

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

DRAFT

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 Corsi Houses
other names/site number Edward Corsi Houses, LaGuardia Memorial House
name of related multiple property listing _____

Location

street & number 306 East 117th Street ☐ not for publication
city or town Manhattan ☐ vicinity
state NY code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10035

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 _____

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Name of Property

New York, New York

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | private |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | public - Local |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | public - State |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | public - Federal |

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | object |

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
0	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

1 [listed in a district but formerly NC]

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

SOCIAL/Civic

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

SOCIAL/Civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK

roof: SYNTHETIC

other:

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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

The Corsi Houses, originally the Edward Corsi Houses, at 306 East 117th Street, is located in East Harlem, Manhattan. Constructed in 1973 by NYCHA as standalone affordable housing for the elderly, the Corsi Houses was built as a collaboration between NYCHA and a local settlement house, LaGuardia Houses. The complex was constructed in the middle of a densely developed block bounded by East 117th Street to the north, East 116th Street to the south, and Second Avenue to the west. The complex consists of a sixteen-story rectangular shaped residential tower with two, two-story wings housing a community/senior center. The residential tower and wings are interconnected at the first and second floors, with the residential tower existing at the northeast side of the site and the community spaces wrapping around the base to the southwest. The roof of the two-story wings was originally used as a terrace with outdoor recreation space including bocce courts, shuffleboard courts, seating areas and planting beds. The recreation areas were later replaced by a green roof in 2009.

Corsi Houses was listed on the National Register in 2019 within the East Harlem Historic District; however, it was identified as a non-contributing building due to its age. Built in 1973, the building was outside the period of significance established for the district [1865-1966.] The East Harlem district focused on the development of East Harlem's immigrant communities after the Civil War and its collection of rowhouses and tenements. Although there are many public housing projects in the neighborhood, Corsi Houses is the only public housing project within the East Harlem Historic District. Therefore, it was deemed more appropriate to evaluate it individually within the context of NYCHA's elderly housing programs than to extend to district's period of significance to include it.

The Corsi Houses was designed in two phases, first by Roger Katan, associate architect for firm Katz, Waisman, Weber, Strauss, and then reworked by the office of Samuel Paul and landscape architect Joseph R. Gangemi after funding restrictions necessitated substantial design changes. At its opening, the complex contained 171 units that housed 256 people. The blocks surrounding the subject property are characterized by mid-to-late-twentieth century mid-rise and high-rise residential buildings, some of which are also NYCHA developed public housing; however, those are complexes rather than stand-alone buildings.

Corsi Houses was built in a functional design aesthetic and the facades are primarily clad in brown and tan brick with little ornamentation, typical of the public housing design employed by NYCHA. The complex features non-historic one-over-one replacement windows and replacement entrance doors, although the window and door openings remain in the same location. Windows also retain their original slate sills. The residential tower and wings are interconnected at the first and second floors, with the residential tower existing at the northeast side of the site and the community spaces wrapping around the base to the southwest. The site is accessed by a small flight of concrete steps leading from E. 117th Street to an open L-shaped entrance plaza that wraps the north and east elevations. Due to the siting of the complex within a densely developed block, the site is largely hardscaped with limited site features consisting of concrete sidewalks, some street trees, and a small, paved

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seating area to the east of the entrance with raised concrete planters that leads to a recessed lower courtyard area.

Narrative Description

Setting: Corsi Houses is located in East Harlem, Manhattan, also known as El Barrio. The neighborhood took its name from the large number of Puerto Rican residents who began moving to the area in the 1950s. East Harlem is roughly bounded by 5th Avenue to the west, the East River to the east, East 96th Street to the south, and East 125th Street and the Harlem River to the north. Corsi Houses is located at the center of the East Harlem neighborhood in the middle of a densely developed block bounded by East 116th Street to the south and Second Avenue to the west. Today, the El Barrio consists largely of low- and mid-rise commercial and residential buildings interspersed with high-rise residential buildings. The high-rise residential buildings are largely NYCHA developments. The surrounding streets are arranged in a typical grid-like pattern and consist of primarily mixed-use residential and commercial buildings. Each block is surrounded by concrete pedestrian sidewalks with mature trees planted throughout. NYCHA's Jefferson Houses (constructed 1959), Johnson Houses (Constructed 1948), Taft Houses (Constructed 1962), and King Towers (constructed 1954) are all located just south of Corsi Houses along East 115th Street between Lenox Avenue and 1st Avenue. These NYCHA complexes fit the campus model of public housing design. Jefferson Houses consists of eighteen irregularly shaped buildings measuring seven and thirteen stories tall; Johnson Houses consists of ten irregularly shaped buildings measuring fourteen stories tall; Taft Houses consists of ten irregularly shaped buildings measuring nineteen stories tall; and King Towers consists of ten irregularly shaped buildings measuring thirteen stories tall.

Site: Corsi Houses is located on an irregularly shaped lot, approximately 0.75 acres (32,819 sq. ft.) in size. The sixteen-story rectangular residential tower is enveloped by the two, two-story community/senior center wings which run along 2nd Avenue and East 116th Street. The residential tower features some frontage along East 117th Street. The site is urban in nature, displaying simple features, typical of urban public housing. Today the complex has limited site features consisting of concrete sidewalks with some street trees remaining, and a small, paved seating area to the east of the entrance with raised concrete planters. There is a small surface parking lot to the west of the entrance plaza. The roof of the two-story wings was originally used as outdoor recreation space with bocce courts, shuffleboard courts, seating areas and planting beds. The recreation areas were later replaced by a green roof.

Exterior: Corsi Houses consists of a sixteen-story rectangularly shaped residential tower with two, two-story wings housing a community/senior center. The residential tower and wings are interconnected at the first and second floors, with the residential tower existing at the northeast side of the site and the community spaces wrapping around the base to the southwest.

The facades are primarily clad in brown and tan brick laid in a running bond. The site is accessed by a small flight of concrete steps leading from E. 117th Street to an open L-shaped entrance plaza that wraps the north and east elevations and is framed by a series of brick piers supporting a recessed walkway below the second story. The eastern leg is a covered walkway and ramp that leads to the main entrance and tall, picket security

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fences are mounted between the piers. Doors and windows are aluminum replacements installed sometime in the late twentieth century. All portions of the complex feature flat roofs with existing penthouses and mechanical equipment.

Residential Tower

The residential tower consists of the sixteen-story tower, which is original to the complex and fronts East 117th Street. The exterior of the tower is covered in brown and tan brick laid in a running bond. The roof is flat and features a wide metal cornice with a metal balustrade and two mechanical penthouses. Fenestration consists of replacement aluminum windows framed in pairs or groups of three. These replacement windows were installed sometime in the late twentieth century and replaced the original configurations, which consisted of a combination of aluminum double-hung, projected/awning, and fixed sash (picture) windows with some steel projected/awning windows. All windows are fitted with child safety guards.

North Elevation: The north elevation is two bays wide and faces East 117th Street. This elevation is characterized by the L-shaped entrance plaza which provides access to the recessed walkway and main entrance and is located behind a metal security gate. All portions of the elevation are built with consistent materials. Fenestration consists of one-over-one single-hung windows framed in pairs. The main entrance consists of a replacement aluminum door with two lights encased in an aluminum-frame with large rectangular sidelights. The replacement door was installed during the late twentieth century and replaced the original door, which consisted of a single-leaf aluminum door with single light glazing pattern and aluminum sidelight assembly.

West Elevation: The west elevation is twelve bays wide and faces 2nd Avenue. The two, two-story wings project from the first and second story of the housing tower's west elevation. A small surface parking lot is west of the entrance plaza. Fenestration consists of one-over-one single-hung windows framed in pairs. The former terrace for outdoor recreation on the roof of the two-story wings is accessed by a door from the community room at the third floor. The outdoor recreation space originally included bocce courts, shuffleboard courts, seating areas, and planting beds. The recreation areas were replaced by the current green roof system in 2009.

South Elevation: The south elevation is two bays wide and faces East 116th Street. A portion of one of the two-story wings wraps around the base of the housing tower's south elevation at the first and second story. Fenestration consists of one-over-one single-hung windows. All of the windows on the elevation are framed in pairs except those on the third floor, which are framed in sets of three.

East Elevation: The east elevation is twelve bays wide and is largely concealed from the public right-of-way; it abuts an unassociated building. A small, paved seating area is located along the east elevation to the east of the entrance and features raised concrete planters.

Community/Senior Center

The Community/Senior Center consists of two, two-story wings that wrap around the southwest base of the residential tower. The exterior of the tower is covered in brown and tan brick laid in a running bond. The roof is flat and features copper flashing, pre-cast concrete coping, and a metal balustrade. Fenestration consists of replacement aluminum one-over-one single-hung and awning windows framed in pairs or groups of three.

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These replacement windows were installed sometime in the late twentieth century. All windows are fitted with metal framed safety screens.

As Corsi Houses was constructed in the middle of a block of existing buildings, there was very little space for outdoor amenities on the ground. Instead, Corsi Houses originally used the roof of the two-story community/senior center as a terrace for outdoor activities such as shuffleboard for the residential tenants and community members. The recreational space on the roof is currently a green roof due to an inability to adequately maintain the recreational facilities.

At the time of survey, scaffolding obscured a good deal of the community/senior center's south and west elevations.

South Elevation: The south elevation is twelve bays wide and faces East 116th Street. Fenestration consists of replacement aluminum one-over-one single-hung and awning windows framed in pairs or groups of three. These replacement windows were installed sometime in the late twentieth century. All windows are fitted with metal framed safety screens. The elevation also features the main entrance to the community/senior center, which is slightly recessed from the face of the building. The entrance consists of a two-story aluminum door assembly featuring two, single leaf metal doors separated by a three-light sidelight and topped by a six-light transom located in line with the second story. A secondary entrance located east of the main entrance is also slightly recessed from the face of the building. The entrance consists of double-leaf metal doors.

West Elevation: The west elevation faces 2nd Avenue and is blind with the exception of two sets of double-leaf metal doors that serve as secondary forms of egress from the gymnasium and community center.

North Elevation: Much of the building's north elevation abuts an unassociated building. The remainder of the elevation looks over the parking lot for Corsi Houses. The elevation is largely blind with the exception of four sets of three windows on the first story and four pairs of windows on the second story.

East Elevation: The building's east elevation abuts the housing tower.

Interior: On the interior, the primary public spaces in the complex include the first-floor lobbies and the corridors at each floor, community rooms and a gymnasium located in the two-story community center wings, and a solarium located on the third floor of the residential tower. Throughout the building, HVAC/MEP equipment is largely concealed within walls and above ceilings, except in secondary, mechanical spaces. This includes fire and life safety sprinklers and HVAC equipment, which are concealed above the ceilings. The residential tower and wings are fully interconnected at the first and second floors. Finishes have largely been updated during subsequent renovations by NYCHA. Some original finishes remain, including concrete and glazed block walls in the lobbies and corridors.

Residential Tower

The general floorplan of the residential tower consists of corridors that run centrally down the length of the building, flanked by units on either side. The first floor includes the residential lobby, mail room, and

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mechanical/utility space, including the upper portion of the boiler room. The first floor also includes meeting rooms and offices that are located within the community/senior center. The second floor includes tenant laundry and tenant storage. The third floor features a solarium that functions as a common gathering space for tenants and community members and serves as the access point to the second-floor rooftop terrace and recreational spaces. Aside from these amenities and vertical access points, the residential tower is composed entirely of apartment units. Vertical access to the building is provided by a stairwell and elevator bank consisting of two cabs on the east side of the central hall in the residential tower, as well as a stair in the entrance lobby that connects the two floors of the community center. The stairs are utilitarian in design, featuring concrete treads and simple metal railings. The elevators consist of two replacement elevator cabs featuring simple metal surrounds.

