Garden Apartments of Los Angeles

Historic Context Statement

SUMMARY

prepared by
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Los Angeles has one of the largest and most notable collections of garden apartments in the nation. The abundance of the property type in Los Angeles can best be seen as the fusion of the following ingredients: Garden City planning principles, first espoused by Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin in England and later by the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA); a nationwide call for more humane housing conditions during the adversity of the Great Depression;
the availability of funding from a number of federal initiatives focused on housing the nation's growing population; the influx of defense workers during World War II and the need to house them; the genius and humanity of a number of local architects, planners and landscape architects and their investment in building a better city; and the landscape, climate and vastness of available land in Los Angeles before and during the boom of the post-World War II era. Los Angeles, with its benign climate, was perhaps the ideal place in the country for garden apartments to thrive. As the 20th century progressed, architects and landscape architects were opening up the relationship between indoors and out in the construction of single-family homes. Garden apartments offered apartment dwellers that same easy access to outdoor living that the modern residents of Los Angeles desired.
GARDEN APARTMENTS of LOS ANGELES  
HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

**Garden Apartments:**  
**Definition of the Property Type**

Planned and constructed in Los Angeles between 1937 and approximately 1955, garden apartment complexes generally consist of concentrations of similar multi-unit buildings situated on a large – and often irregularly shaped – property. Complexes range in size from just a few acres to more than a hundred. Though some of Los Angeles’s preeminent architects designed garden apartments at mid-century, the buildings themselves are typically (and deliberately) architecturally modest. Emphasis is placed, rather, on site plan and landscape; the designers relied on color, texture, planting plan, light and shadow to create visual interest. Building entrances face landscaped courtyards rather than the street, and parking and vehicular circulation is relegated to the perimeter of the site plan or within garage courts separate from pedestrian areas. Large, expansive green space is common; typically there are one or two large courtyards or greens at the nucleus of the complexes available to all residents. Garden apartments vary in appearance, size and plan; however, the following character defining features epitomize the property type in its purest expression:

- Superblock site plan, which deviates from the rectilinear urban grid by combining multiple city blocks or parcels into a single property
- Three acres in size or greater
- Low-slung buildings, rarely exceeding two stories in height
- Elimination of common interior corridors
- Repetition of nearly identical building models throughout the plan
- Stylistic simplicity; buildings are usually minimal in appearance with a lack of stylistic details and ornament
- Primary building entrances face common courtyards rather than the street
• Parking at the perimeter of the site plan, typically in detached, enclosed garage buildings or garage courts

• One or more large open spaces, or greens, located at the interior of the site plan, around which buildings are arranged

• Recreational amenities planned to help foster community

• Variety of landscape, often native or drought tolerant; low shrubs used to delineate outdoor “rooms”; allées; mature trees and the use of climbing vines to add visual interest to buildings
Summary of Historic Contexts and Themes

Although garden apartments are nationwide in occurrence, examples of the property type in Los Angeles outnumber nearly every other city in comparison. Therefore an understanding of the property type and its significance as a pivotal moment in the architectural and social history of the city is critical.

The contexts and themes explored in this study are as follows:

CONTEXT: Public and Private Institutional Development

THEME: Public Housing in Los Angeles, 1937-1955
THEME: Defense Housing in Los Angeles, 1942-1945

CONTEXT: Residential Development and Suburbanization

THEME: Community Planning and Development: Garden City Planning Principles, 1937-1955
THEME: Ethnic Heritage and Segregation, 1937-1955

CONTEXT: Architecture and Designed Landscapes

THEME: Important Architects, Designers and Planners, 1937-1955
THEME: Designed Landscapes, 1937-1955
THEME: Important Landscape Architects, 1937-1955
### Map of Known Garden Apartments, Los Angeles (City and County)

1. Avalon Gardens  
2. Baldwin Gardens (now Cameo Woods)  
3. Baldwin Hills Village (now Village Green)  
4. Belford Park Apartments  
5. Carmelitos  
6. Century Square  
7. Chase Knolls  
8. Chesapeake Rodeo Apartments  
9. Cienega Village  
10. Crenshaw Village  
11. Dorset Village  
12. Estrada Courts  
13. Fairfax Park Apartments  
14. Garfield Gardens  
15. Gloria Homes Apartments  
16. Hacienda Village  
17. Harbor Hills  
18. Hollypark Knolls  
19. Imperial Courts  
20. Jordan Downs  
21. Ladera Townhouse  
22. Lincoln Place  
23. Manchester Gardens  
24. Mar Vista Gardens  
25. Montebello Gardens Apartments  
26. Nickerson Gardens  
27. North Hollywood Manor  
28. Park La Brea  
29. Pueblo del Rio  
30. Ramona Gardens  
31. Rancho San Pedro  
32. Rancho Vega  
33. Rose Hills Courts  
34. San Fernando Gardens  
35. Sunset Barrington Apartments  
36. Verdugo Mesa  
37. William Mead Homes  
38. Wyvernwood