United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Middletown Plaza

other names/site number

name of related multiple property listing N/A

2. Location

street & number 3033 Middletown Road ☐ not for publication

city or town Bronx ☐ vicinity

state New York code NY county Bronx code 005 zip code 10461

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

5. Classification

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

	private
X	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

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

X	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	**Total**

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

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 / Brutalism

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: CONCRETE
roof: ASPHALT
other: METAL

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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

Middletown Plaza, located at 3033 Middletown Road, is a senior public housing project in the Pelham Bay neighborhood of the eastern Bronx, Bronx County, New York. The development is located on a 1.13-acre site bounded by Hobart Avenue to the west, Public School 71 to the north, Jarvis Avenue to the east, and Middletown Road to the south. Designed by Paul Rudolph and completed in 1973 for the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the property is composed of a fifteen-story Brutalist-style tower containing 177 residential units with a one-story community center incorporated into its base. Built with a reinforced-concrete frame, board-formed exposed concrete piers and spandrels, and split-ribbed concrete block cladding, the design itself was a showcase for the versatility and monumentality of concrete as a building material. The surrounding modern landscape design by George F. Cushine also used concrete extensively. The building has been in continuous use as a senior citizen residence with a variety of community services since its construction. Although some alterations have been made to the building, including an expansion of the senior center in 1982, Middletown Plaza retains a high degree of integrity to its original design.

Narrative Description

Location

Named for the adjacent Pelham Bay Park, the Pelham Bay neighborhood is dominated by one- and two-family houses with scattered five- and six-story apartment buildings. Four low-scale commercial corridors, at Westchester Avenue, Crosby Avenue, Middletown Road, and East Tremont Avenue, transect the neighborhood. Though located near the eastern edge of the Bronx, Pelham Bay is served by rapid transit via the IRT Pelham Line and by three major automobile routes: Pelham Parkway, the Hutchinson River Parkway, and the Bruckner Expressway.

Within a predominantly low-rise urban environment, Pelham Bay's five isolated high-rise residential towers—1950 Hutchinson Parkway East (1958), Hazel Towers (1970), 1720 Mayflower Avenue (1964), Pelham Bay Towers (1964), and Middletown Plaza (1973)—are highly prominent in the neighborhood. As a "scatter-site" public housing project intended to place new public housing in existing middle-class neighborhoods, Middletown Plaza is the sole NYCHA-owned and operated development in Pelham Bay.

Site Plan & Landscape

Middletown Plaza occupies the southern half of the block between Hobart and Jarvis Avenues; the northern half of the block is the site of Public School 71 (1925, NRHP-eligible). The built area of Middletown Plaza is confined to the southern end of its property facing Middletown Road, with the tower set back from the street behind the projecting ground-floor senior center and front plaza. The plaza is raised above street level behind a split-ribbed concrete-block retaining wall; the wall continues to the east along Middletown Road as a fence. The concrete materiality and texturing throughout the plaza blur the distinction between building and landscape, with the community center and tower rising from the plaza's landscaping in the same raw-concrete Brutalist styling as the plaza itself.

The entry plaza, located in front of the main entrance overlooking Middletown Road, is accessed by a series of low, broad concrete steps rising from the sidewalk. The plaza is characterized by its sparse modern detailing and its dramatic spatial relationship with the building's entry portico. On the south and north sides of the tower,

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the plaza is paved with scored concrete slabs. The section of the plaza on the tower's west side is punctuated by a rigid grid of twelve tree pits planted with pagoda trees; today, only eight of the trees survive. The western plaza's tree pits are interspersed with historic wooden benches and metal replacement benches. This area was originally paved with asphalt but is now paved with non-historic scored concrete slabs.

To the east, the plaza landscaping continues along the community center frontage that provides the community center with outdoor space. The community center plaza was reduced in size and modified with new planters during an expansion in 1982. At the far east side of the tower is a narrow strip of lawn.

The northern section of the plaza, facing the rear parking lot, is centered upon a tree pit with a single large honey locust framed by low, square-cut barberry. The aluminum lampposts throughout the plaza are original, but their original globe lamps have each been replaced with new LED fixtures. Immediately north of the tower is a parking area. At the plaza's northwest corner where the perimeter retaining wall approaches the rising ground level, a triangular plot paved with alternating-height concrete pavers slopes from the top of the retaining wall to the sidewalk below. The area north of the parking area (not included in this nomination, see boundary justification) is used as a sitting area; since a 1994 redesign, the sitting area has been known as William Koltavich Park.

Exterior

Rising fifteen stories above Middletown Road with a three-story rooftop bulkhead, Middletown Plaza consists of a residential tower with a projecting one-story community center at its base. In an iteration of the Brutalist style, the entire exterior is rendered in raw concrete and glass—with exposed poured-concrete columns and beams and split-ribbed concrete-block infill arranged in stack bond.

The tower is organized as a heavily articulated double-loaded-corridor slab, with each bay thrust varying distances outward, providing the facade with a sense of inward and outward motion. The main entrance is located at the western end of the facade, and is distinguished by a double-height portico, topped by an irregularly shaped balcony. The poured-concrete surfaces are textured by wooden formwork patterning, while the concrete block infill has a precast rough-hewn texture on the outer surfaces of its ribbing. A limited number of masonry units have been replaced in kind at the spandrel beams across all four elevations.

The entrance is recessed behind three monumental concrete piers that support the balcony and tower above. Infill at the entrance is composed of non-historic stainless steel and glass capped by a smooth concrete band, which wraps around the southwest corner of the tower. The door itself, roughly centered between the two eastern concrete piers in front of the entry, is a simple non-historic stainless steel and glass panel. The historic entry door followed a similar configuration to the existing, but it featured a metal push bar.

The cantilevered balcony above the entry is irregularly shaped around the varying planes of the tower's facade, and the stainless-steel flagpole mounted upon its balustrade helps emphasize the location of the main entrance below. The flagpole is anchored to a chevron-shaped stainless-steel collar. The balustrade lining the outside of the balcony is rimmed by a white-painted steel railing. The balcony floor is paved with reddish-brown rectangular concrete pavers arranged in a running-bond pattern, and the ceiling is an unpainted textured stucco over concrete. At the east end of the balcony, a deep recess in the tower's cladding rises to the fifth story to create a three-story ceiling height for a single bay; here, each story has replacement tripartite aluminum casement windows. A steel-frame door with glass infill and flanked by a fixed sidelight provides balcony access from the third-floor residential corridor.

The bay to the east of the entrance and balcony comprises the tower's utility core and rises as a continuous recessed, windowless expanse of ribbed concrete block to the rooftop utility bulkhead at the sixteenth story.

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East of the utility core the tower continues for another ten bays that vary by depth and window configuration; each room lining the facade features a differing wall plane that makes the building's interior layout legible from the exterior. The tower bays alternate between two configuration schemes: partial-height, full-width windows with a fixed center sash flanked by double-hung sash above concrete-block bases; and partial-width, full-height windows with a fixed-glass panel below and double-hung sash above, flanked by concrete-block infill. The partial-width windows feature replacement fixed tempered-glass panels, which are obscured on the interior by non-historic aluminum panels. Historically, the operable windows on Middletown Plaza were either steel or aluminum sliding sash (both options were documented in the architectural drawings, and it is not clear which was ultimately used); the existing aluminum double-hung and fixed picture windows are non-historic replacements installed during the 1990s.

The north elevation of the tower is fifteen bays wide and follows an articulation pattern modified from the front elevation. Its western three bays contain entry infill at the base that matches the non-historic entry infill of the south elevation. The rear entrance is protected by a cantilevered overhang supporting the tower bay above; the supporting columns of this bay extend to the ground as freestanding columns that frame the doorway. Like the cantilevered overhangs above the main entrance and third-floor balcony, the underside of the overhang is clad in unpainted, textured stucco.

The east and west ends of the tower, which are bisected by a differential in wall plane, lack out-facing windows. On the west end of the tower, the south bay extends beyond the plane of the north bay, creating space for north-facing windows on the south bay's outward jut. On the east end, this scheme is reversed such that the north bay juts beyond the plane of the south. The west end of the tower features an additional quirk: a five-story arcade creates a western access point to the entrance at ground-level and a small west-facing exposure for the balcony at the third floor. The ceiling above the west face of the balcony is an additional three stories in height; this condition is reflected at the tower recess on the east end of the balcony.

At the roof of the tower, all east-west oriented exterior walls terminate at the roof's floor, while the north-south oriented exterior walls rise to form parapets. These roof parapets have battered ends and are complemented by canted stainless-steel railings that enclose the east-west gaps between the concrete fins. The roof's centerpiece is the utility bulkhead, which rises an additional three stories in height and bears a distinctive north-sloping shed roof. The split-ribbed concrete-block bulkhead conceals the building's elevator bulkhead and water tower.

The community center, which occupies most of the first floor of Middletown Plaza, extends south from the tower toward Middletown Road. The community center features a distinctive sloping roof, and its entrance is located just east of the main residential entry beneath a non-historic stainless-steel canopy added in 1982. A non-historic 1982 addition to the community center, designed by Walter F. Schacht with Simon Thorensen and Associates, most significantly extended the assembly and arts & crafts rooms south toward the Middletown Road street edge and rebuilt a portion of the exterior wall for the creation of a new south-facing kitchen. The non-historic addition and other changes abided by the design language of Rudolph's original community center by incorporating matching split-ribbed concrete-block cladding. The non-historic 1982 addition readily contrasts with the original community center by having a flat roof that rises to a higher plane than the original building's sloping roof; on the north side, the non-historic addition features clerestory windows that overlook the sloped roof to the north.

Interior

On the interior, Middletown Plaza is organized as a double-loaded corridor tower rising from a combined lobby and community-center podium. The public spaces prevalent on the first floor retain their colorful historic finishes, including two-toned baked enamel block walls and dark-red quarry-tile floors. The residential tower is

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configured along a double-loaded corridor with separate elevator and stair cores; lining the corridor to the north and south are apartments of various size and configuration, ranging from studio apartments to two-bedroom apartments. The upper floors retain many of their utility-oriented historic finishes including painted CMU, plasterboard walls, and safety handrails.

The tower's residential entrance opens into a vestibule followed by a high-ceilinged residential lobby. The lobby's walls are clad in two-toned baked enamel block in an ivory and orange color scheme, while the floor is clad in dark-red square quarry tile. The lobby is interrupted near its center by a tile-clad structural column; a plaster pier with a tile-clad base extends south from this column with the residential mailboxes embedded within. The main lobby is flanked to the east by an elevator lobby, featuring orange-tile north and south walls and an ivory-tile east wall. The two residential elevators are located on the elevator lobby's south wall, framed by stainless-steel housing with rounded corners. Ceilings throughout the lobby are painted, textured concrete, with a dropped plaster ceiling in the lobby's north section, near the rear entrance.

In addition to the elevators, vertical circulation through the building is provided by two staircases that are arranged in a scissor configuration and located near the center of the building. The stairs serve each upper floor and empty into the first-floor community center, providing egress at the north side of the property. The staircases feature utilitarian finishes, including concrete steps, painted CMU walls, and steel banisters that match the residential corridor railings.

The residential elevators arrive at the west ends of the upper-floor residential corridors within small elevator lobbies. The upper-floor elevator lobbies and corridors have simple finishes, with painted CMU walls, grey linoleum tile flooring, and painted, textured concrete ceilings. The north sides of the corridors are lined with historic steel handrails. Building services, comprising a maintenance office and laundry room, are housed at the west ends of the second and third floors respectively. On the third floor, the corridor extends west past the elevator lobby to provide access to the balcony and laundry room. The laundry room features original ivory-colored ceramic-tile walls and dark-red quarry-tile flooring.

The presence of the maintenance office, balcony, and laundry room on the second and third floors reduces the number of units on these floors to twelve apartments. Above the fourth floor, each residential floor follows a typical plan with fourteen units per floor lining a double-loaded corridor. Of these fourteen units, two are studio apartments, eleven (twelve on the fourth floor) are one-bedroom apartments, and above the fifth floor one is a two-bedroom apartment. In total, the tower houses 177 units. Front doors to the apartments are simple steel slabs with built-in interviewers. Though varying in size and layout, Middletown Plaza's apartments share simple finishes, including smooth plaster walls, painted textured concrete ceilings, and vinyl-tile over a concrete floor. At the base of the vertical windows, non-historic aluminum spandrels have been added at the interior.

The community center at Middletown Plaza is accessed via a non-historic vestibule added in 1982. The vestibule opens into a small lobby that extends between the lounge to the north and the assembly room and kitchen to the south; facing the vestibule from the east is an office. The lobby retains historic finishes, including glazed ceramic structural-tile and plaster walls, along with a glass-and-metal wall looking in from the office. The floor is dark-red square quarry tile. To account for the lower floor level of the assembly room, a short flight of three steps descends at the southern end of the lobby. Clustered together as an open-plan space north of the lobby, the community center's club room and lounge share common finishes: orange- and ivory-colored glazed ceramic structural-tile walls, non-historic vinyl-tile flooring, and textured-plaster and acoustic-panel ceilings. The acoustic-panel ceilings are non-historic and date to the community center's 1982 renovation. A corridor extending east from the lounge leads to the arts and crafts room.

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Integrity

Through its intact architecture and landscaping, Middletown Plaza exhibits a high degree of integrity. Though minimal changes to the building and property 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 replacement of select landscape features—the 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 Middletown Plaza over the course of its history reflect NYCHA's evolving, often standardized renovation practices, as well as the changing needs of residents.

By retaining its textural concrete structural frame and cladding system, idiosyncratic modular massing, and integrated plaza design, Middletown Plaza remains a highly legible landmark of New York City's public housing architecture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In its interior layout and features, including original floor plans, circulation, and public space finishes, the combined tower and community center continue to reflect Middletown Plaza's specialized design as an affordable senior housing project.

