

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 Property

Historic name: Town Center East  
Other names/site number: Town Center Plaza East, Town Center Plaza Apartments (East), Waterfront Tower (1101 3<sup>rd</sup> St, SW), and 1001 at Waterfront Tower (1001 3<sup>rd</sup> St, SW)  
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 1001 and 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW including courtyard between and parking lots  
City or town: Washington, D.C. State: DC County: \_\_\_\_\_  
Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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 X 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 X 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 X local  
Applicable National Register Criteria:  
X A \_\_\_ B X C \_\_\_ D

David Maloney / DC SHPO 25 Nov 2013  
Signature of certifying official/Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
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

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**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:)

*John Edison H. Ball*  
Signature of the Keeper

*1-15-24*  
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

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>          </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete, Steel, Glass, Aluminum

### 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.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

Town Center East, also historically known as Town Center Plaza East, consists of two apartment buildings at 1001 and 1101 Third Street SW, the grassy and paved courtyard space between them, and the parking lots on its north and south boundaries. Town Center East is the eastern part of what was conceived as the "Town Center Plaza" mixed-use superblock. The twin apartment buildings and their sites mirror those of Town Center West, located three blocks to the west at the opposite side of the original development plan. Although Town Center Plaza was not fully implemented as designed and has lost its original shopping mall, the residential apartment complexes at Town Center East and Town Center West were constructed and both still stand today. It is Town Center East, however, that is the subject of this nomination.

Constructed between 1960 and 1961, Town Center East was designed by I.M. Pei as a residential complex which functioned as a module within the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan for the redevelopment of Southwest Washington. These matching buildings exemplify modernism's principles of functionalism, with their façade's bold visual expression of structural elements such as columns and slabs, and clarity of form, provided by their strong, unadorned lines, and planes of smooth concrete and vast expanses of glass. Their courtyard provides an element of open space essential to Pei's composition, as well as a highly functional stage for the social life of the complex.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

Besides accommodating residents' automobiles, the parking lots at the site's north and south boundaries provide a portal through which the buildings' apartments receive light and air, as well as a view that integrates them with the surrounding community. Although the southeast apartment tower has been renovated with energy efficient glazing and the courtyard no longer maintains its original landscaping, Town Center East retains its essential historic integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

## Narrative Description

Located in Square 0542, the Town Center East site contains two modernist apartment towers, an intervening courtyard, and asphalt parking lots at its north and south boundaries. Although the buildings have addresses on Third Street SW, their longer axes, which contain their main entrances, run east-west, paralleling K and M Streets SW. As a result, the buildings appear to stand at right angles to Third Street, which provides street frontage for the courtyard. The apartment building at 1101 Third Street (the southeast building) is separated from M Street SW by the parking lot to its south, while 1001 Third Street (the northeast building) is separated from K Street SW by the parking lot to its north.

### 1101 Third Street SW

Exterior Description: The apartment building at 1101 Third Street SW has eight residential floors set upon *pilotis* above a first-story lobby level. The building is constructed of smooth-finished, poured-in-place concrete, but has walls of windows above the first story, whereby ten bays of large glazed areas are bounded within aluminum trim. The main entrance to its first story, which is devoted to a community room, elevator lobby, front desk, and storage space, is recessed between *pilotis*, through glass double doors in the middle of the south façade, while a matching entrance on the north façade gives access to the courtyard. These main doorways are flanked by rectangular full-height glass panels separated by vertical metal dividers. Most of the glass wall panels are hung with translucent drapes, but there is enough unobstructed glass to permit a view from the south entrance doors through the lobby and the north entrance doors into the courtyard, creating a sense of permeability and a unity of interior and exterior space. The east and west walls of the recessed first story to either side of the glazed entry doors are laid in beige brick. The brick walls wrap around the corners of the buildings to the east and west end walls. Secondary entrances consisting of a single door beneath a glass single-pane transom are located on-center of these end walls. On the west elevation, the door has been filled in with brick, although its outline is visible and its transom remains.

Twenty-six *pilotis* (ten on the long elevations and three on the end walls) support the upper floors of the building and form its outer perimeter. A loggia at the first story, created by the first story walls being recessed from the *pilotis*, is approximately fifteen feet deep and wraps around the entire building. Together, the *pilotis* support the horizontal beams that extend around the building and support its upper stories. The *pilotis* intersect the beams with curved chamfered angles, rather than right-angle ones, adding a delicacy to the structure. The glazed corners of the upper stories which are cantilevered beyond the *pilotis* appear to project unsupported into space,

Town Center East

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

making for a complex and visually intriguing geometry. The floor of the loggia is covered with ceramic tile. While it appears that it was originally possible to walk the full perimeter of the building within the loggia, wrought iron security fences now prevent passage on the east and west elevations. On the west side of the building, a stairwell which apparently provides access to the basement is situated beneath the loggia. Its original location presumably matched that of a similar stairwell situated between the northeast building and the property's west boundary, a space which at the southeast building is now occupied by a driveway for the courtyard parking area.

The building's upper stories are highly symmetrical. Each story is delineated by ten bays of horizontal bands of windows. The bays are formed by alternating pairs of wide and narrow double-paned windows, vertically arranged in tiers, and wrapping all four facades. Each of the larger windows consists of two matching plate glass panes with a center metal divider, which is surrounded by an aluminum-colored metal strip and inset in the façade. Each pair of narrow windows is separated from the adjoining pair of wide windows by a concrete column and centered above the *pilotis*. A pair of large windows wraps each corner, with a pane on each façade and its central divider at the corner creating a de-materialized corner that enhances the floating aspect of the building.

Above the windows of the uppermost, or eighth, apartment floor, a slightly-angled cornice band cuts in to a flat section of façade about three feet high, which is topped by a continuous aluminum-colored metal strip. Starting with the seventh apartment floor, each window band is topped by the scalloped edge of the slab that forms the floor of the story of the building above. From a protruding upper edge, this cornice-like edge curves inward and then outward to form the top of the story's extruded window band. These varying surface planes create interplay of light and shadow that changes the appearance of the façade under differing light conditions. Like the windows themselves, the concrete corners of the building are sharply and precisely defined, creating a strong profile line. Mechanical structures are located on the roof of the building.

Interior Description: The interior of 1101 Third Street SW has been renovated, but retains its historic configuration of space and circulation. The entry doors on the south, M Street elevation, open into a central lobby with doors on the opposing side leading out to the courtyard. The lobby thus offers a light-filled space where interior and exterior are merged. The interior lobby has been fully renovated with new marble floors and a paneled partition wall separating the lobby from a sitting room. A bank of elevators provides access to the apartment floors, each of which consists of a long corridor with individual apartments opening off the corridor to either the north or south side of the building, and at the east and west ends. The apartments vary in size from efficiencies to three bedrooms, but all defined by the banks of plate glass windows and their expansive views.

### **1001 Third Street SW**

The apartment building at 1001 Third Street SW is the northeast building, built as a twin to 1101 Third Street in 1960-61. The building remains identical to its twin in most respects. One difference is that the northeast tower's main entrance has a single glass door, with a glass panel

Town Center East

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

holding a callbox replacing its mate. There is a blue canopy with the building's name mounted on the façade above the front entrance.

