

THE COMMONS OF MCLEAN
1601-35 Anderson Road & 7500-36 Ambergate Place
McLean
Fairfax County
Virginia

HABS VA-565
HABS VA-565

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE COMMONS OF MCLEAN

HABS No. VA-565

Location: 1601-35 Anderson Road & 7500-36 Ambergate Place, McLean, Fairfax County, Virginia.

The Commons of McLean is a garden apartment and townhouse rental complex located in Tysons Corner in McLean. The 38-acre complex was developed in five phases between 1965 and 1973 by the Westgate Corporation. The Commons is bounded by Magarity Road and Dolley Madison Boulevard (Route 123) and is bisected by Anderson Road.

The Commons of McLean is located at latitude: 38.924721, longitude: -77.204197. This coordinate was obtained in January 2015 using Google Maps (WGS84). There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Present Owner: LCOR

Present Use: Demolition of The Commons is scheduled to begin in December 2014.

Architect: Charles M. Goodman.

Date: 1965-1973.

Significance: As the first, multi-family, residential development in Tysons Corner, The Commons of McLean is seminal to the transformation of existing farmland into a major residential, commercial and industrial center. It is a product of Fairfax County's explosive post-World War II expansion; the explosion was driven largely by the growth of the military and other government agencies and the related private industries that serviced the government. As the earliest dense residential development in Tysons Corner, The Commons exemplifies the economic metamorphosis of a crossroad village. The Commons was integral to what proved to be a pioneering vision for the region and it was built initially to provide housing for the nascent research park of Westgate and in anticipation of the projected population boom associated with the commercial development of Tysons Corner.

The Westgate Corporation (now WestGroup) shaped the development of Tysons Corner through projects like The Commons. Westgate was one of three major landowners and so well-positioned to play a pivotal role in the area's phenomenal

growth that began in the 1960s and continues today. Within Westgate, Gerald Halpin and Rudolph Seeley are strongly identified with The Commons development. Halpin et al. looked to the nationally prominent architect, Charles M. Goodman, for the design of The Commons. Significantly, The Commons is the only known garden-apartment complex built to a Goodman design. The site plan reflects the cluster planning of the early 1960s while the buildings within that context reflect Goodman's incorporation of contemporary architectural fashions of the late Modern and early post-Modern periods. This is especially evident in the buildings of the first phase of the development that occurred ca. 1964 to 1969.

Historian: Kathryn Gettings Smith, Principal Investigator, and Julia Claypool, Research Historian, History Matters, 2011.

The report prepared by Gettings Smith and Claypool was adapted for the HABS collection by Virginia B. Price in support of the drawing and photographic recording by the HABS office for History Matters as described below.

Project

Information: The documentation of The Commons of McLean was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs division of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief. The project was sponsored by History Matters, LLC, Edna Johnston, Principal. Project planning was coordinated by Catherine Lavoie, Chief, HABS. The field work was undertaken and the measured drawings were produced by Project Supervisor Mark Schara AIA, HABS Architect; and by HABS Architects Daniel De Sousa and Ryan Pierce. The large format photography was undertaken by Renee Bieretz of Shutters and Bellows. Assistance was provided by the staff of LCOR.

Part I. Historical Information

The Commons of McLean was the brainchild of the local real estate development firm of Westgate Corporation. Formed in 1962 by Gerald T. Halpin, Thomas F. Nicholson, Rudolph G. Seeley, and Charles B. Ewing, Jr., Westgate was instrumental in the development of a once rural area into the regional commercial and employment center of Tysons Corner. In 1961, Halpin purchased the 136-acre Storm family farm, which lay adjacent to the Ulfelder Dairy Farm, then owned and operated by Westgate partner Rudolph Seeley and his wife Martha Ulfelder Seeley. In the late 1950s, Seeley and his wife's family were still farming their land. During the same period, the Beltway and Dulles Access Road were under construction. Halpin and Seeley envisioned the transformation of the bucolic Tysons Corner area into a corporate office park with

high quality residential and retail amenities.¹ Halpin is generally acknowledged as “the principal visionary for making Tysons Corner what it is today”; Westgate is noted for introducing the office park to the Washington, DC, area.²

The Commons was part of Westgate’s plan to develop Tysons Corner by enticing large corporations, especially defense contractors and technology firms, to relocate to architect-designed corporate headquarters buildings set in carefully landscaped campuses. Halpin and the other Westgate partners believed that defense and new high technology firms needed pleasant, attractive work places that would allow them to attract and retain the highly educated, professional workforce upon which they relied.³ In order to realize their vision, Westgate retained the services of an architect and landscape architect to both lay out the corporate campus that was named Westgate and to design individual corporate office buildings and complexes. The architect they hired was Charles M. Goodman of the DC-based Charles M. Goodman Associates (CMGA).