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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.)

- [X] 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.
- [X] 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.

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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1970-1973

Significant Dates
1973

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Paul Rudolph (architect)
George F. Cushine (landscape architect)

Period of Significance (justification)
The period of significance is based on the dates of construction of the housing complex, 1970-1973.

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.)

Middletown Plaza is significant under **Criterion A** in the areas of *Social History* and *Politics/Government* as an distinctive, intact example of a "scatter-site" public housing project built for seniors in New York City that illustrates both the city's efforts to provide housing for the city's needy populations and the entrenched intolerance that threatened to derail them. Completed in 1973 in the Pelham Bay neighborhood of the Bronx, the fifteen-story building was part of the scatter-site housing program initiated by Mayor John Lindsay in 1966 as part of an effort to battle the city's entrenched racial and economic segregation. A companion to 1966s Model Cities program, which was intended to rebuild deteriorated inner-city neighborhoods, the scatter-site projects, all built by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), were smaller public housing projects located within established middle-income communities where they could ostensibly "foster economic and ethnic integration and stable balanced communities."[1] Despite these good intentions, the program faced stiff resistance from the residents of majority-white neighborhoods who objected to the influx of new residents due to a fear of overcrowding and a desire to use the land for other public purposes (such as parks and libraries). These thinly veiled objections were often code for discrimination and bigotry, as residents fought to keep their neighborhoods free of diverse racial, ethnic, and economic groups. The late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by protracted, emotionally charged public battles over the program that revealed the effects of long-term income inequality, economic injustice, and officially sanctioned discrimination that plagued efforts of lower-income groups to find decent, affordable housing in New York City.

The project is also significant under **Criterion A** in the area of S*ocial History* as an example of senior public housing, a building type that developed during the 1950s and 1960s to address the needs of the increasingly large population of older people in the United States, many of whom had low incomes.[2] Developments like Middletown Plaza were the result of successive rounds of national legislation that expanded the ability of seniors to qualify for public housing and increased the funding provided for the construction of senior housing. These projects not only provided seniors, both working and retired, with affordable housing that met their specific physical needs, but also aimed to provide them with a community. Unfortunately, a number of these projects were also part of the scatter-site effort and were initially blocked by groups seeking to preserve racial exclusivity, in some cases leading to long delays or even cancellation.

Middletown Plaza is also significant under **Criterion C** in the area of *Architecture* for its outstanding Brutalist design by renowned modern architect Paul Rudolph and its complementary landscape design by George F. Cushine. The project features a single fifteen-story tower with 177 apartments and an attached one-story community center, all executed with a cast-in-place *béton brut* concrete frame and split-ribbed concrete-block cladding. Rudolph's work, particularly in the 1960s, explored modularity and functionalism and was often executed in the Brutalist style, which primarily used concrete and played with light, shadow, scale, and composition. In 1965, Rudolph moved his offices to New York, where he began to design large-scale housing. In 1967 he was hired by NYCHA to design two housing projects, which, included both Middletown Plaza and the Lewis S. Davidson Sr. Houses in the Bronx (completed 1973). Rudolph's design for Middletown Plaza was based on his belief that even in a small apartment "areas of different activity should be articulated, separated,"

[1] City Planning Commission, "Cal. No. 7, CP-19336, Plan and Project Approval," May 11, 1966, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7029.
[2] The term "elderly" is often used to describe frail individuals and is typically not preferred by older adults. During the middle part of the twentieth century, however, the word was in common usage and therefore it is used throughout this document. For more information on modern interpretations of the word see Dale Avers, et al., "Use of the Term 'Elderly,'" *Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy* 34, no.4 (October/December 2011), accessed May 4, 2023: https://journals.lww.com/jgpt/Fulltext/2011/10000/Use_of_the_Term__Elderly_.1.aspx.

along with the desire to have as many windows as possible, which led him to a design with a well-articulated exterior wall of windows and an irregular interior plan. Rudolph's design is among the most sophisticated in NYCHA's public housing catalogue. Rudolph also designed Tracey Towers, a Mitchell-Lama project in the West Bronx (completed 1974). The period of significance for Middletown Plaza is 1970 to 1973, the years of its construction.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Evaluating Public Housing[3]

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.[4] 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 housing. [5] 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, 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 often restricted the developments to lower budget buildings on constrained lots. 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.

[3] This section was prepared by the NYSHPO.
[4] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 123.
[5] Wright, *Building the Dream*, 123.

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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 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 the Pelham Bay neighborhood

Pelham Bay is a neighborhood located in the northeast section of the Bronx bounded by the Bronx & Pelham Parkway on the north, the New England Thruway (I-95) on the east, the Bruckner Expressway (I-95) on the south, and the Hutchison River Parkway on the west. It is situated on the inland side of the Throgs Neck peninsula, which extends to a point where the East River meets Long Island Sound.[6]

The area was first colonized in 1643 by John Throckmorton (1601-1684), an Englishman who first came to the United States in 1631 to participate in John Winthrop’s Massachusetts Bay colony.[7] In 1637, he established a

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[6] Throgs Neck is one of three peninsulas that jut into the East River, the others being Hunts Point and Clason Point, which are located to the south of Throgs Neck. Throgs Neck is sometimes spelled with two g’s; both spells are considered acceptable although one g is the more common spelling in the present day.

[7] New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, “Throgs Neck Expressway,” December 6, 2001, accessed May 4, 2023: https://www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/historical-signs/listings?id=11668.

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settlement in present-day Throgs Neck, "Throgs" being a corruption of Throckmorton's name. Shortly after its founding, the settlers were forced to leave the area after an attack by the Siwanoy Indians, the original inhabitants of the Bronx lands. Throckmorton sold the land in 1652 and it was subsequently subdivided into smaller properties.

The neighborhood's current name of Pelham Bay originates from its proximity to the large tract of land historically held by Thomas Pell (1608-1669). In 1654, Pell signed a treaty with the Siwanoy Tribe for approximately 50,000 acres of land that includes today's New Rochelle, Pelham, Pelham Manor, Eastchester, and other parts of the Bronx, including City Island and the majority of Pelham Bay Park, which is the origin of the neighborhood's name.[8]

For most of the nineteenth century, the neighborhood was a rural section of the Town of Westchester, a part of southern Westchester County. The Town of Westchester was surrounded by a number of small communities, including Schuylerville, Unionport, Bronxdale, Olinville, Stinard Town, and to its direct east, Middletown, a hamlet situated at the intersection of the present Middletown Road and Eastern Boulevard (now Bruckner Boulevard).[9] Located between Westchester Creek and Eastchester Bay, the area included small-to-moderately sized farms and grand country homes bordering the sound, including that of Lawrence Waterbury, whose estate, "Plaisance," would eventually be incorporated into Pelham Bay Park.[10]

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the Bronx and parts of Westchester became more unified, 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 hamlet of Middletown, 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.[11] In Pelham Bay, new development arrived with the extension of the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Company's Lexington Avenue line, which had opened from City Hall to Grand Central in 1904 and had subsequently been extended into the Bronx.[12] Between 1919 and 1920, the new Pelham Line was extended to Pelham Bay Park and included stations at Middletown Road and Buhre Avenue in the Pelham Bay neighborhood. Many of the farms and estates that had populated the area were sold, and speculative developers built swaths of new residences.[13]

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[8] Edward De Lancey, *Map of the manors erected within the county of Westchester* [map] (Philadelphia, PA: L.E. Preston & Co, 1886), Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed April 23, 2023: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/095023f0-1b8f-0134-0aed-00505686a51c.
[9] 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.
[10] New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Pelham Bay Park," accessed May 4, 2023: https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/pelham-bay-park/highlights/11607.
[11] Bill Twombly, *East Bronx: East of the Bronx River* (Charleston, SC: Acadia Publishing, 1999), 7.
[12] In the early twentieth-century other train lines had been established in this vicinity before the subways arrived. In 1910, the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company established passenger service along its Harlem River Branch, which effectively connected New York and New Haven. While other areas of the east Bronx began to rapidly develop, the line's stops at Westchester and Baychester (both demolished) skirted Throgs Neck, thus leaving the hamlet of Middletown largely untouched.
[13] The promise of the IRT extension also brought new development. In 1909, the Koch homestead, a property with 214 lots located on the south side of Middletown Road, was sold at auction. See auction paraphernalia in Bill Twombly and John McNamara, *Throggs Neck-Pelham Bay* (Charleston, SC: Acadia Publishing, 1998), 44.

In the early twentieth century, the land on which Middletown Plaza would eventually be built was the site of a wood-frame house with several outbuildings, all set on diagonal farm lot lines that contrasted with the surrounding gridded streets. During the 1920s, rows of detached houses began to fill the nearby blocks and a new school was built to accommodate the increased population. Public School 71, located on the north side of the block between Middletown Road and Roberts Avenue, and Hobart and Jarvis Streets, was built between 1924 and 1927 and extended in 1929. During this period, five- and six-story apartment buildings were also constructed in close proximity to the subway stations.

Other changes, especially the rise of the automobile and its roadways, accelerated the neighborhood's development and established it as a middle-class enclave with residents of mostly Italian and Irish descent. In 1939, the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, which connected Throgs Neck to the northern shore of Queens, opened along with the Hutchison River Parkway, which acted as a north-south artery through the neighborhood. Vast expansions in the nation's highway networks in the early 1960s further solidified Pelham Bay's connection to areas farther south and west. This included the construction of the Throgs Neck Expressway (now part of the New England Thruway, aka I-95) and the Throgs Neck Bridge in 1961, the construction of the Bruckner Expressway between 1960 and 1961, and the extension of Cross Bronx Expressway to Throgs Neck in 1961.

The 1960s also brought new city- and state-aided housing developments to Pelham Bay including the Hutchison, a city-aided limited profit project at 1950 Hutchinson Parkway (1961); Mayflower Terrace, a state-aided limited profit project at 1720 Mayflower Avenue (1964); and the Hazel Towers Apartments, a state-aided project at 1730 Mulford Avenue (1967). Hazel Towers, and the new public housing project initially known as the Middletown Road-Jarvis Avenue Area and later Middletown Plaza, both proved controversial due to their scale and the perceived overloading of community services. A local group known as the Pelham Bay Taxpayers and Civic Association, helmed by Mrs. Florence Colucci, fought the new projects with public protests, lawsuits, and statements through the press. These efforts were ultimately about retaining exclusive neighborhoods free of Black people and immigrants and they being fought in all of New York's outer boroughs in this period.

In 1976, a branch of the New York Public Library opened at the corner of Middletown Road and Jarvis Avenue, meeting some of the needs that the Pelham Bay Taxpayers and Civic Association had cited in their objections to the new housing developments. In the years since, the neighborhood has become increasingly racially and economically diverse with an influx of Hispanic residents, mostly from Puerto Rico, as well as Bangladeshis, Asians, and Albanians. In 2014, the *New York Times* described the neighborhood as a "working- and middle-class community of about 23,000 residents" with a high level of civic involvement.[14]

Scatter-site housing in the 1960s and 1970s

By the mid-1960s it had become clear to NYCHA that the days of large-scale neighborhood clearance and new massive developments based on the "towers in the park" model were waning, if not over.[15] Backlash to the wholesale clearance and rebuilding of entire neighborhoods reached a crescendo in the late 1950s and early 1960s as prominent critics such as public-housing advocate Catherine Bauer and journalist and community organizer Jane Jacobs voiced their concerns about the drastic changes these massive projects wrought on

[14] Alison Gregor, "Pelham Bay, the Bronx: A Blend of Urban and Suburban," *New York Times*, April 22, 2014.
[15] The "towers in the park" model was based on the ideas of Swiss-born French architect Le Corbusier. The concept originated in the Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine (1922), which was 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. Post-war planners, especially Robert Moses, New York's mercurial chairman of the Committee on Slum Clearance, fully embraced "towers in the park" as a method to enact the complete transformation of large sections of the metropolis. The architectural expression of the type was high-rise, high-density buildings on a landscaped site.