The northeast tower retains its characteristic elements, including the smooth-finished concrete façade; loggia with open arches formed by piloti, and extruded window bands. Although the southeast building has been retrofitted with modern glazing, the northeast building retains most of its original glazing, with a small number of large single pane windows replaced by double-pane inserts. The most apparent differences from the retrofitted glazing used in the southeast building is that, in the northeast building, the metallic band around the panes appears slightly narrower and the glass slightly less reflective and lighter in color. The original glazing also appears to rest slightly deeper in the window aperture. The small paired windows at 1001 Third Street SW, which open inward, bear their original window guards, which are simple metallic rail and picket grilles which rise about one quarter of the way up the window panes. They were presumably no longer required at the southeast building, where the retrofitted windows open outwards to a limited angle.

### **The Courtyard**

The courtyard landscape, designed by Zion & Breen Associates, was historically a fairly minimal square with paving around its edge and into the center of which was planted a large, green circle. Marching across this landscaped circle was an east-west double line of street trees retained from or replaced as necessary to evoke the closed K Street and to set up a cross axis for circulation to the shopping center. Over the years, this scheme has been replaced by a rectangular green space between the buildings but shifted nearer the street, as a 1990s surface parking lot occupies the rear or western portion of the original court.

Today, the courtyard is a wide rectangular open space bounded on the south by the north side of 1101 Third Street SW and on the north by the south side of 1001 Third Street SW. A construction fence defines the courtyard's west border, while its east border is the wall that separates it from the sidewalk along Third Street SW. On its west side, an area equal to approximately one-quarter of the courtyard has been paved to serve as a parking area, which is accessed by a driveway on the west side of the southeast tower. At this time, a temporary fence separates the parking area and driveway from the construction site to the west.

The remainder of the courtyard is planted as a lawn, with interspersed patterned plantings of trees and small shrubs. A metal fence with vertical pickets runs south from the south side of 1001 Third Street SW to intersect a similar fence running east-west along the former axis of L Street SW to the boundary wall that parallels Third Street SW on the east. The east-west fence divides the green space into common areas associated with each of the apartment buildings. The north-south fence section separates the parking lot from the green area adjacent to the northeast tower, but there is no fence between the parking lot and the green space adjacent to the southeast tower. A row of small trees and evergreen shrubs lines these fences. A boundary wall, built of beige brick and topped with a short metal picket fence, adjoins the green fence that closes off street access to the loggia of 1101 Third Street SW and a section of metal fence that adjoins the low brick wall that performs the same function for the northeast tower.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

The courtyard is programmed for active social use. The space adjacent to the northeast tower contains an ensemble of modernist metal lawn furniture. The space adjacent to the southeast tower includes a wood pergola on a concrete pad. Both areas contain concrete walkways that link the courtyard space to the building's loggia, which serve as veranda-like spaces that mediate between the building interior and the outdoor landscape of the courtyard.

### **The Parking Lots**

Town Center East has two outer parking lots. The south lot separates 1101 Third Street from M Street SW and the north lot separates 1001 Third Street from K Street SW. Landscaped strips of green space on either side of a central walk separate each lot from the building it borders. The south lot is separated from M Street by a metal picket fence set on a brick base, and from Third Street by segments of brick wall interspersed with sections of metallic "green fence" planted with flowering vines. On its north and east sides, the north lot is bounded by a metal picket fence. The driveway to the paved parking area of the courtyard connects with the northwest corner of the south lot. A temporary fence bounds the west border of the south lot and courtyard, separating them from the adjacent construction area. The west boundary of the north lot is unfenced.

Although the historical site plan does not appear to show a fence, the parking lots still follow the general scheme, with a pair of parking spaces divided by a planted median that runs east-west. The site plan shows automobile driveways connecting to the street near each lot's west and northeast corners. The northeast driveways to Third Street SW are not present at this time.

### **Integrity**

Although the southeast apartment building has been sympathetically renovated with energy efficient glazing and the courtyard no longer has its original landscaping, Town Center East retains its essential historic integrity in location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Other than the window replacement, the two apartment building blocks have not undergone any significant exterior alterations or additions. The interiors, though renovated, retain the original plan and circulation patterns with apartments benefitting from the large expanse of windows to allow for light filled spaces. The courtyard still devotes most of its space to lawn and patterned plantings of ornamental trees and shrubs. Added elements such as fencing and the pergola are small in scale and impermanent in character. The courtyard still exercises its original functions as a space for social interaction, aesthetic contemplation, light and air for the apartment buildings, and an aesthetic element in Pei's design as a space balancing the masses of the apartment buildings. It thus retains its essential character despite some modifications. The parking lots still reflect their original design scheme and continue as spaces serving their original functions as automobile parking and light and air portals.



Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

## 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

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1960-1961

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1960-1961

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

I.M. Pei, Architect  
Zion, Breen (Robert L. Zion), Landscape Designers  
Webb & Knapp (William Zeckendorf), Developer  
Blake Construction Company, Builder

\_\_\_\_\_

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**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.)

Town Center East is a two-building apartment complex built 1960-1961 within the much larger "Town Center Plaza" mixed-use superblock. The twin, nine-story buildings and their sites are mirrored by those of "Town Center West", erected 1961-1962 on 6th Street, three blocks to the west and at the opposite edge of the original development plan. The two complexes flanked a retail center around what is now 4th Street. The north end of the Town Center Plaza superblock also includes two churches and a public library along the south side of I Street.

Both apartment complexes, and the entire Town Center Plaza, were planned by I.M. Pei and his subordinates while Pei was still leading the in-house design team for Webb & Knapp, New York developer William Zeckendorf's real estate development firm. In 1954, Washington's Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) granted Zeckendorf an exclusive-rights agreement to construct much of the Southwest Redevelopment Area. Following several versions of plans for Southwest, Pei—with assistance from Harry Weese, and influenced by the latest "Justement-Smith Plan"—laid out his ideal plan for the area in 1956, including L'Enfant Plaza, a reimagined waterfront, and a mixed-used town center. The plan changed over time, with elements never built and others changed dramatically. Still, Pei's Town Center Plaza block would ultimately include the elements he anticipated for a proper civic center: residential towers, green public space, a library, churches, and the shopping area. Downtown retail interests, however, had guaranteed that the RLA would permit only a supermarket and medium-sized specialty stores in the shopping center.

Actual construction bogged down for years, as the RLA negotiated with Zeckendorf over the share each would bear of the land acquisition, preparation, and carrying costs. Meanwhile, Webb & Knapp was suffering the effects of its overexpansion and falling profits, and it had to shed many of its properties, leaving Zeckendorf and Pei in control of only the Town Center Plaza block. By 1960, the Pei plan for this module had changed markedly, with the two huge, twin apartment blocks envisioned running parallel to 3rd and 6th Streets replaced by the not-as-long, perpendicular apartments of Town Center East and Town Center West. It was a much more symmetrical site plan, containing courtyards between the buildings that would open onto the shopping area at one end. As it happened, Webb & Knapp would erect only an initial building of the shopping center, on the east side of 4th Street, plus the east and west apartment buildings. After the departure of Pei from Webb & Knapp in 1961, and the sale of Zeckendorf's interests, the plan for the Town Center continued to evolve, with taller apartment towers erected athwart the axis between the Town Center East and West and the shopping center. The retail center itself was not completed until the early 1970s, a couple years after 4th Street was closed.

The subject of this National Register nomination, Town Center East, consists of the apartment buildings at 1001 and 1101 Third Street SW, their joined courtyard area (grassy and paved), and the parking lots on the north and south. Town Center East meets National Register Criteria A and C. The property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the rationalist school of the

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

International Style and is a high-quality example of the architectural use of reinforced-concrete designed by an acknowledged master, i.e., under the direction of Ieoh-Ming Pei. Town Center East is important as one of Washington's best examples of mid-century Modernism, and certainly among the best in Southwest. No matter the identity of the lead architect, it is a significant early work of the Pei firm, one of the major planners of Southwest, D.C.