Charles M. Goodman, Architect

By the time Westgate hired CMGA, Goodman had developed a regional and national reputation for designing Modern (at that time termed “contemporary”) style residential buildings. Among his numerous projects were dozens of single-family residential communities along with prototype model housing for the National Homes Corporation (NHC) and the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). In the Washington, DC, suburbs, Goodman’s work includes Hollin Hills in Alexandria, Virginia (1946-1961), Oak Forest in Fairfax County, Virginia (1953-1954), and Hammond Hill (1949-1950), Hammond Woods (1949-1951), and Rock Creek Woods (1958-1961) in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Goodman worked largely for merchant-builders and large-scale residential developers. While early work focused on single-family, detached residences, he also designed apartment buildings, townhouses, factories, office buildings, shopping centers, and schools. Two of his most widely recognized multi-family projects were River Park, part of the large-scale urban renewal and cooperative housing project sponsored by the Reynolds Metal Company in Southwest Washington, DC (1963) and Hickory Cluster in the pioneering planned community of Reston,

¹ Connie and Mayo Stuntz, *This Was Tysons Corner, Virginia* (Vienna, VA: Constance Pendleton Stuntz and Mayo Sturdevant Stuntz, 1990), 142-44.

² Quotation from Fairfax County-based land developer John “Til” Hazel in Frank O’Connell, “They Came, They Saw, They Built!”, *Regardie’s* (September 1988): 173. Also, www.west-group.com/about/our_history.html; “Westgate Brought Industry to McLean,” *Washington Post*, August 28, 1969, B8; “Work Starts on Big McLean Complex,” *Washington Post*, September 13, 1970, D12; Stuntz and Stuntz, *This Was Tysons Corner*, 142-45.

³ Paul E. Ceruzzi, *Internet Alley: High Technology in Tysons Corner, 1945-2005* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 66-67.

Virginia (1964). Reston is located approximately eight miles west of Tysons Corner in Fairfax County.

Born in 1906 in New York City, in 1931, Goodman received his architecture degree from the Armour Institute in Chicago (later renamed the Illinois Institute of Technology). He spent his early career (1934-1939) designing post offices and other governmental buildings as an architect for the U.S. Department of the Treasury Office of the Supervising Architect. During his government employment, Goodman designed several prestigious buildings, including the U.S. Federal Building Court for the 1939 New York World's Fair and the terminal for Washington National Airport (1939). The latter was a ground-breaking design for which Goodman won an award from the Washington Board of Trade in 1944.⁴

In 1946, Goodman established his own firm and proceeded to design a number of private residences and subdivisions for merchant-builders, including designs for two large-scale garden apartment complexes that were never built, but were featured in the February 1948 issue of *Architectural Record*.⁵ In 1953, Goodman began a five-year assignment as consulting architect for the National Homes Corporation; during his employment with NHC, he designed dozens of model plans in the company's "Modern" line and laid out the plan for approximately fifty NHC subdivisions.⁶

Goodman accumulated numerous awards for his residential designs. In 1959, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) made Goodman a Fellow of the Institute, an honor bestowed on architects who have made outstanding contributions to the profession through design excellence, contributions in the field of architectural education, or to the advancement of the profession.⁷

Goodman was a natural choice for Gerald Halpin and Westgate. Selected to help the company realize its plans for their Tysons Corner property, Goodman was known as a skilled corporate consultant and for his successful collaboration with some of the region's most productive

⁴ During World War II, Goodman served as head architect for the Air Force's Air Transport Command. For more biographical information about Goodman, see: Elizabeth Jo Lampl, *Subdivisions and Architecture Planned and Designed by Charles M. Goodman Associates in Montgomery County, Maryland*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPD)(2004): Section E, 6-39; Ronald W. Marshall and Barbara A. Boyd, "Charles Goodman: Production, Recognition and Reflection," *The Modernism Magazine* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 40-47; Elizabeth Jo Lampl, "Charles M. Goodman and 'Tomorrow's Vernacular,'" in Richard Longstreth, ed., *Housing Washington: Two Centuries of Residential Development and Planning in the National Capitol Area* 229-53 (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2010); Richard Longstreth, "Brave New World: Southwest Washington and the Promise of Urban Renewal," in *Housing Washington*, .255-80; "Charles Morton Goodman (1906-1992)," *The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects*, American Institute of Architects web site, accessed 1 April 2011, <http://communities.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/ahd1016440.aspx>.

