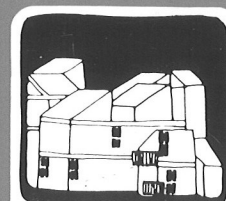




# the Urban Land Institute Project Reference File



attached  
residential

## General Description

Architects Housing is a rental apartment complex for the elderly which offers a refreshing contrast to the typical subsidized senior citizens housing project. The project not only has incorporated design innovations, but also is one of the first residential projects in the United States for low-income senior citizens to be developed and managed by an architects' nonprofit company. The mid-rise, 122-unit project is located on a 1.2-acre site in Trenton, New Jersey.

The project was designed to give the residents a feeling of home and a sense of security, to foster their informal interaction, to emphasize diversity rather than uniformity, and to minimize the institutional atmosphere present in so many low-income projects for the elderly. A variety of communal areas have been provided. The interior common areas are light and airy and have views of the surrounding community. All of the units have one bedroom. However, several floor plans are available and many of the units contain balconies. In addition, twelve of the units are equipped for the handicapped.

The project was initiated in 1974 when the Central Chapter of the New Jersey Society of Architects decided to address the critical shortage in the area of quality, low-income housing for the elderly. The Architects Housing Company, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, was formed by the Chapter to handle the project and a design competition was sponsored in which members of the Chapter were invited to participate. The winning design team was given the architectural commission for the project. Ground was broken in October 1977, and the project's formal opening took place in October 1979. The project has been extremely well received by the residents, and there is currently a waiting list of several hundred.

Construction and permanent financing for the \$5.2 million project was provided by the New Jersey Housing Finance Agency through the sale of 40-year tax-exempt bonds. Rent subsidies for residents are provided by federal Section 8 funds. Therefore, the residents, who must be over 62 years of age with low to moderate incomes, pay only 25 percent of their income as rent. The average rent paid is presently about \$95 a month.



1. The project was designed to meet the needs of the elderly and to be compatible with the site and the surrounding area.

## Architects Housing Trenton, New Jersey

### Project Type:

A 122-unit rental apartment complex for the elderly located on a 1.2-acre site in Trenton, New Jersey. The mid-rise project is one of the first residential projects in the United States for low-income senior citizens to be developed and managed by an architects' nonprofit company. It is designed to meet the needs of the elderly and emphasizes communal areas, tenant interaction and security. Gross density is 97.62 units per acre.

### Special Features:

- Subsidized housing for the elderly
- Sponsored by architects' nonprofit company
- Security
- Balconies
- Community rooms
- Tenant activities

### Developer:

Architects Housing Company, Inc.  
Joseph N. Wirth, AIA, President  
1590 5th Street  
Trenton, New Jersey 08638  
(609) 882-8202

### Architecture/Planning/Landscape Architecture:

Geddes Brecher Qualls  
Cunningham  
12 Nassau Street  
Princeton, New Jersey 08540  
(609) 924-7770

### Management:

Fred Vereen  
Architects Housing Company  
Trenton, New Jersey 08638

October-December 1980

## The Site

The site is located at the southern edge of the central business district of Trenton, the state capital. It is within an urban renewal area and is adjacent to the historic Mill Hill neighborhood, an area of restored mid-nineteenth century townhouses, gas streetlights, and brick sidewalks. Immediately to the west of the site is Douglass Place, an urban square restored by the city, and Douglass House, which has historic associations with George Washington. Immediately to the south is the Mill Hill Historic Park, which contains the Assumpink Creek. The project has had a positive impact on the surrounding area. Nearby residential and commercial buildings which were in a state of disrepair are now being renovated.

The site is conveniently located for the project's residents. It is two blocks from the Trenton Commons, a pedestrian mall in the central business district. Bus service is available on Front Street, which lies just north of the site, and the railroad station, government offices, and state highways 1 and 29 are nearby.

As part of the urban renewal plan for the area, the site had been cleared for some time before it was donated by the city for the project. It slopes approximately 8 feet from north to south.

## Planning and Architecture

The overall design objective was to provide a building which would meet the needs of the elderly and be compatible with the site and the surrounding area. The design was tai-

lored to the site and was able to incorporate the surrounding features, such as the park, the creek, the urban square, and the restored residences. The building was designed with two wings of five stories and eight stories which connect to form a shape like the number seven. The five-story wing, which is also the shorter of the two wings in length, faces the square and the restored townhouses. Its smaller scale allows it to relate closely to the scale of the adjacent single-family residences. This wing has single loaded corridors with windows on one side which provide ample natural light and a cheerful appearance. Some units in this wing have windows on two sides.