The property is also significant as one of the earliest and most distinguished components of the Southwest Redevelopment Area, one of the most extensive and thorough urban renewal efforts in the nation. The building of Town Center East contributed significantly to the development of both the Southwest quadrant and the District of Columbia.

Town Center West, though not included in this nomination since it is located three blocks west and is non-contiguous to Town Center East, would also be considered eligible for listing in the National Register.

The Period of Significance for Town Center East begins in 1960 with the construction of the apartment buildings and ends in 1961 at their completion.

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

**Architecture:** The Town Center East site is significant in the Areas of Architecture and Community Planning and Development. The Town Center East is an important work by I.M. Pei, among the most prominent architects in the world. With the possible exception of Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Pei is the architect who exerted the greatest influence on the redevelopment of Southwest Washington. His role began with the formulation of the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan in 1954-56, and continued through the construction of Town Center East and West and two office buildings designed by his firm at L'Enfant Plaza. Constructed at the same time as the single family Slayton House, Town Center East was Pei's first large project erected in the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

Town Center East is among Washington's most influential and outstanding examples of modernist multi-unit residential architecture. It exemplifies modernism's functionalist principles, whereby the buildings' bold visual expression of structural elements such as columns, beams and slabs is clearly exposed on the façades. The buildings achieve clarity of form through their austere geometry, crisp, unadorned lines, and strong planes. They celebrate "truth in materials" through their artistic use of such industrial materials as concrete, glass, and aluminum in ways that bring out innate qualities of finish without any attempt at disguising their nature. The compositional integration of the buildings with the courtyard achieves a unity of interior and exterior space through an opposition of mass and void.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pei-designed Slayton House on Ordway Street NW, was completed in August 1960 or shortly thereafter. See John Willmann. "Asiatic Split Level. Tri-Arch House Being Completed in District," *Washington Post*, August 20, 1960, B1.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

Town Center East also presents high aesthetic values. I.M. Pei's architecture has been described as not simply the design of buildings but the creation of compositions in space which seamlessly blend landscape and structural forms. Town Center East's buildings are sometimes said to have a "floating quality" because of Pei's *pilotis* that support the buildings' mass while exposing their glass-walled lobbies through arched openings. In turn, the glass lobby walls and the loggia created by the widely spaced *pilotis* integrate interiors with the exterior world, both by providing a sheltered area mediating between courtyard and building and presenting a view from the M Street entrance through the lobby into the courtyard. The sleek, "glass-like" finish of the buildings' concrete frames, which complements its expansive glazed areas, was achieved by innovative construction techniques requiring plywood forms coated with plastic laminate. Other observers have commented on the way in which these smooth-textured surfaces capture the colors of the sky and change appearance radically in the course of a day.

The high quality of the complex's design is illustrated by the awards it has received. In January 1964, the Town Center Plaza received a Federal Housing Administration First Honor Award for Residential Design.<sup>2</sup> The American Institute of Arts and Letters mentioned the Town Center project among the accomplishments for which it bestowed the 1963 Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize on Pei.<sup>3</sup> The previous seven winners of this prestigious award, given to "an architect of any nationality who has made a contribution to architecture as an art," had been Louis Kahn, Edward Larabee Barnes, Paul Rudolph, John Carl Warnecke, John Yeon, and Gordon Bunshaft."<sup>4</sup> The Brunner Prize was the first major architectural award received by Pei, who has since received every honor his profession offers, including the AIA Gold Medal (1979) and the Pritzker Architecture Prize (1983).<sup>5</sup>

May 2011 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the southeast building's opening, thereby making the building eligible for consideration for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In order to "avoid use of the National Register listing to endorse the work or reputation of a living person," the National Parks Service (NPS) discourages the nomination of properties whose designers are still alive. However, I.M. Pei, the last of the great modernists, holds a unique stature among the world's preeminent architectural masters. Although Pei has enjoyed a creative old age, his productive life as an architect and designer is generally behind him and well acknowledged. Indeed, the National Park Service has recognized Pei's stature as a master in the District of Columbia through listing in the National Register of his William L. Slayton House (1960). Further, Pei's National Gallery of Art East Building, one of his penultimate achievements, is listed as a contributing building in the National Register of Historic Places designation for the National Mall.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rasa Gustaitis. "FHA Honor Awards for Design Go to 14 U.S. Residential Projects," *Washington Post*, January 6, 1964, A1.

<sup>3</sup> Antoinette J. Lee. "Southwest Quadrant," in Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee. *Buildings of the District of Columbia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 244.

<sup>4</sup> *Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize*, at website of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, online at [www.artsandletters.org/awards2\\_popup.php?abbrev=brunner](http://www.artsandletters.org/awards2_popup.php?abbrev=brunner), viewed April 25, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> *I.M. Pei - Biography*, Pei Cobb Freed and Partners website, accessed online at <http://www.pcf-p.com/a/f/fme/imp/b/b.html> on April 26, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> United States Department Of The Interior, National Park Service. *National Register Of Historic Places*

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**Community Planning and Development:** Town Center East is significant in the Area of Community Planning and Development as an integral part of the Southwest Washington redevelopment project. The Southwest Redevelopment project exerted enormous influence on the development of urban planning in Washington, DC, and, as the largest such program in the United States at the time of its inception, provided a national model for urban renewal. Town Center East is an intact module from the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan, which guided Southwest redevelopment from before its formal acceptance in 1956 through the construction of the Town Center buildings in 1960-61. Its development illustrates the evolution of the redevelopment plan as it passed through the process of implementation.

### **The National Significance of the Southwest Washington, DC Redevelopment Program**

The redevelopment of Southwest Washington was the largest urban renewal project in the United States at the time of its inception. It served as a model for the national urban renewal effort, a program formalized during the Eisenhower Administration<sup>7</sup> and backed with unprecedented levels of federal funding by the Kennedy Administration.<sup>8</sup> In fact, William L. Slayton, the former vice-president of the Webb & Knapp real estate company who had overseen the firm's Southwest redevelopment project activities, served as United States Commissioner of Urban Renewal during the Kennedy Administration and early years of the Johnson Administration.

The development of Southwest's modernist component communities had far more than local influence. In *Best Addresses*, architectural historian James Goode, a critic of Southwest redevelopment, conceded that "[f]or all their drawbacks, the many apartment houses in Southwest constitute the most important urban renewal project in the country."<sup>9</sup> In *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, Antoinette Lee, one of Washington's preeminent architectural historians concluded that:

Although the developers and architects undertook similar projects in other American cities, such as Hyde Park in Chicago, none has surpassed the comprehensiveness of the Southwest Washington Redevelopment Area. With its new high-rise and town house residential clusters, shopping centers, office structures, parks, and cultural facilities, the

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*Inventory Nomination Form – National Mall.* (May 19, 1981), accessed online at [pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/66000031.pdf](http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/66000031.pdf), viewed April 10, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> "The Eisenhower administration ... devis[ed] the concept of 'urban renewal,' a program recommended by the President's Advisory Committee on Housing in late 1953 and introduced to Congress in his "Housing Message" of January 25, 1954." Arnold R. Hirsch. *The Last And Most Difficult Barrier: Segregation and Federal Housing Policy in The Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1960.* (Poverty & Race Research Action Council, 2005) accessed online at [www.prrac.org/pdf/hirsch.pdf](http://www.prrac.org/pdf/hirsch.pdf), viewed April 20, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the 1960 Democratic Program for Cities and Suburbs was based on the Kennedy Conference on Urban Affairs held in Pittsburgh on October 10, 1960. It stated that "We endorse a 10-year Federal-local action program to eradicate slums and blighted areas..." The first of its five recommended actions was that "Primary emphasis should be placed on rebuilding cities through a long-term Federal commitment to urban renewal." *News Release on Conference on Urban Affairs, from the Democratic National Committee Publicity Division, Washington, DC, October 20, 1960*, online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74130>, accessed April 17, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> James Goode. *Best Addresses.* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 412.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

