



DENVER HOUSING AUTHORITY

Themes in Affordable Housing

Early Affordable Housing Projects: Lincoln Park Homes

DHA quickly started working on affordable housing projects in 1938. DHA's first three projects were large-scale housing developments for low-income residents. One of these developments was the Lincoln Park Homes, built between 1940 and 1942. The complex was located on the site of an existing community that was deemed to be a slum. Clearance of these existing dilapidated structures began in June 1940 to make way for 22 buildings that would house 346 families. The complex was documented by the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) before it was demolished in 1994. The HABS survey noted that Lincoln Park Homes "represented a period in Denver's history when the defense industry was hitting its peak and government subsidization of public housing was just beginning in the state. The Homes were a product of New Deal efforts to revitalize the economic and moral fiber of the nation." Contemporary views of housing programs asserted that communities could be lifted if everyone had access to safe, decent, affordable housing.

Denver architect Temple Buell (1895–1990) designed Lincoln Park Homes, representing a transition between his Depression-era projects and those constructed during WWII. He was a prolific designer and owned one of the largest architectural firms in the region. In addition to Lincoln Park Homes, he is best known for his designs on the University of Colorado campus in Boulder, portions of Denver's former Colorado Woman's College, and the Art Deco Paramount Theater in downtown Denver.



Image 14: The Historic American Building Survey (HABS) documented the Lincoln Park Homes complex (at the corner of West Colfax Avenue and Mariposa Street) before it was demolished in 1994. HABS is a program of the National Park Service that documents buildings and places important to American history. Lincoln Park Homes was documented because it was one of Colorado's earliest housing projects. Photo c.1990. Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, CO-74.



Image 15: A c.1990 HABS photo of Lincoln Park Homes before it was demolished in 1996. The multiple-family dwellings were criticized for their stark appearance. Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, CO-74.



Image 16: A c. 1990 photo of Lincoln Park Homes, including one of the residential buildings with part of the on-site power plant in the background and a playground in the foreground. Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, CO-74.



Image 17: A detail of a second-floor balcony at the Lincoln Park Homes, constructed in the early 1940s. Photo c.1990. Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, CO-74.



Image 18: A typical interior at the Lincoln Park Homes. Photo c.1990. Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, CO-74.

Burns Better Built Bungalows

Over the years, DHA acquired different types of affordable housing units as part of its scattered-site housing programs. DHA managed many single-family homes that architectural historians classified as small “ranch,” “bungalow,” or “minimal traditional” structures. Ranch-style homes contain rectangular footprints and emphasize horizontal lines, while the term bungalow applies to small homes, usually one-story, with cottage-like designs or nods to craftsman styles. Minimal traditional homes are small structures—often with footprints similar to ranches or bungalows—with details like windows, porches, or applied ornaments that resemble older American styles.

Some of DHA’s scattered-site ranch and minimal traditional houses were Burns Better Built Bungalows from local developer Franklin Burns. He specialized in low-cost single-family homes, and thousands of his designs are found throughout Denver today.

Frank Burns began his real estate career before World War II. Although he enrolled at the University of Denver as a pre-med student, he dropped out in 1940 to take over his uncle’s company, D.C. Burns Realty and Trust Company. In 1946, he identified the need for affordable housing after WWII and started developing the Burns Brentwood neighborhood in southwest Denver. He built modest minimal traditional homes for veterans and their families, capitalizing on the favorable terms offered by the G.I. Bill. Several other housing developments followed, and his company went on to construct over 13,500 houses and commercial properties in Denver.

Burns Better-Built Bungalows were some of Frank Burn’s early designs. Through these cost-effective and high-quality minimal traditional homes, Burns gained recognition for his leadership in creating housing options for Denver’s families. Some of the homes in the Park Hill Neighborhood are good examples of Burns Better-Built Bungalows and demonstrate the simple designs that Frank Burns was known for. As part of the Burns Heights subdivision, they represent part of Denver’s suburban development that pushed north and east from downtown following WWII. Elements like unique shutters and the use

of contrasting colors of brick around doors add personality to these small single-family dwellings.



Image 19: An example of a Burns Better Built Bungalow constructed in c.1950 in the North Park Hill neighborhood. DHA has rehabbed buildings like this one to rent as affordable housing. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 20: This affordable house in the North Park Hill neighborhood is typical of the designs from developer Frank Burns. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 21: Burns Better Built Bungalows provided families with affordable but quality housing, like this c.1950 single-family home in the North Park Hill neighborhood. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 22: Although the Burns Better Built Bungalows were not fancy by any means, the homes came with a small yard for growing families, as seen in this c.1950 example in the North Park Hill neighborhood. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 23: Another example of an affordable house constructed by Frank Burns in 1955. Located at 2627 S Osceola St. Photo c.2022. Credit: Google Maps.

Cliff May Homes

DHA invested in diverse housing options as part of its scattered site program, including homes designed by Cliff May in the Harvey Park neighborhood in southwest Denver. The area was named for Texas oilman and rancher Arthur “Tex” Harvey. In 1954, he sold 318 acres of his property to Mortgage Investments Company for a planned community that initially consisted of 1,662 homes.

