PROPOSED
CAMPUS POINTE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
IN BRAZOS COUNTY, TEXAS

By

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Contract Report Number 187

2007

AN ARCHITECTURAL EVALUATION OF EXISTING STRUCTURES TO BE DEMOLISTED FOR THE PROPOSED CAMPUS POINTE DEVELOPMENT ON THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN BRAZOS COUNTY, TEXAS

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Project Number 07-24

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ABSTRACT

A study of existing apartments on the Texas A&M University campus was made by Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) to determine if any of the structures were eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or otherwise significant and worth protecting as the university has plans to raze the structures to make way for new housing. It was determined that none one of the buildings is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is, therefore, recommended that the university be allowed to proceed with their plans to demolish the fifty-five buildings that constitute the Hensel Terrace Apartments, College View Apartments, College Avenue Apartments, and Avenue A Apartments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful to those persons who provided assistance during this project. At CSC Engineering and Environmental Consultants, Inc, maps and contact information at Texas A&M University were provided by Rick Conlin and Scott Schautschick. Pat Minor, Joanie Page, and Chareny Rydl at Texas A&M University provided information regarding the history of the project area and patiently answered my many questions. Greg Smith, Rachel Leibowitz, and Quana Childs, reviewers at the Texas Historical Commission, provided information for preparing a report describing standing structures. Lilli Lyddon drafted the floor plans that appear in Appendix I and the General Location map that appears as Figure 1.

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INTRODUCTION

Texas A&M University in Brazos County, Texas (Figure 1) operates and maintains four separate housing areas in a 69-acre tract that is currently occupied by married students and foreign students on the area of campus near Hensel Park referred to most often as the Married Student Apartments. This area is bounded on the northeast and northwest by Hensel Drive, on the Southeast by University Drive, and on the Southwest by South College Avenue.

The four housing areas are the Hensel Terrace Apartments that were constructed in 1957, the College View Apartments that were constructed between 1967 and 1969, the College Avenue Apartments that were constructed in 1974, and the Avenue A Apartments that were constructed in 1980. These facilities are administered by the Department of Residence Life, which is responsible for 650 apartments with a capacity of more than 1000 students in six different and distinctive styles of living facilities.

The University proposes to demolish the structures depicted and discussed in this report to make room for more modern housing for other students. When completed, the new complex will be referred to as Campus Pointe. The students currently housed in the four areas will be relocated to newly constructed apartments nearby, and these housing units will be referred to as University Apartments, Phase I, Phase II, Phase III, and Phase IV. Before razing the existing buildings, the University desires to make sure that all environmental and architectural issues have been addressed. Texas A&M University retained CSC Engineering, Inc. to evaluate the impact of demolishing the buildings on the environment by addressing such issues as the presence of asbestos, lead paint, and other harmful contaminants that are part of the structures. Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) was retained by CSC Engineering, Inc. as a subcontractor to photograph and document the existing structures and submit a report of findings to the Texas Historical Commission for review by its architectural historians. BVRA was not requested to perform an archival search to document the prior use of the project area before the construction of the existing buildings, nor was a survey for the presence of prehistoric archaeological sites part of this study. BVRA believes that the potential for disturbance to a significant prehistoric archaeological site is very low in that the area has been severely disturbed through the various construction events that have transpired in the area. Also, the potential for a prehistoric site is considered low due to the fact that there is no dependable water source in the immediate area.

