainless-steel letters reading "BOSTON-SECOR COMMUNITY CENTER." The community center entry is a non-historic stainless-steel panel door with non-historic stainless-steel-frame sidelights to its right side and a historic white glazed-brick transom. Two shallowly recessed glazed white-brick bays flank the community center's entry to the south; each of these three bays is separated by projecting buff-brick piers. South of these bays, the most prominent street-facing element of the community center is the double-height meeting room, with its glazed white-brick watercourse and fascia and full-height columnar windows rising between. The meeting room's windows are made up of historic aluminum-frame, vertically ganged awning windows with a bronze-toned finish. The buff-brick piers that stretch between the meeting room's windows protrude one wythe outward from the watercourse and fascia, providing the building with a sense of Late Modern muscularity.

Beyond the meeting room, the rear of the community center is a one-story addition constructed ca. 2000. This small addition is clad in a similarly toned buff brick as the rest of the tower, with a recessed soldier course of grey brick distinguishing it from the original building. The community center also features a historic concrete-slab terrace at Building 3's rear central ell.

*Interior*

The residential entries to each of the four Boston-Secor towers open into a residential lobby. The residential lobbies share matching historic designs, layouts, and finishes between each building but employ two different color schemes. The lobbies are each finished with terrazzo floors, ceramic tile walls, and plaster ceilings. The ceramic tile walls alternate between running and stack tile bonds, with the two walls facing the entry and the elevator bank implementing tricolor tile schemes that complement the color scheme of each respective lobby. The lobbies in Buildings 1 and 3 have primarily aquamarine tile walls with taupe- and buff-colored trim and taupe terrazzo flooring, while the lobbies in Buildings 2 and 4 have light-pink tile walls with taupe- and buff-colored trim and buff terrazzo flooring. The terrazzo floors of each lobby are divided into square units separated by metal divider strips.

The lobbies are L-shaped spaces, with broad front sections housing the residential mailboxes on each wall perpendicular to the entry infill and a tile-clad structural pillar at center. Beyond the front section, the lobbies narrow into their elevator lobbies, with the elevator banks at right and an apartment door at the rear wall. Each lobby is also bisected by a lateral public hall between the front section and the elevator lobby that access ground-floor residential units. These halls are raised above the floor plane of the lobbies by two steel-treaded terrazzo steps and share the ceramic-tile walls and terrazzo floor finishes of the lobbies. Each building also has

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a perambulator room on its first floor, varying in footprint, located just left of the lobby, and entered through a separate exterior door at the left end of the front portico. Building 3 varies from the layout of the other three towers by lacking a public hall leading to the right where the community center is located.

At the upper floors, the elevator halls feature buff-colored ceramic tile walls, while the residential corridors are lined with painted concrete-block walls. Floors throughout the upper-floor public halls are clad with either historic asphalt tile (e.g., in Building 3) or non-historic vinyl tile (e.g., in Building 2). The historic asphalt tile appears in an alternating color scheme, primarily marbled aquamarine in color interspersed with marbled buff tiles. The non-historic vinyl tile is a NYCHA-standard dark red. The upper-floor hall ceilings are painted concrete slabs. Each tower has two fire stairs, which are bundled in a scissor configuration at the building's core, opposite the elevator hall from the elevator bank. The fire stairs have utilitarian finishes including concrete steps, painted concrete-block walls, and cylindrical steel handrails.

Each building has nine apartments per typical floor, comprising three one-bedroom apartments, three two-bedroom apartments, two three-bedroom apartments, and one four-bedroom apartment. Floor plans vary by building on the first floors, with Building 1 housing four units on its first floor (with the south wing occupied by the boiler room) and Buildings 2 and 4 housing six units, including one five-bedroom apartment; Building 3 has no residential units on its first floor (with the south wing occupied by the management offices and the north and east wings by the community center).

The apartments are accessed from public halls by historic steel slab doors. Apartments throughout the project vary in layout but share simple, utilitarian finishes including plaster walls, non-historic vinyl-tile flooring, and painted concrete-slab ceilings. Some kitchens retain their original plywood cabinetry, and some closets retain their historic wood doors with brass knobs. The bathrooms have historic small square-tile flooring with white marble thresholds and plaster walls and ceilings.

Unique among the four towers, the ground floor of Building 3 features the project's management office and community center. The management office, entered via a separate exterior door just north of the residential lobby, is centered upon a small waiting room with historic, flat plaster wall and painted concrete ceiling finishes and non-historic vinyl-tile flooring; the manager's office is accessed by a historic wood-panel door. The community center, meanwhile, opens into a small, enclosed vestibule, with a historic buff quarry-tile floor, that leads into the lobby. The community center lobby's walls are clad with historic glazed ceramic-block. Ceilings throughout the community center alternate between plaster hung ceilings and painted concrete slabs; floors are clad in non-historic vinyl tile. Beyond the lobby, the community center corridors and clubrooms feature concrete-block walls and non-historic vinyl-tile floors; some areas in the clubrooms have historic asphalt-tile. Corridors built for community center's circa-2000 rear extension are distinguished by their painted square, stack-bond concrete-block walls. The community center's centerpiece is the double-height meeting room that projects from its southwest corner. The meeting room, a multi-purpose space that can also be used as an auditorium or gymnasium, features a rhythmically angled hung-plaster ceiling shaped to accommodate the full-height columnar windows on the west wall. The meeting room's west wall is clad in running-bond buff brick that matches the exterior brickwork. At the south end of the meeting room is a projecting stage, which is accessed by a pair of symmetrical stairs to either side; the recessed portion of the stage is flanked by a pair of storage rooms. The meeting room's floor is covered in non-historic vinyl.

*Integrity*

Boston-Secor Houses is an intact example of a complex illustrating the government initiative for high-density public housing in the outer Bronx and exhibits a high degree of integrity. Though minimal changes to the

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project over the course of its history are apparent—including the installation of new windows and entry infill, a sympathetic enlargement and renovation of the community center, and the replacement of select landscape features—character-defining elements of the original layout, design, and finishes are intact. Typical for a public-housing project of its age, the minor alterations to Boston-Secor Houses over the course of its history reflect the New York City Housing Authority’s evolving, often standardized renovation practices, as well as the changing needs of residents.

Through its Late Modern design, with buff-brick and glazed white-brick facades, richly appointed porticoes and lobbies, and double-height community center, Boston-Secor Houses remains a highly legible landmark of New York City’s public housing architecture of the late 1960s. In their interior layout and features, including original floor plans, circulation, and public space finishes, the towers and community center continue to reflect Boston-Secor Houses’ design as a late-period towers-in-the-park public housing project in New York City.

*Resource List*

The following is a list that includes the building number and addresses of all of the buildings in the district, and the one contributing site, along with their notable associated features. All of the buildings (with the exception of a small, detached maintenance garage) are of an identical building type, yet the interior configuration differences are noted below.

Building 1—3475-3485 Bivona Street, 1 contributing building

- Type: Sixteen-story T-plan tower
- Boiler Room within ground floor of south wing

Building 2—3555-3565 Bivona Street, 1 contributing building

- Type: Seventeen-story T-plan tower
- Original water tower centered on roof

Building 3—3550-3560 Bivona Street, 1 contributing building

- Type: Twelve-story T-plan tower with parallel one-story wing
- Management Office (3570 Bivona Street) within ground floor of north wing
- Community Center (3540 Bivona Street) within ground floor of south and east wings

Building 4—2175-2185 Reed’s Mill Lane, 1 contributing building

- Type: Thirteen-story T-plan tower

Detached maintenance garage—No address listed (behind 3550-3560 Bivona Street), 1 contributing building

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

**Period of Significance**

1967-1969

**Significant Dates**

1969

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Ames Associates (architect)

Leo A. Novick (landscape architect)

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance is based on the dates of construction of the housing complex, 1967-1969.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Boston-Secor Houses is **locally significant** under **Criterion A** in the area of *social history* and *politics/government* as an example of a late-twentieth century public housing project in the Bronx that illustrates important themes in NYCHA's efforts to provide integrated housing, stem white flight, and counter racism in outer borough projects in the 1960s. The complex was built in 1967-69 and designed by the architectural firm Ames Associates, with a landscape design by Leo A. Novick. The district is located in the Eastchester neighborhood, on the northeastern edge of the borough and consists of four high rise towers, a maintenance building and a landscaped site. Planned in 1950 as low-scale garden style apartments in the character of the community, the project was first opposed by local groups who fought against a more inclusive neighborhood, then stymied by increasing costs. A revised design, which consisted of high-height towers, was opposed again, this time by almost all groups: those who didn't want any housing, those who didn't want Blacks and immigrants in the neighborhood, and those who opposed the less than desirable "tower in the park" design. By the time the development of the towers was complete in 1969, white flight was in full force, and both the neighborhood and even the Williamsbridge branch of the NAACP opposed the project, the latter believing that its proximity to other increasingly segregated developments would lead to blockbusting. Like most of NYCHA's outer borough projects in this era, Boston-Secor consisted of high-rise towers widely spaced on a landscaped site, NYCHA's interpretation of the tower in the park model. This prototype, while favored by NYCHA since the 1940s, was just beginning to fall out of favor with a new generation of planners and architects, who favored smaller buildings that were better integrated into neighborhoods. Boston-Secor Houses reminds us that good intentions are often not enough to untangle the complicated issues involved with racism, design and city planning in providing affordable public housing. The period of significance is 1967 to 1969, encompassing the construction of the complex.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

*Evaluating Public Housing*<sup>1</sup>

The history of public housing in America is an extremely complex subject. Issues relating to housing inequality date to the Republic's earliest days, as do the moral and social values associated with home and specific ideas about family and community relationships. The cost of land, widely differing site characteristics, religious, social and class distinctions have also raised complicated questions about who may and should live where, how they should live, and who is responsible for housing the citizen.

In New York City, the late-nineteenth century flood of immigrants from eastern and central Europe followed by the migration of African Americans from the south in the early twentieth century focused attention on inadequate living conditions in poorly built and overcrowded tenements, leading reformers to lobby for model tenement laws and architectural experiments. Despite good intentions, these had little effect, as the ten groups of model tenements built between 1855 and 1905 were vastly outnumbered by the 50,000 tenements built in the same period.<sup>2</sup> Yet, housing was still seen as the purview of private industry and associated with capitalism. None of these reformers, architects, or builders ever considered that the government would build or subsidize

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<sup>1</sup> This section was prepared by the NYSHPO

<sup>2</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 123.

