FHR-8-300 (11-78)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

[redacted]

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Talahi Improvements

and/or common Same

2. Location off U.S. 129

street & number Cherokee Boulevard, Iskagna Drive, Kenesaw Avenue, Keowee Drive Talahi Drive, Talliluna Avenue and Tugaloo Drive ___ not for publication

city, town Knoxville ___ vicinity of congressional district 2

state Tennessee code 047 county Knox code 093

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	X public	___ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
___ building(s)	___ private	X unoccupied	___ commercial	X park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
X site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	X yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	X transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Knoxville

street & number City Hall

city, town Knoxville ___ vicinity of state Tennessee 37902

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City of Knoxville Engineering Department

street & number 1400 Loraine Street

city, town Knoxville state Tennessee 37902

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historical and Architectural Survey has this property been determined elegible? ___ yes ___ no

date April 1978 ___ federal X state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Tennessee Historical Commission

city, town 4721 Trousdale Drive, Nashville state Tennessee 37220

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_X_ original site
___ good	___ ruins	_X_ altered	___ moved date _____
_X_ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Before the onset of their financial disaster, the developers of Talahi were able to complete a complex set of improvements for their eight-block, hundred-acre subdivision on the banks of the Tennessee River in west Knoxville, These included contoured streets, no less than eight pairs of lighted freestanding entrance pylons, two fountains, two types of monumental cast-stone benches, a handsomely fenced playground with two summer-houses, and an electric streetlight system repeating the modern motifs of the other elements. The naturally hilly setting was respected in their placement, and the light gray cast-stone flecked with black and white chips repeated the colors of the high bluffs across the river just southeast of the development. Each element employed stylized motifs intended to represent the Cherokee culture which once flourished in this area, rendered to suit a late twenties taste for linear abstraction and shallow planes.

Today these improvements maintain their integrity, little changed (except for their poor maintenance) from the vision of their buildres, with one ironic exception: their surrounding architecture. The adjacent houses (although sited as intended) were not built consistently in the "English, Early American and Colonial" styles which were to have been required, nor was the intended country club built on the river bank; its elaborate entrance leads nowhere.

The inprovements consisted of the following elements:

The streets. The fairly narrow, curbed, drained concrete streets, divided into boulevards on two streets (Cherokee Boulevard and part of Talahi Drive), were subtly curved, slightly depressed, and contoured to the hilly terrain. The intersections were widened to permit turning by buses, and there were three turning circles. A good instance of the thoughtful street design remains at the intersection at Iskagna and Keowee Drives, where each of the four approaches was given a short, streamlined right turn lane (matched by a nonfunctional lane to the left); there were no right angles in the paving or curbing. The design has not been altered but the streets have received many patchings and have been repaved with asphalt to the level of the curb on Cherokee Boulevard and Keowee and Kenesaw Avenues.

Freestanding pylons. The same design was repeated in eight pairs of lighted cast-stone pylons situated througout Talahi. A rectangular base was surmounted by three setbacks progressively smaller in mass, the whole being incised on four sides with geometric lines and topped by a stylized eight-legged spider (in homage to the Cherokee legend of the spider who brought fire to earth) which held up an electrified globe. Additional embellishments included low relief crossed ellipses on the base, a vertical panel of incised chevrons and lozenges capped by a projecting arrow on each face of the first set-back, and the incised word "TALAHI" on the second setback. All original globes have been replaced. One pylon, on the north side of the south lane of Talahi Drive, is missing; and two, on Cherokee Boulevard, are partly obscured by modern traffic signs.

Median benches. This characteristic pylon was also incorporated into the design of each of two matching lighted median benches (one at either entrance on Cherokee Boulevard), where it was flanked by attached seating, enclosed by a streamlined chair arm decorated with a low relief six-pointed star. The northernmost of these benches is being damaged by a tree growing nearby.