An aluminum door with a square and rectangular light encased in an aluminum-frame with large rectangular sidelights is located on the north elevation and allows access to the main lobby. The lobby remains in its historic configuration and features two central elevators and a staircase leading to each floor. The mail room is located on the south side of the lobby directly across from the entrance and features metal mailboxes. A metal door is located on the lobby's north wall and allows access to mechanical/utility rooms. The original configuration and volume of the lobby remain intact. Finishes within the lobby include VCT flooring, original glazed block walls, and dropped ACT tile ceilings with inset fluorescent lighting.

Finishes in the second-floor laundry room include ceramic tile flooring, painted plaster and concrete block walls and painted concrete ceilings. Finishes in the third-floor solarium include VCT flooring, plaster and exposed brick walls, and painted cement ceiling. The corridors at each floor remain in their historic configuration and volume, some of the finishes within the corridors appear to be replacements. Finishes in the corridors include VCT flooring, painted cement, glazed block walls and painted concrete ceilings. Grab bars, typical of senior housing developments, exist along corridor walls.

Doors to apartment units are single-leaf metal doors. The apartment unit layouts appear to retain their historic configuration. Finishes in units include VCT flooring, painted plaster walls, and painted concrete ceilings. The apartment bathrooms have non-skid ceramic tile flooring, painted plaster walls, metal medicine cabinets, ceramic sinks, and vinyl bathtub inserts. Apartment kitchens have linoleum countertops and backsplashes and wood cabinets. Interior apartment doors are wood.

Community/Senior Center

The first floor of the Community/Senior Center features an entrance lobby that provides access to reception and conference rooms, as well as a series of offices. Multiple club rooms and a library exist at the east side of the community center. There are additional meeting rooms and offices at the lower basement level, which also includes a commercial kitchen and dining room, and a gymnasium with locker rooms exists in the wing that projects off the west. The residential tower's third-floor solarium is accessible from the community center and allows access to the former rooftop terrace and recreational spaces. Finishes in the lobby and entrances include original terrazzo floors, painted concrete block walls, and ACT tile ceilings. Interior doors leading to rooms are aluminum with single-light glazing pattern. Finishes in the remainder of the space include a combination of VCT flooring, concrete block walls, and ACT tile ceilings.

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Alterations: The building has not undergone any character-defining changes since it was constructed in 1973. Based on historical documentation, multiple updates were made to the development in 1978, including the addition of outdoor equipment, a flower garden, and security fencing for the outside terrace, as well as the replacement of the terrazzo floors between the staircase and the gym. Improvements to an auditorium were also mentioned, but specific details excluded. Small changes were made to the complex in the coming decades, with alterations to the maintenance spaces and replacement of the elevator mechanisms in 1989.

Based on available historic documentation the windows were originally aluminum and steel windows in multiple configurations including double-hung, fixed, and awning. These windows have been replaced throughout with aluminum windows that match the material and scale of the original fenestration. In this window upgrade new window guards were installed. Most exterior doors, including the entrance doors to the residential tower lobby, have been replaced with new doors that feature slightly different glazing patterns. Replacement doors are still metal and fit into the original door openings. The brick façade has received routine maintenance including selective repair and brick replacement. As tenants moved in and out, apartment units have received minor finish alterations, including changes to flooring, bathroom fixtures, and appliances. These alterations were consistent with the original materials in that they are utilitarian and often use the same materials.

Integrity: The Corsi Houses have retained their original massing, form, and exterior claddings. Doors, vestibules, and windows have been replaced, typical of NYCHA buildings from the mid-twentieth century; however, the window sizes and locations remain intact. The community center remains in use with a gymnasium, locker rooms, and meeting rooms for community use. Original plans included landscaping and recreational spaces atop the roof of the community center, which remains extant but is no longer in use. The general uses and layouts of the spaces have been retained as well; however, many original finishes and materials have been replaced. Much of the building, including apartment kitchens, the mail room, and elevator hall, originally featured vinyl asbestos tile. Due to its hazardous nature, most of the flooring has been replaced with VCT. Many instances of the historic terrazzo and ceramic tile flooring, however, remain. The original painted concrete block and glazed block remain as well.

The corridors at each floor remain in their historic configuration and the volume of the lobby is also intact. The apartment layouts appear to be in their historic configuration, although many of the finishes and fixtures have been updated in units, including the installation of replacement VCT flooring and appliances. Apartment materials originally included asphalt tile, ceramic tile in the bathrooms, vinyl asbestos tile in the kitchens, and painted plaster walls. In some instances, VCT has been installed over original flooring. The community center originally featured a mix of vinyl asbestos tile, which has since been replaced, and painted concrete and glazed block walls, which remain intact. Lobby and entrances in the community center feature the original terrazzo in many locations. Overall, the Corsi Houses retains integrity and continues to illustrate a mid-twentieth century senior housing complex.

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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.)

- ☒ 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.
- ☐ 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.)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1973

Significant Dates

1973

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Samuel Paul, Architect

Joseph R. Gangemi, Landscape Architect

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the building is 1973, the date of the building's construction. The period of significance conveys the building's construction as elderly specific public housing, as well as its association with NYCHA and LaGuardia Memorial House and their community-based efforts, which continue within the building to this day.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Corsi Houses, a public housing complex in East Harlem constructed in 1973, is significant under criterion A in the areas of POLITICS/GOVERNMENT and SOCIAL HISTORY as one of a group of mid-twentieth century government-funded high-rise senior housing complexes in Harlem developed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). It represents the expansion of federal affordable housing programs to construct apartments specifically designed for seniors under the Housing Act of 1956 and later expanded under housing acts in 1961 and 1965. Even before the federal legislation, NYCHA had begun to reserve sections of its public housing buildings for elderly tenants, and the agency built its first building solely for the elderly in 1964. NYCHA's elderly housing followed the federal government's lead in requiring features such as

...bathrooms with nonslip floors, square bathtubs with seats and hand grips in the walls to facilitate getting in and out, showers with seats and hand grips for persons who would feel insecure in getting into or out of a tub, the elimination of thresholds to lessen the danger of tripping, and electric instead of gas stoves to prevent asphyxiation from escaping gas.

Housekeeping will be simplified by placing the shelves and cabinets at low levels. Life will be made easier by mechanically operated casement windows. Apartments will face the sunny side and more heat will be provided than in other apartment.¹

Corsi Houses is also one of a small set of public housing developments built in collaboration with a local settlement house, in this case, LaGuardia Memorial House, which had served the neighborhood since 1898. Corsi Houses was initiated by the settlement house organization, thus ensuring the direct participation of the community it would serve, and it was built on land that was formerly occupied by the settlement house, a specific attempt to integrate it into the surrounding neighborhood. The complex was intended to fulfill the needs of the community by providing low-income housing for elderly residents, incorporating space for the settlement house into its design, and operating a full-service community center. The project was initiated in 1961, when Edward Corsi, the director of LaGuardia Memorial House, approached NYCHA with the idea to pair a senior public housing building with the community resources and programs provided by the settlement house. Corsi proposed using the site of the LaGuardia House as the site for the complex because it was located within the existing neighborhood and would not require large-scale demolition. It would also be integrated into the fabric of the community rather than built on an outlying site away from a familiar neighborhood. Although project planning was initiated at Corsi's suggestion, the project was delayed by numerous interruptions, including struggles over financing and design approval. Near the end of the process, the contract with the original architect was terminated, and NYCHA hired a more conservative architect who reused a portion of the design from another project to cut costs and simplify the program. After a decade of setbacks, Corsi Houses eventually opened in 1973. Although Corsi Houses continues to fulfill its purpose of combining affordable elderly housing with community support programs in East Harlem, the long struggle to complete it also reveals the tension between well-intentioned programs, community desires, politics, and economic realities² The building also

¹ "State-Aid Housing Must Take in Aged," November 26, 1951.

²

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exemplifies NYCHA's consistent approach to the design of elderly housing, which were almost always towers of at least twelve stories that incorporated a facility that performed a service-related function in the community. The complex is an intact and representative example of the evolution of government-funded senior high-rise housing in partnership with settlement houses around the city. Corsi Houses continues to be managed for its original purpose in partnership by NYCHA and LaGuardia Memorial House, a settlement house that has served the neighborhood since 1898.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Development of East Harlem

The Corsi Houses is located in a section of East Harlem, Manhattan that was largely rural and undeveloped until the mid-to-late nineteenth century when the completion of elevated transit and subway lines allowed for more residential development in the area, specifically in the form of apartments and brownstones. Early in the twentieth century, a growing immigrant population settled in East Harlem leading to a surge in housing development in the area.³ By 1879, the area surrounding the future site of the Corsi Houses had been platted and a few buildings constructed, but most lots remained unimproved. By 1897, the block was almost entirely developed and had become a dense tenement district.

By the end of the nineteenth century, this specific area of East Harlem had become a center for Italian families in New York City, bounded by other immigrant communities throughout the remainder of East Harlem.⁴ The first Italians arrived in East Harlem in 1878 and settled in the area surrounding 115th Street. The neighborhood would come to be defined by multiple immigrant communities, with the largest Italian community in the city settled east of Second Avenue. The *New York Times* called the area "the new East Side" and noted a burgeoning Italian quarter above 108th Street.⁵

History of LaGuardia Memorial House and the Settlement Movement in New York

The LaGuardia Memorial House, which was instrumental in the development of the Corsi Houses project, was founded in 1898 as the Home Garden Settlement of New York and was dedicated to the welfare of East Harlem's large immigrant population.⁶ In 1916, the settlement house had changed its name to "Haarlem House."⁷ Haarlem House, originally located at 311 East 116th Street, was noted in multiple news publications as primarily serving Harlem's Little Italy. Newspapers reported that the organization had a significantly beneficial effect on the neighborhood, minimizing gang activity and improving general health conditions. The settlement

³ "East Harlem, Manhattan (History)," *UrbanAreas.net*, Accessed October 20, 2023, <https://urbanareas.net/info/resources/neighborhoods-manhattan/east-harlem-manhattanhistory/>.

⁴ "East Harlem, Manhattan (History)," *UrbanAreas.net*.

⁵ Marissa Marvelli, "East Harlem South / El Barrio," Historic Resource Survey (New York, New York: Ascendant Neighborhood Development Corporation & Landmark East Harlem, July 2021), 40.

⁶ "LaGuardia Memorial House and Scan Corsi Senior Center," *City Lore*, <https://citylore.org/places/laguardia-memorial-house-scan-corsi-senior-center/>, Accessed October 2023.

⁷ "Advertisement for Easter Dance at Haarlem House," *Sun*, April 9, 1916.

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house offered “Americanization” programs that offered classes in English and “good citizenship” geared towards the local Italian community.⁸

The early programs of Haarlem House were operated out of a single house, but in 1919, the organization expanded and moved operations into two, four-story Colonial Revival style houses located on the future site of the Edward Corsi Houses.⁹ Soon after moving to its permanent location, the settlement’s success and popularity necessitated the purchase of another house adjoining its property to the west. In 1920, Haarlem House had an attendance of 81,000 for the year, a number which again demanded expansion. In 1922, the house appealed for funding to expand its programming once again.¹⁰

Haarlem House was also referred to as “The Colony Club of Little Italy” and was associated with several notable figures in the East Harlem area.¹¹ In 1920, the board of managers for Haarlem House even included the New York Commissioner of Parks. Club officers at the house were all settlement members. This included a young twenty-something Edward Corsi, the building’s future namesake, who began as the director of the men’s department of Haarlem House in the 1920s.¹² Corsi’s involvement with the settlement house likely catalyzed the direction of his career, and he went on to devote his life to immigration and housing issues.