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housing.<sup>3</sup> That role was a product of the Great Depression, which precipitated a critical housing shortage, and it was primarily intended to create jobs in the building industry (1934, National Industrial Recovery Act, Public Works Administration). It wasn't until 1937, with the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, which stated a clear federal commitment to providing decent housing for the American poor, and the subsequent US Housing Act of 1949, a response to the post-WWII housing crisis, which set aside large sums for public housing units and linked housing to slum clearance, that building and subsidizing public housing, became a government mandate.

This legislation came about through the involvement of and compromises among multiple agencies, lobbyists, political figures, idealists, and reformers and thus embodied multiple contradictions. What some saw as a benevolent program, others (realtors in particular) saw as socialism; still others sensed it as paternalism, while some community leaders and scholars perceived it as discrimination and segregation. To varying degrees, all of these assessments were correct. For example, programs funding housing were linked with provisions requiring that the new housing be segregated. Government programs indeed created decent housing complexes in urban areas for Black veterans, but other programs denied them mortgages and neighborhoods fought hard to exclude them, virtually preventing them from living anywhere else. And while government agencies continually sought to improve building and site designs in cooperation with noted architects and landscape firms, redlining, neighborhood protests, and underfunding restricted the developments to lower budget buildings on constrained sites. Conversely, some local citizens and groups fully participated in local housing development and others embraced the policies that resulted in segregation because "all-Black" neighborhoods provided them with a substantial political voting bloc.

Thus, the history of public housing in the United State does not follow a path of consistent policy but is marked by complexity and contradiction, a fact acknowledged by scholars. Catherine Bauer (1905-1964), for example, was one of the most well-known housing scholars and reformers in the country. Her 1934 book, *Modern Housing*, was a passionate argument for a public housing program based on the Modern architecture that she had seen and studied in Europe. Subsequently, she was the primary author of the 1937 US Housing Act and a director of research for the United States Housing Authority, which administered the act. However, near the end of her long and varied career, in 1957, she wrote "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing" for *Architectural Record*, a detailed and self-critical examination of the program's failure to solve the perceived problems. In recent years, numerous contemporary scholars in different disciplines have provided varied and engaging perspectives on government housing programs.

New York City's public housing program is the largest in the country and almost impossible to compare with any others. Over nearly a century, the New York City Housing Authority (the first public housing agency in the country, established in 1934) built more than 300 public housing complexes under different programs, using combinations of local, state, and federal funding sources and diverse architects and in a great many different forms and locations, evoking a wide range of responses, from praise to protest.

The New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) acknowledges the fraught history of public housing programs in New York City and elsewhere and their enormous impact on the lives they served, especially people of color, who were their frequent occupants – either by intention or by default, replacing earlier occupants. SHPO staff have researched and are continuing to pursue existing and emerging information on the impacts of the various housing programs and the direct and indirect effects of public housing on specific populations, such as Puerto Ricans and African Americans. We are strongly committed to the belief that

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<sup>3</sup> Wright, *Building the Dream*, 123.

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everyone's history is worthy of documentation and preservation, and we strive to present the fullest available interpretation for each property, including up-to-date bibliographic entries. Nevertheless, the National Register has multiple purposes, including honor and recognition, but it is also a planning tool, providing eligibility and direction for various other programs, such as grants and tax credits. Nominations must be based on current scholarship, but they are not intended or expected to rival the work of scholars. As a result, while we are committed to thoroughly documenting sites that are important *because* they represent the lives of these Americans and within an appropriate contextual framework, we are also unable to encapsulate the specific perspectives of all scholars and historians. Such exercises are beyond the scope and purpose of the National Register program.

*The development of Eastchester and the Northeast Bronx*

Eastchester is a neighborhood located in the northeast section of the Bronx, roughly bounded by the Bronx-Westchester County border to the north, Hutchinson River to the east, the New England Thruway (I-95) to the south, and Baychester Avenue to the west.<sup>4</sup> Boston Road, which runs southwest-northeast, is a primary thoroughfare through the neighborhood.

Eastchester was originally settled in the mid-seventeenth century by a group of families who received a land grant from Thomas Pell.<sup>5</sup> The rural area was developed as farmland and several saw and gristmills were established along the many waterways that extended from Eastchester Creek, a channel leading to Eastchester Bay, and the Hutchinson River. In 1695, the settlers built St. Paul's Church (currently part of the city of Mount Vernon) on Columbus Avenue, near the center of the village. The present St. Paul's Church (National Historic Site 1943, NRHP Listed 1966) was rebuilt in 1764, shortly before the Revolutionary War.

In 1788, the township of Eastchester was organized, covering an area that extended from roughly 222<sup>nd</sup> Street to the village of Tuckahoe (in present-day Westchester County), and from the Bronx River on the west to the Hutchinson River on the east. The township included several villages such as Eastchester and Tuckahoe, and small communities such as Washingtonville, Newstead, and Chester Hill.

After the Revolutionary War, the village of Eastchester expanded along Boston Road, a Native American path that became a postal route between New York City and Boston, at a point at which it passed over the Hutchinson River into Pelham.<sup>6</sup> The road provided many stopping points for travelers, including, by 1868, the S.B. Odell Hotel, a tavern located just south of the intersection of Boston Road and Reed's Mill Lane.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to be confused with the town of Eastchester, which is located to the north, in Westchester County.

<sup>5</sup> These early settlers drew up an agreement, known as the Eastchester Covenant, that included twenty-six articles governing the community.

<sup>6</sup> The Boston Road was created after the Revolutionary War by Col. Lewis Morris, who sought to reroute the Boston Post Road so that it would run through his lands. For more, see John McNamara, *History in Asphalt: The Origin of Bronx Street and Place Names* (Bronx, NY: Bronx County Historical Society, 1984) and Michael Pollak, "The Old Way to Boston," *New York Times*, November 23, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick W. Beers, *Town of Westchester, Westchester Co., N.Y.* [map], Page No. 14, Atlas of New York and vicinity from actual surveys by and under the direction of F.W. Beers (Philadelphia, PA: James McGuigan, 1868), David Rumsey Collection. Sometimes known as Odell's Tavern, it was called Eastchester Hotel by 1897. By 1908, it was converted by into the Old Point Comfort Hotel and Park, and later, in known as Breinlinger's Old Point Comfort Park until 1957, at which point it was demolished. For more on the history of the tavern/hotel, see *Phase 1A Archeological Assessment – P.S. 189-X Archeology Report*, prepared by Historical Perspectives, Inc. (2001), accessed September 21, 2023: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/lpc/about/archaeology-reports-full-list.page>.

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By the second half of the nineteenth century, the land on which Boston-Secor Houses would eventually be built was largely occupied by Holler's Pond, a body of water that was formed by the damming of Rattlesnake Creek, which ran through the intersection of Boston Road and today's Marolla Place.<sup>8</sup> Situated next to the pond was an ice house that, according to Stephen Jenkins's account from 1912 in *The Story of the Bronx*, supplied the neighborhood with ice and acted as an ice skating rink during the winter.<sup>9</sup> By 1908, an artificial ice plant known as Holler's Ice Factory was built on the south side of the pond near a number of small wood-frame dwellings that bordered the creek and Reed's Mill Lane.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the Bronx and parts of Westchester County, including the Village of Eastchester, became integrated, physically and administratively, into New York City. In 1874, the area west of the Bronx River, formerly part of Westchester, was annexed to New York City; in 1895, the area east of the Bronx River, including the village of Eastchester, was also annexed.

With developments in mass transit, areas in the Bronx that had once been rural quickly transformed into commuter suburbs. Between 1910 and 1940 the population of the Bronx increased by 300 percent, reflecting these shifts.<sup>10</sup> In 1912, the New York, Westchester & Boston Railway (NYW&B)—a subsidiary of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad—created a suburban passenger line through the East Bronx, anticipating future growth. The new four-track electrified commuter line ran over the Harlem River line in the South Bronx and split above 180<sup>th</sup> Street. In Eastchester, the NYW&B opened stations at Baychester and Dyre Avenues anticipating that new suburban riders would appear in these locales. However, the area around the stations developed slowly and in 1935 the New Haven Railroad liquidated the NYW&B, which never achieved the level of patronage that was expected, and it closed in 1937. In 1940, the line was purchased by the city and re-opened by the Independent Subway System (IND) as a shuttle between Dyre Avenue and East 180<sup>th</sup> Street.

In 1953, an attempt was made by the City Planning Commission (CPC) to rezone a vast swath of the Eastchester and Baychester neighborhoods, which remained mostly farm and swampland—and included the future site of the Boston-Secor Houses—from “unrestricted” to residential. The commission noted that suitable land for residential expansion was mostly, at that point, limited to the city's peripheral sections, including in the Bronx. As urban development picked up pace in the postwar period, and undeveloped land became increasingly scarce, the commission determined that “consideration must be given to the reservation, by appropriate zoning, of the lands necessary to accommodate the housing of the borough population.”<sup>11</sup> The re-zoning plan, however, received significant pushback from a racetrack developer and it was ultimately denied by the Board of Estimate.<sup>12</sup>

In 1957, access to Eastchester was significantly improved with transfer of the Dyre Avenue shuttle to the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT), which established of a new through-service line from East 180<sup>th</sup> Street to Dyre Avenue, providing access to the IRT's White Plains Road line (today the 2 and 5 trains). In announcing the new service, the transit authority admitted that “not more than 5 per cent of subway users ever

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<sup>8</sup> G.W. Bromley & co, *Town of Eastchester* [map], (Philadelphia, PA: G.W. & W.S. Bromley, 1881). An above-ground section of Rattlesnake Brook remains extant in Seton Falls Park, a thirty-six-acre wooded area north of Boston-Secor Houses that became an official New York City park in 1930.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of the Bronx: From the Purchase Made by the Dutch from the Indians in 1639 to the Present Day* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 423.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Twombly, *East Bronx: East of the Bronx River* (Charleston, SC: Acadia Publishing, 1999), 7.

<sup>11</sup> “Bronx Racing Plan Upset by Rezoning,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1953.

<sup>12</sup> “Track Site Fixed for Baychester,” *New York Times*, December 18, 1953.



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had ridden on the line, and that its existence was known to not many more.”<sup>13</sup> Further access to the area was provided by the opening of the New England Thruway (I-95) in October 1958, which connected the Bruckner Expressway (completed 1963) to the Connecticut Turnpike (opened 1958).