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existing neighborhoods, as well as their often lackluster design and poor management.[16] Beginning in the mid-1960s, government policy began to reflect the belief that overly large housing projects in concentrated areas effectively perpetuated and exacerbated the existing socio-economic problems of the localities in which they were placed.[17] Moreover, in response to complaints of outright discrimination in some of New York City's privately developed housing projects (ex. Stuyvesant Town), in 1950 the state legislature enacted a law forbidding racial discrimination in any housing that received state aid, for example, in the form of tax exemptions or land condemnation.[18]

Partially in response to this new attention, in March 1966, New York's liberal mayor, John Lindsay (1921-2000), announced plans for a new method of public housing site selection, in which projects were to be distributed more widely throughout the city. The "scatter-site" program, as it came to be known, called for the majority of new public housing in the city to be placed in outlying, non-minority neighborhoods where their presence could foster racial and economic integration.[19] The city's stated goal was to integrate low-income minorities, many of whom were being displaced from slums or were desirous of leaving slums, into stable, safe, and prosperous communities. A complementary goal of the Lindsay administration was that integration would have a favorable effect on the existing residents, who would theoretically become more tolerant and worldly.[20] By forcing integration, Lindsay's program actively sought to address segregation, which had long been entrenched in the public housing program and contributed to the economic stagnation and stigmatization of those who lived there. Another benefit often mentioned by public officials was that scattering the new projects would simply reduce the pressure on existing slums, which were estimated to house more than a million families.[21]

Lindsay's approach to the site selection for new federally aided public housing was two-fold. First, he created an interdepartmental group—consisting of the Office of the Housing and Development Coordinator, the Housing and Redevelopment Board, the New York City Housing Authority, and the Department of City Planning—to authorize the selection of new public housing sites, taking some of the onus off of the housing authority alone.[22] Second, he made clear that he would no longer recognize the unofficial vetoes issued by borough presidents in the past to block construction of public housing in residential areas of Brooklyn and Queens.[23]

The new projects would range in size, from "vest-pocket" developments (smaller buildings built on vacant land and carefully integrated into communities) to larger structures that were lower in density (scatter site projects). The main criterion was that these projects be located outside of so-called "ghetto" areas, including in middle-class neighborhoods and in low- and marginally middle-income areas. A complementary Model Cities program, also enacted in 1966, was created to address the physical, social, and economic issues of what were referred to

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[16] Catherine Bauer, "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," *Architectural Forum* 106, no. 5 (May 1957): 140-142; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
[17] Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 270-272.
[18] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 107.
[19] In the 1950s several cities had begun to explore the concept of dispersal of public housing, but the efforts were uneven before the late 1960s.
[20] Some conservative intellectuals took a particular affront to this method of social planning. One of these was Roger Starr, a planning official, author and editorial writer, who believed that scatter-site housing was unjustified and unproven. For more, see Roger Star, "The Lesson of Forest Hills," *Commentary* 53, no. 6 (June 1, 1971): 45-49, and Bruce Lambert, "Roger Starr, New York Planning Official, Author and Editorial Writer, Is Dead at 83," *New York Times*, September 11, 2001.
[21] Steven V. Roberts, "Charges of Bigotry Fly at Hearing on Housing for Poor," *New York Times*, August 3, 1967.
[22] "Lindsay Enlarges Housing Site Role," *New York Times*, March 17, 1966.
[23] Frank Lynn, "Lindsay Today," *Newsday*, June 18, 1966.

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as "hard-core slum areas" of Harlem-East Harlem in Manhattan, the South Bronx, and Bedford-Stuyvesant and East New York in central Brooklyn.[24]

The changes to New York City's approach to building public housing also coincided with the apex of the American civil rights movement, which had begun in the previous decade and called for equal rights for African Americans and for an end to legalized racial segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. The movement culminated in the mid-1960s with the passage of major legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion or sex, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, religion, or national origin. Although the Fair Housing Act removed obstacles for African Americans and other minorities to purchase homes, the truth was that these groups were still greatly disadvantaged, because they had not been able to build wealth through previous home ownership. While many celebrated the movement's success in ending the Jim Crow era, others, came to believe that the civil rights reforms did not do enough to address the racism and economic problems that continued to confront African Americans, nor did they erase the effects of its long-term history.

In tandem with these societal shifts, federal-level housing policy and programs changed in the mid-1960s. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson created a new cabinet department, called the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as part of his "Great Society" domestic program. When it was officially formed in 1966, the department began to create programs that were meant to address and rectify past policies that had been "destructive of community."[25] The new programs focused on minimizing the future impact on communities and included scatter-site housing, rent-supplement programs (allowing families to integrate into middle-income areas inconspicuously), and turnkey programs (harnessing the speed and money of private development on smaller projects; this program was not without problems, however, as it lacked the quality control exerted by government agencies). Many of these programs reflected a desire to rectify the previous failings of government housing policy, which had, over the previous decades, actively displaced minority groups from distressed areas and re-housed them, with only limited efforts at integration, in new projects of debatable quality.

Although some of the programs floundered for lack of funding, HUD's ability to steer the scatter-site program by way of its regulatory procedures was considerable. As the administrator of federal housing, HUD provided the architectural standards, cost allowances, and crucially, final sign-off on location, for all new federally financed projects. The concept of scatter-site housing became significantly more widespread after 1967, when HUD undertook a new policy of equal opportunity regulation pursuant to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In its Low-Rent Housing Manual, HUD noted that due to the persistence of placing new public housing projects in what was called the "ghetto," new proposals "to locate housing only in areas of racial concentration will be *prima facie* unacceptable."[26] In other words, to get federal funds, local housing authorities were going to have to prove that they were dispersing new public housing projects outside of minority-only communities or else do without the funds.

The city's first six scatter-site projects, located in middle-class communities in Kingsbridge, Riverdale and Pelham Bay in the Bronx, Woodside and Flushing in Queens, and Greenpoint in Brooklyn, were presented to

[24] Charles G. Bennett, "Model Cities Plan is Initiated Here," *New York Times*, August 17, 1967.
[25] George Schermer Associates quoted in James Hogan, *Scattered-Site Housing: Characteristics and Consequences* (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996), 5.
[26] Low-Rent Housing Manual quoted in Hogan, 6-7.

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the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate in April and May 1966.[27] While under the city's new approach, inner-city projects were to be low-scale, averaging from six to eight stories, the scatter-site projects were allowed to be high-rise structures.[28] Hundreds of people showed up to object to locating the proposals in their neighborhoods, arguing that the buildings were too big and that their communities lacked sufficient schools, transportation and recreational facilities, and thus could not absorb the additional population.[29] Their vociferous reaction was national news, with the *Chicago Defender*, a Black newspaper, publishing the headline: "N.Y. Homeowners Fight to Keep Negroes Confined to the Central City."[30]

By June 1966, the City Planning Commission had approved thirteen scatter-site projects, representing some 3,500 apartments, with roughly half reserved for the elderly. Recognizing the high level of tension around the subject of scatter-site housing, the City Planning Commission issued a statement defending the program. While it acknowledged the "fears and anxieties" expressed by opponents of low-income housing, it stated that "the real danger to the city is the feeling of hopelessness which can lead to the kind of explosions that tear at the very fabric of our society," undoubtedly referring to the increasing instances of race riots across the country.[31] These clashes were a broad reflection of the frustration and poverty faced by minorities, especially Black and Hispanic people, in the United States.[32] In addition to city officials, supporters of the scatter-site program included civic groups and housing advocates, many of whom realized that objections to the program were based on longstanding racial bigotry and efforts to maintain policies of discrimination and segregation.[33]

Of all the scatter-site projects, the one proposed at Forest Hills, Queens caused the largest uproar and had the most lasting impact on the program. Initially planned for Corona, the project was moved to Forest Hills after the former neighborhood objected to the proposal. The plan consisted of three twenty-four-story towers, a community center, and a parking lot. Over the course of six years, the community fought the project tooth and nail, garnering national headlines and countless thought pieces on the state of racial relations in America. In 1972, future governor Mario M. Cuomo was appointed to mediate the controversy. His efforts failed and after a few months, the public housing aspect of the project was abandoned in favor of a smaller cooperative-type building.

By November 1971, the city reported that of its original scatter-site projects the vast majority had been put on hold due to community opposition. At that point, the only project of the original group to have been completed was Cassidy-Lafayette, a complex of four six-story buildings for seniors in Staten Island. By the next year, a total of five projects were completed and many more were slated for completion, including several in the Bronx—located at East 180th Street and Monterrey Avenue, Bailey Avenue and West 193rd Street, 2440 Boston Road (later Boston Road Plaza), 3033 Middletown Road (later Middletown Plaza), Fort Independence

[27] "Housing Hearing Sets Off Debate," *New York Times*, April 21, 1966.
[28] Steven V. Roberts, "Housing in Slums to Avoid Towers," *New York Times*, June 8, 1966.
[29] Steven V. Roberts, "Housing Projects in Queens Scored," *New York Times*, June 16, 1966.
[30] "N.Y. Homeowners Fight to Keep Negroes Confined to the Central City," *The Chicago Defender*, May 21, 1966.
[31] Steven V. Roberts, "Planners Defend Public Housing," *New York Times*, June 22, 1966.
[32] Many of these issues came to the fore in a report issued by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the Kerner Commission), which investigated the causes of dozens of urban riots between 1964 and 1967. It warned that the concentration of housing in slum areas was reinforcing the "ghetto walls" and urged the continuation of scatter-site housing programs. For more, see David K. Shipley, "McGovern Says He Is Opposed to Forced Scatter-Site Housing," *New York Times*, October 28, 1972.
[33] Roberts, "Charges of Bigotry Fly at Hearing on Housing for Poor."

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Street and Health Avenue, Tremont Avenue and Sedgewick Avenue, and Randall Avenue and Balcom Avenue—as well as a project at Pennsylvania Avenue and Wortman Avenue in East New York, Brooklyn.[34]

By 1972, a third of the Housing Authority's twenty-four scatter-site developments were designated for the elderly. According to NYCHA chair Simeon Golar (1928-2013), a Black man, the first chair to have grown up in public housing, and the public face of the program, this was due to legal and practical reasons. "When it becomes difficult to get housing through," he noted in the *New York Times*, "communities are always more amenable to projects for the elderly—partly because the elderly are usually white and partly because the community appreciates the need for housing these people."[35] The federal government, Golar added, also provided more funds for these types of projects. Taller buildings had also proved more suitable for elderly tenants than for families, who had difficulty supervising children from high floors.

Not all cities maintained as strict an adherence to the federal government's scatter-site policy as New York. In fact, due to a failure to provide plans for scatter-site developments, the federal government halted federal public housing funds to the housing authorities in Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Cleveland. New York, by contrast, had a constant stream of funds flowing toward the city.

This federal money came to a halt, however, with President Richard Nixon's housing moratorium on January 8, 1973, which reflected a shift towards conservatism on domestic policy issues.[36] Under the moratorium, HUD suspended all subsidized housing programs and issued strict new guidelines for urban renewal, bringing many cities' housing construction programs to a halt.[37] After this point, the Nixon and Ford administrations focused on de-concentration through residential mobility programs, specifically Section 8 certificates and vouchers, which were authorized under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The legislation effectively marked the end of funding for the construction of new public housing and for other forms of subsidized housing, and the beginning of federal funds flowing through block grants and income support.

By 1975, however, some scatter-site projects were being welcomed by their former opponents. Although the middle-class Kingsbridge community had protested the construction of the Fort Heath-Independence project, three years later it was considered a success and, according to Mayor Abraham Beame (1906-2001), a "model for the kind of results that can be achieved when government officials and community residents work together."[38]

Many housing authorities continued to explore strategies in the development of scatter-site housing through the second half of the twentieth century. In 1996, a comprehensive study was made by HUD of scatter-site programs and their characteristics and performance. The survey concluded that it was "a demonstrably better housing choice for families than concentrated high-density projects," that could, through the weaving together of separate spatial systems, "fashion effective remedies to the poverty, inequality and hyper segregation that characterize many U.S. cities today."[39] Efforts to implement non-federally financed scatter-site public housing continue in locations across the country today.

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[34] Steven R. Weisman, "Housing Unit Reports Progress on 'Scatter-Site' Goals for City," *New York Times*, November 28, 1971; Preston Layton, "Scatter-Site Housing Finds a Home in the City," *Daily News*, November 19, 1971.
[35] Jonathan Kandell, "Opposition to Scatter-Site Housing Transcends Racial and Economic Lines," *New York Times*, February 6, 1971.
[36] Hogan, 7.
[37] Agis Salpukas, "Moratorium on Housing Subsidy Spells Hardship for Thousands," *New York Times*, April 16, 1973.
[38] Jill Gerston, "Bronx Scatter-Site Project Welcomed by Its Ex-Foes," *New York Times*, February 14, 1975.
[39] Hogan, xvii.

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Public housing for seniors

In the United States, the problems of the nation's elderly became a public, widespread issue during the 1930s as the Depression took hold and a large number of older, unemployed workers sought aid from the government. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act, which gave cash assistance to the elderly as part of his vast New Deal domestic program. Few advancements were made in senior citizen policy until after World War II when, in 1950, President Harry Truman initiated the first National Conference on Aging, which sought to evaluate the policy challenges posed by the elderly population. The Conference concluded that senior citizens were the most rapidly growing portion of the population, the majority of them lived in cities, and a significant portion had low incomes.[40]

Although virtually no federal policy addressed the housing issues of the elderly, housing officials in New York City sought to address the needs of poor seniors. Since its inception in 1933, NYCHA had provided apartments for the elderly in its public housing developments. Early examples of projects with housing reserved for aged persons include the Red Hook Houses (Alfred Easton Poor, 1938), which had an entire wing of two-room apartments for elderly residents, and the Fort Greene Houses (Rosario Candela, Wallace K. Harrison, et al, 1944, now separated into two entities and known as the Walt Whitman and Ingersoll Houses), which had fifty-six one-room apartments for aged, single persons.[41] In 1942, New York State began its first program of housing for the elderly, requiring that a percentage of its state-aided projects be designed and reserved for aged persons.[42] In 1956, it was estimated that approximately 1,000 aged singles and 1,500 aged couples lived in New York City's public housing units.

In 1956 President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the Federal-State Council on Aging and signed housing act amendments that made single elderly people eligible to live in public housing programs, increased funding for projects associated with public housing for the elderly, and granted loans to the elderly under the Federal Housing Administration program. In addition to spurring new nationwide construction, the changes in public policy also had the effect of attracting the interest of architectural thinkers and practitioners. In May 1956, architectural historian and critic Lewis Mumford wrote in *Architectural Record* about the need to integrate older people into urban settings, and in August 1958 Jane Jacobs called for more public housing for the elderly.[43] Additionally, architectural competitions began to address the concept of senior housing, such as the one held by *Architectural Record* that was sponsored by the National Committee on Aging of the National Social Welfare Assembly.[44]

In addition to discussions of how to locate and plan senior housing, the articles also detailed the design considerations required for housing for the aged, which mostly centered on their safety and comfort. Features deemed desirable, if not necessary, for apartments for the elderly included: at the entry, wider doorways without thresholds to prevent tripping; in the bathroom, "non-slip" tile floors, bathtubs with built-in seats, and grab bars at the tub wall; in the kitchen, wheelchair-height electric stoves to avoid asphyxiation by gas, and lower shelves and cabinets to provide easier reach; and in the living areas, larger radiators to provide more heat, additional lighting, and plenty of closets. In addition to physical needs, the social and emotional needs of seniors were

[40] *Some facts about Our Aging Population; National Conference on Aging Federal Security Agency, Washington, D.C. August 13-15, 1950* (Washington, DC: National Conference on Aging, 1950).
[41] Thomas W. Ennis, "Homes for Aged: Modern Dilemma," *New York Times*, November 18, 1956.
[42] In 1956, New York State required senior housing to make up five percent of new projects. By 1961, that had increased to ten percent.
[43] Lewis Mumford, "For Older People—Not Segregation but Integration," *Architectural Record* 119 (May 1956): 191-194; Jane Jacobs, "Housing for the Independent Aged," *Architectural Forum* 109 (August 1958): 86-91.
[44] "Prize Winning Designs and Report of the Jury - Home for the Aged Competition," *Architectural Record* (January 1956): 161-168.

increasingly seen as critical to their well-being, and, thus, the importance of community centers, where seniors could socialize with friends and family, were deemed a necessary component of almost any new senior-focused structure.