⁵ Lampl, MPD, Section E, 15.

⁶ Lampl, *Housing Washington*, 240; Marshall and Boyd, *Modernism Magazine*, 41.

⁷ "Charles Morton Goodman (1906-1992)," *The AIA Historical Dictionary of American Architects*.

merchant-builders. His work was regularly featured in local and regional newspapers and in popular and professional magazines such as *Progressive Architecture*, *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record*, *House Beautiful* and *Good Housekeeping*.⁸

Tysons Corner: Early Planning and Development

Prior to the 1960s, Tysons Corner in the Providence District of Fairfax County, Virginia, was a rural crossroads where two main transportation routes, Route 123 and Route 7, intersected. In 1955, the federal government approved construction of the Capital Beltway; by 1958, plans for the Dulles Access Road were underway as part of the design of the new international airport to be built near Chantilly on the Fairfax County-Loudoun County border. These two new major transportation routes converged near Tysons Corner, where they formed a triangular area bounded by the airport access road, the Beltway, and Route 7. Visionary real estate developers, like Halpin, foresaw that, due to its excellent access to these high-speed highways, Tysons Corner could develop into a major commercial hub.⁹

Fairfax County planners and officials also understood the potential. As early as 1960, 630 acres of land in Tysons Corner were included in an industrial development plan for the county.¹⁰ In 1962, the County Board of Supervisors approved the rezoning of a parcel of land within the triangle formed by the Beltway, Route 7, and the Dulles Access Road; this land would eventually be developed with Tysons Corner regional shopping center. In its 1963 land use plan for Tysons Corner, Fairfax County officials echoed the vision of the handful of developers who had converged on the area with plans for development. The plan states Fairfax County's desire for a mixed use node at Tysons Corner:

It [Tysons Corner] is suitable and could become, in addition to an industrial center . . . , a regional shopping center, a regional business district, a cultural center, a convention and/or civic center, with multifamily and single-family housing developments forming a complete regional center of activities. . . . [It] has the potential of being one of the most dynamic, thriving, well-planned regional centers in the Washington metropolitan area.¹¹

Among the “desirable land uses” identified by the authors of the 1963 land use plan was multifamily housing in the form of both high-rise and garden-style apartment buildings. Despite repeated opposition to apartment construction by McLean and Vienna residents, the plan identified approximately 150 acres that were deemed suitable for high-rise apartments and

⁸ Lampl, MPD, Section E, 16-22.

⁹ Stuntz, *This Was Tysons Corner*, 142-44; Ceruzzi, *Internet Alley*, 55-57, 65-74.

¹⁰ Fairfax County Planning Division, “A Land Use Plan for the Tysons Corner Area with First Amendment Proposals, Fairfax County, Virginia,” (adopted February 7, 1963), 3.

¹¹ Fairfax County Planning Division, “A Land Use Plan . . .,” 3-4.

another 60 acres that would accommodate garden apartments and townhouses.¹² The latter were mainly recommended for the periphery of the planning area where they would serve as buffers between the existing low-density residential areas and proposed “high-activity areas of commerce and industry.” Notably, the parcels that The Commons garden apartments now occupy were initially targeted for high-rise apartment development in the 1963 plan.¹³

Goodman’s Designs for The Commons

By 1964, Goodman was working with Westgate to complete a master site plan for Westgate Research Park, which would eventually house dozens of national corporations including United Airlines, TRW, MITRE Corporation, Research Analysis Corporation, and Westinghouse Electric, among many others.¹⁴ The Commons was likely part of that overall plan. The apartments and rental townhomes were planned to house both military personnel temporarily stationed in the area and the many new county residents who would work at jobs that “do not offer salaries that allow these people to purchase homes.”¹⁵