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Sunhouse Fountain. Located on Cherokee Boulevard one tenth of a mile beyond the first entrance into Talhi, where the axis of the Talahi Drive improvements intersected with the boulevard, was a fountain which would have provided considerable drama at the entrance to the proposed country club. The Sunhouse Fountain (the name derived from a Cherokee legend) was a large, low circular cast-stone work of twelve bays in the center of a turning circle. Each post was incised with a sunburst and surmounted by a bronze frog which arced water toward the fountain's center, where a single jet spurted upward. The frogs have disappeared, their plumbing has been capped with cement fill, and the fountain is not presently operable as designed.

Curved benches. The fountain's circular design was echoed in two nearly matching pairs of monumental curved benches on the east and west sides of Cherokee Boulevard, which ended at their centers in attached lighted pylons of characteristic design. Each bench was embossed with fretwork. The shorter, west benches (each segment being three bays long) introduced the vista toward the Panther Fountain's obelisk. The longer, east benches (each segment being six bays long), began the vista toward the planned clubhouse on the river bank. The west pair terminated at the outer ends with low rectangular arms topped by shallow dome-like shapes, while the east pair was closed with yet two more attached lighted pylons. The west benches led into what was to have been a boxwood maze.

The clubhouse entrance was further developed by descents of four steps each in two modest terraces leading eastward toward the river. On the lower terrace the east-west axis was intersected with a short perpendicular axis closed by four small cast-stone post-and-lintel benches at either end, backed by semicircular plantings of five hemlocks. Each bench was embossed on either end with fretwork. Today one bench has collapsed (its missing post is in the next yard), and one has been extensively eroded.

Papoose Park. Located along the east-west axis of the Cherokee-Talahi intersection, in the median of Talahi Drive, was a rectangular greensward, enclosed by a shoulder high cast-stone and iron fence, entered at midpoint on either side of the long dimension through high iron gates. Each gate had a stylized thunderbird centered in a geometric design. The chamfered east end of the park (eight bays in length, with attached summerhouses in each corner and four bays across the end) was more elaborate than the west end, which was of the same length but had no summerhouses or chamfering. Each cast-stone fence post was embossed with a tumbled fret, and each length of fencing had a repeated thunderbird motif.

The three-bay summerhouses provided shelter and built-in seating beneath their steeply-pitched roofs. The gable ends and upper walls of each house were enclosed only by rustic stained wooden fretwork. The bargeboards were incised with a scrolled design. The woodwork in considerably weathered. At either entrance to each house, two elements which were at one time attached to the posts between the tie-beam and

the stone floor (which is two steps above grade) are missing. The ghosts indicate that the missing parts measured four by six inches.

The most serious intrusions in Papoose Park are the substantial trees growing at either end of the rectangle. These are barriers to the intended vista between the two fountains and, more seriously, their roots and trunks are destroying the fence. One post has been repaired with no attempt to replicate its original material or form.

Panther Fountain. The east-west axis concluded at the point where Talahi Drive was divided into two streets, one tenth of a mile east of Cherokee Boulevard. Placed there was a smaller but more elaborate circular cast-stone fountain culminating, after a series of setbacks of various geometric shapes, in an obelisk which had a six-pointed star in low relief at its base. The water came from four panther heads (from the Cherokee legend of the underground panther) located midway down the central shaft, poured into four simple urns, and trickled down the stepped forms into the pool. The fountain was surrounded by six post-and-lintel benches. Today this fountain's plumbing scarcely works at all, and there have been some erosions in the cast-stone, as well as inadequate repairs to some of the erosions.

Light standards. Along every street in Talahi (with their wiring run underground) there were replications of a cast-stone electric lamp post consistent in design with the motifs elsewhere employed. The circular base underwent a series of sensitive modulations including zigzags and fluting as it rose toward the globe. All globes have been replaced; of the original posts fifty-four remain (close to the original number). At intersections these also served as signposts; three still bear their original signs.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	_X_ community planning	_X_ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	___ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
_X_ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