Early senior public housing projects constructed under the Housing Act of 1956 included the Highland Garden Apartments in Somerville, MA (Abbott Associates, 1959), Victoria Plaza in San Antonio, TX (Noonan & Thompson & Krocker and Marmon & Mom, 1960), and Dexter Manor in Providence, RI (Lloyd W. Kent, 1962).[45] Victoria Plaza, in particular, was celebrated as an example of high-rise construction that was "being used as a research laboratory in the problems of the aging" in which local artists, merchants, landscape architects, and service organizations were all given a proprietary interest, making it a community enterprise.

The Housing Act of 1959 encouraged additional federal public housing projects for the elderly and authorized the FHA to grant mortgage insurance for nonprofit rental housing for the elderly. In May 1961, the first White House Conference on Aging brought additional national attention to the subject of senior public housing and laid out specific policy statements and recommendations. The report called for an expansion and extension of the public housing program for the elderly, especially where private enterprise could not meet the locality's needs.[46] In terms of planning and design, it called for multi-unit structures to be dispersed in neighborhood areas rather than "concentrated in institutional-like projects" where seniors could maintain close relationships with community and health agencies.[47]

The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, signed by President Lyndon Johnson, expanded federal funding for the construction of senior public housing and raised the allowable construction costs from $3,000 to $3,500 per room. Overall, the federal government allowed higher costs for senior housing. However, this was not due to the expense of its senior-specific features, rather, it was because these buildings needed to accommodate a higher number of small units compared to the average non-senior public housing development. One notable example of new senior public housing was Crawford Manor, a fifteen-story tower in New Haven, Connecticut, featuring a ribbed concrete-block skin and distinctly shaped curved balconies that was designed by Paul Rudolph and completed in 1967.[48] Like other public housing, efforts to build senior public housing were largely abandoned with Nixon's 1973 housing moratorium and after that point, endeavors to build senior housing were relegated to private industry.

Middletown Plaza

Less than one month after the scatter-site program was announced, a new project known as the "Middletown Road-Jarvis Avenue Area," or Project No. NY 5-102, was presented to the City Planning Commission (CPC). The proposal involved the construction of a sixteen-story building with 183 apartment units designed for the elderly on a 1.13-acre site in the Pelham Bay neighborhood of the Bronx. The site on which it was to be built was largely vacant and only occupied by a frame dwelling and a one-story store building.

An initial CPC hearing was held on March 30, 1966, at which time representatives from the mayor's office urged a quick approval so that the city could secure commitments for funds under the 1965-1966 federal housing program. The Bronx Borough president, however, asked for a continuation, and a second hearing was

[45] "Public Housing for the Elderly," *Progressive Architecture* 42 (March 1961).
[46] United States Congress, Senate Special Committee on Aging, *The 1961 White House Conference On Aging: Basic Policy Statements And Recommendations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1961), 69.
[47] United States Congress, Senate Special Committee on Aging, *The 1961 White House Conference On Aging,* 73.
[48]" Balconies for the Elderly," *Architectural Forum* 124, no. 2 (March 1966): 57; "Crawford Manor Apartments," *Progressive Architecture* 48 (May 1967): 125-129.

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held on April 20th. At that hearing the Pelham Bay Taxpayers and Civic Association, a group led by Florence Colucci, and other residents, stated their opposition to the project, principally based on the contention that the site should be utilized for an addition to P.S. 71, a library, or a civic or community center. At the hearing, the group's lawyer noted that "we are not objecting to housing as such, but we are objecting to the proposal of any housing in this particular area."[49] This, of course, was a thinly disguised way of stating just that: that they were opposed to housing in *their* neighborhood, a coded expression of racism, classism, and exclusion.

In the opposite corner were the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council, a housing-focused non-profit research and education organization founded in 1937, and the Metropolitan Council on Housing, a tenants rights organization founded in 1959, both of which spoke in favor of the project. Despite objections by Commissioner Elinor Guggenheimer, the first woman to have joined the CPC in 1961, and Commissioner Beverly Moss Spatt, a planner and preservationist, the project was approved by the CPC and soon after by the Board of Estimate (BOE).

Shortly after the BOE approval, the Pelham Bay Taxpayers and Civic Association filed a lawsuit to invalidate the BOE meeting since neither the mayor nor the city council president had been in attendance as required by the City Charter. In August 1966, the State Supreme Court ruled in the association's favor and the BOE decision on the Middletown Road-Jarvis Avenue Area was reversed, much to the consternation of city officials who worried about what that meant for the dozens of other consequential decisions the BOE had made in the meantime.[50] A headline in the *New York Times* declared that "Bronx Housewife Wins City Praise" after a parade of 700 neighborhood residents marched through the streets of Pelham Bay following the lawsuit victory.[51] By November, however, the judge reversed his ruling after he was informed that the mayor and the City Council president had designated aides to sit in on the relevant meetings.

In mid-1967, architect Paul Rudolph (1918-1997) was engaged to design two projects for NYCHA, both under the same contract number.[52] One was the Lewis S. Davidson Sr. project, a Bronx Model Cities development at 810 Home Street in the Morrisania neighborhood of the South Bronx, and the other was the Middletown Road-Jarvis Avenue Area project, soon known as 3033 Middletown Road.

One of the nation's foremost architects in the 1960s, Paul Rudolph was born in Elkton, Kentucky, and studied at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) as well as the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he was trained by Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius. In 1952, Rudolph started his own firm and spent several years in Florida, where he experimented with modern materials and design in buildings such as at the Revere Quality Institute House (NRHP 2008), built in 1949 in Sarasota, FL.

In 1958, Rudolph became the chair of the Yale Department of Architecture and opened an office in New Haven. While there he was invited to work on several construction projects on campus, including the Yale Art & Architecture Building (1958-1963), a seven-story tour de force of poured-in-place concrete and exposed textured concrete, all with complex and contrasting vertical and horizontal elements. The building's design was an example of what came to be known as the Brutalist style, which was first popularized in the 1950s by British

[49] Pelham Bay Taxpayers and Civic Association, Inc. v. Honorable John V. Lindsay, Hon. Mario A. Procaccino, Hon. Frank D. O'Connor, Hon. Constance Baker Motley, Hon. Herman Badillo, Hon. Abe Stark, Hon. Mario J. Cariello and Hon. Robert T. Connor, constituting the Board of Estimate of the City of New York in *Records and Briefs New York State Appellate Division* (New York: Library of The New York Law Institute, 1968), 14, accessed May 4, 2023: https://www.google.com/books/edition/Records_and_Briefs_New_York_State_Appell/b6vX5gFAr2UC?hl=en&gbpv=1
[50] Edith Evans Asbury, "Estimate Session Voided by Court," *New York Times*, August 12, 1966.
[51] Edith Evans Asbury, "Bronx Housewife Wins City Praise," *New York Times*, August 28, 1966.
[52] Both projects were known as NY 5-96.

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architects Alison and Peter Smithson and then widely adopted in Britain in large-scale governmental, institutional, and public housing construction.[53] The style was characterized by the use of unadorned building materials, notably concrete, in bold geometric and/or sculptural forms and often monochromatic color schemes. Although sometimes associated with a socialist utopian ideology, it was more often considered an aesthetic that placed a heavy emphasis on form and material. Brutalism offered a distinct contrast to the other major expression of Modernism, the International Style. While the International Style advocated for a very pure, abstracted expression of the classical style, Brutalism was purely subjective and expressionistic. This is reflected in the character of the materials typical of each: glass and exposed steel framing vs sculptural concrete.

By the early 1960s, the Brutalist style had gained popularity in the U.S. and was being used by architects such as Louis I. Kahn, Marcel Breuer, and Ralph Rapson. Rudolph's Yale Art & Architecture Building, in particular, captured the imagination of the architectural world with its concrete monumentality. It had the effect of both introducing the Brutalist style to the public and making Rudolph famous. Soon, Rudolph had risen in prominence, becoming one of the most renowned architects of his generation. The 1960s saw his career skyrocket as he designed dozens of Late Modern and/or Brutalist residential, institutional, and civic buildings, mostly along the Eastern seaboard.

In many of his works, Rudolph explored spatial relationships, particularly the way larger and smaller spaces created major and minor areas, and the vast possibilities of concrete, which he believed provided more feeling and expression than materials typically used in the International Style. Rudolph's use of concrete evolved over time. At the Yale Arts & Architecture Building, an on-site, handmade process was used to create the textured concrete: formworks were built, then filled with a large-aggregate concrete mix, and once those were removed the concrete was hammered to expose the aggregate. To Rudolph, the textured or corrugated surface was important for two reasons. First, the ridges worked to break down the scale of the building, much like flutes in classical columns, and second, the ridges were able to withstand staining and weathering better than smooth concrete.[54]

In an attempt to reduce the expense of that hand-crafted process, which he initially intended to use at the Charles A. Dana Creative Arts Center (1963-1966) at Colgate University in upstate New York, Rudolph switched to a prefabricated concrete block, which was manufactured by the Plasticrete Corporation and could be made into rough-textured ribbed blocks and smooth fluted blocks.[55] The rough-textured blocks were ultimately used as infill units, stacked in a way that gave the illusion of ribs or modern fluting, with matching mortar, all contrasting with the cast-in-place *béton brut* concrete frame. The smooth fluted version of the block was used at Crawford Manor (1962-1966), a senior public housing project in New Haven, Connecticut, with curved balconies that was hailed as the "tallest all-block building in the U.S."[56] Rudolph's adoption of concrete block was, according to historian Réjean Legault, "a shift from the monolithic concrete wall to the light masonry partition, from the process of casting to that of bonding, from the building site to the factory."[57] In the end, the concrete block was an affordable, machine-made, endlessly adaptable textural element that allowed Rudolph to experiment with surface pattern.

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[53] British critic Reyner Banham elaborated on the emergent movement in a 1955 *Architectural Review* essay titled "The New Brutalism," also associating the term with art brut ("raw art" or outsider art) and *béton brut* (raw concrete), a reference to the characteristic use of that material by French Modernist architect Le Corbusier.
[54] Réjean Legault, "Paul Rudolph and the Shifting Semantics of Exposed Concrete," in *Reassessing Rudolph*, ed. Timothy M. Rohan (New Haven, CT: Yale School of Architecture, 2017): 84-85.
[55] Legault, 85
[56] "Paul Rudolph and Plasticrete team up on tallest all-block building in U.S.," *Concrete Products* (January 1966): 55.
[57] Legault, 88.

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In July 1967, Mayor Lindsay hailed Rudolph's hiring as an example of new projects by leading architects—the others being William F. Pedersen, Davis Brody & Associates, Slingerland & Booss, and E.N. Turano—that would "avoid the stereotype look" so often associated with the "projects."[58] Although Lindsay admitted that their work "cost a little more," he declared that "good design was well worth it." Unnamed housing officials were quoted in the same article saying that the use of exposed concrete, "which many of the better architects use," was driving up costs, meaning that some projects were having to apply to the city for increased mortgages, translating to higher rents.

NYCHA and Rudolph, who had moved his office to New York in 1965, began to meet to discuss the design of Middletown Plaza in the fall of 1967. The minutes showed a shared commitment to avoid an "institutional appearance" at the building and the importance Rudolph gave to the building's massing (an issue complicated by zoning requirements), materiality, and facade articulation, particularly the large sliding windows.[59]

By late 1968 increasing construction costs put strain on the project as costs ballooned to be $274,000 over the development budget.[60] Despite these issues, and likely due to the mayor's personal interest in making the projects with high-profile architects a reality, work began on Middletown Plaza in November 1970.[61]

In his design for Middletown Plaza, Rudolph continued to explore spatial forms, functionality, and materiality. The project consisted of a fifteen-story slab tower with articulated elevations of projecting window bays contrasted with an exposed *béton brut* cast-in-place steel-reinforced concrete frame and split-ribbed buff-colored concrete-block cladding. It exhibited Rudolph's trademark expressiveness of form with dramatic contrasts between verticality and horizontality, and projections and voids. Situated on a raised base, the tower was accessed via a wide stair leading to a spare plaza and a monumental, double-height entry portico framed by massive, yet slender, concrete columns. A small one-story community center, built of matching concrete block and articulated with a shed roof, projected off the front of the building. At the upper stories, the facade was a grid of concrete, organized by floor and window bay, with a large, recessed balcony of varying heights located directly over the entry. A solid elevator tower, slightly recessed from and taller than the rest of the facade, acted to provide visual relief.