Goodman’s early designs for The Commons incorporated garden apartments, townhouses, and an “elevator apartments” building. The latter was never built, even though several drawings found among Goodman’s designs for The Commons depict a thirteen-story elevator apartment building with a cross-shaped footprint and projecting balconies. Another, never-built, design included a rectangular, mid-rise apartment building of eight stories sited where the lower parking lot and building B-4 now stand.¹⁶ It is not known why either of these designs was rejected. However, the variety of housing seen in these early plans typifies “New Town” planning principles popular during the 1960s and exemplified by developer Robert Simon’s complete new town development at Reston, which was located only a few miles from Tysons Corner. In 1964, Goodman designed a section of Reston townhouses known as Hickory Cluster.¹⁷

One Goodman drawing for a site plan dated October 1965 shows that he initially planned The Commons to be constructed in two phases (Phases 1 and 3 were conceived as Phase 1); both

¹² Fairfax County Planning Division, “A Land Use Plan ...,” 8. The 1963 plan acknowledges that “the people of McLean and Vienna have repeatedly opposed the building of apartments in their communities.”

¹³ Fairfax County Planning Division, “A Land Use Plan...,” 8, 14, Map 2.

¹⁴ By 1968, Westgate stretched across 268 acres and incorporated one million square feet of office space. Twenty-five acres had been deeded to the county for parks or schools. The office park was so successful that in 1970, Westgate Corporation began on a second, 313-acre research park known as Westpark, also in the Tysons Corner area. “Westgate Brought Industry to McLean,” *Globe Newspapers* August 28, 1969, B8; “Work Starts on Big McLean Complex,” *Washington Post* September 13, 1970, D12.

¹⁵ Fairfax County Planning Division, “A Land Use Plan...,” 8.

¹⁶ Charles M. Goodman Archive, Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

¹⁷ “Reston: An Answer to Suburban Sprawl: Urban Living in the Country,” *Architectural Record* (July 1964); Ada Louise Huxtable, “‘Clusters’ Instead of ‘Slurbs’,” *New York Times* February 9, 1964, Sunday Magazine 36; Wolf von Eckardt, “The Row House Revival Is Going to Town – Not to Mention Country,” *Washington Post* July 24, 1966.

phases utilized the same layout and building design that was ultimately only realized in Phases 1 and 3. The drawing shows a complete and integrated site layout for the parcels. The drawing is labeled “First and Second Phases” and it shows the first and third phases much as they were actually built. However the area where Phase 2 is today was laid out with eight garden apartment buildings and two townhouse blocks that replicated or closely followed the designs seen in Phase 1. The central, square fountain that dominates the upper parking area of Phase 1 as built is repeated two more times on the October 1965 site plan; it also acts as the organizing feature of the plan in Phase 2. As built, Phase 2 simplified the site design and the number and footprints of the garden apartment buildings. It also eliminated the townhouse units.¹⁸ The reasons for the abandonment of the October 1965 site plan are not currently known.

Once Goodman completed the designs, Westgate submitted them to the Fairfax County Planning Commission which approved them on December 16, 1965. The approved Phase 1 site plan included 154 dwelling units, 240 parking spaces, and a swimming pool and bath house. At the time it was approved, Phase 1 included a rectangular, mid-rise apartment building set in the lower parking area.¹⁹

With financing secured from Equitable Life Assurance Society, construction commenced on Phase 1 early in 1966 and was well underway by August when an article describing its progress appeared in the *Washington Post*. The article described The Commons as a 100-acre townhouse and apartment development being developed by the Westgate Corporation near the intersections of the Beltway, the Dulles Expressway, and Dolley Madison Boulevard (Route 123). Rents for the one-, two-, and three-bedroom garden apartments and two-, three-, and four-bedroom townhouses were advertised at \$135 to \$325 a month. The article noted that architect Charles M. Goodman designed the master plan to conform to natural topography and to take advantage of the “natural assets” including ponds, hills and valleys, and groves of trees. The buildings were described as being “clustered, European-fashion, around a central park and recreation area complete with ponds and waterfalls that follow the contour of the hill.”²⁰

A photo that appeared in *Fairfax City Times* on September 16, 1966, shows that the townhouse row was the first of the buildings to be completed.²¹ The townhouses opened the first week of

¹⁸ Charles M. Goodman Archive, Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

¹⁹ Site Plan #801, Phase 1 of The Commons of McLean, approved December 16, 1965, available at Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services [microfilm].

²⁰ This last description may come from an as yet unidentified drawing; however, it appears that no waterfalls were built. “Commons of McLean Built to Plan,” *Washington Post* August 21, 1966, N13.

²¹ “Progress of Construction at The Commons [photo],” *Fairfax City Times*, September 16, 1966, 22.

