

COMMENT ON NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

ADDRESS: 900-04 N 63rd St, Overbrook Gardens Apartments

OVERVIEW: The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) has requested comments from the Philadelphia Historical Commission on the National Register nomination of 900-04 N 63rd Street, located in the Overbrook neighborhood of West Philadelphia and historically known as the Overbrook Garden Apartments. PHMC is charged with implementing federal historic preservation regulations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, including overseeing the National Register of Historic Places in the state. PHMC reviews all such nominations before forwarding them to the National Park Service for action. As part of the process, PHMC must solicit comments on every National Register nomination from the appropriate local government. The Philadelphia Historical Commission speaks on behalf of the City of Philadelphia in historic preservation matters including the review of National Register nominations. Under federal regulation, the local government not only must provide comments, but must also provide a forum for public comment on nominations. Such a forum is provided during the Philadelphia Historical Commission's meetings.

According to the nomination, Overbrook Garden Apartments is significant in the Area of Community Planning and Development, as a prime example of the large, efficiency apartment building that became a highly desirable form of housing in West Philadelphia during the 1920s. The building is also significant in the Area of Architecture as an important example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style in Philadelphia and representative of a courtyard-type apartment building, a building form that became prevalent in West Philadelphia during the 1920s. The Period of Significance begins in 1928 when construction completed, and ends in 1930 when construction in West Philadelphia slowed due to Great Depression and interest in the Spanish Colonial Revival style waned.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

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.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: **Overbook Gardens Apartments**

Other names/site number:

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: **900-904 N. 63rd Street**City or town: **Philadelphia** State: **PA** County: **Philadelphia**Not For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ 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 ___ 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 ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

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**

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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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – Multiple Dwelling (Apartment Building)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: **Brick**

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

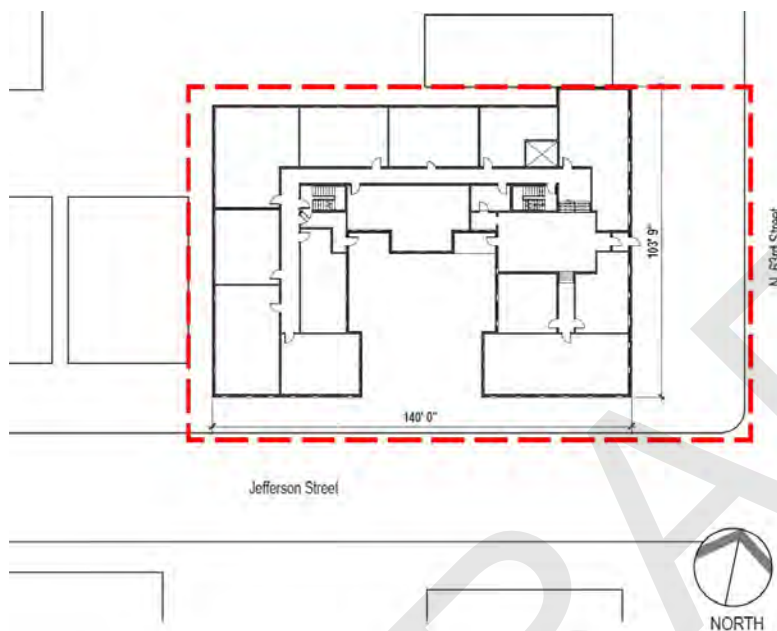
The Overbrook Gardens Apartments is a four-story, Mission Revival style apartment house at the northwest corner of North 63rd Street and Jefferson Street in the Overbrook section of West Philadelphia. Built in 1928, the building is framed in steel and faced in brick, stucco and cast stone. On the south side, there is a landscaped courtyard, which the U-shaped building surrounds on three sides (it is open to Jefferson Street on the south side). On the east side, there is a grass lawn with large trees between the building and the sidewalk. The site is urban and is surrounded by early twentieth-century rowhouses and apartment houses to the east as well as blocks of larger, single-family and duplex houses from the same period to the north, west and south.



Aerial View in 2018, pre-fire – Google Maps

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Existing Site Plan with National Register Boundary

Narrative Description

The south elevation (facing Jefferson Street) consists of two five bay-wide wings on either side of a central courtyard (**Photos 1-3**). At the back of the courtyard, the recessed portion of the south elevation, which features a central, slightly projecting tower, is nine bays wide.



Photo 1 (left) – South elevation, looking north
Photo 2 (right) – South elevation, looking northeast

Nearly all bays, including those in the side elevations of courtyard (**Photos 4, 5**), contain single or paired aluminum replacement windows in a one-over-one, double-hung configuration. Due to a fire in 2018, most of the first floor window openings are currently covered by plywood and many of the fourth floor windows are missing.

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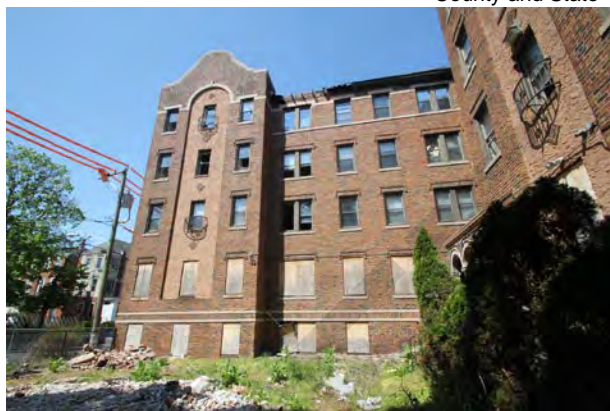
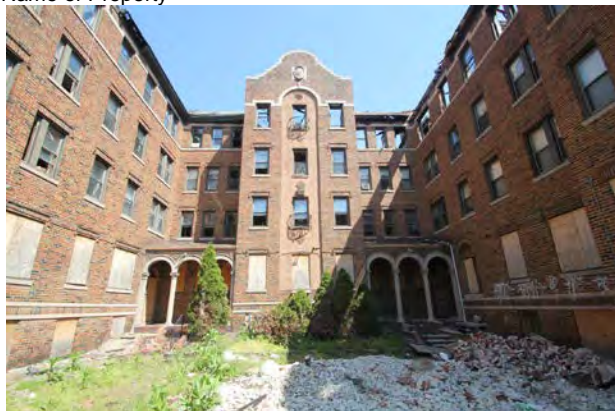