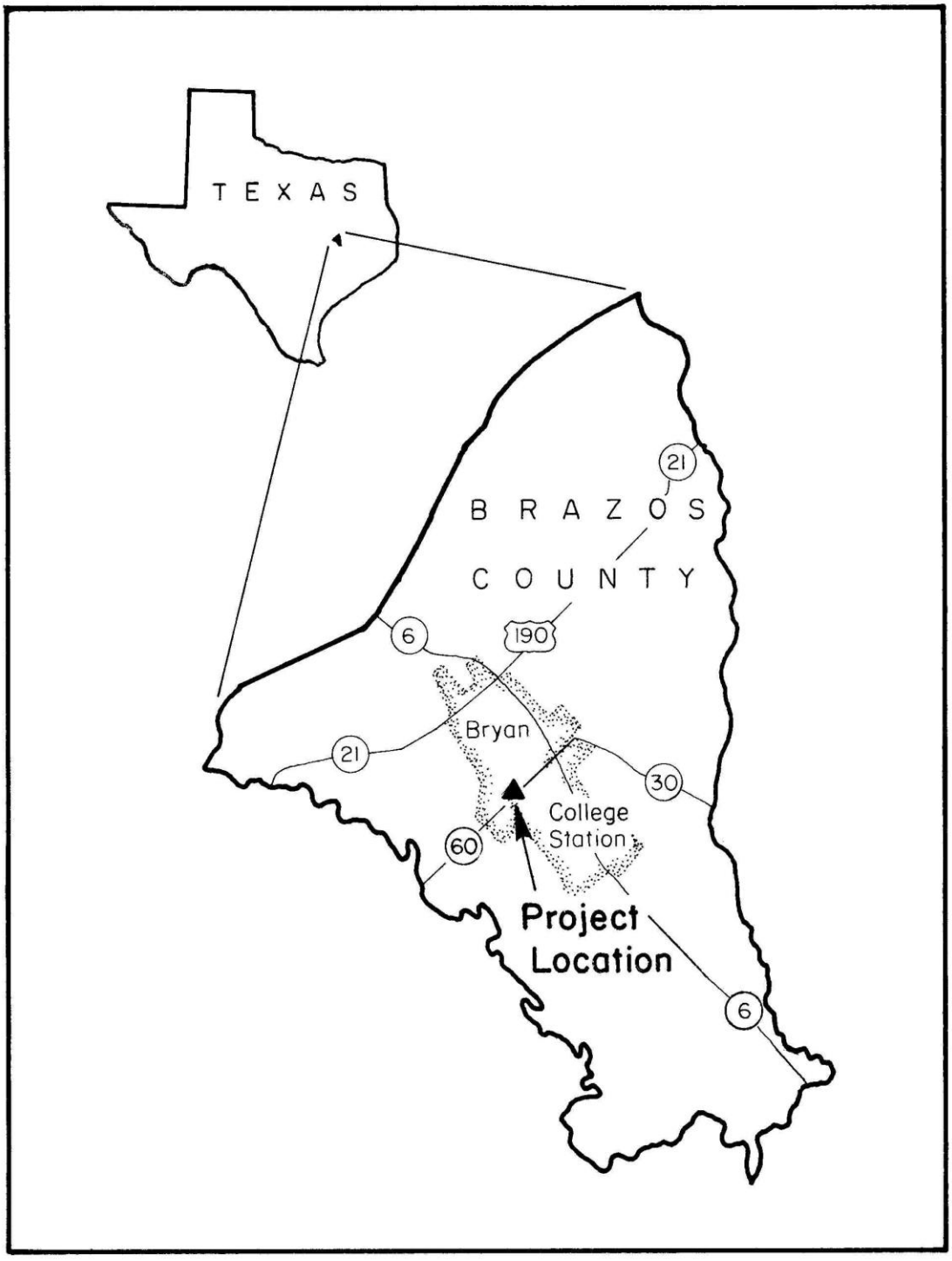

Figure 1. General Location

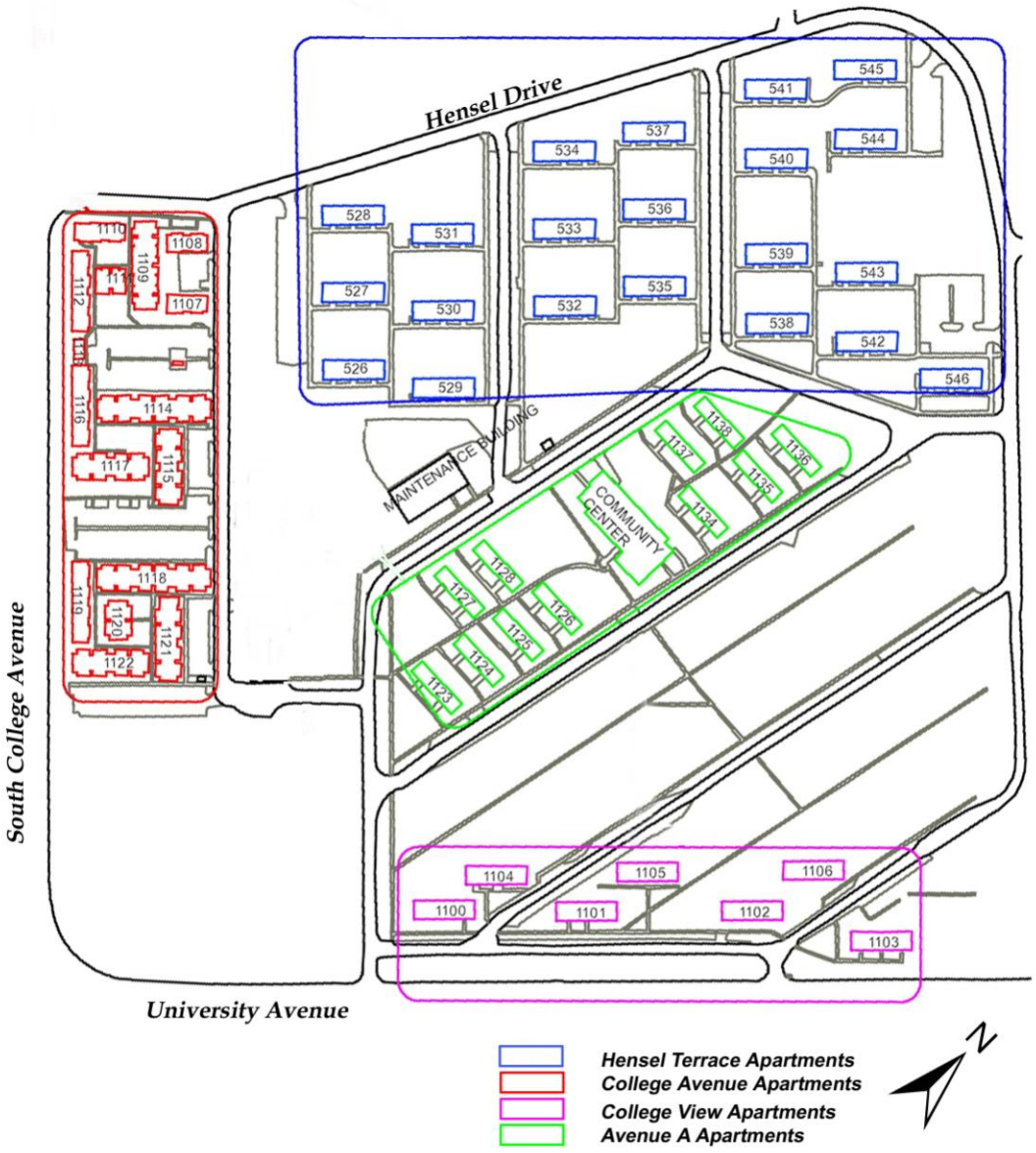

Figure 2. Plan of Existing Housing

This report documents the results of the architectural evaluation through digital photography, floor plans of the different types of buildings present (Appendix I), and a map depicting the location of the buildings on the landscape (Figure 2). Selected elevation photographs of the various buildings appears in the report as appendices II-V, and the remainder of the photographs have been placed on a CD and inserted into a sleeve at the back of the report.

UNIVERSITY APARTMENTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

The Department of Residence Life has administrative and programmatic responsibility for the four housing areas that are the subject of this report. The family housing concept began at Texas A&M University after World War II with the introduction of the GI Bill. Texas A&M College, as it was known at the time, along with other institutions were not adequately prepared for the large influx of married veterans wanting either to begin or continue their college education. Because of its military ties, Texas A&M had many more married students than some of its counterparts. As a result, temporary measures were put into effect to accommodate the need for housing.

The first permanent type housing for married students was constructed in 1957 and ready for occupancy in 1960. These were the twenty-one building Hensel Terrace Complex that house 252 apartment units. Quonset Hut type facilities available on site and constructed in 1937 were converted for use as a University Apartments Office and Maintenance Center. These buildings were used as office space until the current Community Center was constructed and opened in February 2001. The maintenance portion of the Quonset Hut buildings were used until the new Maintenance Facility was constructed and opened in October 2004.

Following the construction of Hensel Terrace Apartments, a total of eighty-four College View one bedroom units were constructed and readied for occupancy in 1969. In 1974, 226 College Avenue Apartments were constructed providing a total of 120 two-bedroom apartments, 69 one-bedroom apartments, and 37 studio apartments. In 1980, eighty-eight two bedroom Avenue A Apartments were constructed. Lastly, in 1989, the Brazos Duplex property was purchased which consisted of fifty-five duplex buildings. At the time of purchase, these duplex buildings were occupied by both Texas A&M University students and non-students. However as apartments became available, each was re-rented to Texas A&M University students who met University established and approved eligibility requirements. The University razed the Brazos duplexes beginning in 1991, and all were demolished by the middle of 1992.