By the late 1940s, the Holler Ice Manufacturing Company had sold the entire property to the Rubel Corporation, distributors of ice and coal, and by the mid-1950s the pond was infilled.<sup>14</sup> Over the next decade, the surrounding farmland was replaced by new private housing developments of semi-attached and detached homes mostly located to the west and north of IRT Dyre Avenue Line. To the east, the neighborhood developed as a light manufacturing district occupied by gas stations, automobile dealers and repair shops, and a lumber yard. In between, the large site of the former Holler’s Pond offered an ideal location for the city to build more public housing. By the late 1950s it was clear that much of the outlying areas of the city would be rezoned under a new zoning resolution (ultimately passed in 1961) that would allow them to be developed at densities that recognized that people wanted to—and were able to with the aid of automobiles—live at the city’s peripheries.<sup>15</sup> Although many areas on the city’s edges were zoned with low residential densities, the new zoning rules recognized the popularity of the “tower in the park” model of building, allowing its use in certain areas.

*Postwar public housing in the Northeast Bronx*

After World War II, the sparsely populated, largely vacant land in the Northeast Bronx was eyed for development by city planners who were looking for a way to house the country’s thousands of returning veterans, many of whom were settling in New York City with their families. The 1940s also marked a lull in federal funding for housing programs, which was paused during war so that efforts could be devoted to housing defense industry workers or supporting the war effort. Realizing that many of the veterans they were aiming to house were middle-income and thus lived in a gap between being eligible for subsidized public housing and being able to afford adequate private market-rate housing, the city created a new \$200 million public housing program that would cater to those above the low-income level. The program, approved in March 1948 by the Board of Estimate (BOE), called for housing to be built on all, or mostly, vacant sites that would include no or partial subsidies on a tenant’s rent, meaning that the extra income could be used by NYCHA to cover the project’s debt service, maintenance, and operating costs.<sup>16</sup>

The city program included several new projects in the Northeast Bronx, including Eastchester Houses in Eastchester (NR eligible, later known as Eastchester Gardens, Harrison & Abramowitz, 1950), Gun Hill Houses in Williamsbridge (Alfred Hopkins & Associates, 1950), Parkside Houses in Allerton (Walter & Poor, 1951), and Pelham Parkway Houses in Pelham Parkway (Rogers & Butler, 1950). While each of the projects shared a similar exterior treatment with simple red brick facades and regularly spaced window openings, the massing and site planning varied tremendously from project to project, with combinations of low and tall buildings (ranging from six to fourteen stories), and a variety of building plans, including slabs, T-shapes, and cruciforms. With its focus on middle-income veterans, the housing was highly sought after. After Pelham Parkway Houses and

<sup>13</sup> “Subway Trains Run to Dyre Ave.,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1957.

<sup>14</sup> “Rubel Corp. Takes Ice Plant in Bronx,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1949. Holler’s Pond is still visible in aerial photos taken by the City from 1954, see NYCityMap: <http://gis.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap/>.

<sup>15</sup> NYC Planning, “City Planning History,” accessed September 22, 2023: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/planning/about/city-planning-history.page?tab=2>.

<sup>16</sup> The projects were financed through the sale of NYCHA’s own bonds, guaranteed by the city; “City Housing Need Put at 861,100 Units,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1946.

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Eastchester Houses began accepting applications in June 1949, 32,000 application forms were distributed for the 2,140 apartments.<sup>17</sup>

The political and economic situation changed dramatically with the passage of the Housing Act of 1949, a new federal housing law which sought to address the decline of urban housing by reducing housing costs, raising housing standards, and, for the first time, enabling the federal government to aid cities in clearing and rebuilding “blighted” areas.<sup>18</sup> Of particular note was Title I of the Housing Act, which was allowed cities to borrow from the federal government to finance development plans and to acquire, demolish, and construct public buildings and utilities.

Many of the city’s partial and no-subsidy projects for veterans and those subsequently built under the Housing Act of 1949 demonstrated a shift in public housing design, theory, and policy. Earlier complexes in New York City, many of which had been constructed in the name of replacing dilapidated housing, typically consisted of low-rise buildings within carefully landscaped settings, examples of which include: the First Houses, designed by Frederick L. Ackerman and built 1935-1936 (NRHP 1979); the Harlem River Houses, designed by Archibald Manning Brown, et. al. and built 1936-37 (NRHP 1979); and Williamsburg Houses, designed by William Lescaze and Richard H. Shreve, and built 1935-1938 (NRHP 2021).<sup>19</sup> The designs of these projects drew on social housing ideals developed in Europe in the 1920s and subsequently adopted in the United States in the 1930s. Briefly stated, the concept was that government-built housing, beyond providing the extra units needed to ensure that the urban poor didn’t become homeless, could also have a profound impact on the lives of the poor. The buildings themselves—with their ordered site plan and repetition of modern design and form—were thought to give residents a healthy, ordered environment in which to live, which would also provide a sense of community and shared purpose.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the American models generally didn’t match the architectural sophistication, technical innovation, or abundant social support offered by their European counterparts.

Before long, however, the prevailing American architectural expression of public housing shifted away from low-rise, low-density complexes that more-or-less reflected the context of their surrounding communities to the “towers in the park,” or high-rise, higher-density buildings, on an amply landscaped sites. This model was loosely based on the ideas of Swiss-born French architect Le Corbusier and quickly became Modernist orthodoxy. The concept originated in the Le Corbusier’s *Ville Contemporaine*, which was known from a series of drawings he exhibited at the *Salon d’Automne* in Paris in 1922. In the *Ville Contemporaine*, a city for three million inhabitants, Le Corbusier envisioned a collection of high-density apartment buildings, built with modern materials like steel and concrete, laid out in a regular park-like setting accessible with the help of the automobile. Although Le Corbusier’s plan was for a fully developed city and was more theoretical than practical, post-war planners, especially Robert Moses, New York’s mercurial chairman of the Committee on Slum Clearance (which gave him absolute control over NYCHA) fully embraced its defining component, the “tower in the park,” or a high-rise apartment within a greenspace, as a method to enact the complete

<sup>17</sup> “32,000 Applicants Seek 2,140 Home,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1949.

<sup>18</sup> This description of the law comes from the American Planning Association, which named the Housing Act of 1949 a “Planning Landmark” in 2014. See “Housing Act of 1949,” American Planning Association, accessed March 30, 2023: <https://www.planning.org/awards/2014/1949housingact.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> The First Houses was the first public housing development to use eminent domain to acquire and demolish existing tenement buildings and acted as an early test of slum clearance programs.

<sup>20</sup> Paul R. Lusignan, Judith Robinson, Lauren Bobeczko, Jeffrey Shrimpton, “Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (Washington, DC, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), Section F, pg. 70.

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transformation of large sections of the metropolis. To Moses and similar thinkers, the towers presented a more efficient and economical way to house a large number of people, while reducing the need for land acquisition in congested areas. Moses also focused on the possibilities plans like these offered for widespread demolition and clearance, something that was much closer to his heart than public welfare and also abetted his road building schemes. While some architects and planners did look to the high-rise design for its supposed benefits to society, for many, the Utopian visions of Le Corbusier were far from their thoughts.

The first federal project to be constructed under the Housing Act of 1949 in the Northeast Bronx was Edenwald Houses (NR nominated), located at Granada Place and Baychester Avenue. Initially planned as a complex of three- and six-story buildings on a vacant forty-eight-acre site, it was eventually changed to include twelve fourteen-story buildings and twenty-eight three-story buildings, all designed by architects Rogers & Butler and completed in 1953.<sup>21</sup> As at many of the other city-built projects, the tenants of Edenwald Houses were mostly white (making up 65.6 percent of the total population), reflecting the makeup of the surrounding Bronx neighborhood in which it was built and for whom priority was given in the application process.<sup>22</sup>

By 1955, private homeowners and other taxpayers in the Northeast Bronx, reacting to the sheer quantity of new public housing, were becoming vociferous in their objections to the projects. In a series on the changing city, the *New York Times* described the way the Upper Bronx was “suffering from a split personality,” with its desire to be a suburban residential area clashing against the “ceaseless surge of urbanization and new residents.”<sup>23</sup> The existing residents, many descended from earlier Irish, German, Italian, Polish, and Jewish immigrants, felt anxiety over increased tax burdens and inadequate schools that they feared the public housing would bring, and many expressed open racism toward the Black and Puerto Rican communities. Although this anxiety betrayed the depth of long-held prejudices, Black leaders were more sanguine, predicting that “the Bronx will make its adjustment to new groups as it did to old.”<sup>24</sup>

As the 1950s drew to a close, there was an increasing awareness of racial contrasts between the city and the suburban-like peripheral areas of the city, with Black and Puerto Rican residents being concentrated in inner city “ghettos,” and projects in the outskirts being filled with white tenants. Among those bringing attention to the problem was Charles Abrams, a writer, urbanist, and housing expert, who was also the chair of the State Commission Against Discrimination. The city’s policy of re-housing minority residents in previously minority neighborhoods had, Abrams explained, “meant well and had been on economic rather than racial considerations”; however, “the net results was in many instances in the direction of racial separation rather than integration.”<sup>25</sup> These government policies actually dated at least to the 1930s, when the PWA developed its “neighborhood compatibility” guidelines. The latter required that government-funded public housing for different races be placed only in those neighborhoods where they were consistent with existing racial makeup.

In 1958, Mayor Robert F. Wagner reorganized NYCHA—notably installing a new chair, William Reid, and ejecting associates of Robert Moses—and attempted to rebalance projects that appeared on a path to segregation. This effort, it was believed, would be aided by a new state law that allowed the city to give priority

<sup>21</sup> “Bronx Housing Proposed,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1950.

<sup>22</sup> When it was completed, the residents of Edenwald were 65.6 percent white, 25.2 percent Black, and 9.2 percent Puerto Rican. See “N.Y. Housing Race-Policy Shift Asked,” *The Sun*, June 9, 1958.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Amper, “Our Changing City: Conflicts in the Upper Bronx,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1955.

<sup>24</sup> Amper, “Our Changing City: Conflicts in the Upper Bronx.”

<sup>25</sup> Charles Grutzner, “State Seeks Halt to ‘Ghetto’ Trend,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1956; “‘Ghettoizing’ Trend Seen in Housing,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 3, 1957.