October and featured a community swimming pool, pond, outdoor social center, and riding stables.²² Goodman described his design approach at The Commons, stating:

We have used a lot of brick and classic design ideas and we tailored our buildings to the contours of this unspoiled countryside. Residents will be able to walk to their cars in the central lot. The broad walkways provide outdoor space for stopping and talking and the big trees placed around the lots diminish the visual effect of parked cars.²³

The Commons in Architectural Context

Goodman's design of the townhouses and garden apartments at The Commons dramatically departed from the townhouses he designed for Robert Simon at Reston in 1964. His extensive use of punched, arched openings in solid brick walls differed sharply from the highly rectilinear, Bauhaus-inspired design of the Hickory Cluster at Reston. Goodman used arched roofs at River Park, a 1963 townhouse and apartment development in Southwest Washington, DC. At The Commons, Goodman combined the two by mixing the punched, arched openings with rectangular and linear elements. The resulting design reflects a distinct transition in Goodman's work as well as a changing design aesthetic then taking place in American architecture.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the dominance of the International Style in American architecture gave way to more variety and experimentation. The late Modern and early post-Modern eras in America were characterized by more expressionistic forms and experimentation with traditional architectural motifs. Well-known architects such as Paul Rudolph and Albert Kahn designed massive, masonry buildings with punched windows and voids.²⁴ Goodman's design for Phase 1 of The Commons combines his high modernist works with a new focus on historicism. The extensive use of arches in the windows and balcony spandrel beams – elements which Goodman described as “classical”²⁵ – along with the solidity of the brick walls evoke the Roman and Romanesque architecture of 11th and 12th century Italy.

Phases 1 and 3 of The Commons are architecturally significant as good examples of Charles M. Goodman's late career when he experimented with more traditional building forms and moved away from his more International Style early works. In addition, the complex is the only known

²² “The Commons [photo],” *Washington Post* October 30, 1966, L9; “Townhouses of The Commons of McLean [photo],” *Fairfax City Times* October 7, 1966, 28.

²³ John B. Willman, “State of Real Estate,” *Washington Post* October 29, 1966, 88.

²⁴ Various labels have been applied to the mode of architecture of the 1950s and 1960s, including Neo-Expressionism and Brutalism. For more on architectural trends of the period, see David P. Handlin, *American Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 232-74; Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman, *Architecture from Prehistory to Post-Modernism/The Western Tradition* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986), 534-51, 556-68.

²⁵ Willman, “State of Real Estate,” 88.

example of garden-apartments executed to Goodman's designs. They are representative of his late work and are evocative of trends in American architecture of the post-war period.

Final Build-out, Phases 2, 4, and 5 of The Commons

The Commons, Phase 1 was substantially complete by December 1966. The following year it won the top prize in the garden apartment category from the Northern Virginia Builders Association.²⁶

Just as the first buildings of Phase 1 were opened, Fairfax County approved the site plan for Phase 3, which contained eighteen townhouse units in two buildings, twenty-eight parking spaces and a play area.²⁷ The units were located on a narrow strip of land across Anderson Road from Phase 1. The County issued the certificate of occupancy for Phase 3 on August 21, 1967.²⁸

Although the initial plans for Phase 2 of The Commons mirrored the plan and layout of Phase 1 on the large parcel located to the south, sometime prior to March 1968 when Fairfax County approved the present site layout, the plans were altered. The eight individual apartment buildings and townhouse blocks clustered around two additional square fountain features were replaced with five larger apartment buildings set around a sizable central courtyard that is open at the north end. The architectural expression of the apartment buildings was also altered. The number of design elements were reduced and simplified. The same unit structure was repeated to form the apartment buildings. The result is a more conventional and regularized plan and architectural design.

During History Matters' study, no Goodman drawings were found for Phase 2 of The Commons.²⁹ Only a single site plan prepared by Berry Engineers and dated October 1967 was located for Phase 2. The distinctive feature of this Phase is its spacious courtyard which contains mature deciduous and coniferous trees planted in small, randomly spaced clusters. There are no paths or paved walkways within the courtyard, which slopes down slightly to the east and drops off steeply at the south where it opens out onto Phase 1.

Halpin and Westgate continued building sections of The Commons through 1970. Phase 4 consisted of The Commons Shopping Center or Shopping Village, which was built on a six-acre

²⁶ [Photo of The Commons dated Christmas 1966], *Washington Post* April 15, 1967, D20.