Southwest became the most complete post-World War II urban renewal community in the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Other historians, including Richard Longstreth, have noted that Southwest redevelopment was widely influential for its re-focusing on the quality of urban life, and recognized it as a nationally visible test case for improving the city through the development of residential communities that employed modern architecture and planning principles.<sup>11</sup>

### Forbearers of the Zeckendorf-Pei Redevelopment Plan

The building of the Town Center Plaza is a less-familiar chapter in a well-established narrative. This story's earliest chapters trace the citywide drive to clear "substandard" housing, from the initiatives of such early reformers as First Lady Ellen Wilson through the alley housing movement of the 1930s. Postwar pressures for redevelopment of "blighted areas" spurred passage of the locally focused DC Redevelopment Act of 1945 and the Housing Act of 1949, whose scope was national. The 1945 Act created the federal District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) to conduct urban renewal activities in the city, and the 1949 legislation authorized the hitherto-unfunded RLA to apply for federal grants like any other local redevelopment agency.<sup>12</sup> The mechanics of the District's urban renewal process were complex. Legislation required that federally-funded projects be components of a citywide redevelopment plan, which was developed for the District by the National Capital Park and Planning Committee (NCPC). The NCPC and the District of Columbia Commissioners were to approve the boundaries of proposed redevelopment areas. Following a public hearing, the redevelopment plan would be adopted by the NCPC, approved by the District Commissioners, and certified for execution by the RLA.<sup>13</sup> The RLA would then acquire all privately owned land in the designated redevelopment area by purchase or through its power of eminent domain, clear existing buildings, and aggregate individual lots into new parcels, which would be sold or leased to developers for vast projects that would accomplish the objectives of the master plan.

Although an unrealized 1942 plan had suggested renovating Southwest to create housing for war workers, it was not until the early 1950s that political resolve to redevelop the quadrant reached critical mass. The NCPC's December 1950 Comprehensive Plan for Washington, DC suggested that Southwest would be Washington's pilot urban renewal area, in part because the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, the Fort McNair campus, and the waterfront provided physical boundaries for the redevelopment zone. Planners, civic leaders, and politicians soon noted that 1950 Census data showed Southwest's population declining even as the city's population reached its historic peak, and that a survey had classified more than 95% of the housing in a large sample area as either "dilapidated" or "obsolescent." For many years, pleas for housing

<sup>10</sup> Lee, 231.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Longstreth. "Brave New World: Southwest and the Promise of Urban Renewal," in Richard Longstreth, ed. *Housing in Washington*. (Chicago: Center for American Places, 2010), 255-257.

<sup>12</sup> *District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency Annual Report for 1951*, (Washington, DC: Redevelopment Land Agency, 1952), 1.

<sup>13</sup> *District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency Annual Report for 1952*. (Washington, DC: Redevelopment Land Agency, 1953), IV.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

reform had been illustrated with images of the Capitol dome floating above dismal, warren-like alley housing. Southwest's close visual tie to Capitol Hill thus made the area an especially conspicuous candidate for "renewal." Although the proposed redevelopment zone also included stable working-class blocks of modest but livable houses, the area was labeled "substandard" as a whole.

During the early 1950s, iterative redevelopment plans proposed competing strategies for redeveloping Southwest. The Peets Plan (1951) proposed gradual waves of renovation mingled with new construction, which would have preserved a substantial portion of Southwest's existing buildings and maintained a high proportion of the area as low-income housing. The Justement-Smith Plan (1952) sought to maximize economic return, link Southwest to downtown, and build mixed income housing with higher-income development concentrated on the waterfront and the area closest to a proposed cultural center. The Justement-Smith Plan differed from the Peets Plan in that it placed a much higher percentage of housing units in large elevator buildings and small walk-up apartment houses, and a much lower percentage in row houses. It did not propose any low income housing and made no reference to preservation of existing structures. While the Peets Plan had maintained the existing small-scale neighborhood commercial strip along Fourth Street SW, the Justement-Smith Plan proposed concentrating retail business in shopping centers north of the Southwest Expressway.

In 1952, the NCPC issued a "final" plan based on a report by Bartholomew and Associates which synthesized recommendations from the Peets and Justement-Smith Plans. The NCPC plan defined the boundaries of the redevelopment as the planned Southwest Expressway on the north, Maine Avenue on the west, South Capitol Street and Delaware Avenue on the east, and P Street on the south. Low income housing, whether public or private, was to be concentrated east of Fourth Street, although the NCPC Plan did not set a target number for such units. A revised version of the original NCPC plan defined two high priority redevelopment areas within the urban renewal area in addition to Area A, between Seventh and Eleventh Streets SW, which was earmarked for office construction. Area B, bounded by the railroad tracks and E Street to the north, I Street to the south, Maine Avenue to the west, and South Capitol Street and Delaware Avenue to the east, contained the highest proportion of substandard housing in the quadrant and was designated for new housing.<sup>14</sup>

In March 1953, after the NCPC plan had assigned Area B the highest priority for redevelopment, the RLA selected the Bush Construction Company of Norfolk, Virginia as its sole developer.<sup>15</sup> However, the pace of redevelopment was hobbled by unforeseen complications. A lawsuit by a department-hardware store owner that challenged the RLA's power of eminent domain made its way to the Supreme Court before being resolved in the agency's favor in November 1954. In April 1955, the Bush Company was forced to withdraw from its contract for failure to secure adequate financing, and an agreement with a new developer was not signed until mid-1956.

<sup>14</sup> The boundaries selected in December 1951 were revised in March 1952 in part because the results of the 1951 NCPC housing survey revealed different patterns of concentrated "blight" than had been expected. However, the RLA cited the selection of the F Street SW corridor as the Southeast-Southwest Freeway route as the major reason for revision. See *DC RLA Annual Report for 1952*, vi.

<sup>15</sup> *HABS-DC-856*, See 29-40 for discussions of plans and boundary delineation.



Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

## The Zeckendorf-Pei Plan

In 1953, William Zeckendorf's New York-based Webb & Knapp real estate development firm had submitted an unsuccessful proposal to purchase Area B, but ended up with a contract to formulate a plan for the entire redevelopment effort.<sup>16</sup> In September of that year, Zeckendorf successfully proposed that a re-delineated Area C include the entire redevelopment area other than the previously awarded Area B.<sup>17</sup> In March 1954, the RLA granted Webb & Knapp a one year exclusive agreement to develop Area C.<sup>18</sup> Southwest redevelopment was a project of such stature that on July 9, 1954 Zeckendorf and I.M. Pei, the director of his in-house architectural team, briefed President Dwight D. Eisenhower on their firm's comprehensive plan.<sup>19</sup>

The Zeckendorf-Pei Plan, devised under the direction of Pei with assistance from Harry C. Weese, was deeply influenced by the Justement-Smith Plan. The "Z-plan," as newspaper headlines sometimes called it, treated "New Southwest" as an "Ideal City" that combined green space and cultural amenities.<sup>20</sup> As formally presented in April 1956, it contained five key elements; the Tenth Street Mall, "a new entertainment center" called L'Enfant Plaza, "an improved waterfront" with seafood restaurants and facilities catering to "yachtsmen," and a Town Center of "concentrated" community buildings and stores below apartments, situated in a residential sector which was to include six large "elevator apartment" buildings, 900 high-style row houses, and about 500 apartments in low-rise buildings clustered around green space squares.