Specific dates 1929 **Builder/Architect** See below

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

"The most aesthetically designed subdivision that Knoxville had ever seen" was opened to sales in the spring of 1929. Talahi harmonize "an Indian past, a technical future, and a natural forest setting." It was an attempt in which its "visionary" developer, Robert L. Foust--who based his ideas on the Druid Hills development in Baltimore, Maryland--spared no expense in trying to offer Knoxville something which turned out to be "beyond the scope and imagination of East Tennessee people" (in the words of a business associate). Since that time, however, this unique ensemble has become an intensely-used if inadequately maintained recreational amenity in the heart of what is now thought of simply as Sequoyah Hills, a coveted residential section. A large, hilly area bounded by the Tennessee River on the south and Kingston Pike on the north was annexed to Knoxville in 1916. Its development was begun in 1925 by E.V. Ferrel, a North Carolinian, who named the section Sequoyah Hills and its chief artery Cherokee Boulevard. The surburb had underground utilities, streets banked to discourage fast automobile traffic, and a rather ordinary stone entrance. (Plans for a bronze statue of Sequoyah at the entrance were dropped when it was learned that the cost would be $10,000). Sequoyah Hills developed rapidly; some fifty lots had been sold before the stock market crash, and sewer contracts in the amount of $80,000 were let in Sequoyah Hills in 1927.

In 1926, Robert L. Foust, a partner in the real estate firm of Alex McMillan Company, bought a riverside parcel of one hundred acres adjacent to the Sequoyah Hills development. Also associated with him in Talahi, the Mutual Development Company, were Knoxvillians Paul King, chief engineer, and Walter Brooks of Sehorn and Kennedy, consulting engineers; E.S. Draper of Charlotte and Atlanta, consulting engineers; and Southern Landscape Planners, Inc., Nashville, landscape architects and designers. Alex McMillan Company was the agent for sales.

The undertaking reflected several influences which came together in Knoxville in the twenties, including planned development, the automobile, increased interest in recreation, a rediscovery of Cherokee culture, and modern design.

The tradition of the landscaped suburb dates from Frederick Law Olmsted's 1869 plan for Riverside, Illinois, a Chicago suburb which had a deliberately rural atmosphere with large lots, picturesque vistas, common recreational areas, and curved, depressed roadways which preserved the natural lay of the land. Six decades later, development of a parcel of land as a planned subdivision was still relatively new to Knoxvillians. Planning itself was new to them: the city's three-year-old planning commission presented its first zoning proposal in July 1928, designed to promote "orderly growth, healthfulness and beauty." The proposal included a map showing most of the city as a rigid grid, intensely developed, with only one area within the city limits (the Sequoyah-Talahi area) having both markedly contoured streets and land use restricted to single-family house on lots of no less than five thousand square feet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Fletcher, Robert J. "A Historical Perspective of Talahi: Knoxville's First Planned Subdivision Development." Unpublished MS, 1969. Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knoxville-Knox County Public Library

[Foust, Robert L.]. Talahi. Knoxville: Mutual Development Company, [1929]. Calvin McClung Historical Collection, Knoxville-Knox County Public Library.

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreage of nominated property 18, approximately

Quadrangle name Knoxville, Tennessee Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	17	233340	3980980
B	17	233420	3980370
C	17	232630	3980400
D	17	232380	3981000
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the property nominated is shown as the red line on the accompanying tax assessment maps, entitled "Knoxville, Knox County, No. 108-P" and "Knoxville, Knox County, No. 122-A," both of which are drawn at a scale of 100 feet to the inch. The nominated property consists of

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Taylor, Adjunct Instructor of History

organization History Department, Middle Tennessee State University date April 1978

street & number telephone

city or town Murfreesboro state Tennessee 37130

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Haye

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission date 10/11/79

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Sally G. Oldham date 12/26/79

Keeper of the National Register Chief of Regis

Attest: Kristin O'Connell date 12/12/79

~~Chief of Registration~~

GPO 938 835

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The automobile, a means of nightly escape from the city where one's living, greatly influenced Talahi. In announcing his real estate development, Foust noted his era's automobile transportation,interest in golf, shorter work hours, longer vacations and desire to avoid the "discomfort of congested city life." Talahi was offered to those "who insist upon and can afford the best" and want to live in a place where "all the ugliness of city life has been shut out." Talahi's lighted concrete streets were made thick to withstand years of traffic, and intersections were designed to accommodate buses. Foust intended to require all houses built in Talahi to have garages which faced away from the street and driveways which harmonized with "the general color scheme."