Photo 3 (left) – Courtyard, south elevation, looking north

Photo 4 (right) – Courtyard, east elevation, looking west

At the first floor, the central tower is flanked by three-bay wide arcades with cast stone columns and rounded heads supporting small pitched roofs. The central tower and corners of the side wings are differentiated from the smooth brick walls with tall stucco shafts with rounded cast stone heads. The second and fourth floor windows within the stucco shafts contain non-functional, curved iron balconies. Above the stucco shafts, the parapets, which consist of a basketweave brick pattern rather than the running bond found elsewhere, feature a Mission-style scalloped profile with cast stone coping. Within the parapet at the top of the central tower, there is a cast stone cartouche inscribed with the date 1928. Between the scalloped parapets, there are short, pent-like pitched roofs that contain barrel-shaped clay tiles although in some locations the tiles are missing due to damage sustained during the 2018 fire. In some locations, particularly on the east side of the courtyard and the other elevations of the east wing (parallel to 63rd Street), the pitched roofs were destroyed during the fire.



Photo 5 (left) – Courtyard, south and west elevations, looking northeast

Photo 6 (right) – South and east elevations, looking northwest

The east elevation (facing 63rd Street) is eleven bays wide and is treated much like the south elevation with one-over-one aluminum replacement windows and stucco shafts in the center bay and at the corners (**Photos 6, 7**). The main entrance to the building is located in the center bay, which consists of a modern, aluminum-framed glass door with side lights and transom within an

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ornate, Spanish Baroque-style cast stone door surround (**Photo 8**).



Photo 7 (left) – East elevation, looking west

Photo 8 (right) – East elevation, entrance detail, looking west

The north and west elevations are more functional in treatment as they do not face the street. These sides are clad in stucco and contain no decorative features except at the end bays adjacent to Jefferson Street and 63rd Street, which continue the corner treatment described above -- tall stucco shafts slightly inset into the brick wall, with a scalloped parapet at the top. Like the south and east elevations, these sides contain one-over-one, double-hung aluminum replacement windows in most bays. There are also fire balconies on the east elevation.

Interior

On the interior, the building contains 64 one- and two-bedroom apartments along a U-shaped, double-loaded corridor. On the first floor, the main lobby, which is entered from the entrance on the east elevation, contains vinyl tile over mosaic tile floors, plaster walls, and exposed wood joists at the ceiling where the original plaster finish was damaged during the 2018 fire (**Photos 9, 10**). At the center of the north wall, there is a large stone fireplace.



Photo 9 (left) – First floor, lobby, looking west

Photo 10 (right) – First floor, lobby, looking east

To the east of the fireplace, there is a round arched opening with plaster rope molding with a

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small stair that leads to the first floor corridor. There is a similar but blind opening to the west of the fireplace. The west wall contains a metal door -- leading to the arcade at the east side of the courtyard -- which has a stained glass fan light and is set within original painted wood casing. To the right of the door, there are two multi-light wood windows with stained glass and painted wood casing similar to the door.



Photo 11 (left) – First floor, corridor, looking north

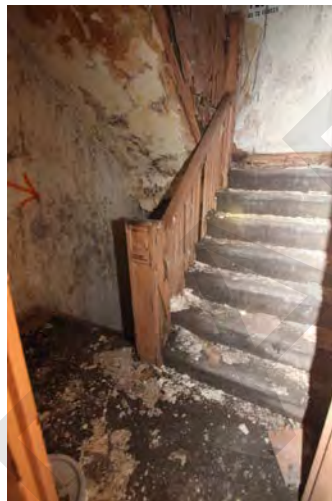


Photo 12 (right) – First floor, stair, looking east

Entered from openings in the north and south walls of the lobby, the first floor corridors contain carpeted floors and plaster walls and ceilings (**Photo 11**). The corridors also feature painted wood baseboard and door casing at the apartment entrances. These treatments are identical on the second through fourth floors, although the fourth floor sustained damage during the 2018 fire. At the east and west ends of the east-west section of the corridor, there are U-return wood stairs, which are currently carpeted (**Photo 12**).



Photo 13 (left) – First floor, apartment, looking west



Photo 14 (right) – First floor, apartment, looking east

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Photo 15 (left) – Second floor, apartment, looking southwest

Photo 16 (right) – Second floor, corridor, looking south

The apartments contain wood floors, and plaster walls and ceilings, although on the fourth floor and in limited locations on the third floor these finishes are missing or were damaged during the 2018 fire, leaving debris on the floors in many areas (**Photos 13-21**). Except on the fourth floor, much of the historic millwork -- including baseboard and window and door casings -- remains intact.

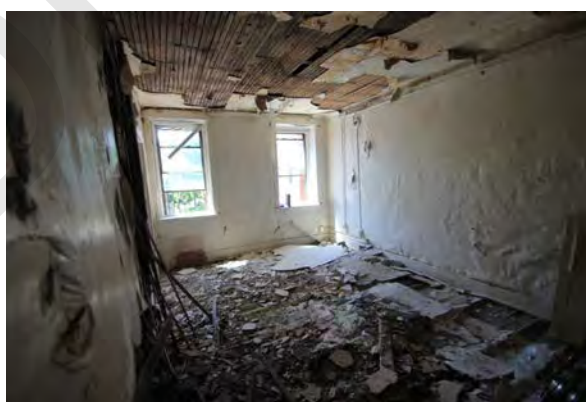


Photo 17 (left) – Second floor, apartment, looking southeast

Photo 18 (right) – Second floor, apartment, looking west



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Photo 19 (left) – Fire damage on fourth floor, looking southwest

Photo 20 (right) – Fire damage on fourth floor, looking west



Photo 21 – Fire damage on fourth floor, looking northeast

Integrity

The Overbrook Gardens Apartments retains integrity. Despite the 2018 fire, during which the roof collapsed and the building sustained significant interior damage (mainly on the fourth floor) and some exterior damage along the roofline, the character-defining Spanish Revival design and materials remain largely unchanged. Because the roof was flat, its loss has had little effect on the overall exterior form of the building and, therefore, has not seriously impacted its ability to convey its historic, residential use.

