

ANOTHER CHANCE FOR HOUSING: LOW-RISE ALTERNATIVES

WALL LABEL

Urban public housing since World War II has concentrated on high-rise apartment towers, usually spaced far apart and often independent of the existing street pattern. Community hostility to many of these housing projects is based in large part on their overpowering size and impersonal character. High-rise buildings make it difficult for parents to look after children at play, while dependence on elevators and extensive public corridors creates problems of security and maintenance, no matter how well the buildings may be designed.

For some time architects and planners have been advocating the development of economical alternatives to high-rise buildings. The New York State Urban Development Corporation has begun to explore "low-rise" housing for relatively small urban sites, accommodating large numbers of families living closer to the ground in environments that are better for children. The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, which is affiliated with the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, proposed to the UDC the design of a prototype which would establish significant criteria to make such low-rise, high-density housing fully responsive to the needs of the people who will live in it.

For example, the prototype limits building heights to four stories. Apartments have direct access to outdoor space, thus simplifying the supervision of children. Security problems are reduced because a unit accommodates four or six families only, each of them sharing corridor and entry space with known neighbors. Particularly important, the grouping of these individual houses is designed to maintain a clear sense of community, yet also offers relatively private garden spaces.

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Two versions of the prototype have been developed. The first is for Marcus Garvey Park Village in Brownsville, Brooklyn; the second is for Fox Hills in Staten Island. (Construction is scheduled to begin in Brownsville at the time this exhibition opens.) The Brownsville plan introduces to an urban area some of the amenities associated with suburban life; the Fox Hills plan is designed to preserve and reinforce that area's already threatened suburban character, while at the same time introducing the advantages of coordinated development. Both plans include appropriate community facilities.

This exhibition presents models and drawings of the two projects, as well as a brief review of the history of 19th and 20th century housing concepts. Also included are some examples of housing commissioned and built by the Urban Development Corporation. Besides illustrating a concern for high standards of planning and design, they suggest how UDC's ideas of what constitutes desirable housing have evolved.

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