Denver annexed the neighborhood in March 1954 to anchor the city’s southwest corner. The previous year, the city’s population increased by 20,000 and there was a great need for affordable housing options. According to the *Denver Post*, nearly 4,000 homes were built in less than three years in the mid-1950s.

A great volume of construction was possible due to the popularity of tract homes, offering homeowners a few affordable designs in different color schemes and sizes. Several developers took advantage of the housing construction boom in Harvey Park, including Hutchinson Homes, K.C. Ensor Construction, and Fredericks Brothers Construction. The ranch-style homes were offered in three basic plans: the Century 970 (two-bedroom, one-car garage), Century 1142 (three-bedroom, one-car garage), and the Century 1255 (three-bedroom, two-car garage). When the first families moved in, the streets were not paved, there were no bus services in the area, and no available telephones; however, the views of the Rocky Mountains were breathtaking. Families were typically white and comprised of college graduates, couples in their thirties with young children, and veterans, many of whom were eligible for a low-interest VA loan for returning WWII servicemembers. It is important to note that significantly fewer veterans of color were able to use the same benefit by comparison.

Notable architect Cliff May designed around 170 tract homes in Harvey Park. Architectural historians have credited May with designing the California Ranch style, which significantly

impacted the design of small single-family homes across the country. May's Harvey Park homes were built by Rocky Mountain Cliff May Homes, a subsidiary of D.C. Burns Construction, run by the founder's nephew Franklin Burns. The company was one of the first in the region to build housing for veterans returning from World War II. Once the structural foundation was in place, the exterior envelope could be completed in one day due to the efficient construction system, resulting in the affordability of May's homes.



Image 24: As part of its scattered sites model, DHA has acquired a few mid-century gems in the Harvey Park neighborhood, including this c.1955 house from famed designer Cliff May. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 25: Cliff May's homes in Harvey Park were meant to be affordable yet fashionable. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 26: By the time the Cliff May homes in Harvey Park were built in the mid-1950s, American families relied on personal vehicles for transportation, so garages were incorporated into many properties. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 27: Street view of 2320 S Newton St, a Cliff May home in Harvey Park. Photo c.2019. Credit: Google Maps.



Image 28: Additional street view of 2320 S Newton St, a Cliff May home in Harvey Park. Photo c.2019. Credit: Google Maps

Impact of Affordable Housing on Denver's Minority and Underserved Communities: Park Hill Neighborhood

DHA has invested in affordable housing across the City and County of Denver, and scattered sites of affordable housing are available in the Park Hill neighborhood, which helps tell the story of the fight for racial equality.

The history of Park Hill goes back to 1887 when Baron Alloys Guillaume Eugen von Winckler designed a 32-acre development on land he owned in northeast Denver. As the neighborhood grew, settlers from many nations, including England, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy, moved into the neighborhood, as well as many African Americans. After Winckler took his own life in 1898, his property soon became available to other developers. Those developers began the creation of Park Hill as a residential neighborhood, offering a quiet life removed from the city. In most respects, Park Hill's early development was similar to so-called streetcar suburbs established in other turn-of-the-century American cities. By the early 1930s, Park Hill had become an automobile suburb, as the majority of Denver commuters now made their way to work by private car.

The twentieth century underwent the most significant building boom in Park Hill during the 1920s and 30s, and again in the 1940s and 50s to meet the post-World War II demand for housing. Park Hill's residential styles ranged from various Victorian forms to the Arts and Crafts homes of the early twentieth century, to modest mid-century homes constructed for new postwar families.

Park Hill is made up of several housing additions, including the Downington Addition, which was named for Municipal Court Judge Jacob Downing who volunteered with the 1st Regiment of the Colorado Infantry and actively participated in the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre. Like many other housing developments of the time, restrictions placed on the properties in Downington Addition limited sales to strictly White people. The restrictions

were eventually lifted, and DHA worked to ensure equal access to affordable housing for all of Denver's residents.



Image 29: When the Reichert House was built in the Park Hill neighborhood in 1928, Black people were not allowed to purchase homes in this area. But now, through equal housing regulations, DHA's scattered sites of affordable housing have created diverse neighborhoods. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 30: The Reichert House in the Park Hill neighborhood, built in 1928, represents the types of affordable housing that was once off-limits to minorities. Photo c.2021. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.

Impact of Affordable Housing on Denver's Minority and Underserved Communities: Platte Valley Homes

Only a decade after DHA was founded, the organization already constructed four housing developments: Platte Valley Homes, Las Casitas Homes, Lincoln Park Homes, and Arapahoe Courts. Most of these complexes were located in the Five Points Neighborhood, impacted by several large-scale urban renewal projects in the 1940s.

Denver became segregated by the late nineteenth century as the Black population grew from the 1870s to the 1890s. Many Black people lived in lower downtown or just north of downtown in the Five Points Neighborhood and worked as laborers, janitors, or in the service sector as porters or waiters.

By the 1930s and 1940s, however, many of the homes in Five Points were in great disrepair. Local authorities declared that several blocks in the neighborhood were slums that needed to be removed to improve the overall quality of life in the area.