From the exterior, it is clear that the building sustained damage from the fire. However, the actual losses, which apart from the roof include a few courses of brick at the upper portion of east wing (facing 63rd Street, Jefferson Street, and the courtyard), the scalloped parapets at the west end of the east wing, and the pent roofs between them, are minor compared to what survives. In fact, much of the building's exterior brick treatment as well as its cast stone features -- the ornate, east elevation door surround, arcades at the east side of the courtyard, and character-defining Spanish Revival scalloped parapets -- remain largely intact. While the original windows have been replaced, the new windows are compatible in design and fit within the original openings. Therefore, the new windows do not detract from the overall appearance of the building nor its historic fenestration pattern. Likewise, on the interior, although there is debris throughout the building, the historic lobby, the original circulation plan, and the materials and layout of the apartments have all changed little since 1928. As indicated above, the major exception is the fourth floor, which sustained major damage during the fire, however this accounts for only 20% of the building's floor space with the basement level included.

The location and setting of the building also have remained virtually unchanged since its completion in 1928, and therefore the surrounding neighborhood's early twentieth-century

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housing stock remain remarkably intact.

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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.)

- ☐ 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

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning & Development

Architecture

Period of Significance

1928-1930

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Morris Fruchtbaum

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Overbrook Gardens Apartments was built in 1928 in the Overbrook neighborhood of West Philadelphia. The building is significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development as a major example of the type of large, efficiency apartment building that became one of the most popular forms of housing in West Philadelphia during the 1920s. The surge of apartment house construction became one of the most visible forms of change in this part of the city, creating a broader mix of residents in the area and an alternative to the rowhouses, duplexes, and large, single-family dwellings that had dominated since the mid-nineteenth century. In the Overbrook neighborhood, in particular, the Overbrook Gardens Apartments epitomizes this transformation. The building is also significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture both as an important example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style in Philadelphia, and as a highly characteristic courtyard-type apartment building, the form most common in West Philadelphia during the 1920s. The period of significance begins in 1928, when the building was completed, and ends in 1930, when, due to the economic realities of the Great Depression, apartment house construction dropped off significantly in West Philadelphia and the Spanish Colonial Revival style began to pass from favor.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

CRITERION A – Community Planning and Development

The development of the Overbrook Gardens Apartments is highly representative of the socioeconomic and real estate development trends that shaped West Philadelphia and the Overbrook neighborhood between about 1910 and 1930. While the eastern portion of West Philadelphia had long been a residential center, developing as an affluent streetcar suburb as early as the 1850s, the western section remained largely undeveloped until after the turn of the twentieth century (**Figure 1**). With the opening of the Philadelphia Rapid Transit's Company's Market Street Elevated Line in 1907 and the concurrent expansion of the company's electrified trolley system, which traveled up 63rd Street to Lancaster Avenue, Overbrook and the adjacent neighborhoods of Cobbs Creek, Haddington and Carroll Park began to fill in with speculative housing, including small rowhouses for working people and more spacious duplexes and single-family dwellings for the upper-middle class. By 1910, the area to the immediate north and south of the site where the Overbrook Gardens Apartments would eventually stand had been built-up with the latter type as seen in a 1910 property atlas (**Figure 2**). Over the following decade, nearly all of the remaining vacant land seen in the 1910 map had been developed with housing.

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Figure 1 – Bromley Atlas of Philadelphia, 1895. The future site of Overbrook Gardens is outlined in red.



Figure 2 – Bromley Atlas of Philadelphia, 1910. The future site of Overbrook Gardens is outlined in red.

By the early 1920s, West Philadelphia's growing population led to the development of higher density apartment houses for the middle class. Although apartments did appear in Overbrook before 1920 – the Monte Vista Apartments, built in 1910 on 63rd Street, just north of the future Overbrook Gardens, is one of the most prominent examples – they were uncommon.¹ As late as 1910, William F. Gray wrote that “apartment houses figure relatively little in Philadelphia life,” with W. Wallace Weaver explaining later that although West Philadelphia had been “experimenting with apartment houses since about 1895,” Philadelphians were “slow to give up their houses.”²

After 1920, however, the situation was reversed, with large, multi-story residential buildings becoming virtually the sole type of large-scale development in West Philadelphia, often replacing duplex or single-family houses that were built just ten to twenty years prior. In 1924,

¹ The Monte Vista was individually listed on the National Register in 1983 (NRHP reference no. 83002275).

² William F. Gray, *Philadelphia's Architecture* (Philadelphia: City History Society of Philadelphia, 1910), 365; Weaver, 121.

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Buildings and Building Management, a real estate industry publication, remarked that “No branch of the building industry, with the exception of the two story dwelling, is being pushed forward so vigorously as the apartment house,” and that “West Philadelphia has shown the way to all other sections of Philadelphia in the construction of residential buildings for occupancy on the apartment plan.”³ The same year, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* expounded on the recent apartment boom, writing that “Without jeopardizing its cherished reputation of being the ‘city of homes,’ Philadelphia is rapidly attaining prominence for its recent extensive construction and contemplated construction of large apartment houses.”⁴ This trend continued over the next few years, with the same paper reporting in 1927 that “Apartment house building in West Philadelphia is expected to be one of the leading features of this year’s building activity here.”⁵

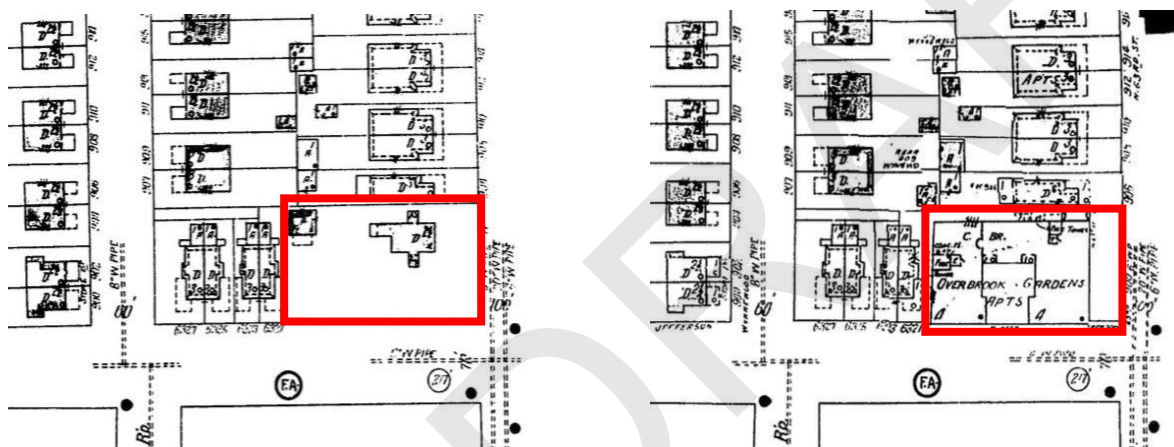


Figure 3 (left) – Sanborn Map, 1925. The future site of Overbrook Gardens is outlined in red.

