

Another Chance for Housing: Low-Rise Alternatives is the title of an exhibition of models, drawings and plans for a neighborhood in Brooklyn and one in Staten Island offering new solutions for urban and suburban housing project design. It will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from June 12 through August 19. Both projects were designed by the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS), a private, non-profit agency affiliated with the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design. The exhibition also contains a brief review of the history of 19th and 20th century housing concepts, and some examples of housing commissioned and built by UDC throughout New York State. It was directed by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design.

"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," Mr. Drexler notes in the wall label explaining the purpose of the exhibition. "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 UDC 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 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

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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."

Two versions of the prototype that has been developed are shown in the exhibition. The Marcus Garvey Park Village in Brownsville, Brooklyn, introduces to an urban area some of the amenities associated with suburban life; the Fox Hills plan in Staten Island 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.

Edward J. Logue, President and Chief Executive Officer of UDC, who was present at the ground-breaking for the Brownsville project June 11, says in the accompanying catalog: "From the very outset, the parties agreed that this was not going to be another theoretical exercise with a planning report and a proposal which would wind up gathering dust on a shelf somewhere. Working with the local community groups, the Model Cities organization in Central Brooklyn, and with the various city agencies, we developed a real site and a real program which is presently slated to get under construction on the same day the exhibition opens at The Museum of Modern Art. We are particularly pleased to have been successful in obtaining an allocation of 236 funds which will permit the housing to be made available to families of low and moderate income."

The original prototype design for these low-rise, high-density units was developed by Kenneth Frampton and Peter Wolf from the IAUS and Theodore Liebman,

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Anthony Pangara and J. Michael Kirkland from UDC. The applications to the Brownsville site and the Fox Hills site were designed by Arthur Baker, Peter Eisenman and Peter Wolf from the IAUS.

The Fox Hills plan offers new configurations for suburban living. The open cluster is used instead of the traditional street and square of most urban areas. The essential relationship between the basic elements, the automobile (parking is provided for one car per unit) and the dwelling unit, are a primary concern. Each unit is provided with a set-back private terrace which gives the facade a richly varied appearance despite the fact that the basic building components are simple and repeated. Density is 65 people per acre.

For the Brownsville project the prototype was adjusted to fit existing conditions, including the elevated street that cuts through the area. Parking facilities were concentrated there, partly as a sound barrier, and at the north and south ends of the street. However, the essential ingredients of the prototype are followed: the dwellings preserve the spatial profile of the street and create a sense of neighborhood; entrances are as private as possible; children's play areas can be easily seen from the house; each unit has a private yard as well as as semi-private space provided by the design of stoops or outdoor stairs; two separate living spaces are provided for large families; walk up is limited to 2-1/2 floors, and day-care centers are provided. Density is 80 per acre.

In addition to scale models, site plans and elevations, two large vividly colored drawings by Craig Hodgetts make clear the ways in which both projects would be used.

Theodore Liebman, Chief of Architecture at UDC, comments on the evolution of UDC's housing policies: "UDC has found that 'learning from experience' is essential to the evolution of a viable housing policy. Good design for us means housing that is not only attractive in appearance, but convenient, durable, flexible and

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above all equipped with related facilities responsive to peoples' needs. It means the creation of housing which is sensitively integrated into the context in which it is situated. It means the construction of livable units that respond to cost limits while bearing in mind the overall impact on the life style of the occupant.

"By now UDC has evolved a procedure and a set of criteria which are issued as general instructions to both the architect and the corporation. These internal standards help us to establish an appropriate program for each site and serve as guidelines not only in the initial design phase but also for the evaluation of the project after it has been completed. In this way it is intended to update criteria in what will amount to a cyclical process of refinement and revision. Such a procedure should help the UDC to reflect the desires and aspirations of its tenants. It should also demonstrate that housing a low to moderate income populace can create a community asset and not an additional urban problem."

The issues and criteria that were used to develop the low-rise, high-density proposal are defined in the catalog by Kenneth Frampton of the IAUS and Anthony Pangara of the UDC as:

1. The establishment of a physical environment which could be capable of inducing at one and the same time both a sense of community and a sense of propriety, at a number of different scales;
2. A whole cluster of secondary but nonetheless crucial issues, in particular the potential for adequate child supervision from the dwelling and the capacity of design to induce in each household the desire to contribute to the spontaneous maintenance of the scheme as a whole, and
3. Beyond these concerns there remains the demand for the dwelling to be as responsive as possible to the varying needs of the individual. This issue turns on the problematic notion of "built-in" flexibility; that is on the inherent capacity of the environment to be modified in accordance with the inhabitant's

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changing needs. In order to meet this option we attempted to provide more than one living space and to allow for bedrooms to double as either play or living spaces.

The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies was established in 1967 in order to broaden the role played by professional architects and planners in determining the physical form of the public environment. It was established for the purpose of developing methods, procedures and models which would be capable of being directly applied to the improvement of the existing urban context.

Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501.

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