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to residents already living within one mile of a new project. According to Wagner, attracting more white tenants, especially in outlying, open sites “away from minority and ethnic concentrations” would “offer the best possibly opportunity for integration.”<sup>26</sup> To stimulate integration and achieve a “better racial balance” in its public housing projects, the authority created a new division, the Intergroup Relations, led by National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) veteran Madison S. Jones.<sup>27</sup> Yet the eviction of high-income tenants and white flight to the suburbs meant that achieving full integration was an uphill battle. By the middle of 1958, for example, Edenwald Houses had lost roughly 25 percent of its white residents.<sup>28</sup> The integration program, although aiming for a utopian ideal of model housing, was quickly challenged by critics who perceived it as unfair and discriminatory. In 1963, the policy was modified to remove identifying information such as race from the application process.

*Boston-Secor Houses – The 1959 unrealized design*

To mitigate the flight of white residents from public housing projects to the suburbs, NYCHA proposed a compromise: if white New Yorkers would persist in moving to the suburbs, it would bring the suburbs to them. In April 1959, the city announced its plans for a new community of garden apartment buildings, consisting of two- and three-story walkup rowhouses and five-story elevator buildings with 500 apartments, on a twenty-two-acre site near the intersection of Boston Road and Secor Avenue.<sup>29</sup> Designed by architecture firm of Tippetts, Abbett, McCarthy, Straton, the low-rent, federally financed project included buildings that were spread out on the site to give the impression of a spacious suburban community.<sup>30</sup> The design restricted cars to the perimeter and included a landscape with curving walkways, playgrounds and community areas within the building courts. Its overall cost was given at slightly over \$8.7 million.

This was not the city’s first attempt at a “suburban type” of public housing development within the city limits. Three previous projects—Clason Point Gardens (NRHP Eligible, York and Sawyer, Aymar Embury II, and Burton and Bohm, 1941) in the Bronx, and Mariner’s Harbor (Coffin & Coffin, 1954) and Edwin Markham Houses (DeYoung & Moskowitz and Frederick Mathesius, 1943, demolished), both in Staten Island—were built exclusively with low-rise buildings, but they were “not in the style envisioned by the authority” for the Boston-Secor Houses.<sup>31</sup>

The proposal for Boston-Secor was, notably, part of a new site selection program that, as Chair William Reid explained, would help the authority “balance” its program by building in “outlying, largely vacant areas where a minimum of relocation is required.”<sup>32</sup> In these areas, NYCHA proposed to “build low-rise buildings that will blend with the surrounding neighborhood and be in keeping with the character of the community.” The land on which NYCHA proposed to build the Boston-Secor Houses was vacant except for a handful of dwellings housing three families and an abandoned icehouse.

<sup>26</sup> Mayor Wagner quoted in Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 171.

<sup>27</sup> “Race Relations Expert Named to City Housing Authority Post,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1958.

<sup>28</sup> “Integrated Housing Losing Whites, N.Y. Survey Says,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 9, 1958; “N.Y. Housing Race-Policy Shift Asked,” *The Sun*, June 9, 1958.

<sup>29</sup> “City Will Create ‘Suburb’ in Bronx,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1959; “Bronx Housing Project Like Suburbia Proposed,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 22, 1959.

<sup>30</sup> “New Approaches Are Being Taken in Apartment Developments in the City,” *New York Times*, December 13, 1959.

<sup>31</sup> “City Will Create ‘Suburb’ in Bronx.”

<sup>32</sup> Press Release, April 22, 1959, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 8045.

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At the city planning hearing on April 22, 1959, local civic organizations and residents lamented the “detrimental effect” they believed the project would have on the neighborhood. Opponents included the Committee Against the Secor Project, which existed under the umbrella of the Northeast Homeowners Association. Although the group’s stated opposition to a low-scaled, suburban style project was their anxiety over the increased tax burdens and inadequate schools that they feared the public housing would bring, many expressed open racism toward the Black and Puerto Rican communities, which was probably the underlying sentiment of all the opposition. Supporters of the project included a representative of the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council, as well as one from NYCHA. Among those bringing attention to the problem was Charles Abrams, a writer, urbanist, and housing expert, who was also the chairman of the State Commission Against Discrimination. The city’s policy of re-housing minority residents in previously minority neighborhoods had, Abrams explained, “meant well and had been on economic rather than racial considerations,” however, “the net results was in many instances in the direction of racial separation rather than integration.”<sup>33</sup> Despite the opposition, the proposal was approved by the CPC and by the Board of Estimate (BOE) in May 1959.

NYCHA acquired the title to the site through city-led condemnation proceedings in July 1961.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, in 1963, when bids were sought, the project was now advertised as fifteen two- and three-story buildings and six six-story buildings; the two- and three-story buildings had been removed from the project. Nevertheless, the received bids were ultimately rejected. Although the budget was increased to \$10.7 million, the bids came in at \$13.1 million due to high constructions costs, a number which also exceeded the statutory limits in the federal law, leaving project dead in the water.<sup>35</sup>

*Boston-Secor Houses – The 1964 design*

After some time, NYCHA determined that financial considerations made it necessary to change the design concept of the project yet again. Instead of a suburban-style group of garden apartments, the plan was radically changed to include four sixteen-story buildings that would provide the same number of apartments as the original proposal. In maintaining the same site and the same number of units, NYCHA avoided having to bring the project back to a city planning hearing, yet CPC Chairman William F.R. Ballard lamented the “regrettable” change in design. Still, Ballard recognized the “the desirability of providing accommodations for low-income families in this section of the city” and that the change in design was “necessary in order to provide such accommodations in an economically feasible project.”<sup>36</sup>

Although the new design maintained the previous site area and density, its massing clearly identified it as a “towers in the park” project. Although NYCHA had avoided building high-rise towers before the 1940s, after 1941 the majority of its public housing projects consisted primarily of medium sized towers of approximately twelve stories or extremely high buildings that included up to twenty or more stories. In addition to the influence of Robert Moses, who had a firm grip on NYCHA’s program and purse strings, towers conformed to the myths of reducing costs and coverage while getting rid of tenements – making them a low-cost symbol of reform.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Grutzner, “State Seeks Halt to ‘Ghetto’ Trend,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1956; “‘Ghettoizing’ Trend Seen in Housing,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 3, 1957.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from William Reid to Mayor Wagner, December 6, 1965, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7384.

<sup>35</sup> The construction bids were rejected on June 25, 1963.

<sup>36</sup> William F.R. Ballard to William Reid, September 15, 1964, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7384.

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Backlash to the towers in the park model came from architectural circles as early as the 1940s, but by the late 1950s and early 1960s it had picked up steam. While the urban projects of the 1950s, many of which were modelled on the towers in the park, were intended to act as an emblem of reform in poor neighborhoods, in the end they eliminated street life and its associated sense of community and security. In many cases, the introduction of public housing perpetuated and exacerbated the existing socio-economic condition of the locality and increased crime.<sup>37</sup>

As the prominent housing reformer Catherine Bauer summed it up in *Architectural Forum* in May 1957: “Life in the usual public housing project just is not the way most American families want to live. Nor does it reflect our accepted values as to the way people should live.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to standardized, often mediocre designs, Bauer noted that the density of the projects sometimes made them seem institutional with their backs turned to the surrounding neighborhood.

Others, like housing activist Edith Elmer Wood, continued to support the concept of high-rise public housing, but called for greater “richness and imagination” in site designs, along with more places for social connection.<sup>39</sup> As the 1950s drew to a close many progressive architects and city planners continued to believe in the idea of social housing at low cost but began to call for a higher design standards which, it was believed, would elevate the tenants’ sense of community and pride in their homes.

In 1965, Greenberg & Ames (later known as Ames Associates), a firm founded around 1949 by Charles E. Greenberg (b. 1901) and Marvin Ames (1913-1983), was announced as the new architects of the Boston-Secor Houses.<sup>40</sup> Greenberg began his career as a draftsman by 1930 and appears to have established an independent practice by 1945.<sup>41</sup> Ames served as an officer in the U.S. Army during World War II and was established as an architect by 1949. After becoming Greenberg & Ames, the firm was active designing speculative apartment houses in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Queens, many of which were modern in style, with planar red or white brick facades, simple window openings, and few adornments.

In 1961, Greenberg & Ames was hired by NYCHA to design the John Purroy Mitchel Houses (completed 1966), a federally aided development of roughly 1,500 apartments on six blocks in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx.<sup>42</sup> The project coincided with a push by city officials to give architects more freedom in the design of public housing in an effort to counteract the stereotype that they were “brick barracks.” In discussing the Mitchel Houses, Greenberg & Ames noted that they were “trying to get away from the solid block effect of projects” and intended to use a “more informal layout.”<sup>43</sup> In addition to more organic layouts, city officials encouraged the use of color, the installation of balconies, and the addition of more sitting and play areas.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 268-272.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Bauer, “The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing,” *Architectural Forum* 106, no. 5 (May 1957): 141.

<sup>39</sup> Edith Elmer Wood in Gwendolyn Wright, “Design and Affordable American Housing,” *Cityscape* 16, no. 2 (2014): 75.

<sup>40</sup> The earliest mention of Greenberg & Ames’ participation in the Boston-Secor Houses project also describes the project as including six six-story and an undetermined number of two- and three-story buildings. This means that the scope of the project was changed after they were hired. See *Engineering News Record* 174 (1965): 57.

<sup>41</sup> During his time as a private practitioner Greenberg appears to have designed apartment buildings including the Moderne-style 315 West End Avenue (1946-48) on the Upper West Side and 189-207 Pinehurst Avenue (1947) in Hudson Heights. For more on Greenberg & Ames, see NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Riverside-West End Historic District Extension II Designation Report*, LP-2464 (New York: New York City, 2015), 325.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Conley, “New City Housing to Cost 83 Million,” *New York Times*, April 26, 1961.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Kaplan, “Design’s the Thing as City Aims at More Artistic Public Housing,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1962.

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Other, smaller public housing projects by Greenberg & Ames included the John James Audubon Houses (completed 1962, NRHP 2022) in Manhattan, a twenty-story building and an early example of NYCHA's "scatter site," or smaller-scale, developments, and the Morrisania Houses (completed 1963), another "scatter site pocket" project in the Morrisania section of the Bronx that included two sixteen-story buildings with 206 apartments.<sup>44</sup> Both were built in a plain, utilitarian style with red brick facades and regular, symmetrical elevations, but the Morrisania Houses was distinguished by areas of blue-glazed brick, visually identifying the building's projecting entry bays.