Figure 4 (right) – Sanborn Map, 1950, showing Overbrook Gardens.

The construction of the Overbrook Gardens Apartments in 1928 came at the height of the apartment boom in West Philadelphia. The property, on which a large, single-family house was built around 1900, was acquired by a corporation formed specifically to develop the site: the Overbrook Gardens Construction Company. Led by investor Isaac Dozor, the company subsequently demolished the house in preparation for the new building. Although this work was first announced in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* (PRERBG) in December 1926, demolition and construction did not begin until early in 1928.⁶ Dozor hired architect-engineer Morris Fruchtbaum, with whom he had partnered on at least one previous apartment house in West Philadelphia – the Cobbs Creek Apartments at 63rd and Chestnut Streets in 1926 – to design the new building. Fruchtbaum’s involvement in another, earlier Dozor project – a row of five, adjoining four-story apartment buildings at the southwest corner of 61st and Nassau Streets, built in 1925 – is possible, but has not been confirmed. Following Overbrook Gardens, which opened in early 1929, the pair would go on to build at least one more apartment house later in 1928: the Kenwood Apartments (now known as the English Manor Apartments) at

³ “Philadelphia Apartments Increase,” *Buildings and Building Management* 24 (27 Oct 1924), 51.

⁴ “Activities of the Day in Real Estate,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 16, 1924.

⁵ “West Phila. to be Apartment Center,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 6, 1927.

⁶ PRERBG (22 Dec 1926), 811; PRERBG (7 Dec 1927), 777.

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243 West Tulpehocken Street in Germantown, which still stands. For the Kenwood, Fruchtbach not only designed the building but invested in it as well, becoming partners with Dozor in this project.⁷

Apart from the Monte Vista Apartments, which continued to expand into the early 1920s, three significant multi-family projects were built in the immediate vicinity of Overbrook Gardens during this decade. These included the Jefferson Apartments, a four-story building built directly across 63rd Street in 1924; the abovementioned project at the southwest corner of 61st and Nassau Streets in 1925; and the Overbrook Arms, a ten-story tower at the corner of 63rd and Lebanon Streets in 1928. Additionally, in the adjacent Overbrook Farms neighborhood to the north, a number of large, four-story apartment houses, including The Anita Apartments (1923), Lincoln Court (1924) The Margrace Apartments (1925), Hastings Manor (1928), and Weymouth Hall (1928) were all built adjacent to or within one block of the Overbrook Station of what was then the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line (now a SEPTA commuter rail station), demonstrating that proximity to transportation was one of the key drivers of apartment house development in this area.



Figure 5 (left) – Advertisement in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 1929.



Figure 6 (right) – Advertisement in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 1930.

Like many neighboring apartment houses, Overbrook Gardens was of the efficiency type and was geared toward a middle-class clientele, creating a broader mix of residents in the area and an alternative to single-family houses. Writing specifically of developments in West Philadelphia, W. Wallace Weaver wrote in 1930 that:

The trend in housing since 1920 has been sharply toward the multiple-family dwelling of the efficiency apartment type. Efficiency apartments usually contain a miniature kitchen and dining room, a bathroom, living room and one or more bedrooms. A number have folding beds in the living room and no bedroom, while others are not provided with kitchens. They are notable for efficient utilization of space, freedom from responsibilities for care, and equipment with the most modern conveniences; but they involve loss of room, lack of privacy and high rentals. In recent years they have become increasingly popular and now constitute one of the most important elements in the construction of new dwellings in West Philadelphia.⁸

⁷ PRERBG (21 Nov 1928), 741.

⁸ W. Wallace Weaver, "West Philadelphia: A Study of Natural Social Areas," (Doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1930), 122.

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The middle-class status of the Overbrook Gardens residents is made clear by the 1930 census records. That year, the census recorded 93 residents in the building, most of whom were young couples (some with one or two children) and older, presumably retired couples. Although all of the residents were white and American-born, about a quarter were immigrants from Europe. Nearly all had middle-class occupations such as salesman, stenographer, teacher, musician, nurse, clerk, insurance agent, hairdresser, and social worker, among others. Rents were modest, ranging from \$35 to \$100 a month, although most came in at \$60 to \$85.

The economic difficulties of the Great Depression significantly affected the construction of apartment houses in West Philadelphia after 1930, ending the boom of the previous decade. In 1931, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that “apartment house construction in this section has registered virtually no activity for some time.”⁹ The headline of this piece, “Expect Apartment Building Revival,” appears to have been overstated, for the *Inquirer* reported again in 1933 that “apartment house construction here has been nil for the last few years.”¹⁰ Although a shortage of working-class housing by the mid-1930s led to the construction of several large Public Works Administration-funded housing projects, such as the Carl Mackley Houses in lower Northeast Philadelphia and the Richard Allen Homes in North Philadelphia – very few large apartment houses were built in West Philadelphia until after World War II.

The Overbrook Gardens Apartments changed little between 1930 and 1970. In 1940, although there were more residents in the building – the census recorded 131 people that year – little had changed in regard to their ethnic or racial composition. It is notable, however, that rents had significantly decreased from those recorded in 1930, with most coming in at only \$25 to \$65 per month, suggesting perhaps that the Great Depression had an impact on the multi-family housing market. Although by the 1960s the surrounding neighborhood was becoming increasingly African-American, the owners of Overbrook Gardens had trouble accepting this change. In November 1970, a black couple sued the owners for \$50,000 in federal court for allegedly refusing to rent an apartment to them.¹¹ The outcome of this case is not known, although it is clear from census data from 1980 and 1990 – when the share of the black population in this census tract was 80% and 89% respectively – that residents of the Overbrook Gardens Apartments had likely become predominantly African-American.