Although located in Harlem’s Little Italy, Haarlem House served more than just Italians. English and civics courses were offered to “Italians, Jews, Bohemians, Greeks, etc.” East Harlem as a whole was home to a diverse immigrant community and Haarlem House became a resource for all who needed help. Americanization was a keynote of the organization. In 1920, the *New York Herald* touted Little Italy’s pride in the settlement house, which had become a fixture in the East Harlem community.¹³ It noted that when Haarlem House came to Little Italy, there was no agency there to stand for “decency and cooperation.”¹⁴ The newspaper also stated that “in an area running from 110th Street to 125th Street and from Park Avenue to the river, there was no neighborhood house.” Haarlem House served an area that was in need of a facility that provided social services. In 1926, Edward Corsi became the director of Haarlem House.¹⁵

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, Haarlem House continued to serve this section of East Harlem. In 1949, the organization celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The settlement house began to be referred to as a community center and remained at 311 East 116th Street. In 1956, Haarlem House was dedicated as a permanent memorial to the late Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia, who had grown up in the neighborhood and even used Haarlem House as an unofficial campaign meeting place.¹⁶ Its new name, LaGuardia Memorial House, remains to this day.¹⁷ In

⁸ “Women Make Harlem House the Pride of Little Italy,” *New York Herald*, April 11, 1920.

⁹ “Italian East Harlem,” accessed October 9, 2023, http://www.vitomarcantonio.com/eh_italian_east_harlem.html.

¹⁰ H.S. Ardell, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 2, 1922.

¹¹ “Women Make Harlem House,” *New York Herald*.

¹² “Women Make Harlem House,” *New York Herald*.

¹³ The history of this neighborhood between 1865 and 1966 is summarized in the National Register nomination for the East Harlem Historic District, NR listed in 2019

¹⁴ “Women Make Harlem House,” *New York Herald*.

¹⁵ “Italian East Harlem.”

¹⁶ “Will Dedicate Haarlem House to LaGuardia,” *Daily News*, March 25, 1956.

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the 1970s, when Corsi Houses was designed and constructed, census data reveals that those living in the area surrounding the complex were still largely of Italian descent; however, the neighborhood was also heavily settled with Puerto Rican immigrants as well. The LaGuardia Memorial House and Corsi Houses served the greater East Harlem neighborhood, including its diverse population.¹⁸

Housing for the Elderly in New York City¹⁹

The need to provide specialized housing for older Americans became a national imperative during the 1950s, particularly for those of limited financial means. As lifespans increased due to “improved nutrition, medical care and knowledge,” the population of Americans over sixty-five years of age jumped from 4.1 percent in 1900 to 7.6 percent in 1950.²⁰ At the same time, the rise of the nuclear family meant that “the custom of aging parents living with one or another of their married children was tending to disappear,” and “the difficulty always confronting aging persons of finding suitable reasonably priced housing had been increased manyfold for older persons in the lower income groups.”²¹

In 1950, President Harry Truman convened the first National Conference on Aging, which was facilitated by the Federal Security Administration. Although the event did not produce any definitive findings on concerns or issues with the senior citizens in the United States, the 815 delegates concluded that “the situation of the aging was so critical that it required the immediate attention of all appropriate groups and interests.”²² That same year, the *New York Times* stressed the need for senior housing, stating, “In the field of housing for the aging, the widow or the widower whose children have grown up, the story is of retrogression rather than progress.” The article continued, “Social workers and housing experts appear to agree that special housing should be created for the aging.”²³

Although federal law did not yet address the housing needs of seniors, NYCHA had already established its own policy of reserving some of its units for older residents. The Red Hook Houses (opened 1938), for example, had an entire wing of apartments designated for seniors, and the Fort Green Houses—NYCHA’s first state-funded housing complex, opened in 1944—had fifty-three of its 3,501 apartments set aside for older tenants.²⁴ One newspaper article in 1950 noted that New York was the only state in the union that “has set aside apartments in public housing projects especially for oldsters.”²⁵

New York State implemented its own policies supporting elder housing in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It created the Joint Legislative Committee on the Problems of the Aging—headed by State Senator Thomas C. Desmond of Newburgh, NY—which had among its chief concerns lobbying for the inclusion of seniors in

¹⁷ Letter from James W. Gaynor, Commissioner of New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal to Albert A. Walsh, Chairman, NYCHA, May 10, 1968, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Social Characteristics of the Population: 1970*, Census Tracts 0186-0200, New York, New York.

¹⁹ The section from Christopher D. Brazee, *Gaylord White Houses National Register Nomination DATE*

²⁰ “State-Aid Housing Must Take in Aged,” November 26, 1951, “Our Aging Population,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1950.

²¹ “State-Aid Housing Must Take in Aged.”

²² Dale Vinyard, “White House Conferences and the Aged,” *Social Service Review* 53, no. 4 (Dec. 1979): 661.

²³ Warren Moscow, “Community Study of Aged Stressed,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1950.

²⁴ “State is Put First in Helping of Aged,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1950.

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public housing.²⁶ These efforts bore fruit in 1951, when the New York State Division of Housing announced that going forward, all state-funded housing developments would be required to set aside a minimum of 5 percent of apartments for seniors, a policy the *New York Times* reported, “reflects the growing interest of the state in the problems of the aged and recognizes the changing family relationships.”²⁷

Not only would state-funded developments be required to include senior housing, but the new policy also stipulated that these units must contain special accommodations for senior residents including:

“...bathrooms with nonslip floors, square bathtubs with seats and hand grips in the walls to facilitate getting in and out, showers with seats and hand grips for persons who would feel insecure in getting into or out of a tub, the elimination of thresholds to lessen the danger of tripping, and electric instead of gas stoves to prevent asphyxiation from escaping gas.

Housekeeping will be simplified by placing the shelves and cabinets at low levels. Life will be made easier by mechanically operated casement windows. Apartments will face the sunny side and more heat will be provided than in other apartment.”²⁸

NYCHA more than met its requirements under the new state law. Between 1951 and 1956, the authority constructed eight state-funded public housing complexes. NYCHA statistics, unfortunately, do not indicate the exact number of units reserved for seniors but do provide enough information to ascertain an approximation. The eight developments consisted of a total of 9,286 apartment units; if five percent of the units were reserved for seniors, it can be surmised that NYCHA added approximately 464 units specifically designed for seniors during that time.²⁹ In fact, the *New York Times* reported in 1957 that 1,700 public housing units across the state were occupied by seniors.³⁰

The federal government implemented its own laws supporting senior housing in 1956, when President Eisenhower signed the Housing Act of 1956 into law. The act expanded upon the previous legislation and increased funding to local housing authorities for both the development of housing and the relocation of those displaced through urban renewal initiatives. Significantly, the law also expanded the public housing program to include senior citizens, specifically, single seniors. The act stipulated that housing authorities could spend additional funds to provide for the special conveniences required for older residents, such as ramps, handrails, and grab bars.³¹ As such, the federal government opened the door to local housing authorities across the country to increase their unit counts and construct housing developments for seniors.

In 1957, State Housing Commissioner Joseph P. McMurray announced that New York “is raising the reservations for elderly persons in its low-rent housing project from about 5 per cent of the total units to 10 per

²⁶ “State-Aid Housing Must Take in Aged.”

²⁷ “State-Aid Housing Must Take in Aged.”

²⁸ “State-Aid Housing Must Take in Aged.”

²⁹ “Project Statistics,” New York City Housing Authority, June 30, 1955.

³⁰ “Housing for Aged Gains,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1957.

³¹ “Public Housing in War on Poverty,” *CQ Press*, July 22, 1964.

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cent.”³² He also noted that for the first time, “some new projects will be entirely for the aged,” rather than being incorporated into larger developments. In July of that year, McMurray unveiled plans “for a public housing project to be tenanted entirely by elderly couples and individuals,” comprising “360 specially designed apartments at the northwest corner of Second Avenue and 104th Streets.”³³ As the *New York Times* noted, “The project, if carried through in its present form, would be the first rental public housing to be built here exclusively for the aged.”³⁴ It took several years, but the development was ultimately completed in 1964 and given the name Gaylord White Houses.³⁵

Vest Pocket Housing³⁶

McMurray had toyed with the idea of constructing small buildings within existing neighborhoods, with the hope that this would help the elderly population integrate more effectively into the neighborhood environment. His interests paralleled those of the settlement house, as well as with the progressive efforts of NYCHA and the New York City government, which was reexamining the efficacy of the large-scale tower in the park model that it had relied on for decades.

By the mid-1950s, public housing in general—and the superblock model in particular—were being questioned by a range of public housing advocates and critics. Even staunch advocates increasingly lamented the lack of innovation in public housing. Catherine Bauer, who had written much of the original 1937 housing act, noted, “Everybody tends to sit tight, clinging desperately to the beleaguered formula, instead of trying to improve it in the light of experience and public attitudes.”³⁷

The federal government took its first steps at improving public housing policy when it adopted the Housing Act of 1954. The law explicitly shifted focus from “slum clearance”—the wholesale demolition of areas determined to be irredeemably damaged—to “urban renewal,” which would involve a range of public and private interventions aimed at preserving deteriorating but salvageable neighborhoods. As one contemporary commentator noted, “The Housing Act of 1954 gave explicit recognition to the need to continuously ‘renew’ our cities... Where the 1949 Act was limited essentially to slum clearance and redevelopment (the bulldozer approach), the 1954 Act provided that an urban renewal project might involve rehabilitation and conservation as well.”³⁸

The 1954 law contained several key provisions. It emphasized rehabilitation and conservation, primarily through private development aided by federal mortgage insurance for renovation projects (Section 220). It required every municipality receiving federal housing funds to develop a workable plan including provisions for building codes, developing a comprehensive community master plan, and conducting analysis of deteriorated

³² “Housing for Aged Gains.”

³³ Charles Grutzner, “Housing Planned for Elderly Only,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1957, 48.

³⁴ Grutzner, “Housing Planned for Elderly Only.”

³⁵ Though planned first, the Gaylord White Houses were completed several months after Van Dyke II became NYCHA’s first purpose-built, exclusively senior housing development to officially open.

³⁶ Partially derived from Brazee, *Gaylord White Houses*.

³⁷ Quoted in Barbara Penner, “The (Still) Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing,” *Places Journal*, October 2018, Accessed 14 Mar 2022, <https://doi.org/10.22269/181030>.

³⁸ New York City Planning Commission, “Urban Renewal: A Report on the West Side Urban Renewal Study” (New York, 1958), 83.

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and declining neighborhoods.³⁹ The act also authorized funding for 35,000 units of public housing. Finally, the act also authorized the federal government to dole out demonstration grants to municipalities seeking to explore new models for urban renewal.

New York City and its housing authority were at the vanguard of interpreting and implementing federal housing policy. The Housing Act of 1954 was passed just months into the first term of Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr., who served from 1954-65 and was instrumental in steering NYCHA, however slowly, in a new direction. In October 1955, speaking in front of a Congressional subcommittee, Wagner announced a pilot program to study urban renewal techniques under the new law.⁴⁰ He noted that this study “involves a cooperative effort on the part of private enterprise and the city, State, and Federal Governments to rehabilitate one entire section of our city, to concentrate on it rather than a few square blocks here and there. If it works in this one area, we will repeat it elsewhere.”⁴¹ The following year, New York City received a federal demonstration grant—as provided under section 314 of the Housing Act of 1954—to fund the study of what came to be known as the West Side Urban Renewal Area, encompassing twenty blocks between West 87th and 97th Streets and Central Park West to Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan.