The building was separated from the street by a plaza designed by George F. Cushine (d. 1995). Cushine was a little-known landscape designer who graduated from Syracuse University's College of Forestry in 1957, at which point he became a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects and started working for the New York State Department of Public Works.[62] Cushine worked for other firms until the late 1960s when he started his own practice. In 1968 he received an award from HUD for his landscape work on Lloyd Terrace, a

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[58] Alfred Miele, "6 Low-Rent Projects Will be Built by City," *Daily News,* July 14, 1967; Steven V. Roberts, "5 Top Architects to Do City Housing," *New York Times*, July 14, 1967.
[59] Office of Paul Rudolph, Minutes of Meeting #3 Regarding Phase 1 Review, January 25, 1968, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7029; Office of Paul Rudolph, Minutes of Meeting #10 Regarding Phase 1I Construction Review, June 26, 1968, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7029.
[60] Some contingency funds would offset that number, but even without the contingency the project was significantly over the budget, which Rudolph blamed on rising construction costs. Office of Paul Rudolph, Minutes of Meeting #17 Regarding Phase 1I Review with H.A.A., October 29, 1968, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7029.
[61] This start date also included Rudolph's other Bronx project, the Davidson Houses. See "2 Bronx Housing Projects to Be Started Tomorrow," *New York Times*, November 22, 1970.
[62] In 1959 Cushine took a position at Harland Bartholomew and Associates, a planning and civil engineering firm in St. Louis, and in 1960, he was employed by the office of Sherwood, Mills & Smith in Stamford, CT. See "ASLA Admissions and Elections," *Landscape Architecture* 47, no. 4 (1957): 492–94; "Carolyn Muller Married to George F. Cushine," *Plainfield Courier-News*, June 29, 1957; "Chapter News," *Landscape Architecture* 49, no. 4 (1959): 258–60; and "People: ASLA Chapter News," *Landscape Architecture* 50, no. 4 (1960): 246–47.

senior public housing project in Princeton, NJ. In that project, Cushine preserved existing trees and created "organizational landscaping" that "considered the different periods of foliation and blooming so that dynamic interest in the landscaping is maintained."[63] In the early 1970s, he was also the landscape designer of a playground in the South Bronx, and various projects in Connecticut, including a church in Wilton, a private home in Riverside, and a medical campus in Greenwich.

Cushine's design at Middletown Plaza included a landscaped plaza that encircled much of the building. With its extensive use of large-aggregate concrete paving, scored into rectangular blocks, the design of the plaza maintained a strong relationship to the building itself. At the west end of the site was an asphalt-paved sitting area with a grid of twelve tree pits planted with pagoda trees and small wooden benches arranged perpendicular to each other. Here, and along the "arts & crafts court" that extended along the community center, residents were expected to partake in recreational activities despite a curious lack of permanent hardscaping like tables or shuffleboard courts to encourage them to do so. The east side of the building featured a sod lawn with more organically arranged plantings, including ornamental fruitless mulberry trees, Callery pear trees, star magnolias, and a variety of flowering shrubs.

Inside, Rudolph finished the lobby and community areas with ivory and orange wall tile, which both acted to define various spaces and provide visual interest. The majority of the first floor was taken up by the community center for the senior residents, which included an office, an assembly hall, an arts and crafts room, as well as a club and a lounge that faced a sunken rear court. At the third floor, a large balcony located across from the laundry room offered space to enjoy the outdoors without leaving the building.

As with some of Rudolph's earlier projects, like Crawford Manor, the plan and configuration of the building evolved from the layout of the individual apartments. In that project, Rudolph noted that he believed that even in a small apartment "areas of different activity should be articulated, separated," which, "together with the desire to have as many windows as possible, leads to an irregular, multicovered plan."[64] Indeed, Rudolph was opposed to "packaging people into simple boxes" and insisted that buildings with more corners and bays of varying sizes did not cost more, as many assumed. At Middletown Plaza, the upper floors were organized into double-loaded corridors, all outfitted with steel handrails, that opened onto one-bedroom apartments, as well as two studios and one two-bedroom apartment on each floor. Each apartment had features deemed necessary to maintain the comfort and safety of their senior residents, including non-skid floors and grab bars in the bathrooms, and low-height cabinets and automatic shut-offs on the gas ranges in the kitchens.

The opening of Middletown Plaza garnered no attention in the press.[65] By 1973, the words "scatter-site" had become synonymous with racial and class tensions as they related to public housing, and it is possible that NYCHA chose to downplay the significance of the completion of the project. This does not mean, however, that the opening was not celebrated. In fact, on May 8, 1973, NYCHA Chair Simeon Golar presented a ceremonial gold key to the first family, an older couple, to move into Middletown Plaza.[66] A marching band accompanied the ceremony on the front steps.

[63] The Lloyd Terrace project was designed by architect Charles K. Angle. See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *1968 HUD Awards for Design Excellence* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 41.
[64] "Crawford Manor Apartments," *Progressive Architecture* 48 (May 1967): 127.
[65] Up until July 1974 the project was officially known as 3033 Middletown Road. The name was changed to Middletown Plaza as the behest of the project's tenant association.
[66] A photo commemorating the presentation of the gold key to the first family to move in is held within the New York City Housing Authority Collection, LaGuardia & Wagner Architect, City University of New York (CUNY).

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By the time of the building's completion, Rudolph's career was also in decline. With the removal of government support for urban renewal, Rudolph all but stopped designing public buildings, which had until then been a major component of his overall output.[67] This period also saw the first sustained reaction against Brutalism, which was briefly a dominant style and then a target of both critics and the public at large. In December 1971, architectural critic Ada Louise Huxable called Rudolph's Yale Arts & Architecture Building "the building you love to hate," noting that it was "full of bugs," including a terminal lack of flexibility for the students who actually used it.[68] Furthermore, the students saw the building as "evil" and the work of an architect on an "anti-people ego trip." [69]

Rudolph continued to use his expressive concrete block on other projects, including Davidson Houses, which was completed the same year as Middletown Plaza and used the same materials and design aesthetic, albeit on a low-scale building. At Tracy Towers in the Bronx (with Jerald L. Karlan, 1967-1972), Rudolph used the block in curving forms, both harking back to Crawford Manor and creating a new sculptural expression. However, during this period, other architects also began to use concrete block, especially on large institutional projects, rendering it more common and more associated derisively with a "bunker" aesthetic. While several monographs have evaluated Rudolph's work, none of those published after the completion of Middletown Plaza in 1973 discuss the project in any meaningful way.[70]

Later History

In 1976, the director of the Senior Citizens Center, as it came to be known, wrote to NYCHA to request that the community center be enlarged for new storage space to prevent a Fire Department violation.[71] In 1979 a contract was awarded to the architectural firm of Simon Thoresen/William Schact & Associates for the renovation of the community center, including separate extensions to the assembly hall and the arts and crafts room, and the rebuilding of a section of exterior wall to accommodate a new ramp leading to a kitchen.[72] Using a ribbed concrete block that matched the original design, the new additions merged seamlessly with the building. As part of the alteration, a new vestibule was also created at the community center's entry with new metal-and-glass infill as well as a new aluminum-clad canopy.

In 1992, Middletown Plaza was named as an affected project in a landmark lawsuit that charged New York City with racial segregation in its public housing.[73] The suit, which was filed on behalf of more than 100,000 Black and Hispanic families, argued that New York City perpetuated segregation in its public housing by giving preference to applicants who lived in neighborhoods surrounding a project with vacancies to be filled. Projects such as Middletown Plaza, it was determined, had given preferential treatment to white families due to its location in a predominantly white neighborhood. "The policy paid political dividends," Robert Pear explained

[67] Lizabeth Cohen and Brian D. Goldstein, "Paul Rudolph and the Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal," in *Reassessing Rudolph*, ed. Timothy M. Rohan (New Haven, CT: Yale School of Architecture, 2017): 16.
[68] Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Building You Love to Hate," *New York Times*, December 12, 1971.
[69] Today, the building is once again revered by historians and scholars.
[70] The post-1973 monographs include Tony Monk, *The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (West Sussex: Wiley-Academy, 1999); Roberto De Alba, *Paul Rudolph: The Late Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003); and Timothy M. Rohan, *The Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
[71] Memo by W. Hermenia Jackson, January 5, 1976, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Archive, Box 7029.
[72] Thoresen graduated from Harvard's Graduate School of Design in 1967 and worked within I.M. Pei's office after that. He is presently a partner at a firm called Thoresen and Linard Architects, which was founded in 1987. William Schact graduated from Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation and currently is a principal at Resilient District Design, see https://resilientdistrictdesign.com/principal-leadership.html.
[73] Robert Pear, "Bias is Admitted by New York City in Public Housing," *New York Times*, July 1, 1992; Alex Michelini, "A Closed-Door Policy," *Daily News,* July 2, 1992.

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in the *New York Times*, since "white neighborhoods were more willing to accept public housing when they were assured that substantial numbers of apartments would go to white families who lived in the area."[74] At Middletown Plaza, the percentage of white residents in January 1991 was shown to be 76 percent, which was far higher than the overall population of white applicants within the total applicant pool. The proposed settlement, in which New York City admitted to the practice, included reserving apartments for the roughly 2,000 families who could show they were victims of such discrimination in the thirty-one affected projects, including Middeltown Plaza. Florence W. Roisman, a lawyer with the National Housing Law Project, noted that the decision would have reverberations across the country and that public landlords "should take note."[75]

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, a number of sensitive repairs and sympathetic modifications were undertaken, all of which aimed to maintain the overall design and character of the building. In the mid-1980s a campaign of masonry repairs addressed underlying issues with the steel-reinforced concrete columns and spandrels, and the deteriorated conditions behind the ribbed concrete blocks. In the mid-1990s the entry infill and windows at the residential tower and the door and window infill at the community center were replaced as part of a system-wide campaign by NYCHA to upgrade its properties. These changes reflected NYCHA's standardized renovation practices as well as the changing needs of residents. In 1994, a new sitting area for the project's seniors was also created to the north of the building and named William Koltavich Park (this area is not included in this nomination, see boundary justification).[76]

As interest in Brutalism surged in the twenty-first century, the *AIA Guide* called Middletown Plaza "Rudolph's best work in the borough" and "one of the Bronx's notable apartment houses" in 2010.[77] The growing interest in Brutalism also coincided, however, with increased threats against buildings of that style, which are still considered eclectic in their expressionism and materials, and face substantial maintenance and repair issues. In recent years, several prominent Rudolph buildings have been demolished, including the Cerrito House in Watch Hill, Rhode Island (1956), the Riverview High School in Sarasota, Florida (1958), the Micheels House in Westport, Connecticut (1972), the Burroughs Wellcome Building in Durham, North Carolina (1972), and portions of the Shoreline Apartments in Buffalo, New York (1974).[78] The Orange County Courthouse in Goshen, New York, has been substantially altered. Others, such as the Government Services Center in Boston, Massachusetts (1971), are currently threatened with demolition.[79]

At Middletown Plaza, residents have made more vocal and public complaints in recent years about security and the need for repairs. In 2013, after a wait of several years, new security cameras were installed inside and

[74] Robert Pear, "Bias is Admitted by New York City in Public Housing."
[75] Robert Pear, "Bias is Admitted by New York City in Public Housing."
[76] Although this property is owned by NYCHA the original Rudolph-designed development did not include any plans for this plot of land since it was expected to become a P.S. 71 playground. When that didn't happen, it remained vacant until it was renovated for the senior citizens living at Middletown Plaza in the 1990s.
[77] Norval White, Elliot Willensky, with Fran Leadon, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 884. Rudolph's other buildings in the Bronx include Tracey Towers and Davidson Houses. He also designed three town houses in Manhattan, including 23 Beekman Place, which was his home.
[78] David Hay, "Modern Antiquity," *New York Magazine*, November 20, 2008, accessed May 10, 2023: https://nymag.com/arts/architecture/features/52410/ ; Sydney Franklin, "Paul Rudolph's Shoreline Apartments are finally coming down in Buffalo," *The Architect's Newspaper*, January 23, 2020, accessed May 10, 2023: https://www.archpaper.com/2020/01/paul-rudolph-shoreline-apts-demolished/; India Block, "Demolition of Paul Rudolph's Burroughs Wellcome Building Underway in North Carolina," *Dezeen,* January 27, 2021, accessed May 10, 2023: https://www.dezeen.com/2021/01/27/demolition-of-paul-rudolphs-burroughs-wellcome-building-underway-in-north-carolina/.
[79] Chris Grimley, "A Boston Brutalist classic is threatened with demolition. Architects and preservationists should fight for its survival," *The Architect's Newspaper*, March 22, 2022, accessed May 10, 2023: https://www.archpaper.com/2022/03/op-ed-boston-government-services-center-threatened-with-demolition/.

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outside the building.[80] In 2016, residents told News12 in the Bronx that the building condition was poor, citing leaks and broken building features.[81]

In 2021, NYCHA announced plans to convert Middletown Plaza under the Section 8 Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) program, which provides unit-bound rent vouchers to private landlords.[82] 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.[83] Middletown Plaza is planned to be rehabilitated, maintaining its current uses.

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[80] Ben Kochman, "New eyes on Middletown Plaza," *BronxTimes*, October 11, 2013, accessed May 3, 2023: https://www.bxtimes.com/new-eyes-on-middletown-plaza/.
[81] "Senior Tenants Call for Repairs at Middletown Plaza," *News12*, March 28, 2016, accessed May 4, 2024: https://bronx.news12.com/senior-tenants-call-for-repairs-at-middletown-plaza-34811536.
[82] "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/.
[83] "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):

__X__ 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
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #____________
____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # __________
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # ___________

Primary location of additional data:

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: ______________________________________

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): ______________________________________

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.79
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

Latitude/Longitude

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

1. Latitude: 40.844639 Longitude: -73.829071

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 entire housing project—including the tower, community center, surrounding landscape, and parking lot—and reflects the boundary of the property during the period of significance (1970-1973). The area directly to the north of the project, although owned by NYCHA, is not included in this nomination. During the planning phase of Middletown Plaza (1967-1968), NYCHA opted to lease the land to the Board of Education for development as a playground for the neighboring elementary school, P.S. 71 Rose E. Scala. In the original 1969 architectural drawings, the land is noted as being outside of the contract and the 1972 rental plans do not show the land at all. By 1994, NYCHA reclaimed control of the parcel and converted it into a sitting area, named William Koltavich Park, for the use of seniors at Middletown Plaza. Since the construction of the park falls outside of the period of significance, it is excluded from the nomination.