Webb & Knapp published *Panorama of Southwest Redevelopment*, a booklet of photographed models, renderings, and maps, which presented the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan. It sketched the existing Southwest neighborhood as "a quiet 19<sup>th</sup> century backwater" which was "essentially charming, if dilapidated" and possessed "the seeds of a much better design." Redevelopment would involve "retaining and regenerating the area's best qualities" and required "no sharp break with tradition." The "same broad avenues" would link townhouses with individual garages arranged around squares, with "landscaped commons" and private gardens replacing alleys. Apartment buildings would "interlace" these residential squares, while "through traffic" would be rerouted onto the new expressway and "discouraged by elimination of Maine Avenue below M Street." Redevelopment's benefits would be spiritual and existential as well as physical. Townhouses would be "free of any restriction in plan and design," and offer "unequaled privacy and amenity for larger families wishing to live according to their own design." Common areas would be "developed according to the wishes of those sharing" them, providing "a high degree of group response and sense of belonging," and "bringing to the heart of the city attributes of village life."

<sup>16</sup> "Concern to Make Its First Bid to Land Agency Here Monday," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1953, M1.

<sup>17</sup> In 1955, Area C-1, a 30 acre tract along South Capitol Street largely devoted to commercial and municipal uses that subsumed the original Area A, was subtracted from Area C and developed separately.

<sup>18</sup> "Zeckendorf Acts on Capital Slums," *New York Times*, March 15, 1954, 14.

<sup>19</sup> "Zeckendorf Tells President about Big SW Development," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1954, 2.

<sup>20</sup> "Zeckendorf 'Ideal City' is Described to Officials," *Washington Post*, February 17, 1954, 19.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

In addition to providing a basic blueprint for the expanded Area C, the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan also influenced the development of Area B, as when Zeckendorf persuaded the NCPC to relocate that area's retail component to the Town Center. The plan codified such key elements of the Justement-Smith Plan as the Tenth Street Mall, but it also proposed elements that became defining characteristics of the "New Southwest," including L'Enfant Plaza, and the Town Center. It incorporated such modern planning concepts as the superblock and the integration of green space into neighborhoods at an extremely local level, and evidenced some very contemporary concerns about mitigating the effects of traffic through urban design. As part of what has been called Southwest redevelopment's refocusing on the quality of urban life, the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan espoused using architecture and planning to restore "a sense of belonging" and community, qualities widely perceived as absent in the alienated and atomized urban world of the 1950s.

In many ways, the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan was as experimental as the concept of redevelopment itself. Like most city plans, it mutated over time, and some of its elements remained unbuilt. Other elements have been criticized retrospectively. For example, the cul-de-sacs intended to keep the community from being overrun by through traffic are sometimes accused of clotting pedestrian circulation. Redevelopment planning was highly optimistic about urban design's abilities to cure social ills. Over the decades, security concerns have caused some grounds created to be publicly-accessible commons to be privatized with walls and fences. Some of the quadrant's most notably unsuccessful elements, such as the inadequate retail space at Waterside Mall and the waterfront commercial district, a prime asset which became an isolated zone catering to tourist-diners, were planned by Chloethiel Woodard Smith rather than Pei and Weese.<sup>21</sup>

Just as its designers are criticized for unsatisfactory elements of Southwest redevelopment, they must be credited with its more numerous successes, such as the cityscape which integrates residential elements with courtyards, parks, and other open spaces. As Antoinette Lee has written, the result of these designers' efforts "was a Southwest Quadrant style of development distinctive in the District."<sup>22</sup> In addition, she noted that "Zeckendorf presented a showcase of twentieth century architecture and planning" in Southwest Washington.<sup>23</sup> As the primary redevelopment blueprint, the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan thus made major contributions to "patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture [and] development" of both Southwest and the District of Columbia.

### **Town Center Plaza**

Southwest redevelopment was to "eradicate some of the city's worst slums, providing thousands of new homes for low income families, and help eliminate disease and crime."<sup>24</sup> However, a goal the *Washington Post* listed as even higher on the project's list of priorities was "to stop the

<sup>21</sup> Smith, of course, also designed such masterpieces as Capitol Park and Harbour Square.

<sup>22</sup> Lee, 234

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>24</sup> Chalmers M. Roberts. "Concern to Make Its First Bid to Land Agency Here Monday," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1953. M1

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

'flight to the suburbs' of many upper and middle-income families by providing good homes at convenient locations."<sup>25</sup> The Zeckendorf-Pei plan for "Town Center Plaza," a civic, retail, and residential core for the quadrant, spoke more to this second goal.

Despite protests, in January, 1956, the NCPC had agreed to Zeckendorf's request that commercial activity be removed from Area B and concentrated in Area C.<sup>26</sup> The Zeckendorf-Pei Plan placed "first commercial space" at L'Enfant Plaza, on the waterfront along Maine Avenue, and in a "Town Center Plaza" superblock originally framed by Sixth Street SW on the west, Fourth Street SW on the east, K, a short connecting section of Fourth, and E Streets to the north, and M Street to the south. The epicenter of Town Center Plaza was intended to be the quadrant's retail core.<sup>27</sup> Although it is sometimes stated that all retail businesses in the redevelopment area were to be relocated to the Town Center Plaza, the plan also provided for "convenience stores" to be sprinkled among the surrounding residential squares.<sup>28</sup>

In 1956, the *Washington Post* favorably described the Pei team's design for Town Center Plaza's retail core as a "tree-shaded suburban style shopping center" with over 1,000 parking spaces.<sup>29</sup> However, as early as 1954, the owners of downtown stores had made their opposition to a major new business district in Southwest known, and had won assurances that the redevelopment area would include neighborhood retail without a major department store, the anchor of malls then and now.<sup>30</sup> News articles announcing the RLA's formal approval of the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan in December 1956 specified that the Town Center Plaza would include only medium-scale specialty stores, a supermarket, a library, and a post office. In the end, this commercial center occupied far less area than a typical suburban mall and provided far fewer parking spaces for shoppers and residents than the 17,000 spaces at the Pei-designed Roosevelt Field Shopping Center on Long Island.<sup>31</sup>

However, Zeckendorf and Pei intended Town Center Plaza to be far more than simply a shopping area. As *Panorama of Southwest Redevelopment* explained, it would possess "symbolic significance" as "the heart of the community" and the site of "the ritual of public gatherings" as well as daily life. The Plaza would incorporate a library, churches, entertainment venues, and even a community building as "the seat of local government." Zeckendorf and Pei envisioned it as "an area of broad, paved spaces shaded by trees under which cars are parked," which would offer convenience to both drivers and pedestrians, with an expansive park

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Shopping Center Plan for Area B Protested," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1955, 17, and HABS-DC- 856, 43.

<sup>27</sup> "Revised Plan for SW Approved by NCPC," *Washington Post*, September 16, 1955, 1

<sup>28</sup> *Panorama of Southwest Redevelopment* was an unpaginated booklet published by Webb & Knapp. Although the booklet is not dated, but its contents suggest that it was published around the time the Plan was formally accepted in 1956. The original copy of the booklet is in the Washingtoniana collection of the Martin Luther King Library in Washington, DC.