Crucially, Wagner also noted in his Congressional testimony that the city had received clarification that “Federal low-rent housing funds previously used only for the superblock type of construction can be used both for single buildings and rehabilitation of old buildings.”⁴² With this confirmation in hand, NYCHA announced in February 1956 that its federally funded developments would be “departing from the superblock pattern of projects covering six to eight blocks...[and] will diffuse the low-rent apartments widely in small development covering a single block, a half-block, quarter-block and in some cases a single building.”⁴³ It also noted that, “The city’s decision to go from superblock construction to smaller projects and scattered single buildings in its federally aided public housing will, if continued, retain neighborhood characteristics of many older residential sections while slowing or halting the encroachments of slum blight,” therefore achieving one of the primary goals of the Housing Act of 1954.⁴⁴

It took a couple of years for NYCHA to implement this plan, but in 1958 it announced fourteen new developments, of which nine were to be what the authority now termed “vest pocket” housing.⁴⁵ As one article announcing the new program claimed, “This will be the first widespread use of small islands of public housing to rehabilitate neighborhoods affected by spotty deterioration alongside other buildings still in good

³⁹ “The workable programs submitted by most large cities consist of a brief textural statement summarizing local compliance”; “The New York workable program comprises a 7-page printed letter of the Mayor to the HHFA Administrator, supported by 45 exhibits.” Quintin Johnstone, “The Federal Urban Renewal Program,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1958), 340 and footnote 231.

⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking and Currency: Investigation of Housing, 1955, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, 3-7; “City Gives Plan to Rehabilitate Upper West Side,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1955, 1 and 22.

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, Investigation of Housing, 1955, 5.

⁴² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee, Investigation of Housing, 1955, 6.

⁴³ Charles Grutzner, “City Will Scatter U.S. Housing Units,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1956, 1.

⁴⁴ Grutzner, “City Will Scatter U.S. Housing Units,” 1.

⁴⁵ NYCHA had in fact used the term “vest pocket” in March 1955 to refer to an unbuilt development in Chinatown. “‘Vest-Pocket’ Housing for City,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 24, 1955.

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condition.”⁴⁶ The article also provided a simple definition of what constitutes a vest pocket development: sites a city block or less in size and comprising one to four buildings.⁴⁷

Vest-pocket was used successfully for elderly housing as they shared similar goals, and in 1962, the year the first vest-pocket complex was approved, the city announced another \$60 million toward vest-pocket developments in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.⁴⁸ A newspaper article from the time noted that, “Thirty-two per cent of all housing projects now being planned or built by the New York City Housing Authority are vest-pocket developments. Such developments occupy less than a city block, and in many instances consist of a single building. The small developments, the mayor said, are intended ‘to preserve neighborhoods throughout the city which may be destroyed because of more extensive public housing activities.’”⁴⁹ Another newspaper article from 1964 claimed that “Vest-pocket development, as conceived by Mayor Wagner, ‘is proving to be one of the most practical and popular techniques in our low-rent housing program.’”⁵⁰ Despite its popularity, however, the city never fully committed to vest-pocket development as a substitute for traditional superblock developments, and NYCHA continued to build superblock developments well into the late 1960s.

Origins of the Edward Corsi Houses

LaGuardia Memorial House at 311 East 116th Street owned about eighty feet of frontage at 307, 309, 311, and 313 East 116th Street.⁵¹ These parcels included the buildings operated as the settlement house. However, the future site of the Corsi Houses would be much larger. The future building site was occupied by a total of seven residential buildings and commercial buildings, as well as the LaGuardia Memorial House. There were only twenty-three residential tenants and three commercial tenants in the buildings. Figures from the 1960 Census revealed that 86 percent of dwellings on the block were in a state of deterioration.⁵² The site, while occupied, would require minimal displacement in an otherwise dense residential block.

In 1961, LaGuardia Memorial House surveyed area residents to gauge their interest in a potential housing project at East 116th Street and Second Avenue.⁵³ Out of 2,900 residents, 2,525 were in favor, 280 were undecided, and only ninety-five were in opposition. According to Joseph J. Christian, the director of program planning for the New York City Housing Authority, it was left to LaGuardia Memorial House to gain community acceptance for the project.⁵⁴ However, with strong support from the neighborhood, project planning continued.

⁴⁶ “City Housing Unit Plans 14 Projects,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1958, 49.

⁴⁷ The initial definition was further refined later in the program.

⁴⁸ Susanne Schindler, “The Housing that Model Cities Built: Context, Community, and Capital in New York City, 1966-76,” Doc. thesis, (Universität der Künste, Berlin, 2018), 48.

⁴⁹ “City Plans Housing in Small Projects,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1962, quoted in Schindler, “Housing,” 48.

⁵⁰ “4 Housing Projects to be Started Here,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1964, 84.

⁵¹ Letter from William Reid, Chairman, NYCHA to James Gaynor, Commissioner of New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, November 4, 1964, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵² Letter from Harold Sole, Chief, Site Management Division, NYCHA to Joseph Christian, Director of Program Planning, NYCHA, October 25, 1966, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵³ Memorandum from Joseph Christian, Director of Program Planning, NYCHA, 1961, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵⁴ Memorandum from Joseph Christian, 1961, NYCHA Archives.

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The original concept, as represented by LaGuardia Memorial House, included a sixteen-story residential tower with community amenities to be under long-term lease by the settlement house. This overall vision was carried through many variations and design schemes until the building was constructed. In 1964, the plan for the building included a 40,000 square foot community space below the residential tower, much larger than those community centers at other NYCHA projects, such as Gaylord White (NR Listed).⁵⁵ LaGuardia Memorial House intended to donate the properties it already owned at the site to the project without cost. At this point, a tentative site plan showed approximately 190 dwelling units, and the estimated cost for the project was \$4,230,000.⁵⁶ The same year, the project was slowed after word came from Commissioner James W. Gaynor that the state's public housing funds had been exhausted. However, he noted that six million should be available soon, and the project seemed to press on.⁵⁷

In May 1965, NYCHA submitted the first application for approval of a plan and project to the city planning commission. The plan had been completed with the guidance of Edward Corsi and the LaGuardia Memorial House, which would be the primary tenant of the community center.⁵⁸ The proposed plan included 188 dwelling units and a sixteen-story residential tower. All the apartments were to be specifically designed for the aged, with parking spaces to be provided as well. A community center was planned, but they had yet to decide on the type of facilities were to be included. NYCHA also requested an expedition of its Application for Financial Assistance to the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, which was responsible for the supervision and development of affordable low-and-moderate income housing in the state. Approval was granted in February 1965 to proceed with design development with the caveat that the project had to cost under four million dollars. The original budget projection slightly exceeded that amount. The Division of Housing and Community Renewal also stipulated that the size of the community center would have to be proportionate to those which had previously been constructed with state assistance.⁵⁹

The plan noted the substandard and unsanitary condition of those dwellings that existed on the site at the time and proposed to replace them with the new construction. It touted the site's proximity to multiple parks, including Jefferson Park, Mount Morris Park (now Marcus Garvey Park), and multiple playgrounds. It also noted the proximity to the Lexington Avenue IRT Line with a station at 116th Street and Lexington Avenue, just two blocks away. Additionally, there were multiple bus lines along 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and Lexington Avenues, as well as East 116th Street.⁶⁰ Edward Corsi stated in letters that the LaGuardia Memorial House had placed a cash offer to purchase the premises at 315 East 116th Street and that this building could serve as an interim settlement

⁵⁵ Memorandum from Joseph Christian, Director of Program Planning, NYCHA, March 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵⁶ Letter from William Reid, Chairman, NYCHA to James W. Gaynor, Commissioner of New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Nov. 4, 1964, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵⁷ Letter from James W. Gaynor, Commissioner of New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal to William Reid, Chairman, NYCHA, Nov. 16, 1964, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵⁸ Application to the City Planning Commission for Approval of a "Plan" and "Project" Relative to a State-Aided Public Housing Project Tentatively Designated as the East 116th Street - Second Avenue Area in the Borough of Manhattan, May 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁵⁹ Letter from James W. Gaynor, Commissioner of New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal to Francis V. Madigan, Vice-Chairman, NYCHA, Feb. 19, 1965, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁶⁰ Application to the City Planning Commission, May 3, 1965.

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house during the demolition and construction phase, which would help with displacement during construction. A new budget was to be prepared based on the elements discussed, including a smaller 27,500 square foot community center.⁶¹

Edward Corsi

The Corsi Houses is named for Edward Corsi, an author and government official active in the areas of immigration, labor relations, and social welfare. Edward Corsi was an Italian American born in Italy in 1896. The Corsi family settled in New York City in 1906. Corsi became a citizen in 1921 and received his LL. B degree from Fordham University. Before graduating from Fordham, Corsi joined the staff of Haarlem House, where he became the director in 1926. Throughout his career, Corsi served in many different roles including Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, Director of the Home Relief Fund, and Deputy Commissioner for the New York City Department of Public Welfare. He became a well-known writer and speaker concerning immigration, writing *In the Shadow Liberty* (1935), and *Pathways to the New World* (1940). In 1954, Corsi was called to serve as special assistant to the Secretary of State for Refugee and Migration Problems. He resigned in April 1955 and returned to New York to continue working with LaGuardia Memorial House, previously Haarlem House. Edward Corsi died in an automobile accident on December 13, 1965, during the development of the Edward Corsi Houses, which was subsequently named in his honor.⁶²

State Funding Challenges & Resulting Design Changes

In September 1966, a new request for approval was submitted by NYCHA with an updated plan.⁶³ The plan included 152 dwelling units on a 32,818 square foot site, with a seventeen-story building. The community center was to take up the suggested 27,500 square feet. The new proposal listed nearby amenities and the services which they could provide tenants. The site was ideal for senior housing because of its close vicinity to hospitals, schools, public transportation, and recreational opportunities like bocce courts offered by the nearby Jefferson Park.⁶⁴

The New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal expressed interest in including the entire Second Avenue frontage in the design.⁶⁵ Joseph Christian of NYCHA rejected this proposal and stated that the tenement at the southeast corner of Second Avenue and East 117th Street had been rehabilitated recently and was in good condition, suggesting that it would be ill-advised to acquire and demolish it. This suggestion was not followed.⁶⁶ However, based on many instances of funding applications, it seems NYCHA was required to

⁶¹ Meeting Minutes, Meeting between, NYCHA, SDH&CR, and LaGuardia Memorial House, March 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁶² "Edward Corsi Papers An Inventory of His Papers at Syracuse University," Syracuse University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, Accessed April 17, 2023, https://library.syracuse.edu/digital/guides/c/corsi_e.htm.

⁶³ Application to the City Planning Commission for Approval of a "Plan and "Project" Relative to a State-Aided Public Housing Project Tentatively Designated as the East 116th Street Second Avenue Area in the Borough of Manhattan, Sept. 13, 1966, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁶⁴ Application to the City Planning Commission, May 3, 1965.

⁶⁵ "Homes and Community Renewal," New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Accessed November 2023, <https://hcr.ny.gov/division-housing-and-community-renewal>.

⁶⁶ Meeting Minutes, March 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives.