CRITERION C - Architecture

The Spanish Colonial Revival Style

The Overbrook Gardens Apartments is one of the most prominent Philadelphia examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture that became popular in the United States beginning around 1915. That year, at the Panama-California Exhibition in San Diego, New York architect Bertram Goodhue’s California Building, although quite ornate in its Spanish Baroque form, became the “energizing archetype” for the revival of Spanish design. Subsequently,

⁹ “Expect Apartment Building Revival,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 13, 1931.

¹⁰ “Phila. Has Built Many Apartments,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 18, 1933.

¹¹ “Apartment Unit Sued; Bias Charged,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, November 14, 1970.

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magazines like *House and Garden* and *House Beautiful* began to showcase Mission and Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in their pages, popularizing the buildings of Southern California among their national audiences.¹² The revival of Spanish architectural forms during this period has been viewed by some as the western counterpart to the Colonial Revival movement in the east, although the Mission and Colonial Revival Styles did enjoy a brief moment of popularity in and around eastern cities between about 1920 and 1930. While not common, a number of private homes, housing developments, apartment houses and commercial buildings were designed in Spanish-influenced styles in places like Philadelphia and their surrounding suburbs during this period.



Figure 7 – Spanish Colonial Revival houses on Osmond Street in East Falls. (Google, 2019).



Figure 8 – Spanish Colonial Revival houses on Barclay Street in East Falls. (Google, 2019).



Figure 9 – Spanish Colonial Revival houses on Mower Street in Mount Airy. (Google, 2019).

In eastern cities like Philadelphia, the style appears to have been used most often as a way to create variety in housing developments that would otherwise have been fairly homogenous in design. The Spanish Colonial Revival style most often appeared in working- and middle-class rowhouse developments where it was mixed in with houses in the Colonial Revival or Tudor Revival styles. On Osmond and Barclay Streets (between Ainslie and Bowman) in East Falls, as well as around the intersection of West Sedgwick and Mower Streets in Mount Airy, dense rows of small, two-story houses with clay tile roofs and scalloped, Mission-style parapets – two

¹² Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 204; Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92.

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defining features of Spanish design – were built between 1925-1926 (**Figures 12-14**). Similar developments appeared in Upper Darby, Lansdowne and Drexel Hill, all just west of Philadelphia, during the same period.



Figure 10 – The Anita Apartments (now The Pennbrook) at 2120-34 N. 63rd Street in Overbrook Farms.

Larger examples of the style were uncommon in Philadelphia, although Overbrook Gardens was preceded by at least one other Spanish Colonial Revival-style apartment house: the Anita Apartments (now known as the Pennbrook), which was built in 1923 just a few blocks to the north, at 2120-34 N. 63rd Street (**Figure 15**). Like Overbrook Gardens, the Anita has slightly more ornate features than its smaller-scale, rowhouse counterparts. While both buildings have the clay tile roofs and Mission-style parapets so common to the Spanish Colonial Revival, they also contain elaborate door surrounds at the entrances as well as arcaded porches. While the Spanish Colonial Revival typically features stucco or plaster exterior walls, both examples are faced primarily in brick, a material more appropriate to their Northeastern setting.

Beyond rowhouse developments and private homes, Spanish-influenced styles appeared in a number of building types in Philadelphia, including at least one hotel, several small commercial buildings and a number of theatres. The Drake Hotel (now the Drake Apartments), a 33-story tower built in 1929 at 1512-14 Spruce Street in Center City, is perhaps the most prominent example of Spanish architectural design in Philadelphia due to its sheer size and its picturesque, Baroque and Art Deco-influenced roofline. The Commodore Theatre, designed by Ballinger/Hoffman-Henon and built in 1928 at 4228 Walnut Street, is an important example of the influence of Spanish design on movie theatres of the period. As in other examples of the type, including the Felton Theatre (built 1925) at 4800 Rising Sun Avenue and the Circle Theatre (built 1929) at 4650 Frankford Avenue, Spanish design was thought to conjure images of Hollywood glamor.

Nationally, although the revival of Mission and Spanish Colonial architecture had become a “craze,” in the words of one architectural historian, it did not benefit from lasting popularity.¹³ Due in no small part to the economic realities of the Great Depression and, subsequently, World

¹³ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 226.

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War II, the style passed rapidly from favor. While advertisements for “Spanish type” houses abounded in the real estate pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* during the 1920s, very few references to this type of building can be found after 1930.

The Courtyard Apartment House

The construction of large apartment houses in Overbrook and adjacent neighborhoods during the 1920s mirrored national trends in the construction of higher density, multi-family housing for the middle class. These buildings, most often referred to as “efficiency apartments,” typically contained one- to five-room units and were located in or near the city’s middle-income neighborhoods and around commercial or industrial sub-centers.¹⁴ They also shared many features with their upscale prototypes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most were built on speculation by contractors; the more luxurious of these had amenities and were individual in appearance, often in the Georgian, Colonial, Tudor, or Spanish Revival styles popular during the period. Like the upscale buildings, apartment houses for the moderate income sector were also architect-designed and often contained finely decorated ground floor lobbies.¹⁵ Although damaged by a fire in 2018, many of the original lobby features in the Overbrook Gardens Apartments remain intact.

Efficient use of the site became a defining feature of apartment houses in West Philadelphia and nationally as developers sought to provide as many units as possible with plentiful air and natural light. This was accomplished through a variety of courtyard-style layouts in the form of an “L,” “H,” “U” and “E.”¹⁶ The U-shaped or “open courtyard” plan is one of the most prevalent found in West Philadelphia. As explained by Frank Chouteau Brown in *Architectural Record* in 1922, “The ‘Open Courtyard’ type of apartment group...is of peculiar interest to those concerned with the future development of apartment house structures in this country. Its proven flexibility of arrangement, its varied adaptability to differently proportioned lots of land [and] its economic advantages for the improvement of larger sized land tracts, urban or suburban.”¹⁷ The courtyard also made possible “an attractive outlook for the rooms overlooking it,” in the words of R.W. Sexton, “and, further than that, offers an interesting means of approach to interior entrances.”¹⁸ Although the central court at Overbrook Gardens was not used as an approach to the main entrance, which was located on the east elevation, facing 63rd Street, it was nonetheless an attractive amenity to those moving from denser neighborhoods where private or semi-private outdoor spaces were not available.

In Philadelphia, such courtyard type buildings began to appear in the West Philadelphia and Mount Airy neighborhoods in the early 1920s. A few prominent examples of the U-shaped or “open courtyard” plan are located near Overbrook Gardens, including the Anita Apartments (described above), as well as Hastings Manor and Weymouth Hall, two four-story, Georgian

¹⁴ John Hancock, “The Apartment House in Urban America,” Anthony D. King, editor, *Buildings and Society* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 159.