As news of the revised Boston-Secor Houses development spread in Eastchester, opponents of public and high-rise housing appealed to NYCHA. In late 1964, the authority met with residents and local civic groups such as the Home Owners Association of Eastchester Bay, Inc., led by Myrtie Minkoff.<sup>45</sup> At these meetings two camps emerged: those who did not want any new housing at all and those who believed that the site should be used for middle-income housing. While NYCHA mostly chose not to engage with those who objected to all new housing, they responded to the those arguing for middle-income housing. Studies, NYCHA claimed, showed that the idea was not feasible, mostly because a sponsor would need to absorb the approximately one million dollars expended by the authority thus far for the land purchase and for the architectural and engineering studies.

In May 1965, Congressman Paul A. Fino wrote to Mayor Wagner to say that he objected "to the way the Boston-Secor project has been continually dealt to the people of the North Bronx off of the bottom of the deck."<sup>46</sup> The Northeast Bronx, Fino explained, did "not need another high-rise public housing project to disrupt a residential neighborhood." These remarks were clearly stated expressions of long-held attitudes about segregation and exclusion that left Black people and immigrants isolated in the poorest neighborhoods. This is revealed in NYCHA Chair William Reid's suggested reply for Mayor Wagner, in which Reid pointed out a number of contradictions. Reid wrote that Fino's stance was "puzzling," as the buildings would offer the same number of dwelling units planned whether in low- or high-rise structures and that the neighborhood already had a high-rise building, the sixteen-story Mark Terrace (1961), a middle-income Mitchel-Lama Project, in the immediate vicinity, and that larger, even taller buildings were being planned at Co-op City.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, since one-third of the project was designed for the elderly, Reid concluded that it would not have a significant effect on the local schools or services and thus would be "a distinct asset to the community and to the City."

In addition to local residents and politicians, the Williamsbridge branch of the NAACP also opposed the project.<sup>48</sup> The group's main issue was the project's proximity to other increasingly segregated developments such as Edenwald Houses which, although still somewhat integrated twelve years after its opening, had become a majority Black and Puerto Rican project, and the Mark Terrace project, which was opened with almost exclusively Black and Puerto Rican tenants. With increasing segregation, the group warned, would come blockbusting. But, in the end, they lost the fight to stop the project.

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<sup>44</sup> For more on the Audubon Houses, see the John James Audubon Houses, 2022. Cindy Hamilton, Erin Ward, Michael LaFlash, "John Jay Audubon Houses," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2021).

<sup>45</sup> Ira S. Robbins to the Honorable Jonathan B. Bingham, November 17, 1964, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 8045.

<sup>46</sup> Congressman Paul A Fino to Mayor Wagner, May 13, 1965, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7384.

<sup>47</sup> Suggested reply to Congressman Paul A Fino for Mayor Wagner, written by William Reid, May 25, 1965, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7384.

<sup>48</sup> "Williamsbridge Loses, Wins in Housing Fights," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 2, 1966.

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By the time the architects issued drawings for the Boston-Secor Houses in 1966 the firm had changed its name to Ames Associates, possibly indicating the departure of Greenberg around this time. The landscape architect for the project was Leo A. Novick, a 1926 graduate of the University of Massachusetts and a prolific designer of New York City housing landscapes, including Title I urban renewal projects such as the Lincoln Square Apartments (1961), designed by architects Webb & Knapp, and Kips Bay Plaza (1964), planned by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and designed by IM Pei & Associates. Like the long, slab-type buildings they complemented, Novick's landscapes were organized in orthogonal patterns with concrete paving and formal-style plantings.

The design of Boston-Secor Houses followed a similar simplified modern style as Ames Associates' earlier projects but departed slightly from those examples in its site planning and color palette. The irregularly shaped site—that is, the rough boundaries of the former Holler's Pond and ice business—was bisected by a new curved road, named Bivona Street, that acted as a connector between Reed's Mill Lane and Boston Road.<sup>49</sup> The new street, which effectively divided the site into two super blocks, also acted as the spine of the development, providing access to the residential buildings and other necessary services such as parking. With its low building coverage, the large site contained several large open areas, which NYCHA designated for recreational purposes.<sup>50</sup>

On the west side of the property, two of the sixteen-story apartment buildings—Buildings 1 and 2—were oriented toward, but setback from, the slightly curved Bivona Street. The buildings were set within large lawns with curved concrete walkways and several small sitting and play areas. Directly to the west of the buildings, numerous recreational areas, including a shuffleboard court, a softball diamond, and a basketball court provided opportunities for play. The inclusion of these active recreation areas reflected NYCHA's attempt to provide spaces for the increasing number of children in the authority's projects. In 1958, NYCHA Chairman William Reid had promised that “instead of building large lawns that nobody can walk on, we'll build more and bigger playgrounds.”<sup>51</sup> While it might prove expensive, he argued that it would save money in the long run by “giving youngsters places to use up their energy in play rather than in mischief in the buildings and on the grounds.” Large parking lots and naturally landscaped zones bordered the western half of the site.

On the east side of the property, the remaining two apartment buildings were oriented with Building 3 (which also included the community center) facing the street and Building 4 set perpendicular, facing Reed's Mill Lane, likely a concession to the irregular site. Like the west side, the plan featured a large number of sitting and play areas and substantial parking areas. Although the 1966 site plan indicates that an additional “natural area” and “picnic grove” were to be included in the project, these areas (not included in the nomination boundary) were transferred to a private developer and leased to the Board of Education the year after the complex was completed. Those areas are now the location of a ca. 1970 shopping center and X189, the Cornerstone Academy for Social Action, a public school built in 2007.

Built of reinforced concrete, the T-shaped apartment buildings featured simply designed, symmetrical primary facades with an alternating pattern of slightly recessed and protruding bays that efficiently maximized light and air. The exteriors were clad with buff brick except at the recessed bays, where the spaces between the windows were finished with glazed white brick, providing a vertical emphasis to the buildings. At the building entries,

<sup>49</sup> As part of the project, the old Rattlesnake Brook was rerouted through underground pipes. See Keith Williams, “The Old Beer Hall in the Bronx,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Memo from Joseph J. Christian to William Reid, July 7, 1965, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7384.

<sup>51</sup> William Reid quoted in Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked*, 163.



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the architects aimed to provide additional interest with recessed porticos clad with granite veneer and topped by a projecting concrete fascia.

At the interior, the building lobbies were finished with polychrome glazed tile in schemes that varied between the buildings—Buildings 1 and 3’s lobbies were aquamarine with taupe- and buff-colored trim while Buildings 2 and 4’s lobbies were light pink with taupe- and buff-colored trim. Above, the apartments were arranged around the central elevator and stair core and a T-shaped double-loaded corridor. While the majority of apartments were one- and two-bedrooms, each building also offered numerous three- and four-bedroom apartments, and three of the buildings contained one or two five-bedroom units.

The design included an attached one-story community center at Building 3. The community center was articulated with full-height columnar window openings each divided by slightly projecting buff piers. The interior meeting room was a multi-purpose space that could be used as both an auditorium and gymnasium and featured rhythmically angled hung-plaster ceiling.

Residents began to move into Boston-Secor Houses in January 1969, and it was dedicated in July. Mayor John Lindsay attended the dedication and voiced his desire for the federal government to provide more funds for low-cost housing, especially due to the challenges urban builders faced with construction costs.<sup>52</sup> The name Boston-Secor was heralded as being rich with American history as the early land owners along the old Boston (Post) Road were the Seacord and Secor families, thus the press release insisted, “the well traveled ‘road to Boston’ and the ‘tradition trail,’ Secor Avenue, are once again joined.”<sup>53</sup> As with most dedications of NYCHA projects during this period, the first tenants were handed a symbolic golden key to welcome them to their new home.

*A re-examination of the “towers in the park” model*

Within the context of New York City’s public housing program, the “towers in the park” model has left a complicated legacy. In the 1950s and 1960s, housing officials and architects embraced the type as the most economical method of replacing tenement districts and their perceived urban disorder with highly regulated, socially controlled communities.<sup>54</sup> While based loosely on prototypes developed by European Modernists, the distance between the utopian premise and the American reality was stark. Good intentions and modernist design were not enough to overcome the absence of adequate funding, which could have allowed for more meaningful designs; the crowding of projects in dense, resource-poor neighborhoods, which aggravated problems of racial segregation; as well as administrative complexity, urban poverty, and challenging local politics. And while Le Corbusier, whose largely theoretical proposal for the Ville Contemporaine originated the type, had worked out all the components of a modern, interconnected city with tower buildings on large open parcels separated from busy streets on different levels, American planners more often plucked the tower itself from the plan and set it into an existing urban or suburban landscape. These partially realized and less expensive versions of the original were also denied the generous maintenance budget that most European social housing enjoyed.

An additional source of criticism centers on the severe imbalance of power that these buildings represented. Poor as they were, the impoverished areas were also *neighborhoods* characterized by familial, economic, and social connections. Yet, outsiders, generally from the majority race and class, felt free to replace entire

<sup>52</sup> Alfred E. Clark, “\$11-Million Housing Project Dedicated in the Bronx,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1969.

<sup>53</sup> New York City Housing Authority, News Release, July 22, 1969, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7384.

<sup>54</sup> *Public Housing Myths: Perception, Reality and Social Policy*, ed. by Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Fritz Umbach and Lawrence J. Vale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 1.

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structured neighborhoods with isolating, anonymous towers largely without input from local populations. And in many cases, such as Boston-Secor, even modest proposals in newer neighborhoods were rejected outright by locals who fought to keep their neighborhoods exclusive.

In the fifty years since the last towers in the park public housing projects were built in New York City, much has been written about their design, management, demographics, and social histories, as well as the multicausal reasons for public housing's overall decline over the second half of the twentieth century. More recently, others have sought to dispel some of the myths that are generally accepted about public housing, and high-rise public housing in particular, including the narrative, which emerged in the 1960s and proliferated in the media through the 1990s, that most public housing is defined by social disorder and crime.

In terms of design, many critics of high-rise superblock developments have sought to place the blame for their failures at the feet of modernist architects, who frequently gave the buildings a stripped-down, brick-clad "barrack" aesthetic. This perhaps valid equation of dull or poor-quality designs with undistinguished industrial architecture is one of the critiques that led to the often-repeated phrase "warehousing the poor."<sup>55</sup> While this critique may accurately describe the "dreary" buildings, as Catherine Bauer called them in 1957, it also assumes that there is a direct relationship between built form and human behavior and thus the social outcomes of public housing projects. This is harder to quantify and has been the subject of some debate. Some scholars have supported this theory, including Oscar Newman, who, in 1972, argued that by eliminating "defensible space," or the area that an individual felt responsible for maintaining and defending, the grounds of high-rise complexes became anonymous and resulted in disorder and crime. Others have agreed that high-rise buildings have the ability to weaken social organization and break down ties between neighbors.<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting, however, that many of those who were most critical, especially in the 1970s, of the failure of modern public housing projects (both in New York City and elsewhere) were a part of the emerging Postmodern movement, which rejected the dogmas of Modernism in principle.