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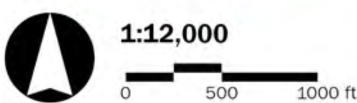
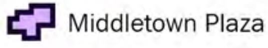
Middletown Plaza
Name of Property

Bronx County, NY
County and State

Flushing
7.5' - 1995 (1999)

Middletown Plaza



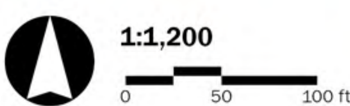


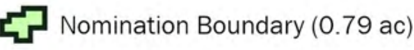
Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

Mapped 04/29/2024 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

Middletown Plaza Bronx County, NY
Name of Property County and State

Lat: 40.844639
Lon: -73.829071
Hobart Ave
Jarvis Ave
Mahan Ave
Middletown Rd
Jarvis Ave
Hollywood Ave



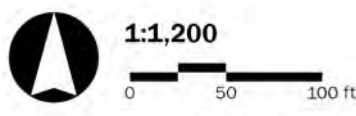


Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N New York State Orthoimagery Year: 2022 Mapped 04/29/2024 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

Lat: 40.844639
Lon: -73.829071

3033
Block 4171,
Lot 24 *(part)*

Hobart Ave
Jarvis Ave
Mahan Ave
Middletown Rd
Jarvis Ave
Hollywood Ave



Nomination Boundary (0.79 ac) Tax Parcels

Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

Bronx County Parcel Year: 2021

Mapped 04/29/2024 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lindsay Peterson and Jesse Kling (HQ), revised and edited by Kathleen LaFrank (SHPO)

organization Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, LLC date May 2023

street & number 11 Hanover Square, 16th Floor telephone 212-274-9468

city or town New York state NY zip code 10005

e-mail peterson@hqpreservation.com

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Additional Documentation

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.)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Figures

Figure 1: 1951 Sanborn map (vol. 21, sheets 5-8) showing the site before the construction of Middletown Plaza. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Collection, Library of Congress)

Figures 2-3: 1940 Tax Department photographs showing the south side of Middletown Road between Hobart and Jarvis Avenues. At left is a wood-frame house located at the west side of the block, and at right is a one-story commercial building at the east side of the block. (New York City Municipal Archives)

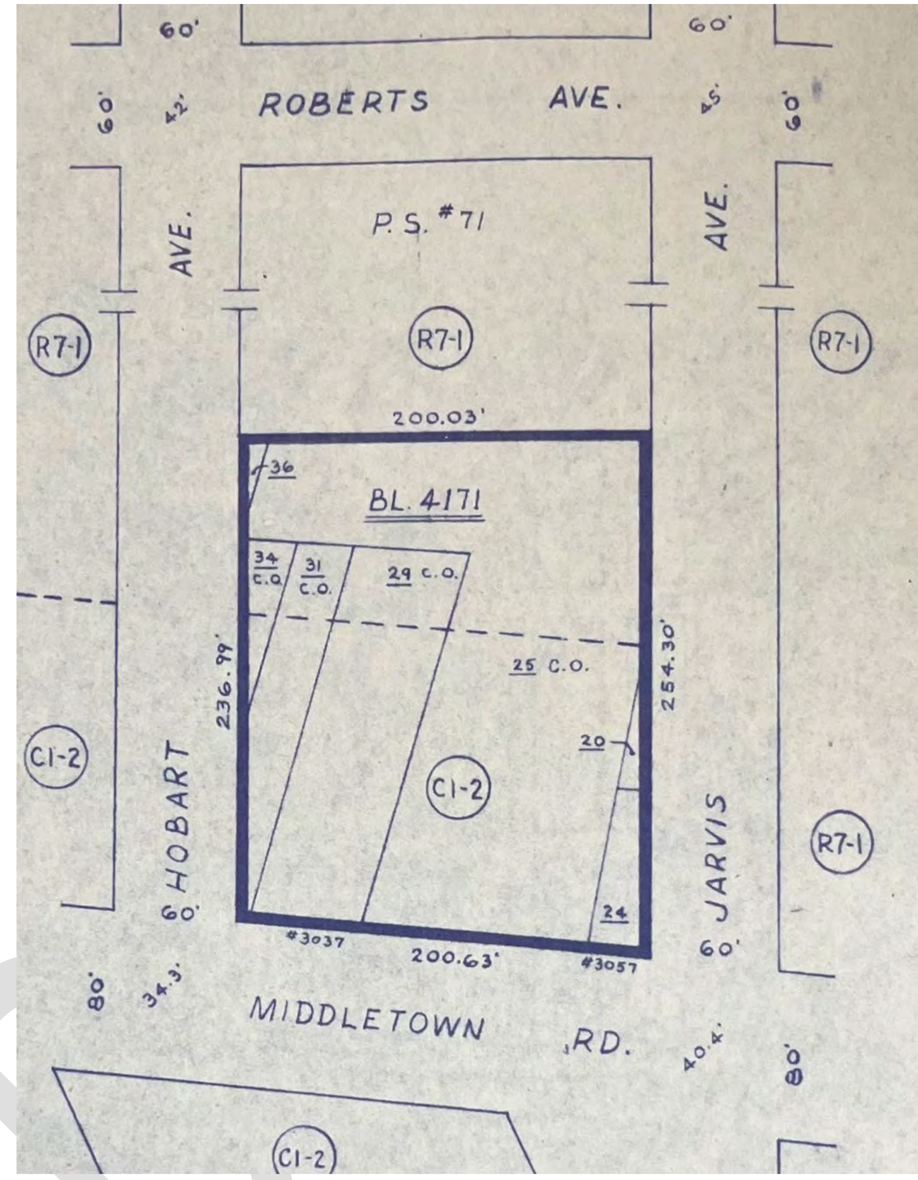

Figure 4: 1966 New York City Housing Authority site map showing the overlay of the Middletown Road-Jarvis Avenue Area project on block. (NYCHA Archives, Box 7029)

Figure 5: Ca. 1969 rendering of Middletown Plaza.
(New York City Housing Authority Collection, LaGuardia & Wagner Archives, CUNY)

Figure 6: Ca. 1969 photograph of a model of Middletown Plaza situated within its urban context.
(New York City Housing Authority Collection, LaGuardia & Wagner Archives, CUNY)

Middletown Plaza
Name of Property

Bronx County, NY
County and State

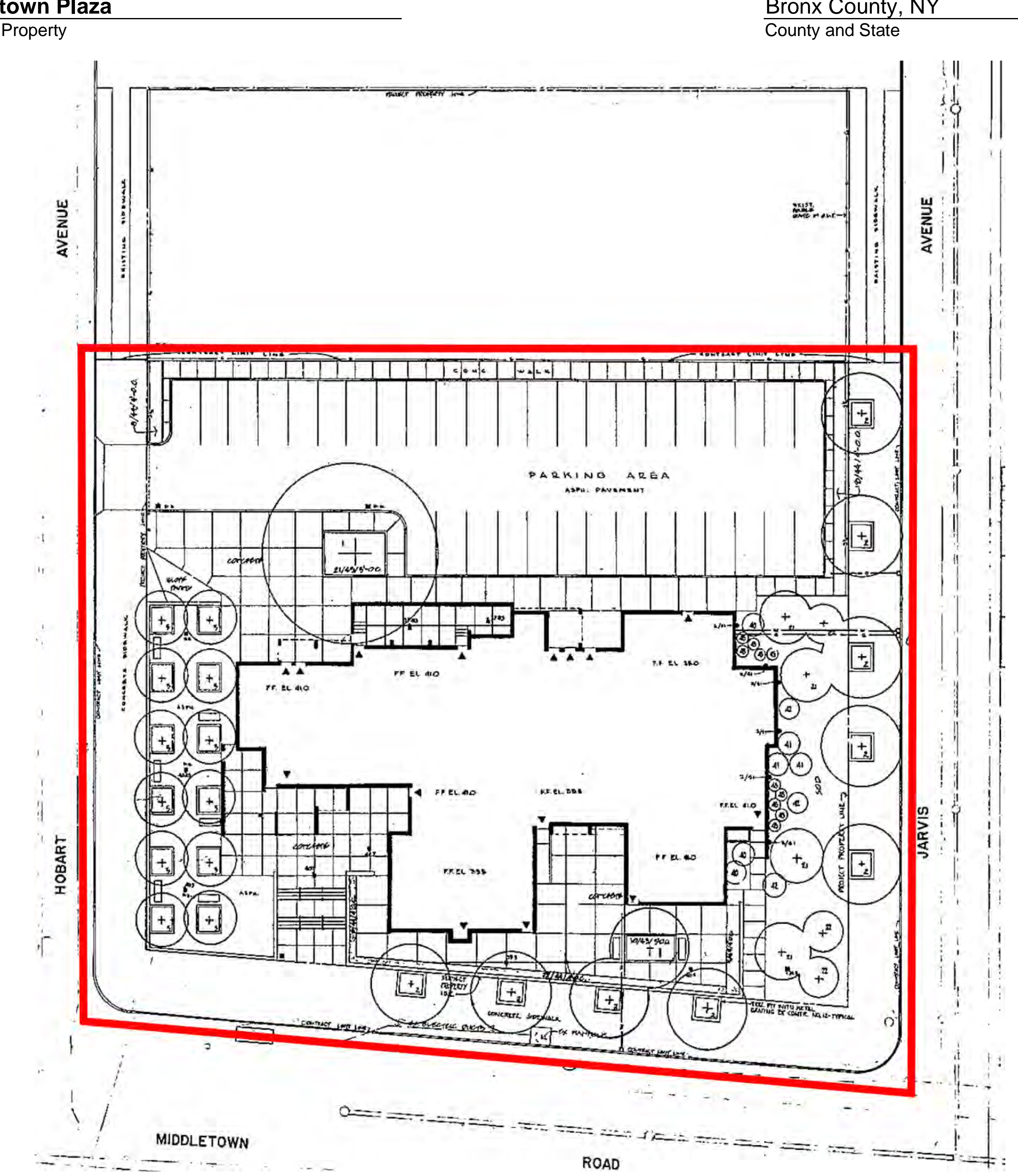

Figure 7: 1969 site plan showing the extent of the development including the building footprint and surrounding landscape, as well as the parking lot. At the plaza, note the paving pattern, tree pits, and planting locations. The red outline marks the boundary of the nominated property not inclusive of the sidewalks. (NYCHA)

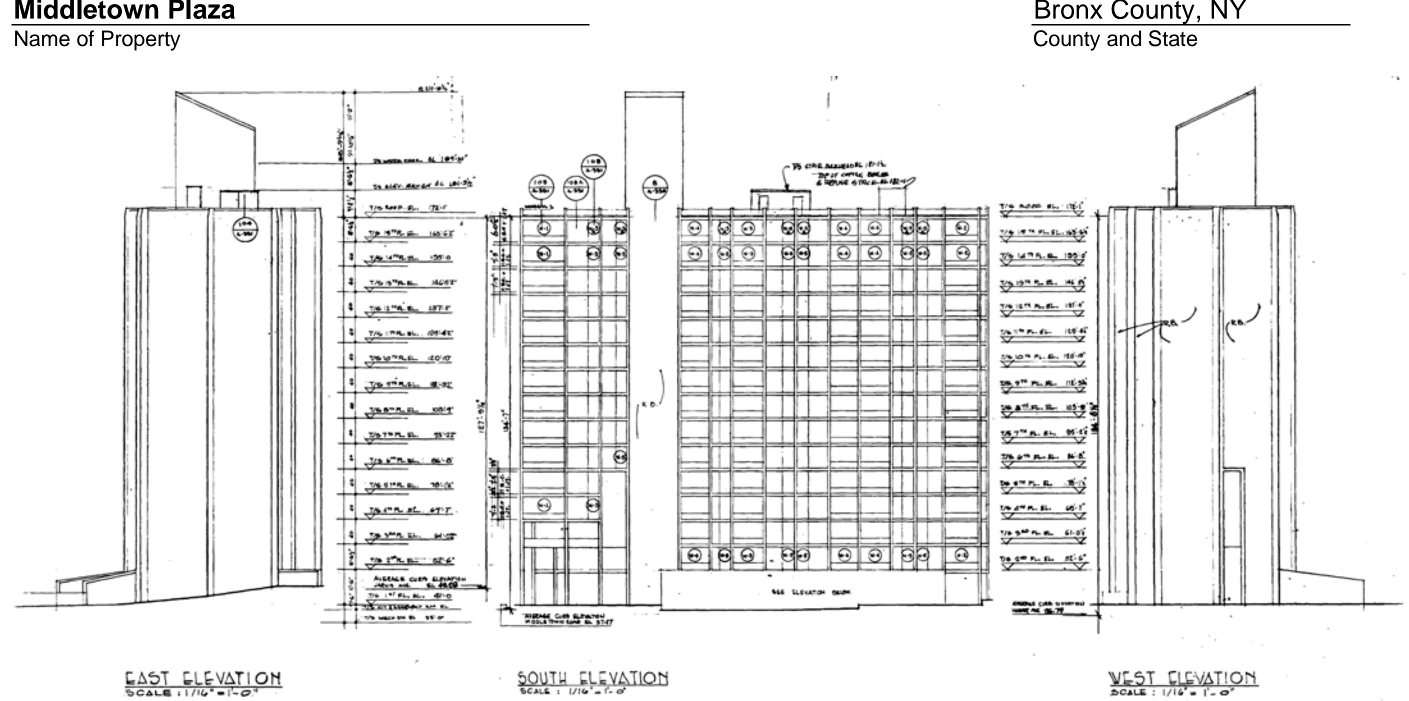

Figure 8: Drawing of the south elevation and the two secondary east and west elevations, 1969. (NYCHA)