¹⁵ Hancock, 159.

¹⁶ R.W. Sexton, *American Apartment Houses of Today* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1926), 2-3.

¹⁷ Frank Chouteau Brown, “Tendencies in Apartment House Design, Part VIII, Open Courtyard Types, in *Architectural Record* 51 (Feb 1922), 153.

¹⁸ Sexton, 3.

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Revival style apartment houses built at the southwest corner of Lancaster Avenue and Sherwood Road in 1928. Slightly farther afield, the Garden Court Historic District, which is located about two miles to the southeast and was listed on the National Register in 1984, contains several courtyard apartment buildings. The most notable examples include, on the 4800 block of Pine Street, three U-shaped apartment houses with front or side courtyards, which were designed in 1922 by architect Clarence Wunder: the Pine Vista, the Pine Lodge, and the Pine Manor. These four-story buildings (with raised basements) were constructed in a simplified version of the Jacobean Revival style. There are also two Regency Revival style apartment buildings at 4900-08 and 4950 Pine Street in the Garden Court Historic District. Despite some variation in architectural style and scale, these buildings are similar to Overbrook Gardens in their basic U-shaped form, low massing, and materiality, which typically consisted of brick with stone, cast stone, or terra cotta ornamentation.

Morris Fruchtbaum, Architect

The Overbrook Gardens Apartments was designed by architect-engineer Morris Fruchtbaum (1889-1978). After graduating from the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn's College of Engineering in 1915, Fruchtbaum came to Philadelphia in 1917 to take up a position at the Atlantic Refinery Company. Educated in civil engineering, the circumstances surrounding Fruchtbaum's entry into the architectural profession are unclear; he was first listed as an architect in Philadelphia city directories in 1924.¹⁹ A 1982 Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form for the Overbrook Gardens Apartments indicates that the building was an "unusual" commission for Fruchtbaum, who "typically designed manufacturing buildings such as packing plants."²⁰ This may be true of his later career, however most of Fruchtbaum's earliest projects – from about 1925 to 1930 – were residential, including numerous apartment houses and dozens, if not hundreds, of small rowhouses.

Apart from the Overbrook Gardens Apartments, Fruchtbaum was commissioned to design the Cobbs Creek Apartments at 63rd and Chestnut Streets in West Philadelphia in 1926, the Kenwood Apartments (now known as the English Manor Apartments) at 243 West Tulpehocken Street in Germantown in 1928, and an unnamed apartment house at the corner of West Ellet and Cherokee Streets in Mount Airy in 1930 (now demolished). Although Overbrook Gardens is the only Spanish Colonial Revival apartment house known to have been designed by Fruchtbaum – Cobbs Creek and the Kenwood were designed in the Georgian and Tudor Revival styles, respectively – all three buildings share the same four-story, open courtyard arrangement. In addition to Cobbs Creek, Overbrook Gardens, and the Kenwood, it is possible that Fruchtbaum was involved in the design of five, adjoining four-story apartment buildings at the southwest corner of 61st and Nassau Streets, built in 1925 by Isaac Dozor, who was his client for Cobbs Creek and Overbrook Gardens. Unlike his subsequent apartment house commissions, however, this project is unusual in that the courtyards, relegated to the rear of the property, take on the aspect of an air shaft or light well rather than a usable, landscaped space.

¹⁹ Obituary for Morris Fruchtbaum, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 25, 1978; "Poly Diplomas to 56 Engineers," *The Brooklyn Times*, June 16, 1915; Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), accessed at https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/25826 on July 8, 2020.

²⁰ Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form for the Overbrook Gardens Apartments, BHP No. 052693 (1982).

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Fruchtbaum's other residential work consisted primarily of speculative rowhouse developments in various parts of the city. In 1925, for example, Fruchtbaum designed 25 houses on Mebus Street in the Northwood neighborhood of lower Northeast Philadelphia (**Figure 16**). The scheme for this development – alternating pairs of two-story, Tudor Revival houses with gabled roofs and Spanish Colonial Revival houses with clay tile roofs – is found on numerous other streets in the surrounding area, including F Street and Smylie Road north of Roosevelt Boulevard, suggesting that Fruchtbaum was frequently hired for such projects. The architect himself resided at 5114 Mebus Street for a brief period during early 1930s. The Spanish Colonial Revival treatment found in these working-class housing developments is the only other known instance of Fruchtbaum's utilization of the style.



Figure 11 – Morris Fruchtbaum-designed houses on Mebus Street in the Northwood neighborhood of Philadelphia (Google, 2019).

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Books and Articles:

Brown, Frank Chouteau. "Tendencies in Apartment House Design – Part VIII, Open Courtyard Types," in *Architectural Record* 51 (Feb 1922).

Hancock, John. "The Apartment House in Urban America." *Buildings and Society*. Anthony D. King, ed. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

Sexton, R.W. *American Apartment Houses of Today*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1926.

Starr, Kevin. *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Starr, Kevin. *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Weaver, W. Wallace. "West Philadelphia: A Study of Natural Social Areas." Doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1930.

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

Periodicals (Newspapers and Trade Journals)*:

Buildings and Building Management

Philadelphia Inquirer

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide (PRERBG)

*see footnotes for specific citations

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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): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ~0.5 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 39.978428 Longitude: -75.246734

2. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

3. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

4. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

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

The boundary of the property is shown as a dotted line on the accompanying map entitled "Overbrook Gardens: Site Plan with National Register Boundary."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed National Register Boundary conforms to the historic parcel and includes all remaining resources that were historically associated with Overbrook Gardens.