Despite pushback from residents whose homes were taken and families who were subsequently displaced, DHA used federal funding to clear 9 square blocks of Five Points in the 1940s. The demolished housing was replaced by three large-scale developments: Platte Valley Homes (77 units), Arapahoe Courts (76 homes), and Curtis Park Homes (450 units). The Platte Valley Homes complex was completed in 10 months and was typical of affordable housing developments from the 1940s.



Image 31: Platte Valley Homes was completed in the Five Points Neighborhood by DHA in 1942. The project was funded by the U.S. Housing Authority, and the simple, unornamented two-story brick buildings were typical of affordable housing from the 1940s. Year of photo: unknown. Credit: Apartments.com

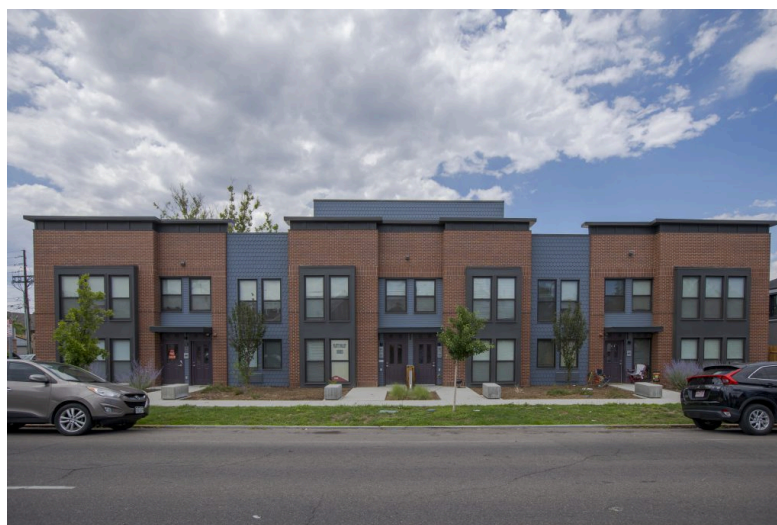


Image 32: Platte Valley Homes underwent a modernization that was completed in June of 2021. This is the newly updated townhome structure today. Year of Photo: c.2021 Credit: Denver Housing Authority

Senior Towers and Denver's Hirschfeld Tower

DHA's Hirschfeld Tower, built in 1967, is a great example of a high-rise residential building for seniors. The development was named for A.B. Hirschfeld, a champion for the elderly and one of the founders and former directors of the Denver House Authority.

The overall plan and design of affordable housing changed in the twentieth century, resulting in increased demand for multi-family residential complexes. In the early 1900s, apartment hotels and boarding houses provided affordable living and shared community spaces. In the 1920s, architects and builders began designing so-called "bungalow courts," complexes of small apartment buildings arranged around internal courtyards. Later, high-rise complexes became the norm.

In 1968, the Johnson administration's National Commission in Urban Problems (NCUP) published an influential study titled "Building the American City." The study recommended small-scale affordable housing projects in geographically scattered sites (vs. tower construction) because small-scale projects were associated with lower crime rates and higher quality of living for families. High-rise towers, though, were found to be acceptable for seniors.

Like other subsidized senior housing from the 1960s, Hirschfeld Tower was a simplified design typical of the period. The site encompassed an entire city block in a residential neighborhood with homes from the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Some of the neighborhood's homes were demolished as part of an urban renewal initiative. Originally, the block was reserved for Daily Public Park as part of the Lake Archer subdivision.

The 250-unit building was designed by Colorado architect Miles Lantz, who was known for Modernist designs. Although the size of individual living units was often small in low-income complexes from the 1960s, many common spaces were provided, such as lounge areas and other gathering spaces where residents could mingle. Like other low-income senior towers from the 1960s, Hirschfeld Tower lacked some of the luxury amenities found at market-rate senior apartment complexes, such as tennis courts or extensive outdoor recreation areas. However, Hirschfeld Tower exhibited many features more commonly seen in market-rate apartments, including the landscaped open spaces around the tower, the number of parking spaces (some low-income complexes of the time lacked parking), and the general emphasis on Modern design.

When Hirschfeld Tower opened, the local media praised the well-lit apartments, the perimeter heating, the abundance of storage, and the proximity to nearby Dailey Park. The tower was renovated in the early 2000s, and a one-story piano-shaped lobby and a banquet hall were added. The renovation also included the installation of geothermal heat.



Image 33: Southeast side of Hirschfeld Towers. Credit: Denver Housing Authority.



Image 34: Southwest corner of Hirschfeld Towers. Credit: Apartments.com.



Image 35: East side of Hirschfeld Towers with a view of the community garden. Photo c.2022. Credit: Google Maps.



Image 36: Piano-shaped lobby that serves as the main entrance into Hirschfeld Towers. Photo c.2009. Credit: Santulan Architecture.



Image 37: Banquet hall at Hirschfeld that was completed during the property renovation. Photo c.2009. Credit: Santulan Architecture.