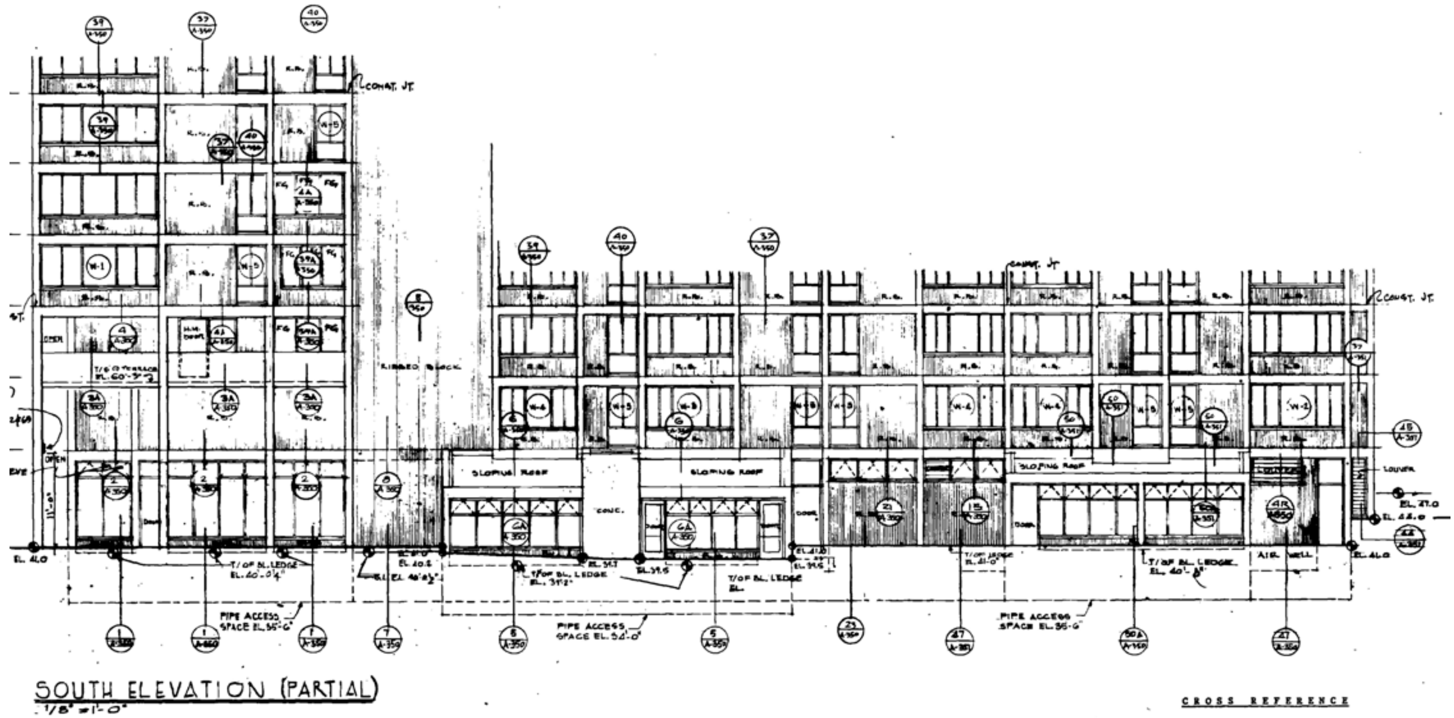

Figure 9: Drawing of the lower levels of the south elevation, 1969. Here, the façade is articulated with an exposed concrete frame, split-ribbed-concrete block infill and large expanses of windows. (NYCHA)

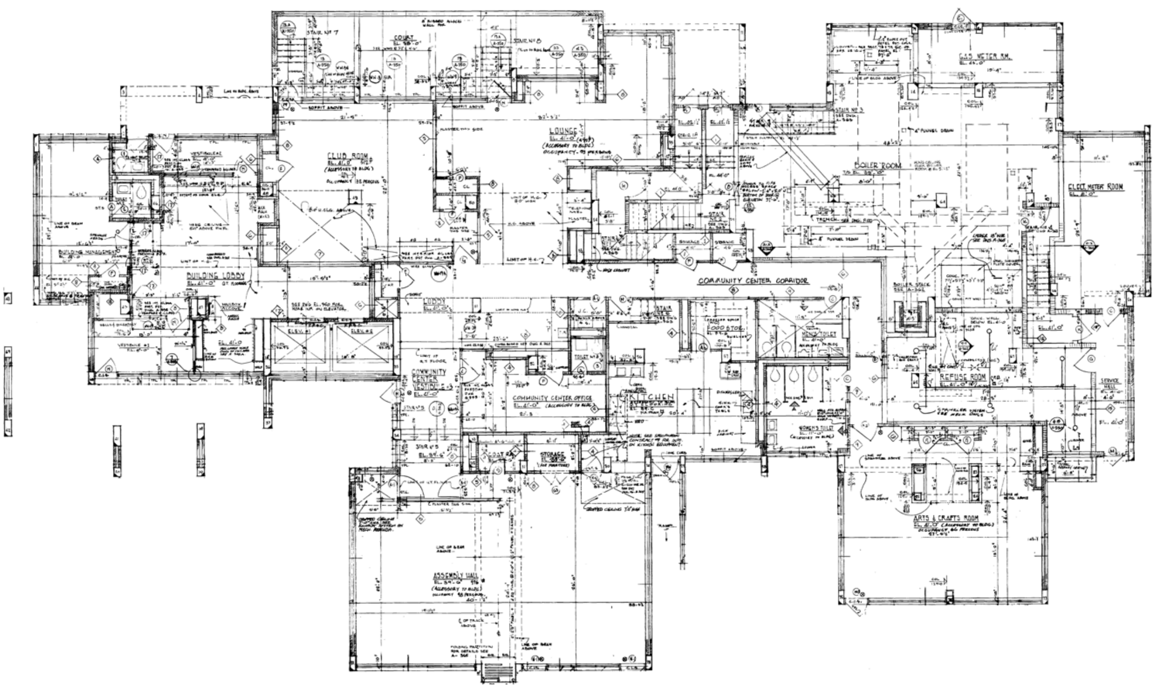

Figure 10: First floor plan, 1969. Note the entry portico at the southwest corner. (NYCHA)

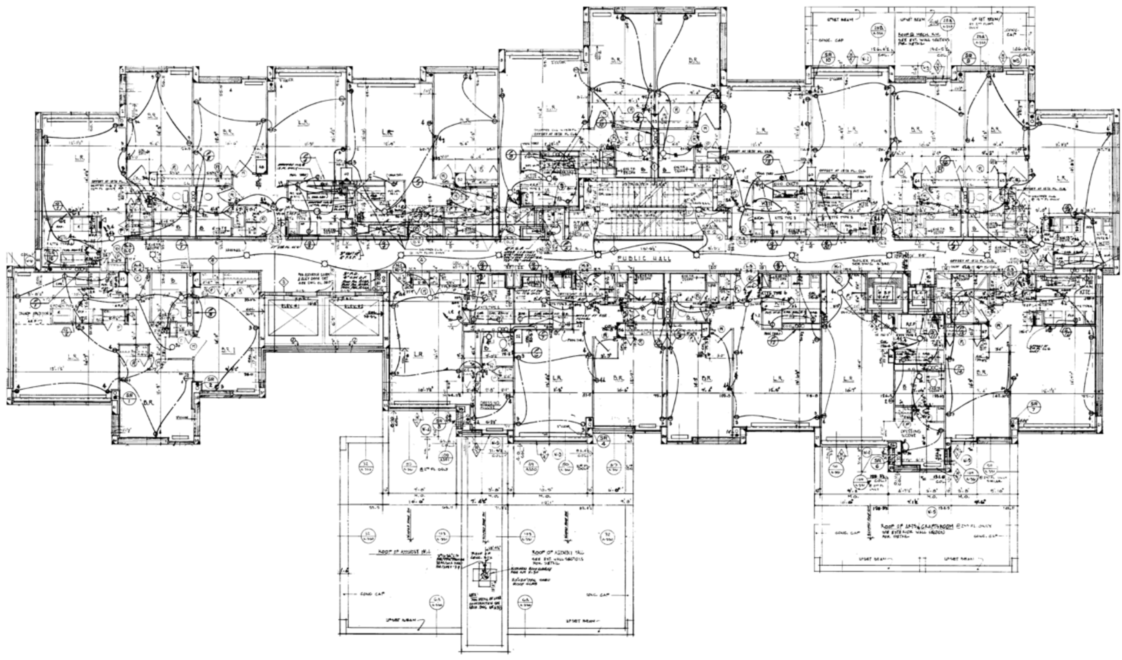

Figure 11: Typical upper floor plan, 1969. (NYCHA)

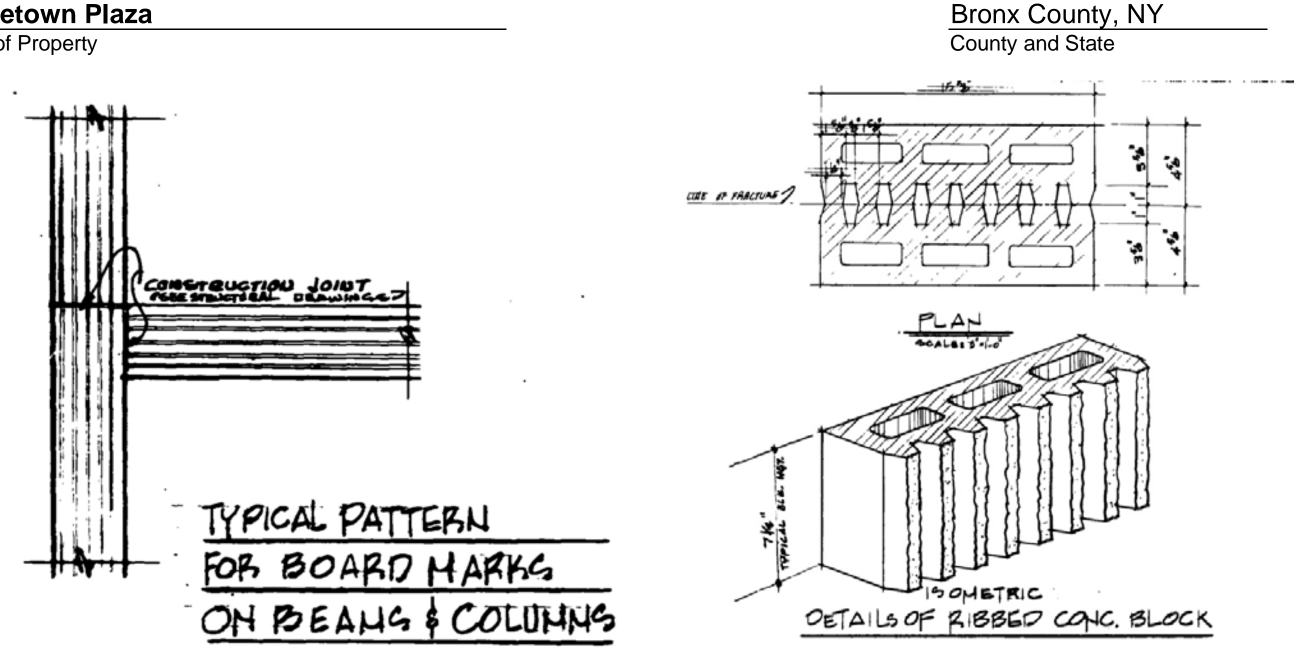

Figure 12: Architectural details of the board-formed exposed concrete frame and the split-ribbed concrete block used at the building by Paul Rudolph. (NYCHA)

Figure 13: 1971 view of Middletown Plaza while under construction. (NYCHA)

Figure 14: 1973 photo showing NYCHA Chair Simeon Golar presenting a ceremonial gold key to the first family to move into Middletown Plaza. (New York City Housing Authority Collection, LaGuardia & Wagner Archives, CUNY)

Figure 15: 1973 photo taken shortly after completion. (Photo by Lauren Soth via the Paul Rudolph Institute: https://www.paulrudolph.institute/196711-middletown-plaza)

Figure 16: 1976 photo looking northwest towards Middletown Plaza from south of Middletown Road. (Photo by William Sauro via Jennifer Bleyer, "Half a Century Ago, Did the Indians Really Want the Bronx?" *New York Times*, November 12, 2006)

Figure 17: Ca. 1985 tax photograph looking northeast towards Middletown Plaza.
(New York City Municipal Archives)

Photographs

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: Middletown Plaza
City or Vicinity: New York
County: New York State: New York
Photographer: Lindsay Peterson and Jesse Kling
Date Photographed: 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0001)
View of Middletown Plaza from the intersection of Jarvis Avenue and Middletown Road, looking west.

2 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0002)
Middletown Plaza from the intersection of Middletown Road and Hobart Avenue, looking northeast.

3 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0003)
Middletown Plaza's west elevation, looking east from Hobart Avenue.

4 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0004)
Middletown Plaza's north elevation, looking southeast from Hobart Avenue.

5 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0005)
View of the main approach and building entry from Middletown Road, looking northwest. The entrance is recessed behind three monumental concrete piers that support the balcony and tower above.