The eight-story wing overlooks the downtown area in one direction and the park and the creek in the other. This wing, which runs parallel to the creek, has double loaded corridors. In order to avoid the institutional look of a long corridor with rows of doors on both sides, the apartments on one side have been staggered and their entrances have been turned sideways. In addition, large windows have been provided at the ends of the corridors. The park facade's scale is broken down and varied by balconies and indentations. All apartments on this side of the wing have balconies except those on the top two floors. The scale of the downtown facade has been lessened by providing recessed windows on the top two floors.

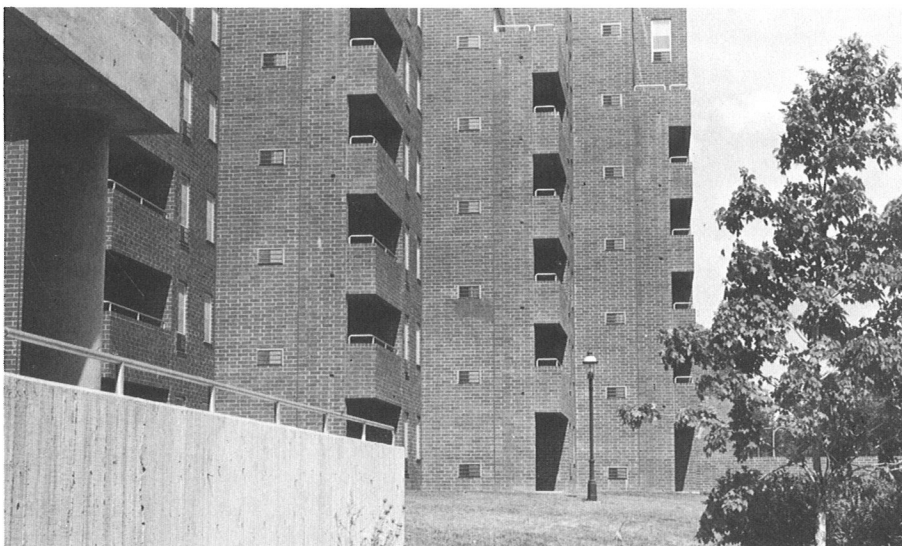
The building's public areas were designed to encourage informal interaction among residents. This has enhanced both the security of the

building and the psychological well-being of the residents. The ground floor is the focal point for socialization and community activity. A large community room has been provided on the ground floor of the five-story wing with two entrances, one from the interior and one from the public square. The community room looks out into the garden and park area to the rear of the building and the public square to the front. It is used for a variety of activities and can be subdivided. A small kitchen is adjacent to the community room.

The building has two main entrances, one from the parking lot adjacent to the eight-story wing and one from the public square. A glass enclosed, semi-circular sitting area overlooks both entrances, the lobby, and the square. It offers residents the chance to sit and socialize, and at the same time to watch activity outside the building and in the lobby area. Just off the lobby is the manager's office, the laundry room, and a crafts room. The strategic placement of the communal areas and the manager's office has allowed them to provide extremely effective yet unobtrusive security. The manager's office overlooks the entrances, the mail boxes, the elevators, and the entrances to the various community rooms. A window has been provided between the laundry room and the manager's office to further enhance security. Connecting the laundry room to a sitting area and the crafts room also has allowed residents to socialize or to participate in arts and crafts sessions while waiting for their laundry to finish. Small sitting areas on each floor in the lobbies provide additional opportunities for informal social contact.

Particular care was taken in the aggregation of the elements of the building, separating the public areas in the front from the private garden area at the back and grouping communal areas in one location. Placing the communal sitting rooms so that they overlook the square and the front entrance has given them a public emphasis, while nestling the garden area in the rear between the two wings has made it a private place and, together with the park, has allowed it to serve as a backyard for residents.

Although all units have only one bedroom, four different layouts provide considerable variety. Unit choices include balconies, walk-in closets, pass-throughs from the



2. The scale of the eight-story wing is broken down and varied by balconies and indentations.

kitchen to the living and dining areas, and markedly different views. All units have an intercom to the lobby, and bathrooms are equipped with sturdy rails by the tubs and an alarm signal which rings in the manager's office.

The building's structure is wall-bearing masonry with concrete plank floors. The open community room on the ground floor required the use of a concrete transfer slab at the second floor to support the upper floors. This transfer slab was supported at the ground floor by concrete columns where bearing walls could not be used. The exterior of the building is red brick, chosen because of its compatibility with the surrounding residential area. Window trim and sashes are in light aluminum and white paint and help to brighten the building's exterior.