²⁷ Site Plan #987, Phase 3 of The Commons of McLean, approved October 4, 1966, available at Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services [microfilm].

²⁸ Information from Fairfax County Zoning Administration Street Files, provided February 2011 by Linda Cornish Blank, Historic Preservation Planner, Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning.

²⁹ Work to catalogue the Charles M. Goodman Archive at the Library of Congress is on-going; the collection contains over 20,000 items and a draft inventory has been prepared. Because Goodman worked extensively with Westgate Corporation in McLean, it is possible that other drawings for The Commons exist and are intermixed with other Westgate projects.

parcel located south of Phase 2. Designed by Charles Goodman, the 55,000-square foot shopping center included a Safeway grocery store, a Drug Fair pharmacy, and an Atlantic Service Station, along with small shops and offices. In 2009, the shopping center was demolished and rebuilt; it remains anchored by Safeway with a few small shops attached. The freestanding service station designed by Goodman remains; it exhibits pre-cast concrete, shallow-arched beams over the building bays that are similar to those used for the balcony spandrels in Phases 1 and 2 of The Commons.

Phase 5 was completed in 1973. Its buildings are nearly identical in design to Phase 2, with the exception of the smaller size of nearly all of the window openings and the use of buff-colored builder's brick. The buildings are divided into smaller units than in Phase 2. Like the Phase 2 buildings, they are sited to face onto parking lots that surround the perimeter of the eleven-acre parcel; open, grassy courtyards occupy the center of the complex.

Part II. Architectural Information

The Commons of McLean Garden Apartment complex occupies thirty-three acres in Tysons Corner, Fairfax County, Virginia. Located along Anderson Road between Chain Bridge Road (Route 123) and Magarity Road (Route 650), the complex contains 577 apartment rental units within twenty-four low-rise apartment buildings and twenty-eight townhouse-style rental units. The buildings are sited in clusters across the property with substantial, landscaped, open space and mature trees scattered throughout. The complex was designed and built in five phases beginning in 1965. Phase 1 consists of garden apartments and townhouses, Phases 2 and 5 contain garden apartments; Phase 3 consists of eighteen townhouse units; Phase 4 contains The Commons Shopping Village (the Goodman-designed shopping center was demolished and a new shopping center built in 2009; the Goodman-designed service station is extant). The report describes Phases 1, 2, and 3 of the development which were conceived and constructed between 1965 and 1969; Phases 1 and 3 were built simultaneously and Phase 2 was initiated two years later.

Phase 1

Designed: 1965-1966.

Constructed: 1966-1967; 1969.

Building Numbers and Addresses:³⁰

B-1: 7530-7536 Ambergate Place

³⁰The building designations B1 and TH1 are found on Goodman's original site plan drawings from 1966.

B-2: 7500-7506 Ambergate Place

B-3: 7511-7517 Ambergate Place

B-4: 7501-7509 Ambergate Place

TH-1: 7508-7526 Ambergate Place

Phase 1, also referred to as the “First Cluster” contains 117 apartment units and ten rental townhouse units, and a swimming pool and associated bath house. Largely constructed between 1965 and 1967, the cluster contains four, three-story, brick-clad, apartment buildings and one row of attached townhouses that includes ten units. Set atop and spreading down a hill, the townhouse and apartment buildings are arranged around two connected squares. Each square contains a parking area that is accessed by Ambergate Place. All of the buildings are constructed of brick-clad cinder block and the site is heavily landscaped with numerous trees that screen the interior parking areas from the buildings that surround them.

Landscape and Site Features

Phase 1 occupies the crest of a hill that slopes down gradually from south to north. The buildings are situated to enclose or partially enclose two paved parking areas, one at the upper or southern end and the other at a lower elevation near Anderson Road and at the property’s northeastern boundary. The parking lots and driveways are asphalt paved; brick and concrete sidewalks front the buildings. The upper parking area centers on a raised and landscaped square fountain feature with sloped, stone-clad retaining walls and concrete steps at each of its four corners. The perimeter of the upper parking area is planted with evenly spaced ornamental trees set within geometrically patterned brick and concrete walkways. A larger, open plaza exists at the southern corner of the upper parking area. The lower parking area is larger; it is divided by two, linear islands planted with ornamental trees. Its perimeter is planted with ornamental trees in a pattern similar to that of the upper parking area. Attenuated, black metal light poles with square profiles are located at intervals along the walkways.