The apartments community is vibrant and diverse. Offering students and their families educational and social opportunities has been an important component of the University Apartments and the Community Council's mission. Educational programs include a passport to learning series, a museum series and Spanish and English classes. We have resident picnics, cook outs and international dinners periodically throughout the year. We have had cultural events including a Ramadan Festival, and a Chinese New Year celebration. Yoga, parenting classes, aerobics, and safety courses have been part of our programming efforts.

In recent collaborative efforts we have partnered with The Career Center, the University Police Department, the Evans Library, Environmental Health and Safety, and the International Graduate Student Association to offer our residents a wide range of classes, events and services.

Currently students living at the University Apartments are primarily single and married international graduate students from more than 54 different countries. There are currently about 30 Undergraduate students living in the College Avenue Apartments and 3 Post Doctorate students residing in University Apartments. At present, more than 92% of University Apartment residents are comprised of international students with the remaining percentage being United States citizens.

METHODS

This project consisted of four phases. These tasks were performed by Edward P. Baxter, Rick Conlin, Leslie K. Leffke, Lili Lyddon, Pat Minor, William E. Moore, Joanie Page, Nora Rogers, Chareny Rydl, Scott Schautschick, and Greg Smith.

Phase I

This phase consisted of the acquisition of maps and other documents needed to prepare the report and make a decision regarding the methods to be followed in the field and the preparation of a Research Design to be followed during the project. Rick Conlin and Scott Schautschick of CSC Engineering, Inc. provided a map depicting the existing structures that are the subject of this study and names of University personnel with knowledge of the project. In order to ensure that our methods would satisfy the reviewers at the Texas Historical Commission (THC), William E. Moore talked with Greg Smith, Quana Childs, and Rachel Leibowitz who informed him as to the proper methods for a project of this nature. Mr. Moore also discussed the project with Chareny Rydl (Senior Associate Director for Residence Life) and Joanie Page and Pat Mynar at University Apartments, (Texas A&M University), who provided him with a brief history of the four housing areas, the dates they were constructed, and floor plans for each of the complexes.