### Tenants' Association and Management

The tenants' association meets once a month in the community room to plan activities and to relay problems to the management. It also uses funds from dues (\$1 per month) and revenue from bingo games to assist residents in times of need. Membership in the association is voluntary.

A full-time building manager is responsible for residents' needs and activities, as well as the maintenance of the building. A guidebook has been prepared for residents which includes background information on the project, rules and regulations, household care hints, and information regarding maintenance, payment of rent, guests, and available services and facilities.

Activities for residents presently include weekly bingo, twice-weekly arts and crafts sessions, weekly movies, and luncheons on special occasions. A monthly newsletter is also printed providing residents with news on upcoming events, outside services, and tenant news.

### Experience Gained

- Placing the community room adjacent to the public square and providing a direct entrance from the square has allowed the room to be used by various outside groups from the community without intruding upon the residents' sense of privacy. The use of the community room by outside groups has resulted in greater acceptance of the project by the community and has fostered interaction between the senior citizens and the community.
- Two-bedroom units should have been provided as well as the one-bedroom units. This would have made it possible for a brother and a sister or two unrelated tenants to share a unit, or for a husband and wife to have separate bedrooms when required because of illness. However, regulations of the state Housing Finance Agency permitted only one-bedroom units.
- Innovative design features and amenities can be provided in subsidized housing without substantially increasing construction costs. The cost per unit for Architects Housing was only about \$1,000 more per unit than the cost for a typical housing project for the elderly in the Trenton area. However, several of

the design innovations met with some resistance from the state because they were not in compliance with state regulations.

- Providing brick walls for the balconies instead of railings created a greater sense of privacy for the residents and increased the use of the balconies. In addition, the brick walls provided continuity in building design. Balconies were not provided on the top two floors of the eight-story wing, since older people tend to be afraid to walk outside at such heights.
- The site location of housing for the elderly is a crucial factor in the success of the project. Since many of the elderly do not drive or prefer not to, the housing must be located within walking distance of essential services and facilities.
- Security is the primary concern of elderly residents and should be reflected in the building design. Providing communal sitting areas for residents with views of the surrounding community has enabled the residents to play a major part in the security program. Twenty-four-hour-a-day security is essential.
- Dedicated management which is sensitive to the needs of the elderly is important to the residents' sense of home and to their psychological well-being. The residents must be certain that the management is truly concerned with their care and the care of the building. Dedicated management and quality design will also increase the residents' pride in the project.

## PROJECT DATA

### Land Use Information:

**Site Area:** 1.26 acres (.51 hectares)

**Total Dwelling Units:** 122

**Gross Density:** 97.62 d.u. per acre

**Parking Spaces:** 42<sup>1</sup>

### Land Use Plan:

	Acres	Percent
Building .....	.35	.28
Parking .....	.38	.30
Open Space .....	.53	.42
Total .....	1.26	100.00

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Includes five stalls for the handicapped.

<sup>2</sup> \$415 per month is the fair market rent. Under the Section 8 program, tenants pay no more than 25 percent of their income for rent. The average rent paid in June 1980 was about \$95 per month.

<sup>3</sup> The urban renewal site was donated by the city of Trenton.