Others have argued that architecture's role in the failure of certain types of public housing is overstated. For example, Katharine G. Bristol's "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" (1991) and Herbert J. Gans's "The High-Rise Fallacy" (1992) both debunk the idea that modern architecture is at the core of the failure, instead pointing to institutional and structural sources of public housing problems.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, with inadequate funding planners were forced to place high-rise projects on the peripheries of cities due to high inner-city land costs and design them in ways that emphasized health and safety considerations over attractiveness and livability. Nevertheless, it is undeniably true that the original, pristine conceptions of mid-century high-rise public housing projects, which tended to fetishize the bold, geometric forms of the buildings and their layout, contrasted greatly with the actual experience of living in the buildings, which often had few gestures toward decorative visual interest.

Although design may have played a role in the overall outcomes of high-rise public housing projects, those outcomes are also the products of other factors such as insufficient funds for top-notch designers, poor management, insufficient maintenance, tenant eligibility requirements, resident poverty, lopsided demographics, and segregation and discrimination. Some may argue that poor design and management were intentional on the

<sup>55</sup> D. Bradford Hunt, "Myth #2: Modernist Architecture Failed Public Housing" in *Public Housing Myths*, ed. by Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Fritz Umbach and Lawrence J. Vale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 47.

<sup>56</sup> Kevin Beck, "Trust and the Built Environment in New York City's Public Housing," *Sociological Perspectives* 62, no. 1 (February 2019): 122.

<sup>57</sup> Katharine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 (May 1991): 163-171; "The High-Rise Fallacy" by Herbert J. Gans in *Design Quarterly* (August 1992): 24-28.

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part of government agencies, housing reformers, and architects, products of the country's long-held racial prejudice and economic inequality, while others attest to the altruistic, but misguided intentions of city planners and architects. By the late 1960s and 1970s, the popular press perpetuated an almost entirely negative view of inner-city high-rise projects, which presented their inhabitants as young, African American, and socially dysfunctional.<sup>58</sup> Violence and vandalism, however, were more likely a reaction to racial discrimination, institutional poverty, and lopsided demographics, specifically, a high child-to-adult ratio.<sup>59</sup> The larger culprit in all of this was, of course, an overall social indifference to low-income urban Black and Latino residents.

Since the 1970s, most new public housing in New York City has been scaled either as rowhouses, or low- or mid-rise apartment buildings. In many ways, this is the legacy of the towers in the park projects of the 1950s and 1960s. After the passage of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, architects, planners, government officials soundly rejected modern high-rises in favor of low-rise, high-density housing. This new model, first represented by the Model Cities program (1966-1974), was seen as a new way to approach urban renewal, with a new plan that, it was hoped, would finally address urban poverty and crime.

In 1993, HUD created the HOPE VI program (now defunct), which sought to demolish the country's most troubled housing projects and rebuild New Urbanist mixed-use, mixed-income projects in their stead. In New York City, this included Prospect Park Plaza Houses, a complex of four twelve- and fifteen-story buildings with 368 apartments in the Ocean Hill section of Brooklyn that was completed in 1974. Despite vociferous objections, a thousand residents were displaced with the demolition of the old buildings, a new complex with 284 apartments was completed in 2017.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to other cities, Prospect Park Plaza Houses was the only project to be demolished in New York City. Critics of the program complained that in most cases fewer apartments are created in the replacement housing and few residents typically move back in. Other criticisms included that the program effectively gentrified the surrounding neighborhoods and had contributed to an overall loss of housing.<sup>61</sup> By 2009, the program stopped being funded.

*Later History of Boston-Secor*

Almost immediately after Boston-Secor Houses was finished, the *New York Times* ran a headline that the neighborhood was "racially tense beneath calm veneer," suggesting that the influx of new residents had brought the tensions between poorer minorities and lower-middle class whites to a breaking point.<sup>62</sup> The projected doubling of the neighborhood's population was also expected to have political ramifications in the staunchly conservative stronghold although it is unclear to what extent this occurred. It was clear, however, by the 1970s that NYCHA's integration policy had failed. Despite efforts of NYCHA's Intergroup Relations division, the system remained bifurcated into two kinds of housing: predominantly white, higher-income projects located in the outer boroughs and minority projects located in the inner city areas. This was not, of course, a uniform result across the NYCHA portfolio. While many projects in the Northeast Bronx did remain largely white, others, like Edenwald Houses and Boston-Secor Houses, were increasingly occupied by minorities. Over the rest of the

<sup>58</sup> A. Scott Henderson, "'Tarded with Exceptional Image': Public Housing and Popular Discourse," *American Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 32.

<sup>59</sup> Fritz Umbach and Alexander Gerould, "Myth #3: Public Housing Breeds Crime," in *Public Housing Myths*, ed. by Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Fritz Umbach and Lawrence J. Vale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 69.

<sup>60</sup> "Tower Wreckers," CityLimits.org, July/August 2001, accessed May 15, 2024:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20071031011832/http://www.citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article\\_id=2150](https://web.archive.org/web/20071031011832/http://www.citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article_id=2150)

<sup>61</sup> John McCrory, "Little Hope in HUD's HOPE VI," May 1999, accessed May 15, 2024:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070630045811/http://www.johnmccrory.com/articles/article.asp?this=225>.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, "Baychester Racially Tense Beneath Calm Veneer," *New York Times*, September 15, 1969.

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twentieth century the neighborhood around Boston-Secor Houses became a majority Black neighborhood—including both African American and West Indian groups—with a substantial Hispanic population as well.<sup>63</sup>

By 1970, NYCHA looked to sell or lease several of the areas at the east end of the site, likely in an effort to recoup the costs of the project’s unusually long planning and construction period. This included the easternmost parking lot, the “natural area,” and the “picnic grove,” all called out in the 1966 site plan (see Figure 8). In 1970, the northeastern most section (the “picnic grove”) was sold to a developer who soon after constructed a retail building facing Boston Road. That same year, NYCHA leased the vacant land to the east (the “natural area”) to the Board of Education for the construction of a one-story temporary metal-clad school (extant, outside of proposed boundary). In 2005-07 a new school, known as PS/IS 189, the Cornerstone Academy for Social Action and the Rosa Parks Education Campus, was built on the remainder of the leased site to the designs of Perkins Eastman Architects. The one-story temporary school building remained in use by the school for storage purposes.

Over the years, other physical changes were made at the property including lighting improvements around the parking lots in 1970, the conversion of Building 3’s perambulator room into a library in 1977, and the construction of a small addition on the rear community center in 2000. In 2002, a \$1.9 million renovation project included the replacement of pavement, fences, and playground equipment, as well as the installation of new trees, shrubbery, lighting, and benches.<sup>64</sup> Also in 2002, façade repairs were made to the exterior brick, including the installation of horizontal expansion joints of all four buildings.<sup>65</sup>

In 2021, NYCHA announced plans to convert Boston-Secor Houses under the Section 8 Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) program, which provides unit-bound rent vouchers to private landlords.<sup>66</sup> The PACT program was created to raise funds needed to make repairs across the NYCHA portfolio of public housing. In February 2023 NYCHA and resident leaders chose Beacon Communities LLC, Kalel Holdings, and MBD Community Housing Corporation as the development team to carry out comprehensive repairs at the site.<sup>67</sup> Boston-Secor Houses is planned to be rehabilitated, maintaining its current uses.

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<sup>63</sup> NYC Health, “Williamsbridge and Baychester—Community Health Profile 2018,” accessed September 21, 2023: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-bx12.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> “Neighborhood Report,” *New York Daily News*, May 5, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> “Neighborhood Report,” *New York Daily News*, October 27, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> “New PACT Projects to Deliver Comprehensive Repairs & Quality Property Management for 5,900 Bronx & Manhattan Apartments,” *NYCHA Now*, October 2021, accessed May 4, 2023: <https://nychanow.nyc/new-pact-projects-to-deliver-comprehensive-repairs-quality-property-management-for-more-than-5900-bronx-manhattan-apartments/>.

<sup>67</sup> “NYCHA & Resident Leaders Select PACT Partners to Deliver \$128M in Comprehensive Upgrades at 3 Bronx Developments,” *NYCHA Journal*, February 24, 2023, accessed May 4, 2023: <https://nychajournal.nyc/nycha-resident-leaders-select-pact-partners-to-deliver-128m-in-comprehensive-upgrades-at-3-bronx-developments/>.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University

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\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 14.61  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 40.884053 | Longitude: -73.833402  |
| 2. Latitude: 40.883554 | Longitude: -73.8320242 |
| 3. Latitude: 40.882414 | Longitude: -73.831412  |
| 4. Latitude: 40.881842 | Longitude: -73.832473  |
| 5. Latitude: 40.881200 | Longitude: -73.833199  |
| 6. Latitude: 40.881861 | Longitude: -73.835909  |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nomination encompasses the largest intact area of the Boston-Secor Houses project including the four high-rise towers and attached community center, the surrounding landscape, and parking lots. When it was initially planned in 1966, the areas to the east were included in the site plan (see Figure 8) as a parking lot, a natural area, and a picnic grove. By 1970, most of this section of the site plan had been sold or transferred through leases. In 1970, the northeastern-most section (the "picnic grove") was sold to a developer for the construction of a retail building facing Boston Road. That same year, NYCHA leased the vacant land to the east (the "natural area") to the Board of Education for the construction of a one-story temporary metal-clad school (extant, outside of proposed boundary). In 2005-07 a new school, known as X189, the Cornerstone Academy for Social Action and the Rosa Parks Education Campus, was built on the site to the designs of Perkins Eastman Architects. The one-story temporary school building remains extant and continues to be used by X189. Since the construction of the commercial and school buildings were planned separately from the public housing complex and fall outside of the period of significance, they are excluded from the nomination.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Lindsay Peterson; revised and edited by Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO

organization Higgins Quasebarth & Partners

date May 2024

street & number 11 Hanover Square, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor

telephone 212-274-9468

city or town New York

state NY

zip code 10005

e-mail [peterston@hqpreservation.com](mailto:peterston@hqpreservation.com)

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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**Photographs:**

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Boston-Secor Houses

City or Vicinity: Bronx

County: Bronx State: NY

Photographer: Jesse Kling & Lindsay Peterson

Date Photographed: 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0001)

Buildings 4, 3, and 2 (left to right) of Boston-Secor Houses viewed from Boston Road, looking southwest.