Phase II

This phase was a photographic documentation of the buildings in the four housing areas. This task was performed by Edward P. Baxter who took pictures with a digital camera of all existing structures in the Hensel Terrace Apartment complex as well as selected examples of structures in the other areas. In order to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), a structure must be at least 50 years of age; be associated with an event or events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; be associated with the lives of significant persons, past or present; embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or that have yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history (National Park Service 1997:2). Because the Hensel Terrace Apartments are the only group that may meet the age requirement for the NRHP, exterior pictures depicting all four elevations were taken of each structure in the complex. In addition, interior pictures were taken of a vacant building. Only one set of interior photographs were considered necessary since the floor plan is the same for all 21 buildings.

Phase III

This phase is the interpretation of the significance of the buildings and the writing of the report. Rachel Leibowitz at the THC provided brief descriptions of the buildings in the four housing areas. Leslie K. Leffke, a graduate student in the Department of Architecture at Texas A&M University, visited these areas and helped describe them using current architectural terminology. The majority of the report was written by Mr. Moore with assistance from Edward P. Baxter using information provided by those mentioned above. The figures in the report were prepared by Mr. Baxter and Lili G. Lyddon of L & L Technical Services in North Zulch. The CD containing additional photographs was created and formatted by Edward P. Baxter. Nora Rogers edited the manuscript.

Phase IV

This phase is the submission of the report to the THC for review. All changes requested by this agency are made, and all errors discovered are corrected. Once approved, copies will be distributed to the THC, TAMU, and other interested parties.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed the presence of four apartment complexes within the area to be converted to new housing for Texas A&M University students. As stated above (see *University Apartments: A Brief History*), the four complexes are Hensel Terrace Apartments (also known as Hensel Avenue Apartments), constructed in 1957), College View Apartments constructed in 1969, College Avenue Apartments constructed in 1974, and the Avenue A Apartments constructed in 1980. The conceptual drawings for the buildings constructed in 1969, 1974, and 1980 were prepared by Graeber, Simons, and Cowen of Austin, Texas.

Hensel Terrace Apartments

There are twenty-one numbered buildings in this apartment complex, and they appear in three groups (A-C). Group A consists of six buildings (526 through 531), Group B consists of six buildings (532 through 537), and Group C consists of nine buildings (538 through 546). They are bounded by Hensel Drive, Calvin Moore Avenue, and Ball Street (Figure 2). Each numbered building contains twelve apartments, each of which conforms to a uniform grid. These are two-story apartments built in the Contemporary Modern architectural style, favored from the late 1950s through the early 1970s. This style is evident by the architect's use of such contrasting wall materials as concrete block and brick. Additionally, the roofs are flat with wide eave overhangs covering the apartment balconies. The stairs are exterior, and there is minimal architectural detailing (McAlester and McAlester 1984:482). Both the Southwest and Northeast facades are comprised of brick veneer walls with no openings that extend past the Southeast and Northwest facades. The Southeast façade of each building is separated by concrete walls into four identical "bays." Each of these bays is further divided into an upper and lower story. The unit on the upper story opens to a balcony space that is defined by brick veneer walls on the Northeast and Southwest sides and a three-foot, five-inch metal chain-link railing on the Southwest. The first floor unit opens to a concrete patio area that has no railing. Both the first and second stories have four windows and one door per bay looking into the balcony or patio areas. The areas below the windows are comprised of metal panels that emulate the same dimensions as the window panes. The Northeast elevation is divided into nine bays. The first, third, fourth, sixth, seventh, and ninth "bays" are recessed approximately two feet into the façade and have windows centered in relation to each bay. The second, fifth and eighth bays are solid brick veneer. The only detailing is in the form of the second floor slab, which is visible, the whole width of the building. The Southeast and Northwest facades both contain double-hung aluminum-frame windows. In addition, a perforated concrete block wall surrounds the laundry area, screening the space from public view.

College View Apartments

There are seven numbered buildings in this apartment complex, and they appear in one group. The buildings are numbered consecutively from 1100 through 1106. They are bounded by Calvin Moore Avenue, University Drive, and undeveloped University property (Figure 2). The area is bisected by Front Street and Frank Nicholas Avenue. Each numbered building contains twelve apartments. The buildings in this area were inspired by the Brutalist architectural style typical of university buildings constructed during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Frampton 1980:267). The construction consists of brick veneer walls without openings of any kind on the Southwest and Northeast facades. The Southeast and Northeast elevations are defined by the periodic use of brick pilasters and aluminum-framed, double-hung windows stretching from the ground to a steep-sloped, standing-seam metal roof. This slope, only present on the Southeast and Northwest elevations, creates a “Mansard-roof’ effect. The roof flattens out to match the height of the Southeast and Northeast brick walls. These buildings also feature open staircases.