Foust was much taken with the area's ancient oaks, the river and its bluffs, the native dogwood and wildflowers. These were to be enhanced by the common recreational spaces, something Knoxville badly needed in the twenties. Before Talahi, Knoxville had only .11 square miles devoted to parks and playgrounds. In addition to the improved spaces, riverside land for a clubhouse and playing fields and a hillside wildflower garden were to be held back for five years.

The improvements were designed to evoke through symbolism the time when "Chief Sequoyah and his Cherokees roamed its woods and marveled at its tinted beauty." Foust wanted his suburbanite "to be filled with satisfaction as he dreams of Indian romance with his feet on concrete pavement." Indian names were given to the streets: Talahi, Iskagna, Kenesaw, Keowee, Taliluna, and Tugaloo.

The choice of a Cherokee motif for Talahi came from the precedent of the naming of Sequoyah Hills and its Cherokee Boulevard, the evidence of Indian habitation given by the mound located .4 miles south of Talahi, and the contemporaneous efforts toward preservation of the Great Smoky Mountains near Knoxville as a national park. The Indian symbols were suitable for transformation into the stylized linear abstractions popularized by the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs held in Paris in 1925, from which the name Art Deco is taken. For this style to appear as the choice of a real estate developer in Knoxville, Tennessee, within so few years, speaks of a conscious effort to be up-to-date.

The lavish tone of Foust's development was announced by the handsome booklet published in 1929 to promote the subdivision. It was bound in leatherette embossed and printed on the cover in gold, with each vellum page printed on one side only. The edition was limited to one thousand copies numbered and inscribed with the names of the recipients. On the improvements themselves, the developers spent over $3000 per lot, in contrast to the standard practice for Knoxville developers at the time to spend only $500 per lot for these.

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Lot size and shape grew out of the hilly contours of the land, so that each lot would be "complete within itself" yet part of "one vast park." Each house was to have been of unique yet conforming design, with a picturesque roofline and careful siting. (Foust apparently saw no conflict in the generally modern style of the improvements and the quaintness he preferred for the houses). Beginning in 1931, the landowners were to have been assessed annually to maintain the amenities, including the cost of the water for the fountains.

The intended architectural standards and maintenance liability were never written into the deeds in Talahi. Even before the Crash, only one lot had been sold, the one at 940 Cherokee Boulevard, bought by Dr. Walter S. Nash. Sequoyah Hills, where lots sold for $4000, below the $4000-$10,000 price range of Talahi's lots, had already taken Talahi's market. By the fall of 1929, a committee of local bondholders was attempting to salvage the bankrupt company with new bonds. With the Depression, these fell to fifteen cents on the dollar, and at one time in the thirties lots in Talahi sold for $600. In September 1933, Foust committed suicide.

On every available lot in Talahi (including, lin 1977, the wildflower garden), houses have been built over the past fifty years, at various levels of architectural effort. The Tennessee Valley Authority's prohibition against building on the flood plain of Fort Loudoun Lake (as this part of the Tennessee River is now known) has preserved the riverside recreational areas as softball diamonds. Cherokee Boulevard has become a jogger's track. The Dogwood Trails, begun in 1955, bring lines of automobiles to the streets of Talahi every April as part of a city-wide system for viewing the flowering dogwood. Through "visionary" planning and lavish use of landscape architecture, the recreational value and natural beauty of Talahi were maintained during its suburban development. Talahi is unique in Knoxville and in its use of Cherokee symbols rendered in Art Deco style for the purpose of enhancing real estate development in the twenties--is probably unique in this country.

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the streets, rights-of-way, and public park owned by the city of Knoxville. No privately owned property is included since all houses were constructed after the collapse of the Mutual Development Company in the early 1930s.