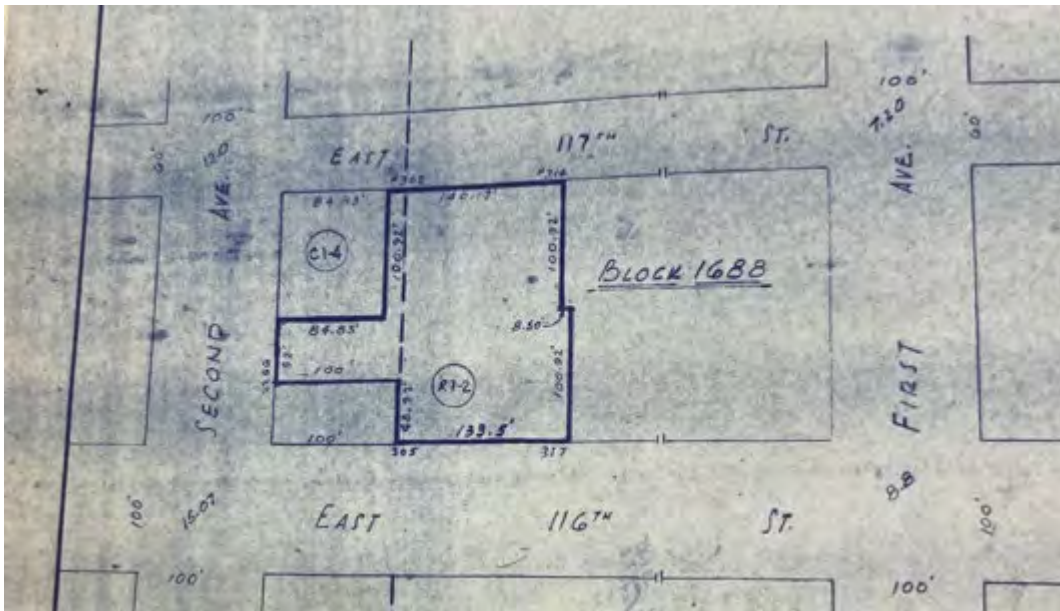
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rework its plans a few times prior to getting approval for funding. In 1967, a new application for funding was submitted, likely because the previous submission was denied. The new application outlined that the development would offer studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom, and four-bedroom apartments. As originally intended, NYCHA was to lease the community center to LaGuardia Memorial House on a rent-free basis. An architect had not yet been appointed by NYCHA as late as July 1967. The application review also stated that previously submitted concepts had been “unsatisfactory” and the space requirements for the community center had to be revised once again.⁶⁷



1966 Proposed Site Plan, NYCHA Archives

By 1968, the design of the project was underway. Following the tragic death of Edward Corsi in 1965, the board of directors of LaGuardia Memorial House requested to name the development the “Edward Corsi Houses.” NYCHA relayed this to the Division of Housing and Community Renewal, which enthusiastically approved it, noting that Corsi was “instrumental in bringing this project about, having approached the division as early as 1961.” The name of the building was unveiled at the Edward Corsi Memorial Concert on May 17, 1968.⁶⁸

During the summer of 1968, NYCHA entered into a contract with the architecture firm Katz, Waisman, Weber, & Strauss.⁶⁹ Working with that firm was associate architect Roger Katan. It is not known how Katan was chosen. By August, a deed for the site was conveyed from the City of New York to NYCHA.⁷⁰ Due to the site’s zoning, small size, and the odd shape of space available, there were few potential layouts possible for the

⁶⁷ Meeting Minutes, Meeting between Kermit Karpel, Harry Levy, William Kennedy, Preston David, Max Schreiber, and Edward Lee July 5, 1967, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁶⁸ Letter from James Gaynor, May 10, 1968, NYCHA Archives.

⁶⁹ Letter of Termination of Architect’s Contract for Edward Corsi Houses with Katz Weisman Weber Strauss, May 3, 1971, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York Accessed 2023.

⁷⁰ Edward Corsi Houses, NYC-144, Deed of Conveyance, NYC to NYCHA June 19, 1968, Aug. 2, 1968, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

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residential tower and community center, especially considering the need for a large gymnasium and auditorium. Katan's plans for the project included balconies in an effort to offer "informal neighborly contact."⁷¹ Considering the minimal recreational outdoor space immediately on site, representatives of the community were strongly in favor of the balconies.⁷² Unfortunately, the overall cost had increased to more than NYCHA had originally advised, and that agency objected to the proposed design scheme on the grounds of inefficiency.⁷³ Balconies were not typical in NYCHA properties, although they were not unprecedented, and other comparable buildings nearby made them a typical neighborhood asset. In October of 1968, NYCHA's Joseph Christian wrote to the Model Cities Committee [even though this was not a Model Cities project] seeking \$155,000 in funding to finance the cost of an underground garage and the rooftop recreation deck. The expenditure was approved.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, by November of 1969, funding for the construction of the Edward Corsi Houses was becoming increasingly scarce, in large part because of the proposal for a large community center. At this time, the design of the Edward Corsi Houses was technically complete.⁷⁵ The Division of Housing and Community Renewal had approved a maximum development cost of \$4,705,000, not based on the funds needed to complete the design, but on the amount of funds remaining for state-aided public housing. This left an \$885,000 difference between the state's top figure and the building's current estimated cost of \$5,590,000.⁷⁶ The Model Cities Committee had already approved an allocation for the construction of the garage and rooftop deck, but it remained the only source of available funds that might support the rest of construction. Thus, additional funding was requested from Model Cities.⁷⁷ The allocation of funding required approval by HUD, and bids were put on hold until a solution could be found, further slowing the project.⁷⁸

Katan seemed unphased by what he considered to be the typical "red tape" involved in publicly funded housing.⁷⁹ In a 1970 *Daily News* article, Katan described his design as incorporating elements of Arabic, African, and Italian and Spanish design. Katan was quoted saying that "the project will stand on stilt-like columns like those in the bush country in Africa. It also will have Spanish inspired terraces and outdoor space resembling Italian plazas. There will be ramps as well as stairs, and portholes through which older people will be able to watch youngsters playing in the gymnasium one flight below."⁸⁰ The article went on to describe the design, which called for a twenty-two story, octagonal building including LaGuardia Community Center, which would offer a gymnasium, auditorium, and outdoor theater. Construction was anticipated to begin just a few

⁷¹ Letter from Albert A. Walsh, Chairman, NYCHA, to James W. Gaynor, Commissioner of New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, July 3, 1968, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁷² Letter from Albert A. Walsh, July 3, 1968, NYCHA Archives.

⁷³ Letter From Joseph Christian to Eugenia M. Flatow, Model Cities Committee, October 17, 1968, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁷⁴ Letter From Joseph Christian, October 17, 1968, NYCHA Archives.

⁷⁵ Letter from Albert Walsh, Chairman, NYCHA to Donald Elliott, Chairman, Model Cities Policy Committee, November 10, 1969, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁷⁶ Letter from Albert Walsh, November 10, 1969, NYCHA Archives.

⁷⁷ Letter from Albert Walsh, November 10, 1969, NYCHA Archives.

⁷⁸ Letter from Albert Walsh, November 10, 1969, NYCHA Archives.

⁷⁹ "Plan Innovative Housing Unit for Elderly in East Harlem," *New York Daily News*, August 23, 1970.

⁸⁰ "Plan Innovative Housing," *New York Daily News*.

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months after the article was written and was to be completed within two years.⁸¹ Katan noted in letters to NYCHA that he intended the building to be a “place of gathering and cheerfulness, a home for exchange and cultural enrichment.”⁸² From this description, it appears that Katan’s design would have been atypical for a public housing project.

Katan became interested in East Harlem in 1964 when Corsi, commissioner of labor and immigration during the LaGuardia administration, told him of the area’s need for elderly housing. Initially, the architect was working for free on the LaGuardia Memorial House and NYCHA development, donating his services to the project. He moved into a brownstone across the street from the proposed development site, further immersing himself in the project.⁸³

Roger Katan

Roger Katan, the initial designer of the Corsi Houses, was born in Morrocco in 1931. He received training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in France and a master’s in architecture and urban design from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; he went on to teach architecture and urban planning at Pratt Institute in New York City. Katan wrote *Building Together: Case Studies in Participatory Planning and Community Building* (2014). From the late seventies to the early aughts, Katan focused on humanitarian relief and development consultation for the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank.⁸⁴ Katan worked as a planning consultant from 1966-1969 and completed a number of projects in France. He was an associate architect with Katz, Waisman, Weber & Strauss and a member of Planners of Equal Opportunity. Katan was a lecturer at Pratt during Sidney Katz’s tenure as the head of the architecture department, a further connection between the two figures.

Katan and Katz, Waisman, Weber & Strauss had completed 84 percent of the work outlined in their contract when construction bids were received in June 1970, amounting to \$5,967,706, a number which far exceeded the original budget. NYCHA discussed with the firm various ways of reducing the cost of the project by a limited redesign which eliminated features such as the underground garage and the gymnasium. The initial plans were ultimately presented to NYCHA later that year.⁸⁵ In August of 1970, the *Daily News* reported that Roger Katan and the city’s housing authority had “agreed upon an innovational, 152-unit public housing development for the elderly and a community center in East Harlem.”⁸⁶

In 1971, a meeting was held between NYCHA, LaGuardia Memorial House, and the Division of Housing and Community Renewal concerning the growing limitations imposed by dwindling funding and difficult budgeting. The commissioner of the Division of Housing and Community Renewal felt that a reduction in the total area of the community center from 40,000 square feet to less than 30,000 square feet would enable the

⁸¹ “Plan Innovative Housing,” *New York Daily News*.

⁸² Letter from Roger Katan to Joseph Christian, general Manager, NYCHA, May 26, 1969, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁸³ “Plan Innovative Housing Unit,” *New York Daily News*.

⁸⁴ “Roger Katan – New Village Press,” accessed October 13, 2023, <https://www.newvillagepress.org/team/roger-katan/>.

⁸⁵ “Plan Innovative Housing Unit,” *New York Daily News*.

⁸⁶ “Plan Innovative Housing Unit,” *New York Daily News*.

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authority to bring the job in under \$4,000,000. The commissioner stated that a community center comparable in size to that at Gaylord White would be more appropriate and that an area of approximately 27,500 square feet was recommended for the LaGuardia Memorial House activities.⁸⁷

Despite the proposed savings, the revised construction cost was still deemed excessive. At this point, for unknown reasons, the design department of NYCHA reached out to another architect, Samuel Paul, seeking an alternative design. Paul prepared a proposal for redesign that recycled an existing plan for the residential tower used at the William Reid Apartments, located in Brooklyn (which Paul had not designed) and paired it with a simplified layout for the community center. The architect's fee for the redesign was \$170,385, including payments to consultants. In the spring of 1971, the Division of Housing and Community Renewal approved the termination of the contract with Katan and Katz, Waisman, Weber & Strauss and the execution of a new contract with the Office of Samuel Paul.⁸⁸ It is not known whether the settlement house or the community had any role in this decision or if they approved of the final design. Considering the deficit in funding, the Division of Housing and Community Renewal suggested that the team take immediate steps to eliminate "all but the basic housing and appurtenant facilities" in the proposed project, or else find other funding.⁸⁹

Samuel Paul & Joseph Gangemi

Architect Samuel Paul was born in Rochester, New York, and graduated from high school in 1929. He worked for a year as a draftsman before entering the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he received a scholarship to the Ecole des Beaux Arts in France. He graduated in 1935 with a bachelor's degree in architecture and briefly entered the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he began to pursue his master's degree. In 1937, he joined Allie S. Freed, who had suggested Franklin D. Roosevelt consider federal housing programs as a solution to the Great Depression.⁹⁰ This led to Paul's first experience designing federally funded housing, in Arlington, Virginia. Paul then joined the prominent New York modernists Skidmore and Owings.⁹¹

Paul designed more than 140,000 housing units during his career, ranging from large to small and including both low rise and high rise. After establishing his own firm in 1940, Paul designed a number of projects along the east coast, from Virginia to Boston. Paul was a much more conservative than Katan; his approach was based on a balance of budget and design. In a *New York Times* article, he was quoted as saying "you just don't design and say I'm going to get a good design irrespective of what it costs. That's out of balance. The space arrangement should be efficient, effective and creative." He designed many large complexes in addition to housing, such as offices, community facilities, and retail structures.⁹²

⁸⁷ NYCHA Archives, Accessed October 2023.

⁸⁸ Letter of Termination, May 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives.

⁸⁹ Letter of Termination, May 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives.

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⁹¹ Lawrence Van Gelder, "LONG ISLANDERS; AN ARCHITECT OF CHANGE," *New York Times*, October 20, 1985, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/20/nyregion/long-islanders-an-architect-of-change.html>.