College Avenue Apartments

There are sixteen numbered buildings in this apartment complex, and they appear in three groups (A-C). Group A consists of seven buildings (1107 through 1113), Group B consists of four buildings (1114 through 1117), and Group C consists of five buildings (1118 through 1121). They are bounded by Ball Street, Hensel Drive, South College Avenue, and undeveloped University property (Figure 2). Each numbered building contains eight to twenty-four apartments. These are two-story structures with a side gable roof and asphalt shingles. The unit facades are staggered to give variety to elevation and to make each unit appear to be separate from its neighbor. Both long facades of the building are similar in characteristics, while the shorter facades have no openings. The exterior siding of the buildings are vinyl strip siding with a thick band of solid siding stretching across the façade of each unit. This detail is utilized to distinguish the floor levels to an outside observer. The windows are aluminum frame and are a mix of horizontal sliding and double-hung. The windows featured on the second story are all horizontal sliding, while the first story windows alternate between the two types. The style of these buildings most closely emulates the Neo-Colonial style of housing made popular beginning in the 1950s and continuing to the present date. These structure’s use of vinyl siding, a steep pitched roof, and their height being limited to two stories are characteristic of this style (McAlester and McAlester 1984:489).

Avenue A Apartments

There are eleven numbered buildings in this apartment complex, and they appear in two groups (A-B). Group A consists of six buildings (1123 through 1128), and Group B consists of five buildings (1134 through 1138). They are bounded by Charles Hamilton Avenue and Calvin Moore Avenue (Figure 2). Each numbered building contains eight apartments. These buildings are a late example of Brutalism, characterized by the long runs of concrete, flat roofs and large expanses of grouped windows. The East and West facades of each building are massive brick veneer parapet walls. The southern facades, also constructed using brick veneer, are comprised of four bays characterized by large flat roof overhangs shading a strip of five windows on the second story. The strip of windows on the first story is shaded by a low-sloped concrete awning. Each building bay is located between the two brick veneer walls. The two end bays are separated from the main building by a concrete stairwell, each side flanked by pierced brickwork for visual interest. The North elevations have windows grouped in a strip of fives similar to the South elevation, yet this façade lacks any significant roof or awning overhang. Additionally, on the North, elevation doors are located on both stories in relation to where the stairwell openings are on the South elevation. The lack of railings or any form of a standing platform indicates that these doors are no longer functional from the interior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The buildings in this study have been found to emulate a number of architectural styles important to the architectural heritage of both the university and American society. Considering this, the possibility of these buildings being eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places was explored. It was found that no building among the fifty-five surveyed meet the requirements of being associated with significant historical events, persons, or were determined to completely embody the distinctive characteristics of their respective architectural style. If these buildings were found to have met any of the previous criteria, only the Hensel Terrace Apartments could be considered. This is due to the basic listing requirement that a building's significance must have been achieved prior to fifty years from the present (National Park Service 1997:2). Therefore, these buildings do not fall within criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, thus supporting the recommendation there is no need for the university to preserve the buildings if it is not in their best economic or social interest. If the buildings are not preserved, and are instead replaced with newer construction, there are a number of points that should be considered when designing and planning for the new buildings in order to best honor the past construction.

The new design should strive to emulate the current buildings in height, context and materials (Tyler 2000:139). The use of brick and concrete as building materials is not common to only this area, but to the university as a whole. This allows for the new construction to connect to the university community across University Drive, while being sensitive to the previous building. All of the buildings surveyed, except for the College Avenue apartments, take orientation into consideration. The blocking of direct sunlight from the Southeast, South and West was emphasized in the design of the original buildings. This feature allows for more sustainable opportunities to be available, if so desired, and should be incorporated into the new design to achieve more sustainable results in building performance. In addition, the height of the new buildings should not exceed five stories. This is important in that it allows the buildings to remain human in scale. This creates a neighborhood essence where the building provides the feeling of an independent home.

The new design should not emulate the current site plan in how the existing buildings are disconnected from one another and from the site. The new buildings should strive to refine and shape open space, rather than sit unrelated to their site surroundings (Barnes Gromatzky Kosarek Architects 2004:42). The consideration of these recommendations will help to honor the important role these buildings have served in the past, while allowing the university to move forward to create a unique living community for current and future graduate students.