<sup>29</sup> "RLA Favors Proposal for Shopping Center," *Washington Post*, December 5, 1956, B1, and "Shopping Center Set in SW," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1957, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, the longtime chair of the RLA's Board of Directors was Mark Lansburgh, a retired executive of the family-owned Lansburgh Department Store in Downtown Washington, DC. Robert C. Albroom. "Southwest Planners Oiling Opposition," *Washington Post*, November 28, 1954; B6.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Ewen. *Picture Windows*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 148.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

separating the commercial core from M Street. *Panorama of Southwest Redevelopment* concluded by stating that "every means will be used to make Southwest Washington a fine living section." The residential component this implied included four adjoining "elevator apartment" blocks containing approximately 500 apartments. One apartment block would face west from the Sixth Street side of the superblock, while another would face Town Center's commercial core from across Third Street. A third apartment block faced the commercial core from the north and the fourth from the current site of Carrollsburg Square across M Street.

By late 1956, both the NCPC and the District of Columbia Commissioners had approved the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan, and the RLA had commenced acquiring land for the plaza.<sup>32</sup> However, it would be five years more before the first residents moved into a Webb & Knapp-constructed building. The major difficulty lay in higher-than-anticipated land costs encountered by the RLA. After the RLA attempted to pass these costs along, Zeckendorf countered by offering 25% of the asking price. In May 1959, Webb & Knapp finally signed 99-year ground leases at about 75% of the original quoted price. By this time, the RLA had turned down several higher offers from other bidders because of its obligation to Webb & Knapp.<sup>33</sup>

While negotiations dragged on, serious cracks had appeared in Zeckendorf's empire. In July 1958, the *New York Times* reported that Webb & Knapp's earnings had fallen markedly in 1957, and that Zeckendorf had admitted to substantial losses during the first half of 1958.<sup>34</sup> A likely cause was reckless expansion, as Zeckendorf had acquired numerous hotel properties now buffeted by the recession that had begun in 1957. Although Zeckendorf stated that large-scale projects like Southwest redevelopment would restore the company to prosperity, its fiscal hemorrhages worsened as delays continued. By early 1960, the firm was liquidating properties in the face of what Zeckendorf called its toughest problems to date.<sup>35</sup> As part of this effort, Webb & Knapp relinquished development rights for the portion of Area C south of M Street SW, which became the sites of River Park, Tiber Island, Carrollsburg Square, and Harbour Square in the hands of other developers under a plan advanced by Chloethiel Woodard Smith.<sup>36</sup>

During Zeckendorf's travails, the plan for Town Center Plaza underwent a gradual metamorphosis. In *A Panorama of Southwest Redevelopment*, its commercial structures consisted of a small medical building and two retail buildings below apartments attached to shopping pavilions. The larger retail pavilion stretched south from I Street and fronted primarily on Third Street SW. The other, a rectangular structure, was set back from M Street by parkland containing a library and from Sixth Street by an apartment block. By 1957, sketch diagrams printed in the *Washington Post* showed the commercial core inset from Sixth and Fourth Street, and moved south toward M Street. The park space had migrated to the north side of the superblock, which had become a rectangle with I Street as its northern boundary.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> HABS-DC-856, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>34</sup> "Webb & Knapp: Profits Fell in 1957 -- Deficit Shown in 1st Half of 1958," *New York Times*, July 30, 1958, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Jerome Zukosky. "Webb & Knapp Calls Its Financing Problems Toughest It's Faced Yet," *Wall Street Journal*, March 9, 1960, 26.

<sup>36</sup> "Hearing Will Air Area C Changes," *Washington Post*, March 11, 1960, B5, and HABS-DC-856, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Ralph Reikowsky. "Town Center' Sale Pressed," *Washington Post*, January 19, 1957, A14.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

By July 1958, a rendering published in the *Washington Post* showed a covered arcade leading pedestrians through a "fountain court" with an outdoor cafe toward the glass façade of a commercial building.<sup>38</sup> By 1960, the plan showed twin commercial buildings on an east-west axis divided by a walkway that followed the right-of-way for Fourth Street. The large apartment blocks of the original plan had become four identical buildings, one of which stood near each corner of the superblock. The large park that had originally separated the commercial core from M Street was now split into smaller green spaces that separated each pair of apartment buildings and surrounded the commercial core.

After a new housing bill passed Congress on the third attempt, Webb & Knapp announced that the funding was in place to begin construction.<sup>39</sup> In November 1959, the RLA announced that the Town Center Plaza plot had been cleared except for structures on the site of the west commercial block, and, just before Christmas, the firm formally took possession of the site.<sup>40</sup> Within days, it had signed a contract for the Blake Construction Company to build the east pair of buildings and the east commercial structure.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the long delay and a rainy day, the Town Center groundbreaking at 4:00 PM on January 15, 1960 was a well-attended affair. George Garrett, former RLA Director, current head of the Federal City Council, and President Eisenhower's special troubleshooter for southwest, turned the muddy earth with a red, white, and blue shovel while RLA executives, the District Commissioners and a crowd of 200 looked on.<sup>42</sup> However, a *Post* article called the groundbreaking "almost anti-climactic," and construction was accompanied by a spate of articles reporting criticism of the RLA for permitting the long delay and charges that its now-superseded policies of restricting opportunities to a single developer and failing to assess carrying charges for the cleared land had been wasteful and inefficient. Not surprisingly, construction of the west buildings was begun without fanfare at noon on October 31, 1960. Although a Zeckendorf spokesman reported that District and RLA officials had been invited to attend, no one had been asked to give a speech or personally break ground.<sup>43</sup>

The public's dissatisfaction with the RLA, Zeckendorf, and the Town Center project did not extend to the buildings themselves. As the east buildings rose, the *Washington Post* commented on their innovative construction technique. The buildings were cast in place, floor-by-floor, with an integrated finishing process. Special laminated plastic coatings applied to the plywood forms provided a "glass-like" surface for the vertical exterior columns, while fiberglass forms were used to cast the beams.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Philip Jodidio and Janet Adams Strong. *I.M. Pei: Complete Works*. (New York: Rizzoli), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Jack Eisen, "New Housing Law Expected to Step Up SW Redevelopment," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1959, D1.

<sup>40</sup> "RLA States Town Center Site Is Ready," *Washington Post*, November 5, 1959, B1.

<sup>41</sup> Jack Eisen. "Contract Let On Southwest Town Center." *Washington Post*, December 19, 1959, B1.

<sup>42</sup> Jack Eisen. "First Earth Is Turned In Town Center Project," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1960, D2, and "Work to Start On Town Center," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1960, D1, and Robert C. Albrook.

"Belated 'Beginning' Is Still Historic," *Washington Post*, January 24, 1960, E2.

<sup>43</sup> "Zeckendorf To Launch Town Center," *Washington Post*, October 29, 1960, D1.