### Unit Information:

**Unit Type:** One-bedroom

**D.U. Size:** 591-657 sq. ft.

**Bathrooms:** 1

**Rent:** \$415 per month<sup>2</sup>

### Economic Information:

**Site Cost:** \$0<sup>3</sup>

**Site Improvement Cost:** \$319,000

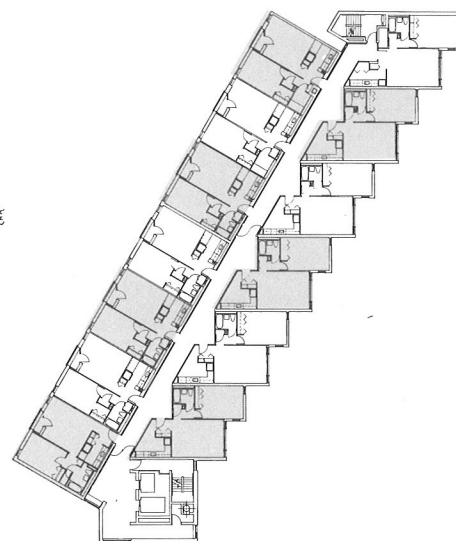
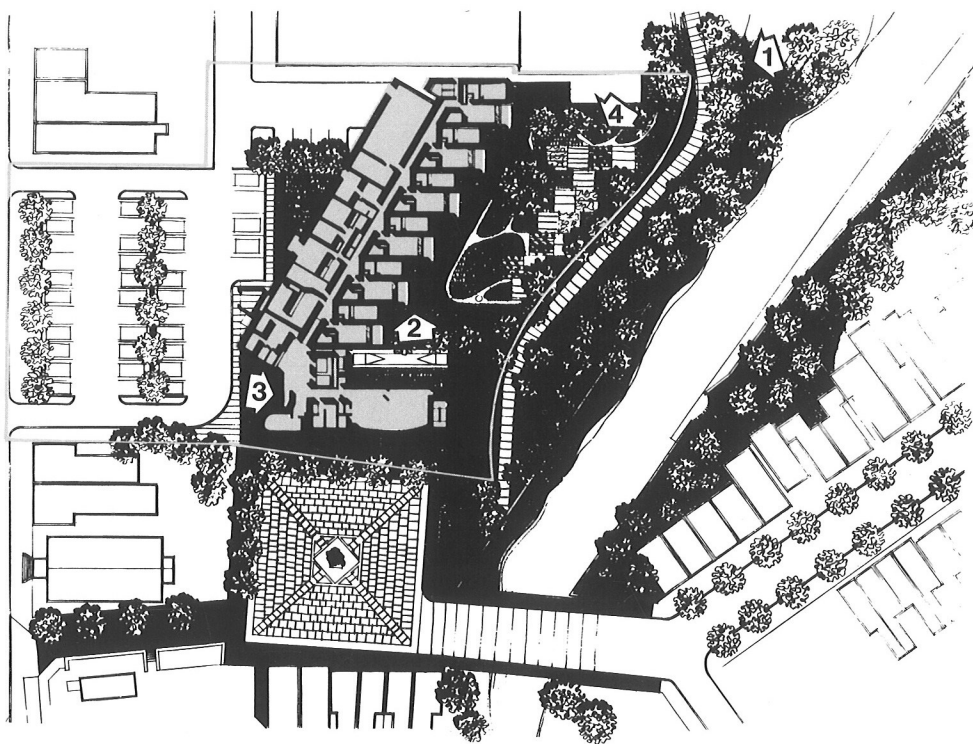
**Construction Cost:** \$31.90 per square foot

### Amenities Cost:

Furnishings .....	\$21,300
Patio area .....	\$ 3,500
Total .....	\$24,800

**Total Project Cost:** \$5.2 million





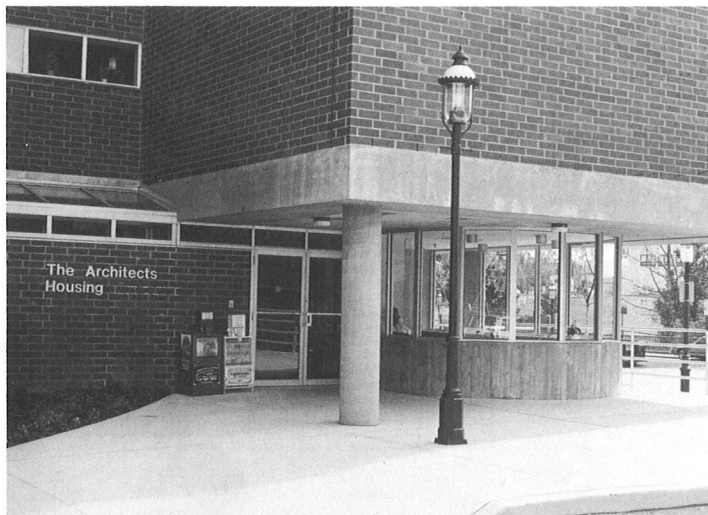
#### Directions:

*From Philadelphia International Airport:* Take Interstate-95 north to the Route 29 exit. Take Route 29 south to the Market Street exit and proceed on Market Street to Front Street. Turn left on Front Street. The project will be on the left.

*Driving Time:* Approximately 45 minutes in non-rush-hour traffic.

*From Newark International Airport:* Take the New Jersey Turnpike south to Exit 9, New Brunswick. Take Route 18 west about one mile to Route 1 south. Proceed on Route 1 to the Front Street exit, Trenton. Turn left onto Front Street (at the first stop sign) and proceed about one-half mile to the project.

*Driving Time:* Approximately 65 minutes in non-rush-hour traffic.



3. A glass-enclosed, semi-circular sitting area overlooks both entrances and enhances security.



4. Open space is provided to the rear of the building between the two wings.

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#### Metric Conversions

meters = feet x 0.305  
kilometers = miles x 1.609  
square meters = sq. ft. x 0.093  
hectares = acres x 0.405  
(1 hectare = 10,000 square meters)