Garden Apartments (Buildings B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4)

The garden apartment buildings that are included in this cluster or phase are all three stories in height and are composed of individual pavilions connected by recessed, glass-enclosed stair towers. Each pavilion has a separate address with individual units numbered within each. Buildings B-1, B-2, and B-3 are similar in design. Each is composed of five pavilions of graduated sizes. The elevations that face inward toward the central parking area are finished differently from the outward-facing elevations on the opposite side of each building. A distinctive feature of all of the apartment buildings is the bank of balconies that extend across the

elevations that face outward. The balconies are distinguished by their shallow-arched, exposed-aggregate spandrels and extended beam ends. A single bank of balconies extends from the inward-facing end pavilions of Buildings B-1, B-2, and B-3. Third-story balconies throughout Phase 1 are uncovered.

The inward-facing facades are characterized by a variety of window types; each pavilion has a distinct character based on the combination of window types. Some pavilions feature traditional, round-arched window openings, while others have only rectilinear windows and transoms that are combined to create grid-type patterns. A few of the pavilions combine both rectilinear and arched windows.

Apartment Building B-4 is similarly composed of seven pavilions laid out in an L-shaped configuration set at the east corner of the lower parking area. The lower parking lot has a more standard parking lot layout without the centralized fountain feature.

Townhouse Building (Building TH-1)

The block of ten townhouses (TH-1) stands along the southwest border of the upper parking area and faces inward toward the central fountain. Each townhouse unit opens onto a paved terrace with a combination of patterned brick and concrete paving that extends across the front of the townhouse block. The townhouses are two and three stories in height. Each unit has a rear patio enclosed by brick-clad walls. TH-1 occupies a sloping site where the units step down toward the northwest. The grassy area behind the townhouses forms a series of terraces. A walkway with a series of stairs built into the terraces extends down the slope at the rear of the townhouses.

The ten townhouse units utilize the same varied vocabulary of arched and rectilinear windows as the apartment buildings. A new element in the townhouses is the round-edged, rectangular arches utilized in the lintels above some of the entrances. Each of these entrances contains a single-leaf, flush metal door with a round-edged transom and a single, full-light sidelight.

Another unique feature of the TH-1 building is the use of deeply projecting segments that enhance privacy. Some of these projections incorporate unit entrances that face laterally instead of facing out toward the central parking area.

Phase 2

Designed: 1967 (Berry Engineers Site Plan Phase 2, Revised December 27, 1967).

Constructed: 1968-1969.

Building Numbers and Addresses:

1640-1646 Anderson Road (Type B)³¹

1647-1653 Anderson Road (Type B)

7400-7412 Colshire Drive (Type A)

7414-7420 Colshire Drive (Type B)

7422-7434 Colshire Drive (Type A)

Phase 2 contains 186 units in five, three-story, brick-clad apartment buildings with addresses on Anderson Road and Colshire Drive. Two different building designs are present: two of the five buildings are long (Type A) and three are shorter buildings (Type B). One long and two short buildings are arranged orthogonally in a U-shape creating a rectangular central courtyard that is open on its northwest end, facing Phase 1 of The Commons. The other two buildings, one long and one short are situated along the southwestern and northeastern boundaries of the Phase 2 parcel. The second long building stands parallel to the property's southwest boundary and is fronted by an asphalt-paved parking area. The one additional short building stands across Anderson Road, to the east of the central, U-shaped cluster; it faces Anderson Road.

Landscape and Site Features

Phase 2 stands on a slightly sloping parcel. The central courtyard is relatively level, grassy, and planted with scattered mature deciduous and coniferous trees. There are no paved paths within the central courtyard. A U-shaped, asphalt-paved parking lot extends around the outside of the central building cluster. Concrete walkways provide access to and between the apartment buildings. Mature trees front some of the buildings and line Anderson Road. A row of medium-sized trees grows in a median strip that divides the parking lot located to the west of the central building cluster.

Buildings

Completed in 1969, Phase 2 of The Commons was built after Phases 1 and 3. Although it contains garden apartments like Phase 1, the massing and architectural vocabulary evident in the earlier phases was simplified in the design of Phase 2. The buildings are three stories tall and are constructed of cinder block clad with brick. Like Phase 1, they utilize precast, exposed aggregate concrete for details, including on the lintels and balcony spandrels.