⁹² Van Gelder, "LONG ISLANDERS; AN ARCHITECT OF CHANGE," *New York Times*, October 20, 1985, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/20/nyregion/long-islanders-an-architect-of-change.html>.

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Landscape architect, Joseph Gangemi, established a practice in 1949 in New York City as a consulting landscape architect to architectural firms in the New York City Metropolitan Area. He graduated from New York University in 1934 with a degree in architecture and studied at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design. Gangemi worked for the City of New York in the Department of Parks and Recreation under Robert Moses, commissioner during the 1930s. He also worked for a number of private firms before opening his own firm.⁹³

By July 16, 1971, because of the uncertain funding at the state level, NYCHA submitted an application to HUD to develop the Edward Corsi Houses as a federally aided project. Funds contributed by East Harlem Model Cities and state loans were planned to be used together.⁹⁴ However, by 1972, the shortage of funds for state-aided public housing projects resulted in the complete transference of the project to the federal level. Since the contract with Katan had already been terminated, it appears that the compromise plan by Paul was submitted to HUD. On January 14, 1972, HUD approved a revised Development Cost Budget totaling \$5,190,000 for the project, maintaining the \$1,250,000 committed by the East Harlem Model Cities Committee, which NYCHA considered to be sufficient.⁹⁵

Construction was finally completed in 1973 and turned over to management in June. The residential portion of the building was sixteen-stories tall and had 171 apartments, all designed for the elderly.⁹⁶ The Corsi Community Center covered approximately 33,000 square feet and included a full-size gym, showers for men and women, and about fourteen rooms on the two levels accessed by two staircases. The rooftop of the community center served as a terrace with outdoor recreation areas. The new LaGuardia Memorial House facility offered all-day senior citizens programming as well as youth activities and other community programs.⁹⁷

The Corsi Houses also conformed to state and federal guidelines set forth for senior housing. All apartments in the building were equipped with special safety features and social considerations for the elderly. The building was designed with minimal decoration, in economical and durable materials. The high-rise tower and community center feature elevators which serve as the primary means of movement from floor to floor, requiring minimal stairs for the residents and community center visitors. The elevators are easily accessible at the entrance lobby for both the residential tower and community center. The main entrance to the community center is at street level, along E. 116th Street, and provides access to administrative offices and classrooms on the first floor and the gymnasium, dining room, and club rooms on the lower basement level. These additional amenities can be used by residents and community members alike, which allows residents to stay involved in the surrounding community.

⁹³ "JOSEPH GANGEMI Obituary (2004) - Westchester, NY - The Journal News," Legacy.com, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/lohud/name/joseph-gangemi-obituary?id=48192948>.

⁹⁴ Letter from Marcus Levy, General Manager, NYCHA to Charles Urstadt, Commissioner, New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, July 16, 1971, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁹⁵ Marcus Levy, Letter from Marcus Levy, General Manager, NYCHA to Joseph Tenga, Housing Unit Head, Bureau of the Budget, February 11, 1972, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁹⁶ Memorandum from Sydney Schackman, Director of Management, NYCHA to Irving Wise, General Manager, NYCHA, May 4, 1973, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁹⁷ Letter from W. Hermenia Jackson to NYCHA, n.d., NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

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In 1978, multiple updates were made to the development. Included were grounds improvements, such as the addition of outdoor equipment, a flower garden, and security fencing for the outside terrace, as well as the replacement of the terrazzo floors between the staircase and the gym. Improvements to an auditorium were listed as well, but the nature of these alterations was not uncovered by research.⁹⁸

Small changes occurred at the building in the coming decades, with alterations to the maintenance spaces and replacement of the elevator mechanisms in 1989.⁹⁹ The outdoor recreational features on the roof terrace were slowly abandoned over time and fully replaced with a green roofing system in 2009. However, the legacy of the building, its connection to the LaGuardia Memorial House, and the history of settlement houses in the East Harlem Area remains.

In 1978, smoke detectors were installed on the walls of the apartment units in Corsi Houses as part of a federally financed program aimed at saving the lives of the elderly. Known as the Senior Citizens Fire Safety and Smoke Detector Program, this HUD funded community development block grant provided \$190,000 to equip elderly housing in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx with 16,100 smoke detectors. Mayor Koch stated that more than one-third of the city's fire victims were elderly.¹⁰⁰ In 2021, Corsi Houses was used as an official Coronavirus vaccination site. Corsi Houses was one of five locations opened in New York City neighborhoods typically underserved by traditional healthcare operations. This was especially helpful for the many essential workers and vulnerable populations, including the seniors living at the Corsi Houses had easier access to the vaccine.¹⁰¹

Comparative Analysis: NYCHA Elderly Housing

Today, NYCHA has ten public housing complexes *in Manhattan* built specifically for the elderly (see Table 1). All were developed by NYCHA except Morris Park Senior Citizens Home, which was a private senior housing development acquired by NYCHA almost a decade after construction. All ten are single buildings of at least nine stories tall. Six of the ten buildings are located on lots less than one acre in size, and only one building, Mary McLeod Bethune Houses, is located on a parcel larger than two acres (2.03). Seven of the ten buildings have additional amenities including senior, children, or community centers. Five of the buildings are located in the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, two are located in Washington Heights, one in the East Village, one in Lennox Hill, and one on the Upper West Side. Five of the ten buildings are at least fifty years old; two, Mary McLeod Bethune and Gaylord White, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places; and Corsi and Morris Park are proposed for nomination. Landscaping and hardscaping at the complexes typically includes a garden, courtyard, or landscaped area with trees and benches. A few of the complexes, like Morris Park and Corsi Houses, had little space for landscaping. However, Morris Park's proximity to Marcus Garvey Park allows tenants easy access to green space, and Corsi Houses originally used the rooftop of the community center

⁹⁸ Memorandum from Samuel Tepper, Controller, NYCHA to Bernard L. Moses, Director of Management, NYCHA, August 30, 1978, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

⁹⁹ Contract, Alterations to Maintenance Spaces, August 29, 1989, NYCHA Archives, New York, New York, Accessed October 2023.

¹⁰⁰ "First of 16,100 Fire Detectors for Elderly is Installed by Koch," *New York Times*, November 28, 1978.

¹⁰¹ Theodore Parisienne, Morgan Chittum, and Larry McShane, "Crowd in Brooklyn turned away a 2nd day," *New York Daily News*, January 16, 2021.

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as a terraced landscaped for outdoor amenities. Many of the buildings have undergone some alterations that are typical of public housing, specifically the replacement of exterior doors and windows, the addition of child guards on windows, and updates to finishes within units including the replacement of appliances and flooring.

Also of note are the William Reid Apartments (1968), a senior housing complex in Brooklyn, New York, which is tied to the redesign of plans at the Corsi Houses. Of these examples constructed by NYCHA during the same period as the Corsi Houses all include simple, high-rise, brick towers and federally imposed design elements related to senior living.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of Const.</i>	<i>Architect/Landscape Architect</i>	<i>NRHP Listed (Y/N)</i>	<i>Single or Multiple Bldgs</i>	<i>Elderly Housing (Y/N)</i>	<i>Community Organization</i>
Morris Park Senior Citizens Home	Ca. 1963	Samuel S. Arlen and John Louis Wilson Associated Architects	nominated	Single	Y	N/A
Gaylord White Houses	1964	Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass, Architects	Y	Single	Y	Union Settlement
Mary McLeod Bethune Houses	1967	Pomerance & Breines, Architects; Gilmore D. Clarke and Michael Rapuano, Site Planners and Landscape Architects	Y	Single	Y	N/A
Metzler Tower	1971	Morris Ketchum Jr. and Associates, Architect; M. Paul Friedberg, Landscape Architect	N	Single	Y	N/A
Corsi Houses	1973	Samuel Paul, Architects; Joseph R. Gangemi, Landscape Architect	nominated	Single	Y	LaGuardia Houses
Robbins Plaza	1973	Carl Puchall & Associates, Architect; Abel & Bainnson, Landscape Architects	N	Single	Y	N/A
UPACA (Site 5)	1986	Sanchez & Figueroa, Architect; Bale & Bainnson Landscape Architects	N	Single	Y	UPACA
UPACA (Site 6)	1986/7	Samuel Paul and David J. Paul Architects; P. De Bellis Landscape Architect	N	Single	Y	UPACA

Table 1: List of NYCHA housing complexes with community involvement and/or senior housing in Manhattan

Senior housing in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn (not comprehensive)

- Morris Park Senior Citizens Home (ca. 1963) – Located in East Harlem, Manhattan Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is a nine-story T-shaped building dedicated to senior living. Situated on a 0.23-acre site, the building was designed by Samuel S. Arlen and John Louis Wilson Associated Architects. Like Corsi Houses, the building is located in the middle of a densely developed block and lacks room for landscaping and outdoor space. Morris Park was developed as part of an innovative program partnering with the Abyssinian Baptist Church. The building is located across the street from Marcus Garvey Park, so residents can utilize the amenities located in the park.



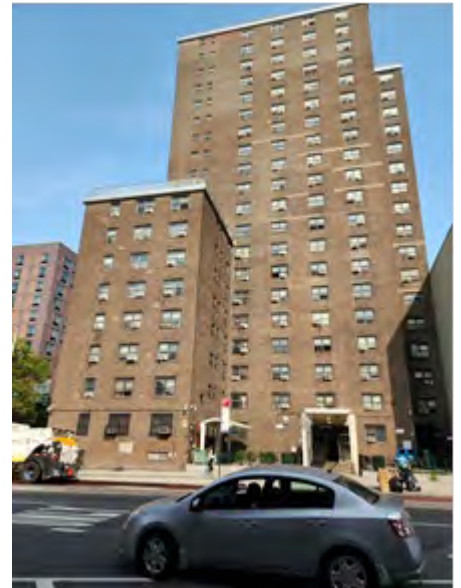
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- Gaylord White Houses (1964) – The complex was completed in 1964 as standalone elderly affordable housing in East Harlem, Manhattan. Designed by Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass, the Gaylord White Houses consists of a twenty-story tower and a nine-story extension at the northwest corner of East 104th Street and 2nd Avenue. A one-story children’s center and three-story community center are located along East 104th Street and are connected to the main building. Gaylord White Houses displays qualities common in elderly public housing such as the fireproof tower design, the location in proximity to public amenities, restaurants, retail, and medical care. It also has a mail room, a simple floor plan with simple corridors, and a main entrance with a canopy. In contrast to the Corsi Houses, Gaylord White has a front and rear courtyard with walkways, seating, and plants. Gaylord White was constructed almost a decade earlier than Corsi Houses, but began to be conceptualized during the same period, sharing a similar settlement house origin story. The scale of the two buildings is comparable, especially considering the Corsi House development team’s reference to it while generating designs for the LaGuardia Community Center.



- Mary McLeod Bethune Houses (1967) – Mary McLeod Bethune Houses consists of a single, twenty-two story rectangular building constructed in Washington Heights, Manhattan in 1967. It is located on a 2.03-acre, L-shaped lot, similar to that seen at the Corsi Houses. Unlike the Corsi Houses, which originally enjoyed outdoor amenities only in the form of a rooftop terrace, the Bethune Houses feature a landscaped area with curved paved walkways, trees, and parking. The Mary McLeod Bethune Houses are only one high-rise tower and lack the community amenities and settlement house connection present at an example like the Corsi Houses. At the interior, the Mary McLeod Bethune Houses are larger and feature 210 apartments, with offices and amenity spaces on the first floor. Similar to the residential tower at the Corsi Houses, the Bethune Houses are organized around a central corridor which provides access to units on the upper floors as well as club rooms and other spaces at the first floor. Bethune Houses were also developed with the aid of federal funding and included features such as grab bars and non-skid flooring. Both Mary McLeod Bethune Houses and the Corsi Houses have experienced alterations consistent with the turnover of tenants and general deterioration. The Mary McLeod Bethune Houses represent NYCHA’s efforts to provide senior housing developments during the early 1960s, when LaGuardia Memorial House began taking initial steps towards developing its idea for a senior housing complex.