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Form Prepared By

name/title: Kevin McMahon, Associate
organization: Powers & Company, Inc.
street & number: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717
city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19107
e-mail: kevin@powersco.net
telephone: (215) 636-0192
date: October 19, 2020

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Overbrook Gardens Apartments

City or Vicinity: Philadelphia

County: Philadelphia

State: PA

Photographer: Robert Powers

Date Photographed: May 13, 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

<i>Photograph #</i>	<i>Description of Photograph</i>
1.	South elevation, looking north
2.	South elevation, looking northeast
3.	Courtyard, south elevation, looking north
4.	Courtyard, east elevation, looking west
5.	Courtyard, south and west elevations, looking northeast
6.	South and east elevations, looking northwest
7.	East elevation, looking west
8.	East elevation, entrance detail, looking west
9.	First floor, lobby, looking west
10.	First floor, lobby, looking east
11.	First floor, corridor, looking north
12.	First floor, stair, looking east
13.	First floor, apartment, looking west
14.	First floor, apartment, looking east
15.	Second floor, apartment, looking southwest
16.	Second floor, corridor, looking south
17.	Second floor, apartment, looking southeast
18.	Second floor, apartment, looking west
19.	Fire damage on fourth floor, looking southwest
20.	Fire damage on fourth floor, looking west
21.	Fire damage on fourth floor, looking northeast

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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 100 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.

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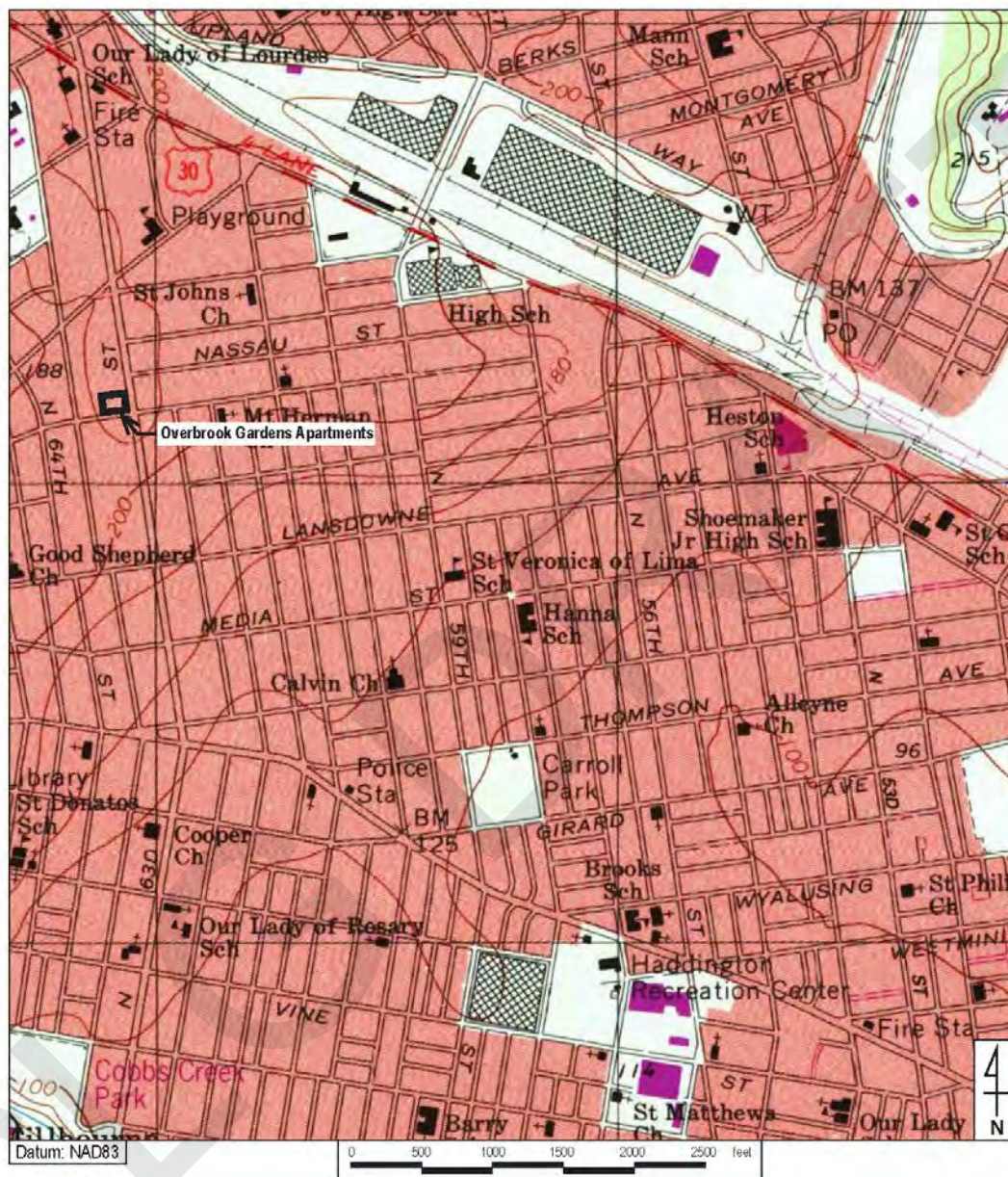
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<i>Figure #</i>	<i>Description of Figure</i>
12.	USGS Map – Philadelphia Quadrangle, New Jersey-Pennsylvania (1995)
13.	Site Plan with National Register Boundary and Photo Key
14.	Photograph Key – 1 st Floor
15.	Photograph Key – 2 nd Floor
16.	Photograph Key – 3 rd Floor

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USGS Map Excerpt - Philadelphia Quadrangle - Pennsylvania (1995)
Overbrook Gardens Apartments
900-904 N. 63rd Street
Philadelphia County, PA

Lat. Long.
39.978428 -75.246734

Figure 12 – USGS Map

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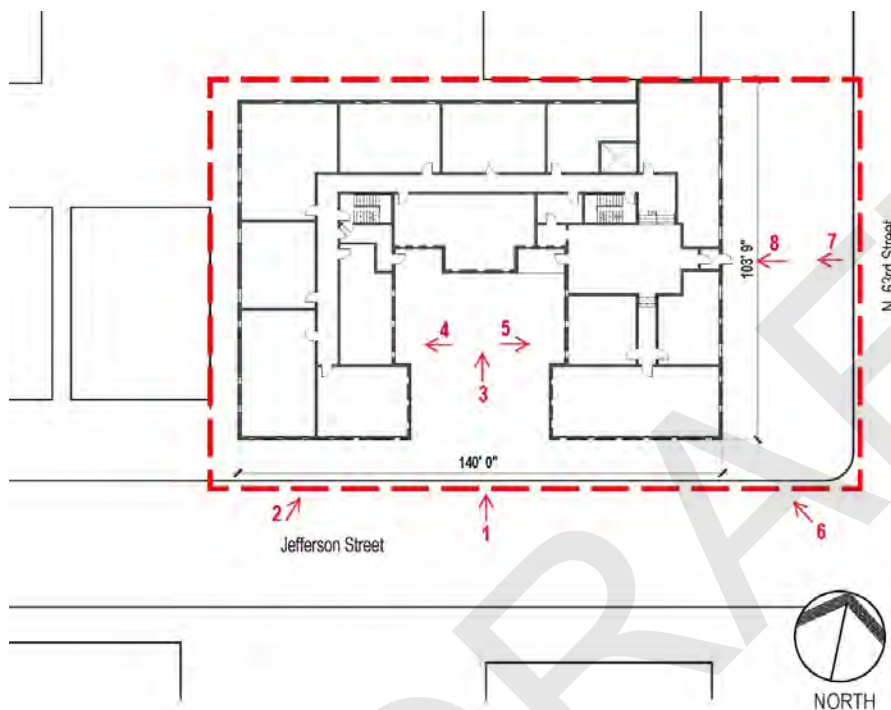