³¹ For ease of description the authors of this report have assigned the Type A and Type B designations. No original drawings were found for Phase 2 of The Commons, thus the architect's original type names are not known.

Phase 2 departs from Phase 1 in its simplified massing and uniform use of arched window openings. Each building is divided into several units that are connected by enclosed staircases; the sense of each of these units being a separate pavilion is diminished by shallow setbacks and generally uniform sizes. Variety is achieved with setbacks, slight grade changes, and staggering of window heights. The outward-facing facades of the buildings read as a series of projecting bays on varying planes.

Each stair entrance is denoted by an aluminum storefront with a full-light, single-leaf door capped by a two-story tall, metal-clad, steeply sloped shed roof that encloses the stairs behind it. The rear elevations of the buildings (the elevations that face inward to the central courtyard or outward from Anderson Road and the western parking area) feature inset balconies at each floor level. The balconies are spanned by precast, exposed aggregate concrete beams similar to those used in Phase 1. Shallow wing walls project from the face of the buildings and enclose each balcony. Unlike those in Phase 1, the third floor balconies are roofed.

Type A and B buildings differ only in the number of units and length. The Type A buildings have six entrances; a central tunnel entrance provides access to service and storage areas in the basements. In the case of the central building cluster, the tunnel connects the parking lot side of the building to the courtyard. Type B buildings have four entrances.

Phase 3

Designed: 1965-1966.

Constructed: 1968-1969.

Building Numbers and Addresses:

1601-1615 Anderson Road (TH-2)

1617-1635 Anderson Road (TH-3)

Completed in 1967, Phase 3 includes two buildings that together contain eighteen townhouse units. Building TH-2 contains ten units; TH-3 is a row of eight units. The site also includes concrete walkways and two parking areas. Set at an obtuse angle to one another, the two buildings face Anderson Road and a front parking area. Landscaping is minimal, consisting mainly of mature trees lining the street front, scattered shrubs, and foundation plantings.

Building TH-2 has the same footprint as TH-1 in Phase 1 of The Commons, and the units appear to be very similar in exterior design. Like Phase 1, some units are two stories and some are three, though they all appear to be two stories from the front or street side. The façade treatments also are very similar, utilizing arched windows sparingly and rectangular windows more frequently.

Large, uninterrupted expanses of brick wall provide both privacy and a sense of solidity. Building TH-3 has a very similar layout to TH-1 and TH-2, but it encompasses only eight townhouse units. Both Phase 3 buildings have straight rear walls with no projections. Each townhouse has a rear, fenced yard that includes a concrete patio.

Condition

Phases 1, 2, and 3 of The Commons are all in good overall condition. There is some deterioration in the building fabric, primarily in the balconies. In the balcony for 7503 Ambergate Place (Phase 1) the bricks are spalling, whereas throughout the complex, the rebar is exposed in the precast, aggregate beams in the balconies and the paint is flaking off the wood handrails. The loss of the paint on the balcony railings led to some water damage to the wood elements. Also throughout the complex, the paving is loose and uneven and several of the light poles are leaning.

The Commons retains most of its original architectural form, detailing and materials and site layout, with the notable exception of the windows. For nearly all the buildings in Phases 1, 2 and 3, the windows were replaced. The original windows were constructed of milled wood with fixed sheet glass and operable awning units. Contemporary photographs make it appear that the millwork was painted in a dark color. The replacement windows are extruded aluminum in a deep brown color. The configurations of the replacement units are in many cases nearly identical to the original sash; however, some proportions have been changed and, in select cases, entirely new window divisions and sash types have been introduced.

This is evident on the southwest-facing elevation of 7530 Ambergate Place (Phase 1) where the original window configuration consisted of a single, uninterrupted arched pane of glass set atop a pair of awning windows. A mullion of approximately five to six inches in height separated the fixed and operable sash. The replacement windows in this location consist of semi-circular fixed pane set mullions. The bottom two panes are smaller than the upper two. This “I” –shaped mullion configuration departs from the original design by introducing additional mullions and eliminating the large open expanse of arched glass that originally dominated.

Original windows are still in place in select areas, especially in the TH-1 building. In addition, it appears that, with the exception of the stair enclosures and entrance doors, all of the original interior and sliding glass exterior doors remain in place.

The replacement of the windows and stair tower enclosures (on Phase 1) has diminished the integrity of materials; however, since the replacements are similar in design and materials to the originals, the complex retains its essential character and feeling.

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