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- Metzler Tower (1971) – Designed by architects Morris Ketchum Jr. and Associates and landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, Metzler Tower is a single twenty-story rectangular building reserved for senior living. Located in the East Village of Manhattan, the building is located on a 1.19-acre lot with parking to the east and greenspace with trees to the west. Similar to Corsi Houses, the building is an example of a development located within a densely developed block surrounded by other buildings. Metzler Towers features a senior center and some commercial space as well as a courtyard area with trees, tables, and paved paths, but the larger community services and link to a settlement house.
- Robbins Plaza (1973) – Robbins Plaza is a twenty-story senior residence constructed in Manhattan in 1973. The building is located on the corner of a densely developed street and, like the Edward Corsi Houses, features some landscaping and outdoor amenities. However, unlike the Corsi Houses, the Robbins Plaza is only one tower and lacks the larger connection to the community that the Corsi Houses has due to its ties with the LaGuardia Memorial House.

UPACA Site 5 (1986) – Designed by architects Sanchez & Figueroa and landscape architects Bale & Bainnson, UPACA Site 5 is an eleven-story L-shaped building used exclusively for senior housing. Located on a 1.5-acre site along Lexington Avenue in East Harlem, Manhattan, the building features some parking. Landscaping includes large grassy area, tenant garden with perimeter trees, bushes, paved walkway, benches, fenced grassy areas with trees and plantings, and a paved entrance courtyard with benches.

- UPACA Site 6 (1987) – UPACA Site 6 is a twelve-story rectangular building located on a 1-acre site along Lexington Avenue in East Harlem, Manhattan. The building was designed as senior housing by architects Samuel and David J. Paul and landscape architect P. DeBellis. The site features a fenced grassy area, rear tenant garden with



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benches, tables, trees, fenced grassy areas with trees and bushes flanking entrances, and some parking.

Both UPACA Site 5 and 6 were named for their association with the Upper Park Avenue Community Association (UPACA). UPACA was founded by Harlem residents, Mary Iemma and Margaret Jenkins, in 1963. Their mission was to redevelop Lexington Avenue between 117th and 124th Streets. This collaboration between NYCHA and a community organization and the subsequent naming of the building after said organization is similar to the history of the Corsi Houses. UPACA completed multiple earlier projects that are not part of the NYCHA portfolio. However, they were constructed as affordable housing for residents of East Harlem. For example, in 1974 a thirty-two-story building known as UPACA Towers was constructed. UPACA Towers was design by Roger Glasgow and, according to one source, was the first of its size to be designed by a Black architect.¹⁰²

- The William Reid Apartments at 720-710 East New York Ave in Brooklyn, New York were constructed ca. 1968. They were built by NYCHA as a senior housing complex. In order to cut development costs, the design of the tower at the William Reid Apartments was used as a model for the residential tower of the Corsi Houses upon hiring the office of Samuel Paul. While the two buildings differ in height, like the Corsi Houses, the William Reid Apartments feature a residential tower and community center nearby multiple bus lines. The tower at Reid is taller, at twenty stories, and the community center smaller at just one story. The William Reid Apartments also feature surrounding landscaping, unlike the Corsi Houses. The general plan was likely carried over from Reid Apartments to the Corsi Houses, with the latter still pulling from Katan's design and the site and budget driving many choices.



Conclusion

The need for housing for the elderly in the twentieth century resulted in landmark legislation at both the state and federal level.. Both the city and state of New York were at the forefront of supplying public housing to the elderly. These organizations aided in the first elderly housing units, which were set aside in the early 1940s, followed by the first statewide mandate of units designed specifically for the aged in 1951. In the 1950s and 60s, NYCHA began collaborating with community organizations to develop improved senior housing complexes such as Corsi Houses. Completed in 1973, Corsi Houses is an example of stand-alone senior housing built by NYCHA in partnership with a settlement house. By 1970, ten complexes had been built exclusively for

¹⁰² “32-Story Building With Over 300 Units Dedicated in Harlem,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1974.

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elderly residents in New York City. Eight of them were constructed as vest-pocket developments.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the *New York Times* reported that seniors were facing increasing difficulty in securing low-cost housing.¹⁰⁴ A 1971 Senate committee report concluded that federal housing programs for the elderly were “fragmented” and many seniors still lived in “substandard quarters.”¹⁰⁵ The long and complicated history of the Corsi Houses illustrates some of the reasons for this imbalance, while also illustrating the ultimately successful outcome of one cooperative project between a settlement house and a government agency

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¹⁰⁴ Francis X. Clines, “City’s Elderly Fights Ailments and Economics to Survive,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1969.

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Starr, Roger. "Robert F. Wagner and the Construction of Modern New York City." *New York Daily News*, Aug. 14, 2017.

Union Settlement. "History." Accessed February 28, 2023. <https://www.unionsettlement.org/history>.

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Vinyard, Dale. "White House Conferences and the Aged." *Social Service Review* 53, no. 4 (Dec. 1979): 661.

Corsi Houses

Name of Property

New York, New York

County and State

Von Hoffman, Alexander. "History Lessons for Today's Housing Policy: The Political Processes of Making Low-Income Housing Policy." *Housing Policy Debate* 22, no. 3, (2012): 321–76.

"Will Dedicate Haarlem House to LaGuardia." *Daily News*, March 25, 1956.

"Women Make Harlem House the Pride of Little Italy." *New York Herald*, April 11, 1920.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☒ 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 0.75

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	_____	_____	_____	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the attached map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated property was drawn to include all property historically associated with the nominated property during the period of significance. No extant or historically associated resources have been excluded.

Corsi Houses

Name of Property

New York, New York

County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cindy Hamilton, Caitlin Herrnsstadt, Nika Faulkner; edited by Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO

organization Heritage Consulting Group

date February 2025

street & number 15 W Highland Avenue

telephone 215-248-1260

city or town Philadelphia

state PA

zip code 19118

e-mail chamilton@heritageconsulting.com

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.)

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.

See enclosed Pre-Rehabilitation Photographs

Corsi Houses

Name of Property

New York, New York

County and State

Additional Items:

Corsi Houses - Boundary Map

Corsi Houses Site Map



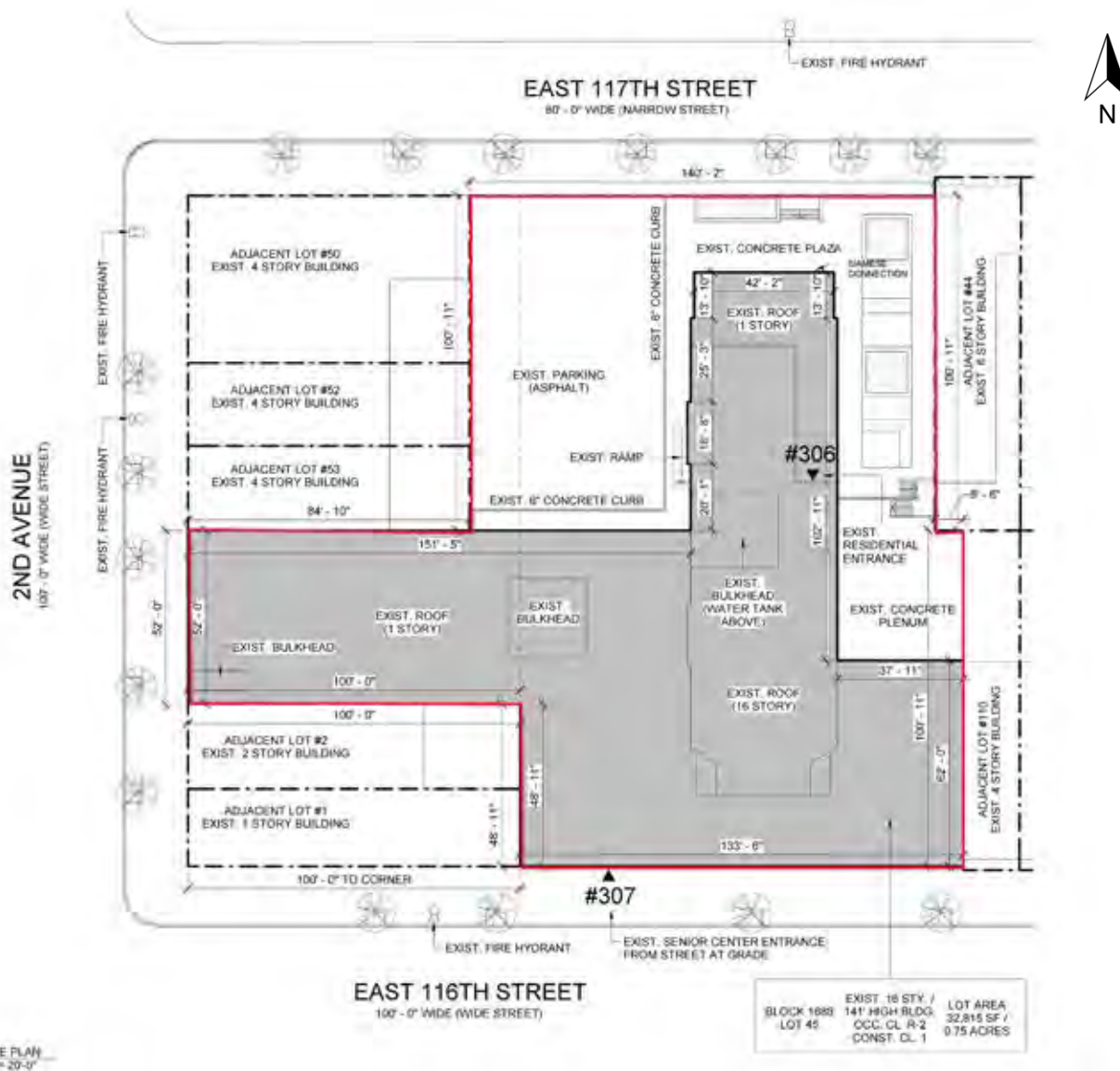
Corsi Houses

Name of Property

New York, New York

County and State

Corsi Houses – Site Map



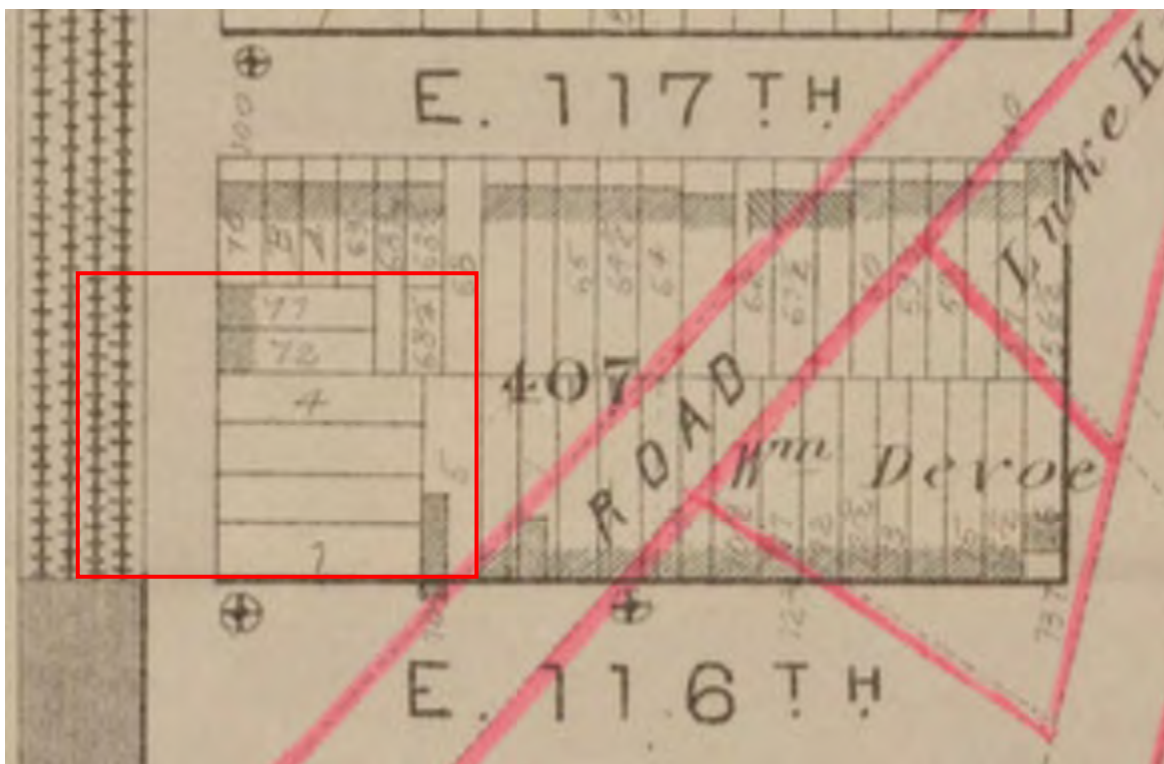
Corsi Houses

Name of Property

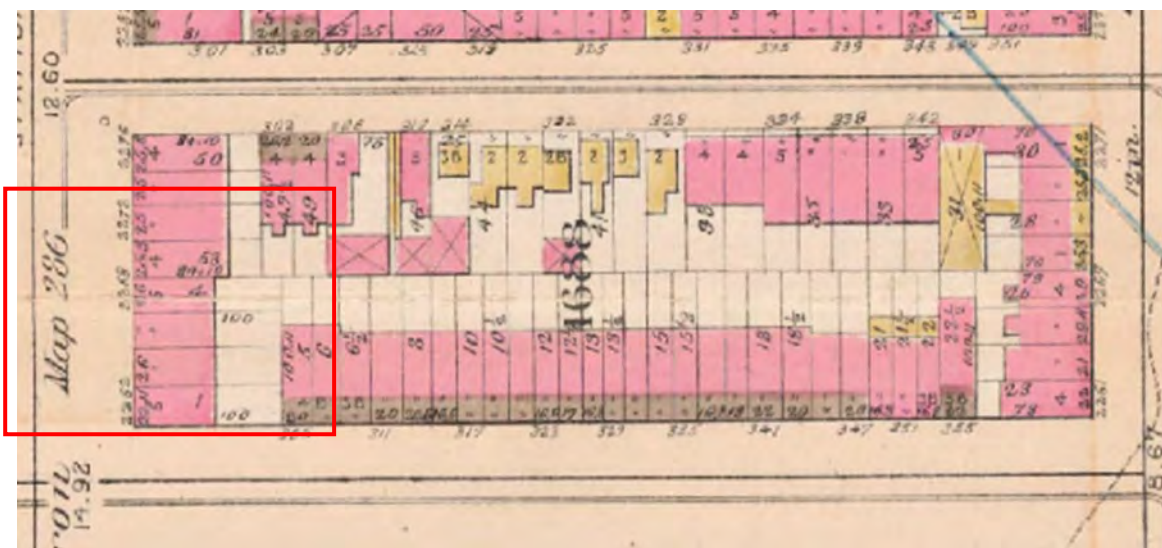
New York, New York

County and State

Corsi Houses – Historic Maps



1879, Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Plate 24:" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 10, 2023.



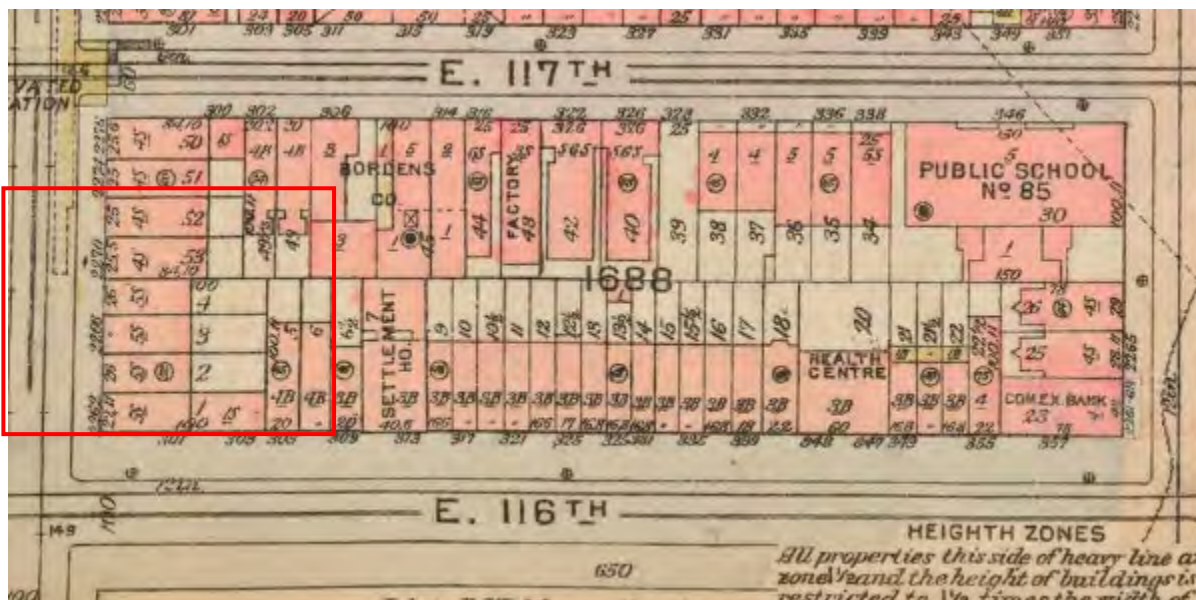
1897, Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Bounded by Third Avenue, E. 125th Street, East River (Pleasant Avenue) and E. 108th Street" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 10, 2023.

Corsi Houses

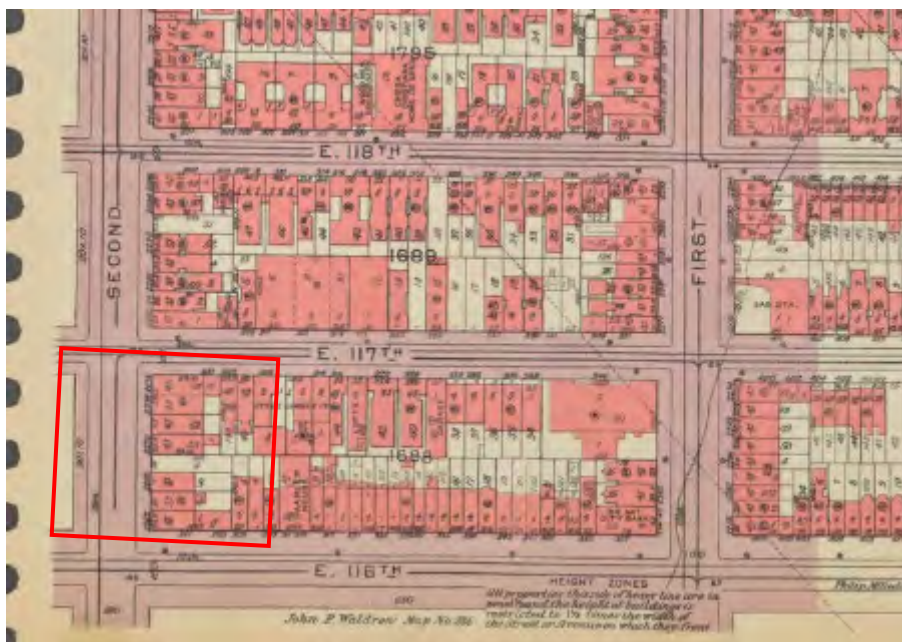
Name of Property

New York, New York

County and State



1927, Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Plate 137, Part of Section 6" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 6, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/aeb3b010-2586-0132-9b61-5>



1955, Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Plate 137, Part of Section 6" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 6, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/95834120-4737-0132-503a-5>

Corsi Houses

Name of Property

New York, New York

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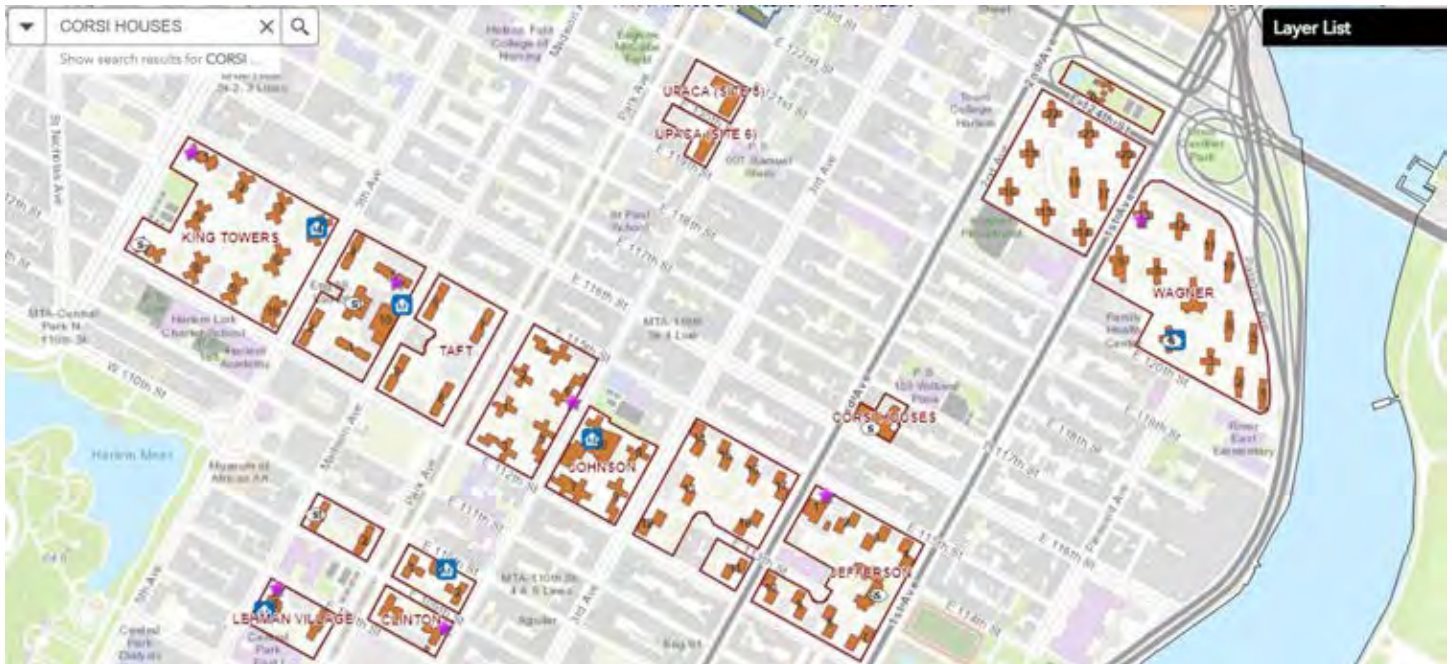


Image showing existing NYCHA public housing in East Harlem

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 Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

East Harlem Historic District
Name of Property

New York Co., NY
County and State

East Harlem Historic District - *NOT Corsi Houses* New York, New York Co., NY



































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HKS
HKS
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**THIS IS A
SENIORS
ONLY
BUILDING**





NO
SMOKING

Assaulting

1. Assaulting
2. Assaulting
3. Assaulting

WVC WVC WVC

NO
SMOKING

NO
SMOKING

FIRE ALARM
PULL STATION



EXIT