2 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0002)

The main façades of Buildings 1 and 2 as viewed from Bivona Street, looking southwest.



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3 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0003)  
Buildings 3 and 4 from Bivona Street, looking east.

4 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0004)  
The main façade of Building 4 from Reed's Mill Lane, looking northwest.

5 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0005)  
Building 4's west elevation and main façade from Bivona Street, looking northeast.

6 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0006)  
The main façade of Building 2 from Bivona Street, looking west.

7 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0007)  
Building 1's rear elevation, looking east from the baseball field.

8 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0008)  
Buildings 3 and 4 within the Bivona Street streetscape, looking southeast.

9 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0009)  
Building 3 with the community center at its base, looking north.

10 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0010)  
Typical residential entry at Building 3, looking east.

11 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0011)  
Typical residential entry infill and historic granite column at Building 3, looking southeast. The residential entrances feature black and grey granite-faced square columns and grey granite entry surrounds.

12 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0012)  
Typical upper-story façade at Building 3, looking northeast. The four buildings of Boston-Secor Houses are all clad in a matching buff-brick masonry with glazed white-brick sections between the windows.

13 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0013)  
The community center's meeting room at the base of Building 3, looking northeast.

14 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0014)  
A typical entry to the complex along Bivona Street, looking northeast.

15 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0015)  
A typical walkway, lawn, and non-historic sitting area at Boston-Secor Houses, looking north toward Building 2.

16 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0016)  
The project's baseball field, looking north toward Buildings 1 and 2.

17 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_ Boston-Secor Houses \_0017)  
The basketball court at the south of the baseball field, looking south.

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18 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0018)

Tricolor glazed tile at the lobby for Building 1, looking west. The residential lobbies share matching historic designs, layouts, and finishes between each building, but vary between two variant color schemes.

19 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0019)

Overall view of Building 1's residential lobby, looking southwest. Buildings 1 and 3's lobbies have primarily aquamarine tile walls with taupe- and buff-colored trim and speckled taupe terrazzo flooring.

20 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0020)

Building 1's lobby elevator bank, with a first-floor residential corridor at right, looking northwest.

21 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0021)

From left to right, a fire stair landing, apartment entry, and lobby elevator bank at Building 2, looking west.

22 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0022)

A first-floor residential corridor in Building 2, looking north. First-floor residential corridors in Buildings 1, 2, and 4 shared the glazed-tile-wall and terrazzo-floor finishes of the lobbies.

23 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0023)

A typical upper-floor residential corridor on Building 2's ninth floor, looking south.

24 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0024)

The living room in Building 2's Apartment 9J, looking north. Apartments throughout share simple, utilitarian finishes including plaster walls, non-historic vinyl-tile flooring, and painted concrete-slab ceilings.

25 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0025)

The second-floor elevator lobby and corridors in Building 3 feature historic patterned asphalt-tile flooring.

26 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0026)

A typical apartment hallway within Building 3's Apartment 2D, looking north.

27 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0027)

A typical stairwell, looking west toward the third floor of Building 3.

28 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0028)

The community center's lobby at Building 3 features historic glazed ceramic block.

29 of 29 (NY\_Bronx County\_Boston-Secor Houses\_0029)

The community center's meeting room, looking southwest. A multi-purpose space that can be used as both an auditorium and gymnasium, the meeting room features a rhythmically angled hung-plaster ceiling.

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Name of Property

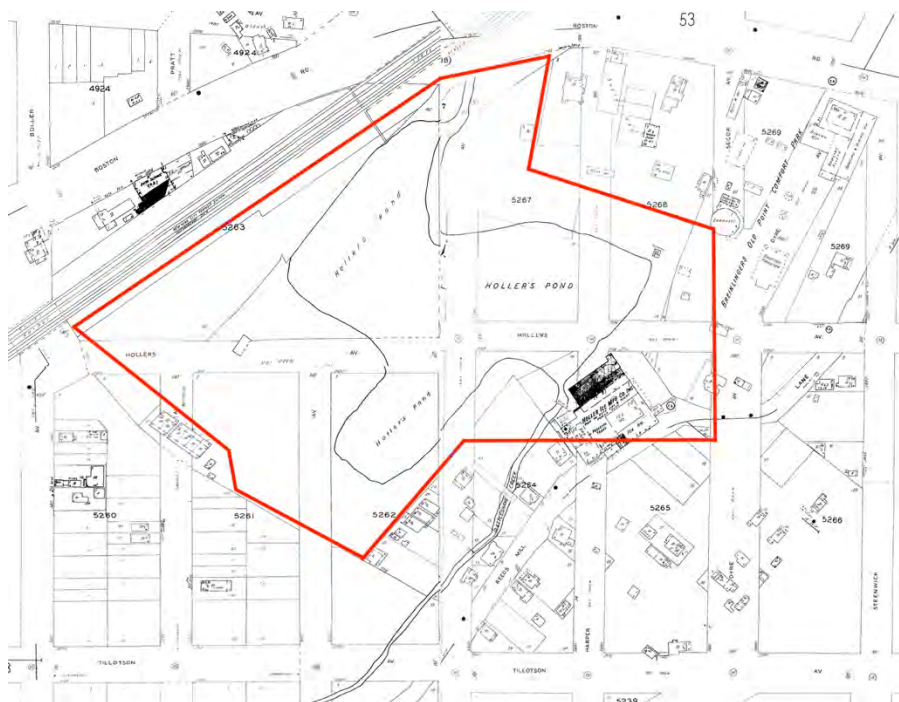


Figure 1: 1951 Sanborn map (vol. 22, plates 62, 64, 67) showing the site before the construction of Boston-Secor Houses. The red outline shows the approximate location of the project. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Collection, Library of Congress)



Figure 2: 2000 Sanborn map (plate 135) showing the boundary of the Boston-Secor Houses nomination. (STV Incorporated via Phase 1A, Archeological Assessment, P.S. 189-X, prepared by Historical Perspectives, Inc.)



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Figure 3: April 1959 site plan of the first, unrealized scheme for Boston-Road Houses, which called for a garden-apartment complex. (NYCHA)



Figure 4: Ca. 1959 model showing the first, unrealized scheme for Boston-Road Houses. (NYCHA)



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Figure 5: 1960 aerial view showing the site in relation to the surrounding neighborhood and transportation arteries. (NYCHA)

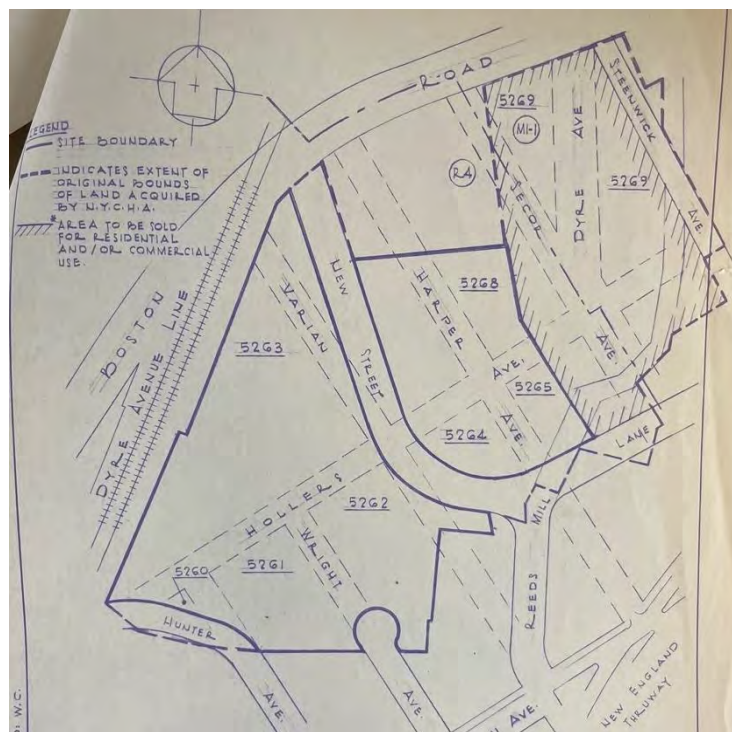


Figure 6: 1964 site plan indicating the location of the two future superblocks and the newly platted Bivona Street. (NYCHA)

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Figure 7: Ca. 1966 rendering of the Boston-Secor Houses. (LaGuardia & Wagner Archive)



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Figure 8: 1966 site plan showing the nominated boundary of Boston-Secor Houses. Note that the eastern portion of the site (outside of the red boundary) was sold and/or leased shortly after the complex was completed. Today those areas are occupied by a large storage building, a school, and a commercial building, and are all outside of the proposed nomination boundary. (NYCHA)

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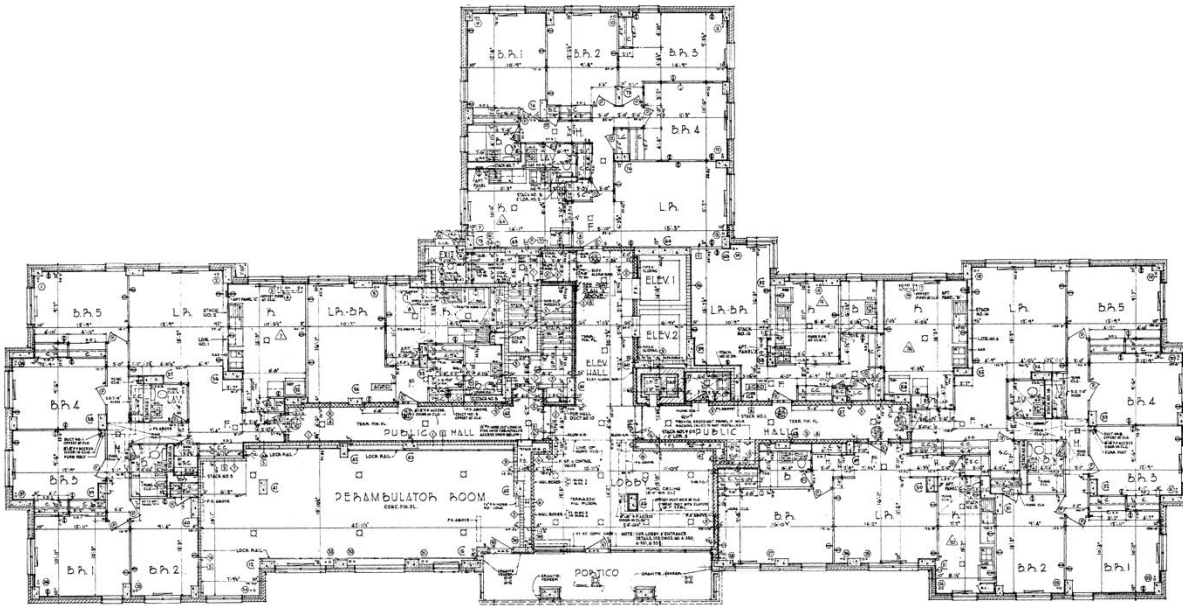