Figure 13 – Site Plan with NRN Boundary and Photo Key

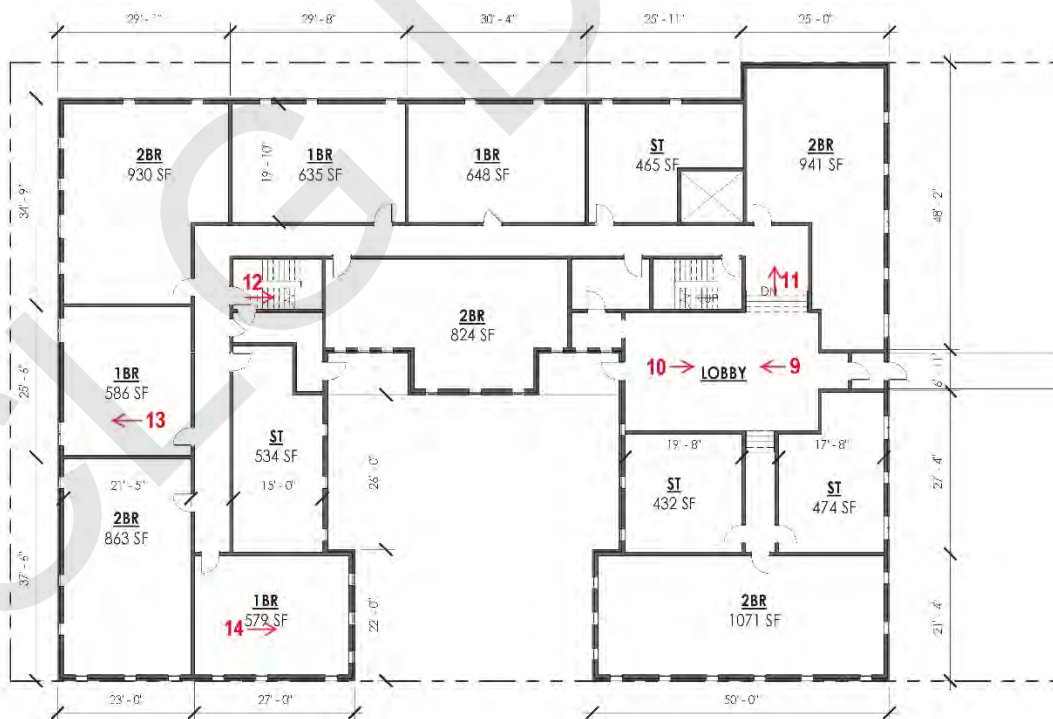


Figure 14 – First Floor Plan with Photo Key

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Figure 15 – Second Floor Plan with Photo Key (Third Floor similar)

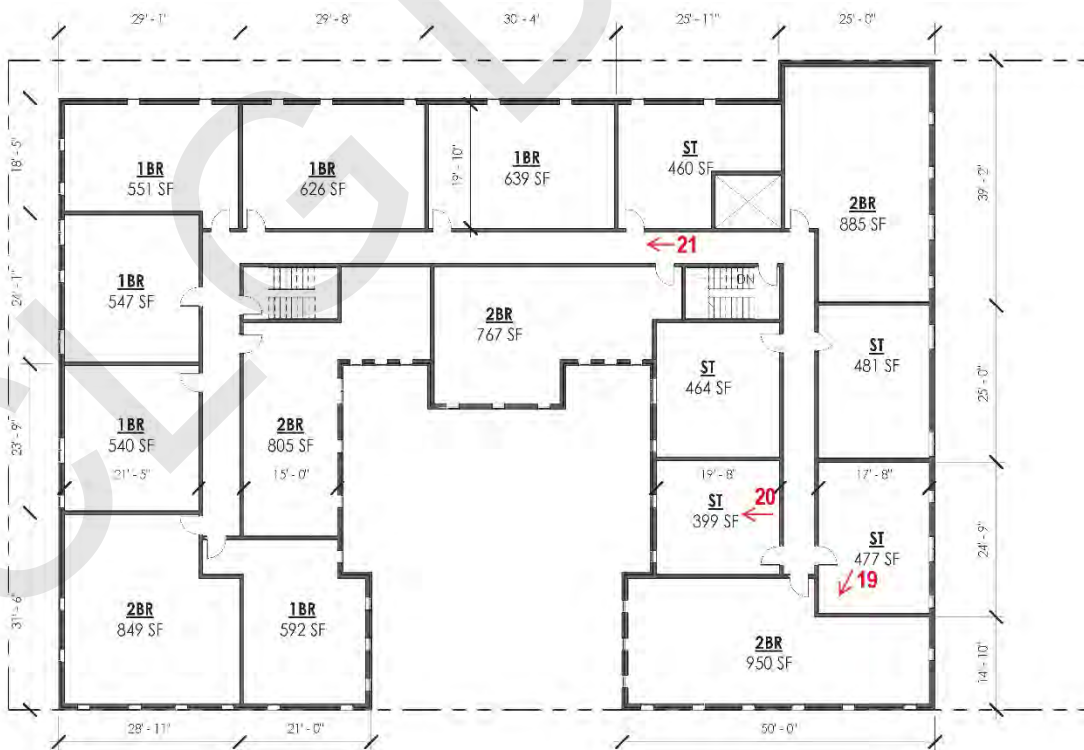


Figure 16 – Fourth Floor Plan with Photo Key