

Date: March 1963- Nov 1964

Material: Brick, Asphalt Roof, Concrete, Concrete block

Architect: Stainback and Scribner, Charlottesville, VA Use: Affordable Housing

Landscape Architects: Meade Palmer, Warrenton, VA

Tax Map, Parcel Number: 31-145

Date of Survey: July, 2011

Original Owner: Charlottesville Housing Authority

Architectural Description:

One hundred and twenty-six, two-story units on a ten-acre tract are lined in rows with small front and back yards. Capping the vertically aligned blocks are 6-bay buildings – with the exception of the far triangular block. Each of these blocks is separated by a wide street and is composed of two rows of apartments. The two rows are separated by a pedestrian walkway. To the south of these vertically aligned blocks and across the street which winds through the complex are four multi-unit horizontally aligned structures. At the entry to the complex along Hardy Drive is another two-unit row. The apartments vary from 1 to 5 bedrooms and 1 or 2 bathrooms per unit. Steel frame one-over-one sash windows provide light to the interior. The facades are red running bond brickwork with cream colored stucco on every second story bay demarking a separation of one unit from another. The structures are built of steel frame and concrete block construction. Each unit has a one story white concrete portico beneath this bay. The concrete porticos have narrow decorative slits mimicking wooden posts on a traditional wood porch. Roofs are asphalt shingle with a low pitched side gable. The front yards of most of the apartments today are grass lawns, but one front yard located on the horizontally aligned row is filled with various plantings and metal patio furniture. The interiors of the units have linoleum floors and concrete block walls typical of institutional architecture in the 1960s.

About the Architect

Stainback and Scribner built other red brick and white concrete structures in the 1960s around Charlottesville, including the bank on the corner of Arlington Boulevard and Emmet Street and the old Daily Progress building at 401 E Market Street. The design of Westhaven is a fairly typical layout for a public housing project of the time. The “modernism” that is employed by the architects is typical of other governmental projects of the era.

Neighborhood History:

Public housing in Charlottesville was and is still today a controversial issue. Early advocates of government subsidized housing wished to establish better living conditions for the poor communities of Charlottesville. Some local activists believed that public housing communities would further perpetuate residential racial segregation. However, by the 1950s many middle and upper class African-American citizens supported efforts to

provide poor black citizens with decent and sanitary housing while citizens living in substandard housing were generally against public housing.

The decision to clear Vinegar Hill beginning in the early 1960s – partially to improve living conditions of residents and partially to create a better downtown business district (one free of any sort of deterrent to potential customers i.e. bad roads, abandoned houses)– was what led to the construction of Westhaven, the city’s first public housing project. Westhaven would provide government subsidized housing that would be ideally of a better standard of living for displaced residents of the controversial Vinegar Hill urban renewal. Westhaven was constructed in March of 1963 on the site of Cox’s Row, a row of one-over-one frame-and-stucco houses without indoor plumbing that had been built around the turn of the century as low-priced rental units by Azell D. Cox, a Confederate veteran. The site would allow residents to not be far displaced from schools and churches that once served the African-American community – however, this would also continue to promote residential racial segregation in Charlottesville.

Building History:

Construction on Westhaven was completed in 1964 and the complex opened for residents in December of that year. The project According to the *Daily Progress* a year after settling in, most residents were happy with their new homes and took “pride” in caring for them – many planted flowers in their yards and called the maintenance office often. There was initially a waiting list to get in some 250 families long. Residents were encouraged to find private housing after exceeding the maximum income limit but could remain if no proper housing could be found. A community center and new maintenance office building was added to Westhaven in the summer of 1967 by the same architects as the rest of the complex.

Significance:

Westhaven is the earliest low-income housing complex in Charlottesville. It represents the national issues of 1960s urban renewal, racial desegregation, and public housing. While the modernism of Westhaven, both stylistically and with its new amenities (heat, electricity and indoor plumbing) attempted to provide better housing for residents displaced by Vinegar Hill.

Bibliography:

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