<sup>44</sup> "Concrete First at Town Center," *Washington Post*; December 24, 1960, A18.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

The first completed element of the Town Center Plaza project was the east retail building, which opened in December 1960.<sup>45</sup> A long series of glass-panel fronted storefronts beneath a flat roof, it accommodated eight businesses, including a Safeway grocery store, a dry-cleaner, a liquor store, a Peoples Drugs store, a bank, and a post office. Future Secretary of State Dean Rusk later bowled in a league at the twenty-one lane bowling alley on its lower level.<sup>46</sup>

Town Center East opened with a cocktail party in a pair of model apartments on February 9, 1961. In a feature article on the New Southwest, *Post* real estate editor John B. Willman referred to the new buildings as “sleek glass-faced twins” with spectacular views, and noted that “these concrete-glass buildings and their beauty impresses more with each look”<sup>47</sup> Webb & Knapp promoted the complex with an illustrated brochure, which spoke of “a mood of quiet luxury,” “an atmosphere of suburban charm,” and “elegance without extravagance in a magnificently spacious setting designed to make you feel at home in the heart of Washington.” The brochure stressed the integration of sophisticated lifestyles and work with a detailed map showing the relationship of the complex to major government offices and cultural centers such as the newly-constructed Arena Stage, National Gallery, and even the planetarium proposed for Webb & Knapp’s Tenth Street Mall development. The brochure evoked the complex’s blending of indoor and outdoor spaces through illustrations showing “tenant shoppers” relaxing under table umbrellas at the “fountain court” that adjoined the shopping plaza and residents on chaise lounges gazing upon monumental Washington from a rooftop deck.<sup>48</sup>

By March 1961, the first residents were moving into the northeast building, and, by May, the southeast building was occupied. Perhaps the strongest vote of approval was cast by the marketplace. By August, 1961, although landscaping, parking, and other elements were still incomplete, the northeast building was 82% rented and the southeast building 64% occupied. The Town Center West buildings, which would not open until the end of 1961, were already 15% rented.<sup>49</sup> The Town Center Plaza project would go on to win several immediate accolades, including a reference in the citation for Pei’s Brunner Prize in 1963 and a Federal Housing Administration First Honor Award for Residential Design in January 1964.<sup>50</sup>

### **Town Center Plaza After Zeckendorf and Pei**

Despite these favorable responses, the apartment towers were the last buildings constructed by Webb & Knapp at Town Center Plaza. The firm’s financial woes continued to worsen, and Pei’s firm had fully separated from Webb & Knapp by the time the apartment buildings were

<sup>45</sup> Ruth Wagner. “Town Center Units Feature Gay Colors, Big Picture Windows,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 1961, B7.

<sup>46</sup> Donald May. “Rush and Aides Kept Rendezvous After Dark in a Southwest Alley,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 1962, A1.

<sup>47</sup> John B. Willmann. “New Apartments Add to Maturity of Southwest: New Apartments in SW,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 1961, B1.

<sup>48</sup> *Town Center Plaza: A Webb & Knapp Residential Community*. (New York: Cole, Fischer, and Hogow Advertising for Webb & Knapp, nd) np.

<sup>49</sup> “New Southwest Units Filling Fast,” *Washington Post*, August 26, 1961, D1.

<sup>50</sup> “Apartments” in *The Architectural Record*. Volume 135 (January 1964), 143.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

completed. In 1964, the firm, on its way to bankruptcy, was forced to sell its Town Center assets to Maryland developer Charles S. Bresler and his partners.<sup>51</sup> Even while the west buildings were under construction, the NCPC had pressured Zeckendorf to substitute either an office building to house planning agencies or a mixed use apartment and office tower for the west commercial block.<sup>52</sup> Bresler took this concept one step further, building two tall buildings deliberately “less ultra-modern” in style,” sited at right angles to each pair of apartment buildings.<sup>53</sup> Originally planned for apartments, these buildings instead became office space.

Bookended by Bresler’s office towers, Waterside Mall, designed by Cloethiel Woodard Smith, had superseded Zeckendorf’s commercial block by 1972. Without space to accommodate a large modern grocery store, plagued by insufficient, expensive parking, and resembling an urban blockhouse, it was quickly branded a commercial graveyard.<sup>54</sup> Despite the addition of an office building, Waterside Mall struggled financially until it was demolished in 2007.<sup>55</sup>

In 2010, Fourth Street SW was reopened through the mall site, re-subdividing the superblock formed under the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan. This section of Fourth Street SW is now lined by a symmetrical array of multi-story buildings with first floor retail, including a large supermarket, restaurants, and dry cleaner, with office space above. In 2010, Bresler’s Brutalist office buildings were gutted to their slabs and columns and are currently being rebuilt in a more contemporary style as apartment buildings as originally intended.

Town Center Plaza East and Town Center West buildings now have different owners. Town Center West remains a rental complex, as does the northeast building of Town Center East. After a period of city ownership, Town Center East was sold to a developer selected by the tenants. The southeast building of Town Center East became condominiums in 2009 and is now known as Waterfront Tower.

In 2006, the owner of Town Center West, then known as Marina View, submitted an application for a planned unit development (PUD) that proposed modifications designed by architects Esocoff and Associates and landscape architects Zion, Breen, and Richardson, the successor to the original design firm. After discussions with the DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO), the architectural and landscape plans for the proposed modifications were reviewed by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB). On September 28, 2006, the HPRB endorsed this concept plan as compatible with the historic character of the site.

When the owner of the southeast building of Town Center East sought to replace its windows in 2010, it did so using a similar energy efficient glazing system that was used at Town Center West since those windows had been endorsed by the DC HPO and HPRB.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Jack Eisen. “Town Center Is Sold by Webb-Knapp,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 1964, A1.

<sup>52</sup> Paul A. Schuette. “More Apartments Set For Southwest Area,” *Washington Post*, November 9, 1962, B2.

<sup>53</sup> Helen Dewar. “Builder to Change Southwest Design,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 1964, B1.

<sup>54</sup> “Aid Sought for Waterside Mall,” *Washington Post*, March 3, 1974, K1.

<sup>55</sup> “New Urban and Urbane Bustle Will Fill Desert in SW,” *Washington Post*, April 25, 1965, G10.

<sup>56</sup> Maloney, np.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

**Southwest Redevelopment's Architect, Developer, and Landscape Architects: I.M. Pei, William Zeckendorf, and Zion, Breen**

Ieoh Ming Pei is a truly American architect; which is to say, he spent his youth in China, his architectural mentors were German and Hungarian refugees, his major collaborators include Boston-born Harry Cobb, German-born James Freed and Croatian-born, French-educated Araldo Cossutta, and his work includes the library memorializing America's only Irish Catholic president, the pyramidal entry to the Louvre, and an art museum for his ancestral home town in China. His designs reflect the diverse and cosmopolitan blend of heritages, traditions, and influences uniquely experienced in the United States, which Pei has combined with his personal experience of traditional Chinese culture and synthesized into his own unique aesthetic.

After his mother's death, Pei spent a considerable portion of his youth in the household of his grandfather, who lived in a European-style house in Shanghai. However, he summered in Suzhou, his mother's ancestral hometown and his birthplace, a city famed for its gardens,<sup>57</sup> traditional houses, and family compounds. Pei's career in America is a familiar story; his graduation from MIT and architectural studies at Harvard under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, their interruption by World War II defense work at Princeton, brief stints at architectural firms, his re-entry into academic life while his plans to return to China were first deferred and then discarded,<sup>58</sup> and then, at age 31, his sudden invitation to become staff architect to Manhattan-based real estate developer William Zeckendorf and begin designing on a vast scale.<sup>59</sup>

William Zeckendorf (1905-1976) was the nation's most flamboyant real estate developer before Donald Trump. As president of the publically-traded Webb & Knapp realty firm in the years following World War II, Zeckendorf built an empire of 20,000 apartments, 10,000,000 square feet of office space, and 8,000 hotel rooms, among other holdings.<sup>60</sup> Although Zeckendorf constructed utilitarian parking garages, apartment complexes, and office buildings, he was a lover of visionary architecture. When Zeckendorf hired the almost unknown Pei in September 1948, he observed "...it was about time the modern Medici began hiring the modern Michelangelos and da Vincis."<sup>61</sup>

Pei's earliest publicized design for Zeckendorf was the "Helix", a spiral apartment tower with terraced individual units that could easily be contracted or expanded to split levels by shifting interior walls. Although the Helix was never built, its innovative design was hailed by Le Corbusier and Pei's rendering was reprinted in numerous newspapers.<sup>62</sup> Pei had designed

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30. Also see 32-33 for an account of Pei's exposure to traditional Chinese culture in Suzhou.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 38-45

<sup>59</sup> Wiseman, Carter. *The Architecture of I.M. Pei*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 47-72. Wiseman's third chapter provides a comprehensive overview of Pei's Zeckendorf years. See also Jodidio and Strong, 18-60 for a detailed account of Pei's individual projects for Webb & Knapp.