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APPENDIX I

FLOOR PLANS

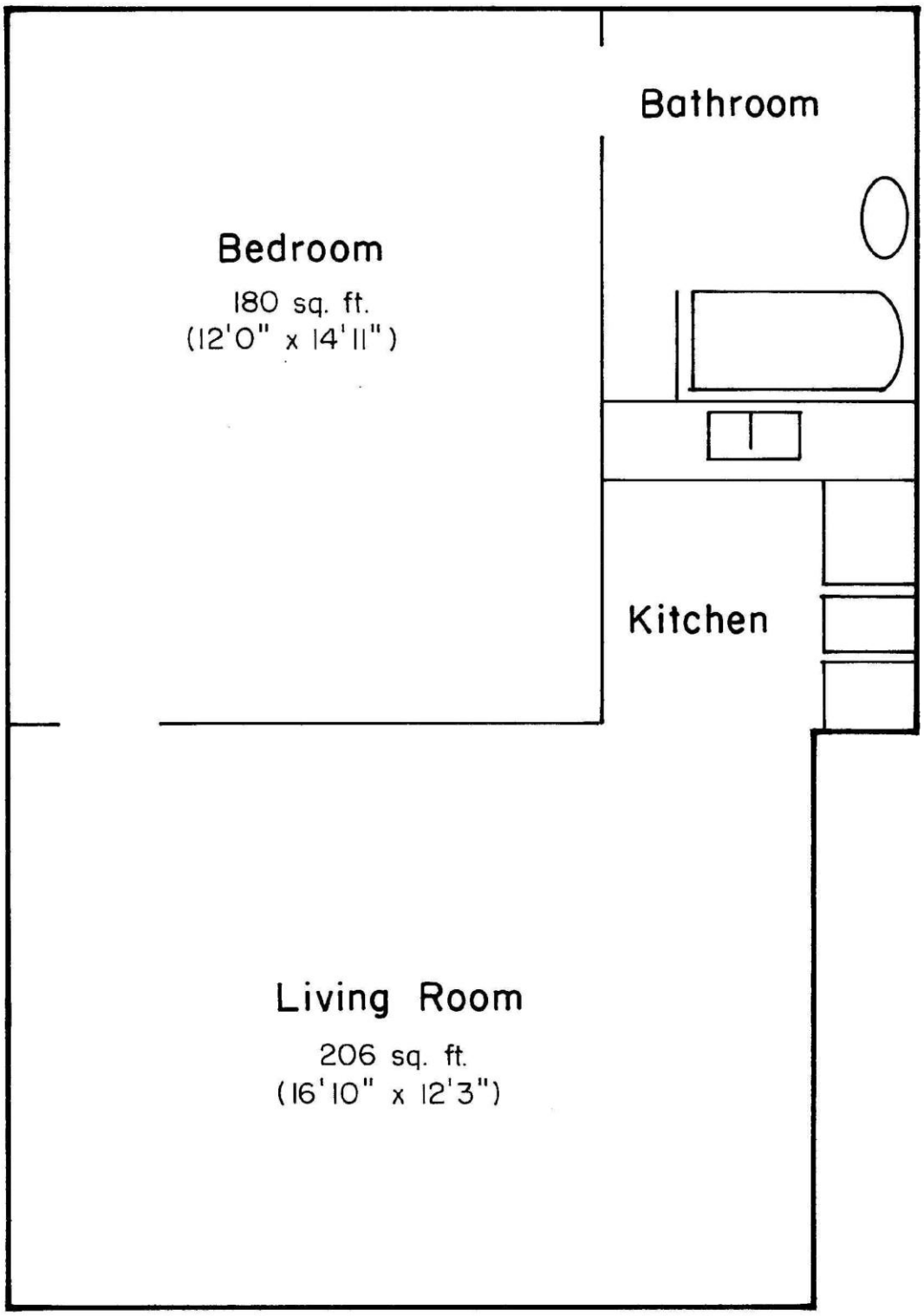

Figure 1. Floor Plan for Hensel Terrace Apartments

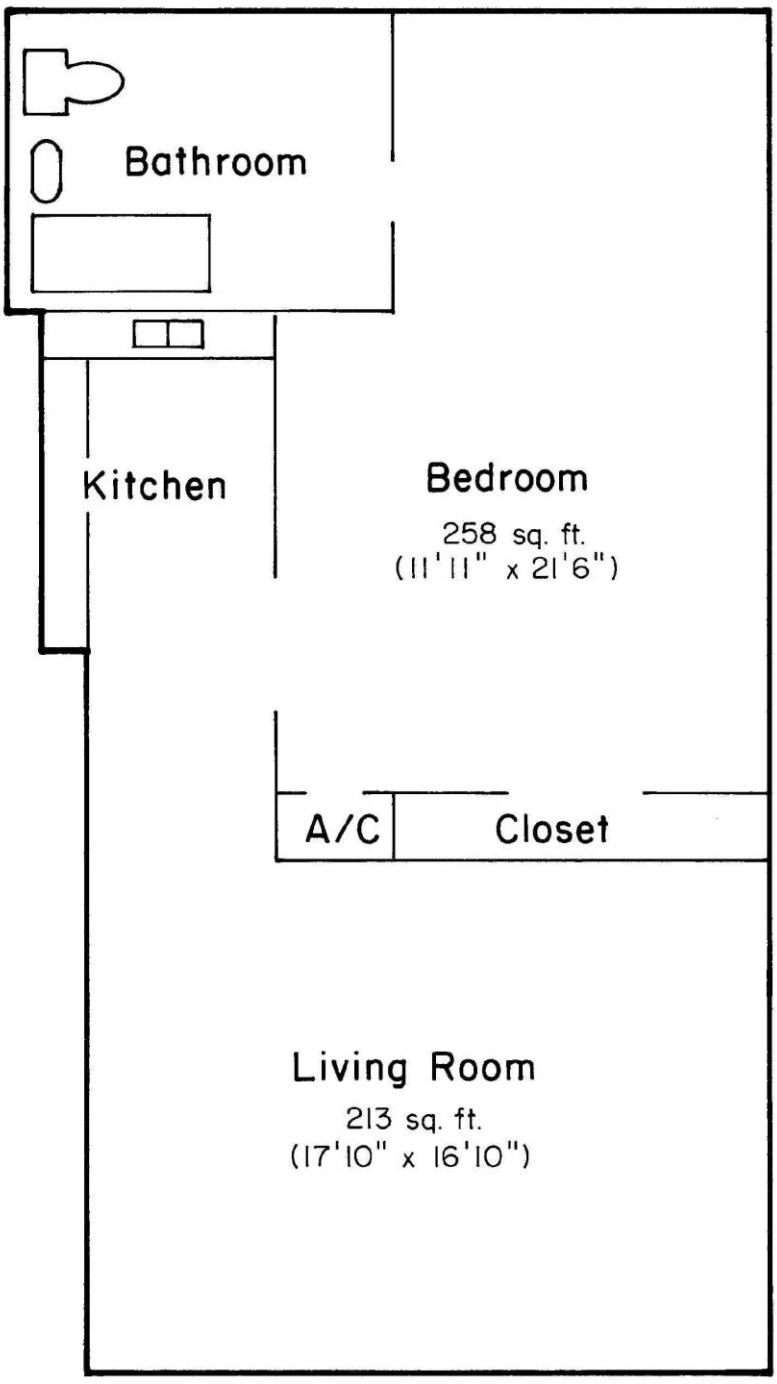

Figure 2. Floor Plan for College View Apartments

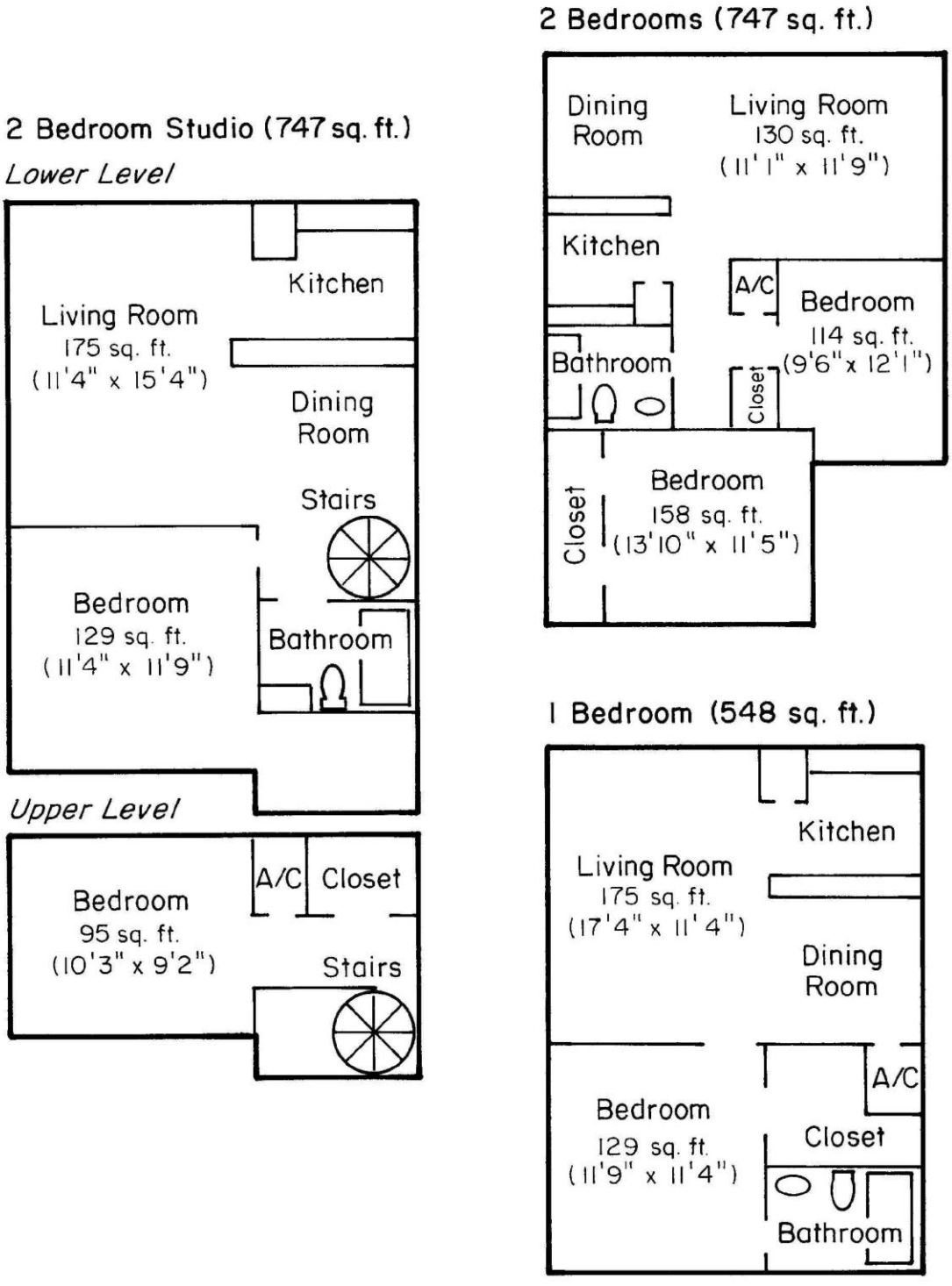

Figure 3. Floor Plan for College Avenue Apartments

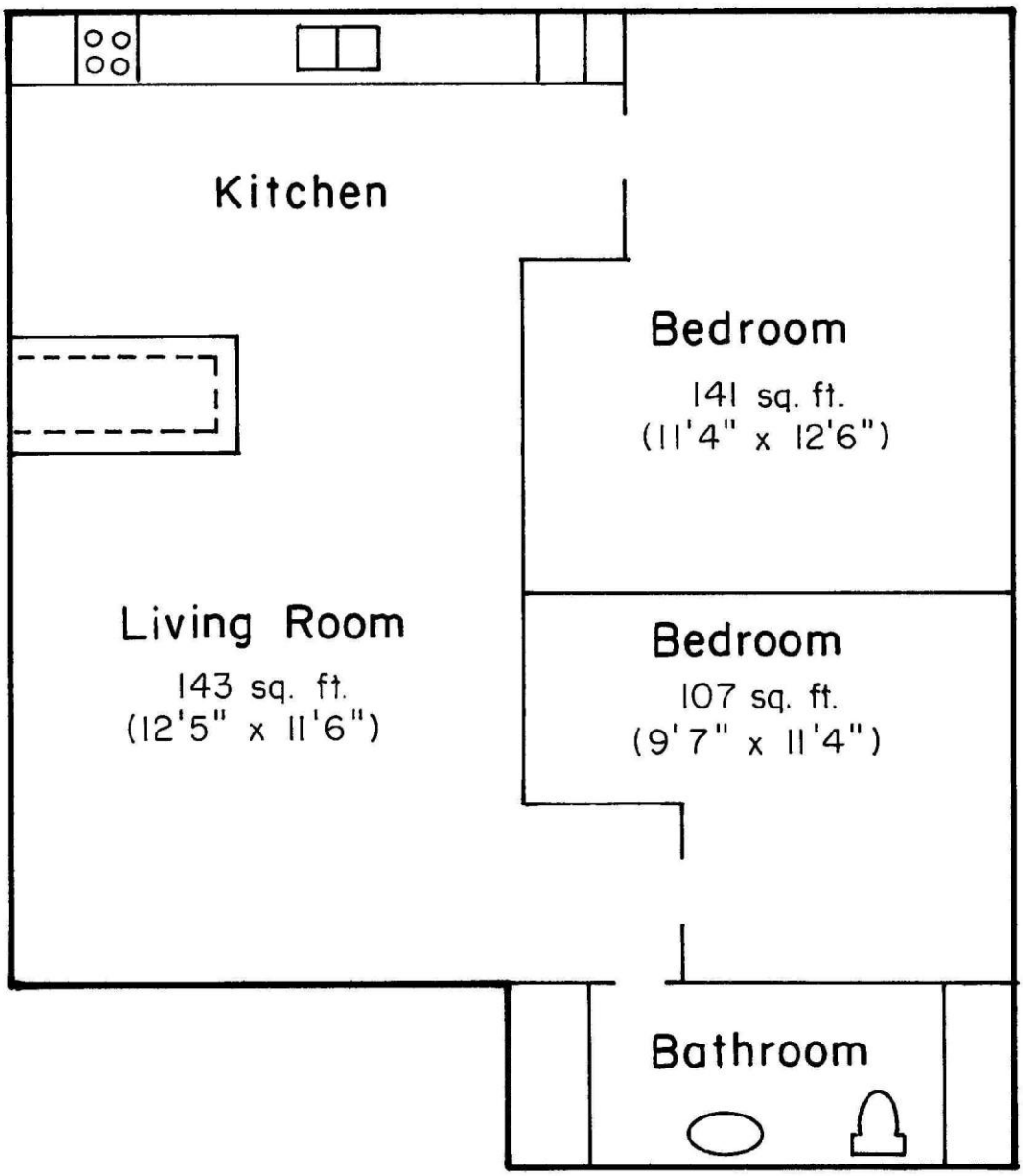

Figure 4. Floor Plan for Avenue A Apartments

APPENDIX II

PHOTOGRAPHS OF HENSEL TERRACE APARTMENTS

CONSTRUCTED IN 1957

Building 529 – South Elevation (downstairs)

Building 529 – South Elevation (upstairs)

Building 534 – South/Southwest Elevation

Building 534 – Southwest Elevation

Building 529 – South Elevation

Building 531 – East Elevation (Clothesline)

Building 529 – Entrance to Bedroom

Building 529 – Bedroom

Building 529 – Closet in Bedroom

Building 529 – Kitchen

Building 529 – Living Room

APPENDIX III

PHOTOGRAPHS OFCOLLEGE VIEW APARTMENTS

CONSTRUCTED IN 1969

Building 1130 – Northeast Elevation

Building 1130 – South Elevation

Building 1130 – Southwest Elevation

Building 1130 – East Elevation

APPENDIX IV

PHOTOGRAPHS OFCOLLEGE AVENUE APARTMENTS

CONSTRUCTED IN 1974

Building 1115 – East Elevation

Building 1118 – North Elevation

Building 1118 – Northeast Elevation

Building 1118 – West Elevation

APPENDIX V

PHOTOGRAPHS OF AVENUE A APARTMENTS

CONSTRUCTED IN 1980

Building 1136 – Northwest Elevation

Building 1136 – Southwest Elevation

Building 1136 – Southeast Elevation

Building 1136 – West Elevation