Figure 9: Typical first floor plan, 1966. (NYCHA)

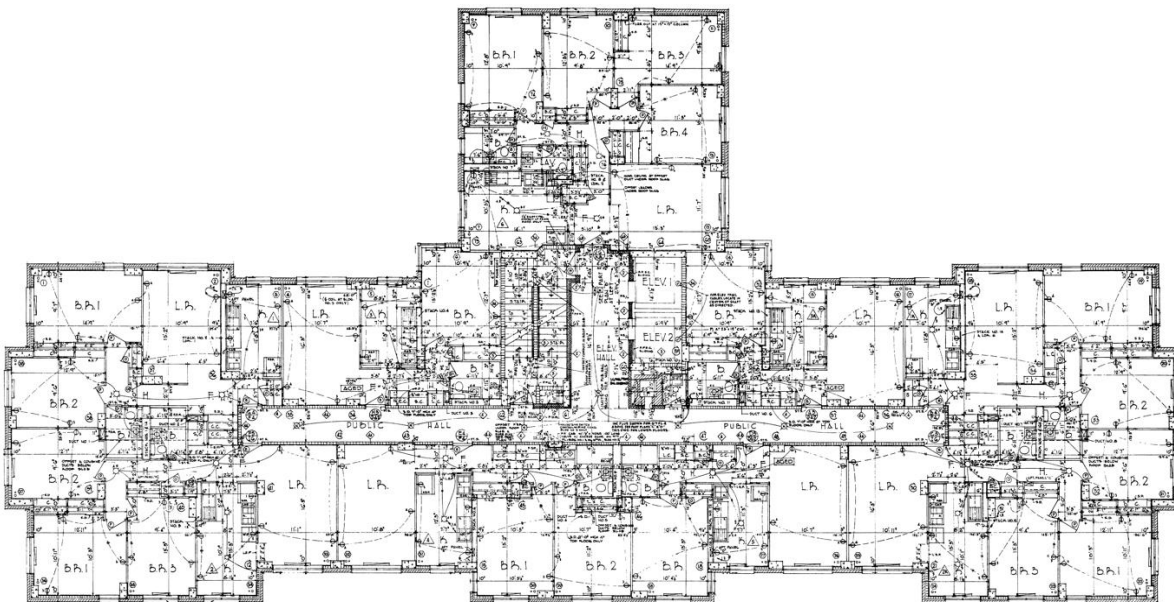


Figure 10: Typical upper-floor plan, 1966. (NYCHA)



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Figure 11: View of Building 1 during construction, June 1967. (NYCHA)



Figure 12: View of Buildings 3 and 4, looking northeast, during construction, October 1967. (NYCHA)

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Figure 13: View of Buildings 3 and 4, looking northeast, during construction, April 1968. (NYCHA)



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Figure 14: View of a tenant moving into the building, July 1969. (NYCHA)

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Figure 15: 1969 photo showing NYCHA Chair Simeon Golar (sixth from right) with tenants who received a ceremonial gold key. (NYHCA)



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Figure 16: Mayor John Lindsay with children at the dedication of Boston-Secor Houses, 1969. (NYHCA)

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Figure 17: View of typical apartment, 1969. (NYHCA)



Figure 18: View of typical apartment, 1969. (NYHCA)



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Figure 19: 1978 view of Buildings 1 and 2 looking west. Note the octagonal buff-brick water tower atop Building 2. (NYHCA)

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Figure 20: Ca. 1985 view of one of the apartment towers. (NYC Municipal Archives)



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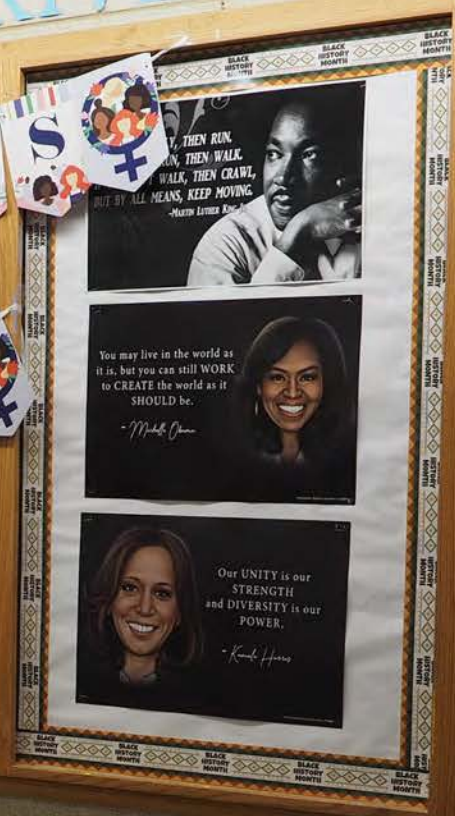


# BOSTON SECOR'S THRIVING COMMUNITY WELCOME TO

EVERY DAY IS A STAR  
WOMEN'S DAY IS A STAR



BLACK HISTORY MONTH



... THEN RUN,  
... THEN WALK,  
... THEN CRAWL,  
... BUT BY ALL MEANS, KEEP MOVING.  
-Martin Luther King Jr.

You may live in the world as  
it is, but you can still WORK  
to CREATE the world as it  
SHOULD be.  
-Michelle Obama

Our UNITY is our  
STRENGTH  
and DIVERSITY is our  
POWER.  
-Kamala Harris

BOSTON SECOR



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Improve the lives of Boston  
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relationships through quality  
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confidence, sustainability are  
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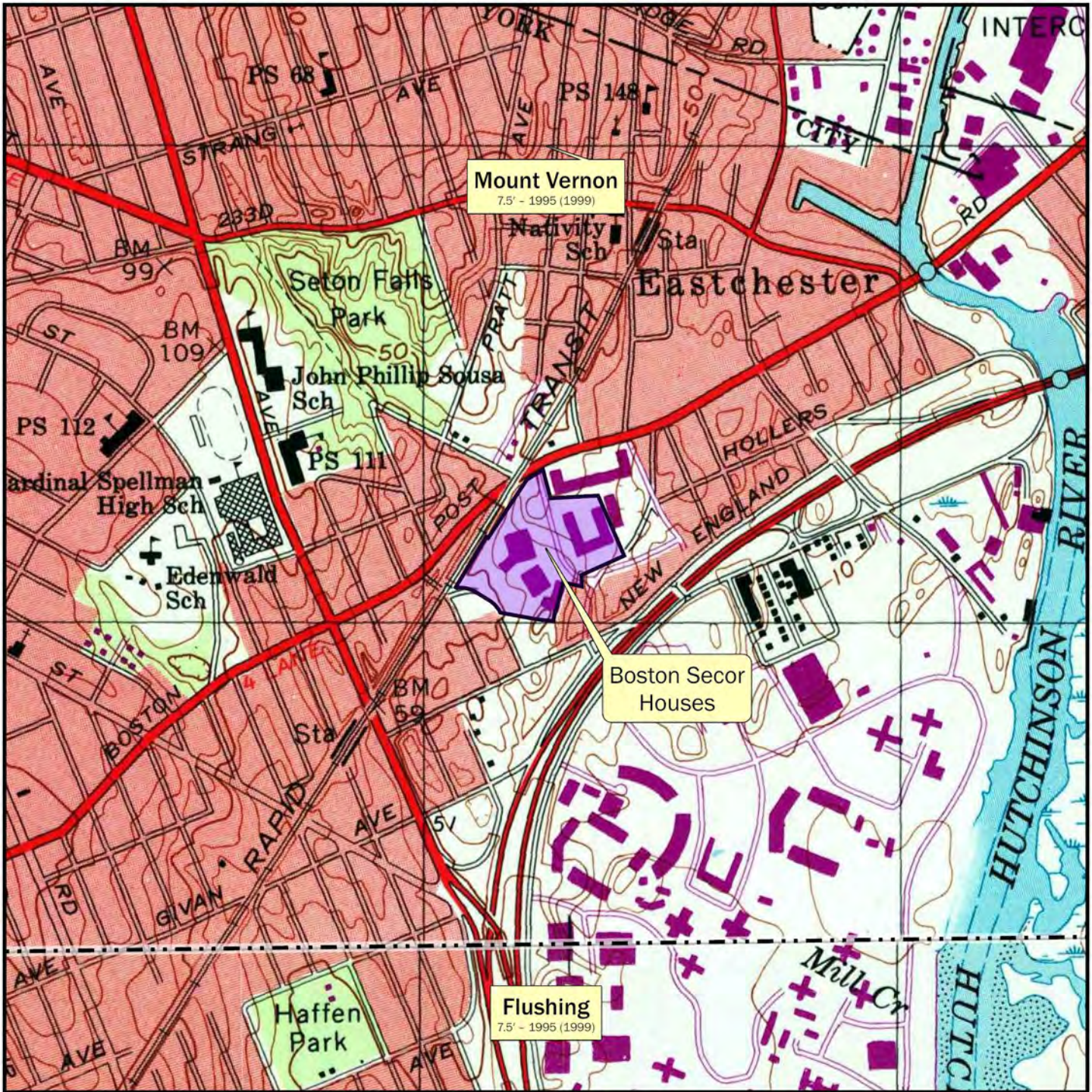




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Boston Secor Houses

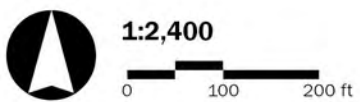



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2	40.883554	-73.832042	4	40.881842	-73.832473	6	40.881861	-73.835609

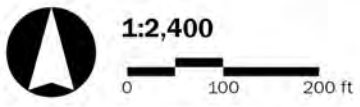




 Nomination Boundary (14.61 ac)





Parcel Status Map  
See Resource List for details



 Nomination Boundary  Contributing