6 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0006)
View of the residential entry and the third-floor terrace above, looking northwest. The building is constructed of poured-in-place concrete, seen at the piers, and ribbed concrete block, which is used as a cladding material.

7 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0007)
View of the community center's west elevation, as viewed from the front plaza.

8 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0008)
View of the community center's east elevation from Middletown Road, with the site's east lawn at right.

9 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0000)
View of the plaza as viewed from the third-floor terrace, looking south.

10 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0010)
View of the plaza, looking southeast toward Middletown Road. The plaza is punctuated by a rigid grid of twelve tree pits planted with pagoda trees.

11 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0011)
View of the base of Middletown Plaza's north elevation, looking east from Hobart Avenue.

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12 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0012)
Detail view of the upper stories at the tower's south facade, looking northwest from the front plaza, above the residential entrance.

13 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0013)
View within the tower's third-floor terrace, looking southeast toward Middletown Road. Poured-concrete surfaces are textured by wooden formwork patterning, while the concrete block infill has a precast rough-hewn texture on the outer surfaces of its ribbing.

14 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0014)
View of the residential lobby, looking west.

15 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0015)
View of the tower's ground-floor elevator bank, located to the east of the lobby.

16 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0016)
View of the community center lobby looking southeast toward the administrative office (left) and the multi-purpose room. The entrance is to the right. The lobby retains historic finishes including glazed ceramic structural-tile and plaster walls, along with a glass-and-metal wall looking in from the office.

17 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0017)
View of the community center's lounge area, looking northeast.

18 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0018)
View of the second-floor elevator bank and corridor looking southeast. The upper-floor elevator lobbies and corridors have simple finishes throughout, with painted CMU walls, grey linoleum tile flooring, and painted, textured concrete ceilings.

19 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0019)
Typical studio-apartment living room, apartment 14K

20 of 20 (NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0020)
View of Stair B viewed as seen from its second-floor landing.

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NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0001

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0002

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0003

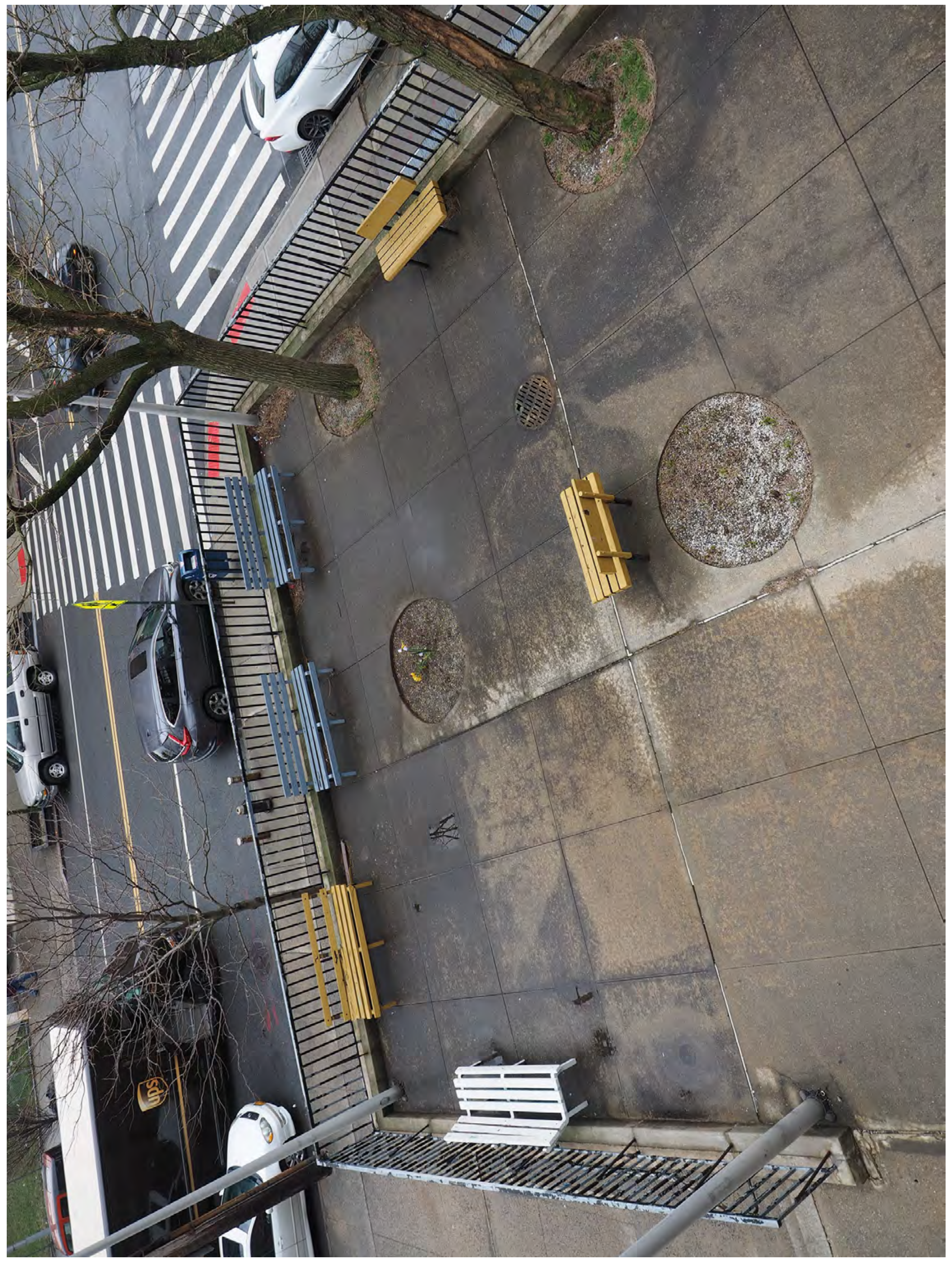
NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0004

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0005

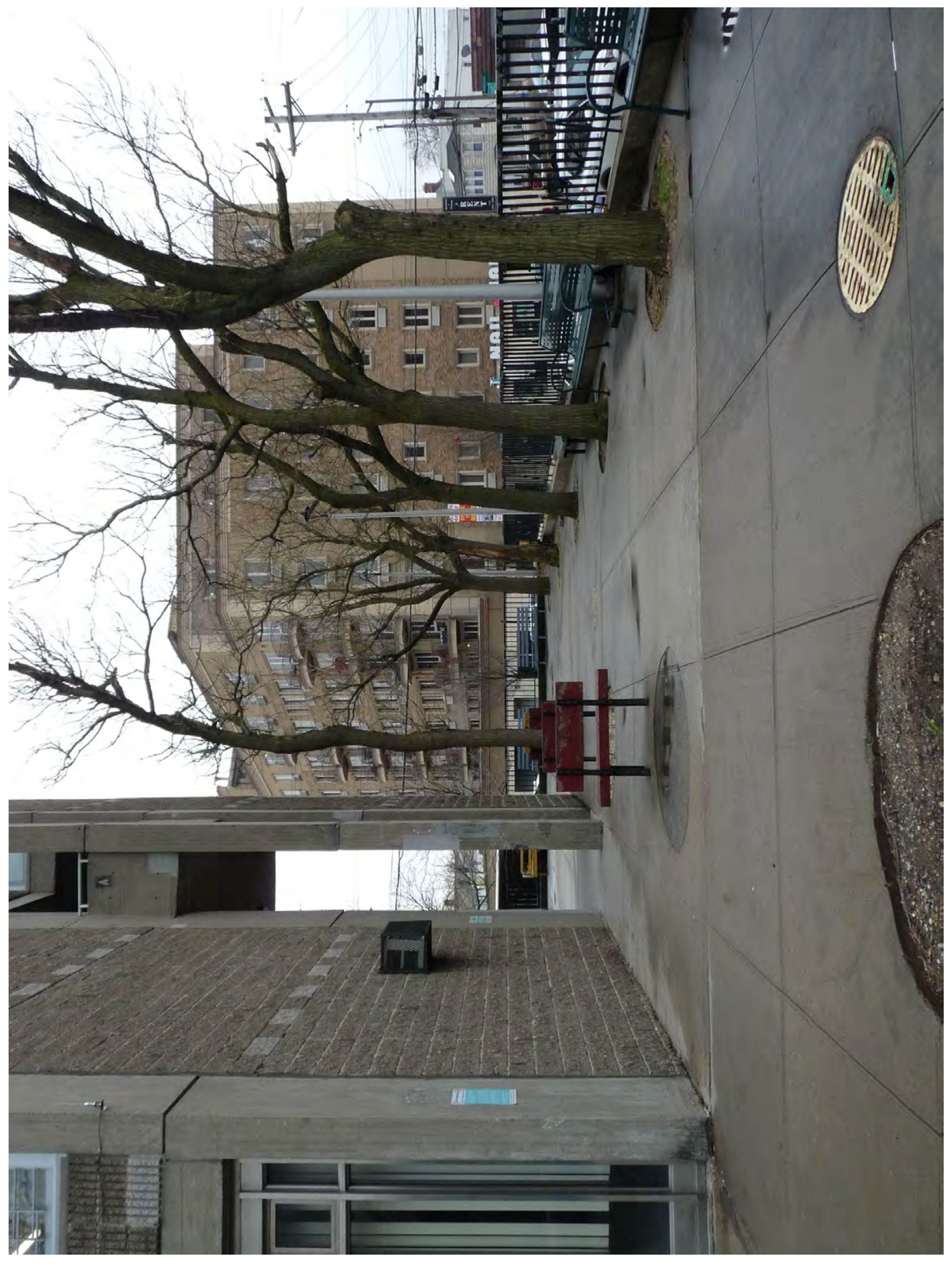
NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0006

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0007

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0008



NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0009



NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0010

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0011

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0012

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0013

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0014

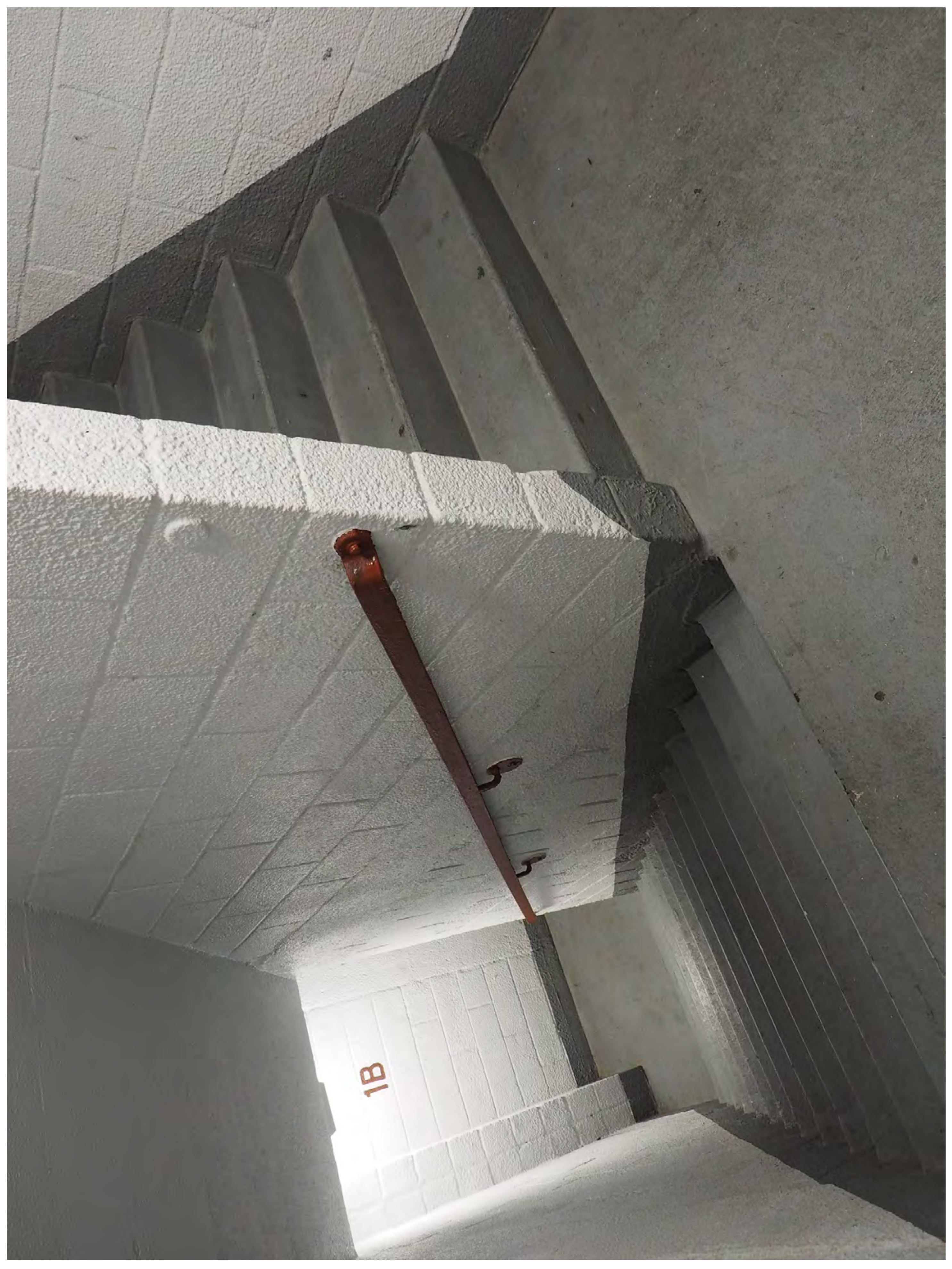
NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0015

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0016

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0017

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0018

NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0019



NY_Bronx County_Middletown Plaza_0020