<sup>60</sup> Wiseman, 47.

<sup>61</sup> Wolf Von Eckardt. "The Architect Who Understands Social and Visual Dynamics," *Washington Post*, May 14, 1978, F2.

<sup>62</sup> Wiseman, 51-52.



Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

several smaller buildings and worked on the Southwest Washington Urban Renewal Plan with Weese before his first major project for Zeckendorf was constructed.<sup>63</sup> This was the massive shopping center at Roosevelt Field, Long Island, which opened during the summer of 1956.<sup>64</sup> During the period that he was working on Roosevelt Field Mall, Pei was planning the Mile High Center commercial complex in Denver,<sup>65</sup> which was followed by urban renewal projects in Chicago, Hartford, Long Island, Manhattan, Montreal, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco.<sup>66</sup>

Webb & Knapp provided Pei the opportunity to work on massive planning and design projects and to hire a staff of seventy that included numerous future associates. The benefits of this association were reciprocal; he later credited Zeckendorf with "teaching me everything about evaluating a piece of land. I never looked at one the same way again."<sup>67</sup> However, Pei reportedly chafed at his administrative duties and felt that the perception that he was simply an "in-house" architect diminished his ability to attract the type of monumental projects he aspired to.<sup>68</sup> In 1955, while he worked on the Southwest redevelopment plan, Pei and his handpicked team of architects began to be known as "I.M. Pei and Associates,"<sup>69</sup> and worked on independent commissions as well as Webb & Knapp projects. Although the firm formally became a separate entity in 1960, it occupied space in the Webb & Knapp offices long afterwards.<sup>70</sup>

It was during the period surrounding Pei & Associates' formal separation from Webb & Knapp that Town Center East was constructed. A closely contemporaneous Zeckendorf-Pei project with many parallels was the nationally-recognized Kips Bay Plaza in Manhattan, which Zeckendorf had taken over in 1957 after the original developer had failed to begin construction. Plans for Kips Bay Plaza's included a shopping center and two twenty story towers which, with 1,118 apartments, were considerably larger than the Town Center East buildings. Like the Town Center East buildings, the Kips Bay towers were separated by a landscaped plaza. They shared such elements as exposed structural elements and the suggestion that:

the tall 'sandwich' of concrete floats on slender columns over glass enclosed lobbies. The effect is one of lightness and airiness, despite the fact that there is no sheathing on the structures besides the floor-to-ceiling glass...<sup>71</sup>

The Kips Bay Plaza project essentially bracketed the Town Center Plaza buildings' construction, with ground broken in 1959, the first building completed in January 1960, and the second in early 1963.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Wiseman, 59-61. See also "Concern to Make Its First Bid to Land Agency," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1953, M1, and "Zeckendorf Acts on Capital Slums," *New York Times*, March 15, 1954, 14.

<sup>64</sup> "Webb & Knapp Buys Roosevelt Field for Light Industry and Retail," *New York Times*, August 8, 1950, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Wiseman, 57-58. Also see "Offices in Denver Will Open July 1," *New York Times*, May 9, 1954, R10.

<sup>66</sup> See Pei, Cobb, Freed, and Partners Official Website, "List of Projects," Online at <http://www.pcf-p.com>

<sup>67</sup> Wiseman, 69. The *New York Times* reported on Webb & Knapp's growing architectural staff, directed by I.M. Pei, "consultant architect on special projects," in "Webb & Knapp Expands," April 2, 1950, 193.

<sup>68</sup> Wiseman, 69.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Glenn Fowler. "Kips Bay Plaza Renting To Begin," *New York Times*, December 4, 1960, R1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

Other than revising the Southwest Redevelopment Plan, Pei's Washington projects of the 1960s included a single family house on Ordway Street NW. Created for William Slayton, Pei's friend and a Webb & Knapp colleague who became the Kennedy and Johnson Administration's Urban Renewal Commissioner, the Slayton House is one of perhaps three single family houses erected to Pei's design. It was entered on the DC Inventory and National Register of Historic Places in 2009. Pei and Associates partner Araldo Cossutta designed the Astral and Comsat office buildings, erected at L'Enfant Plaza in 1967-68. Later in the 1960s, Cossutta and Pei began design work for Third Church of Christ Scientist complex on Sixteenth Street NW. Third Church of Christ opened in 1971, and although listed in the DC Inventory, was demolished in 2013.<sup>73</sup> In 1968, Pei, who became world famous during the decade that began with the Town Center Plaza buildings, began designing his National Gallery East Building, one of Washington's most iconic structures as well as one of his most noted works. Since the opening of the East Building in 1979, Pei and his partners have created iconic architectural masterpieces all over the world, including Washington's Holocaust Museum.

The landscape plan for the Town Center Plaza was created by Zion, Breen, an influential modernist design firm whose primary designer was Robert L. Zion (1921-2000). Zion worked for Pei as an employee at Webb & Knapp, apparently making a significant contribution to the landscape design for the Roosevelt Field Shopping Center. In 1957, he began a Manhattan-based partnership with Harold Breen (1923-1995) which executed many significant commissions in New York City.<sup>74</sup>

Zion's rather minimalist courtyard design featured a slightly off-center double row of retained trees which traced the route of L Street SW before redevelopment (Illustration 2H). A rectangular white concrete walkway traced the perimeter of the courtyard around an incised circular grassy lawn. On either end of the privacy wall that bounded the east and west sides of the courtyard were walkways connecting to the street and the parking area within the plaza's commercial core. Today, no readily-apparent traces of Zion, Breen's plantings and walkway remain. However, the courtyard is still mainly green space with patterned plantings of shrubs and trees, and continues to function as a social center for residents as it did in the earlier years of the complex.

### Assessing Town Center East

Town Center East has a significant relationship to the urban design of the District of Columbia both through its relationship to the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan and in its own right as an outstanding example of a successful residential development incorporating the principles of modernist architecture and planning. Although the application of these principles to Southwest redevelopment sometimes yielded controversial results, the Town Center Plaza apartment complexes are aesthetically and architecturally important works that have received numerous awards and accolades.

<sup>73</sup> Although eligible, the Third Church was not listed on the National Register because of owner objection.

<sup>74</sup> Herbert Muschamp. "R.L. Zion, 79, who Designed Paley Park, Dies," *New York Times*; April 28, 2000; C20.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

The Town Center Plaza was a key component of the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan. This plan, which blended a synthesis of prior plans with new concepts, served as the blueprint for redevelopment of Southwest Washington, which numerous scholars have called a nationally-influential model for urban renewal as well as a major influence on the development of the District of Columbia. As is common in urban and architectural plans, the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan arranged Southwest as an interwoven set of modules, which included townhouses groupings around green squares and apartment buildings separated by courtyards. Town Center Plaza community was an evolving composition in such modules.

Although the Town Center Plaza featured concentrated neighborhood retail in a single location, it was envisioned as far more than a mere shopping center. It was to be a community whose residents could shop, worship, enjoy cultural amenities, and participate in civic life while living within walking distance of the federal buildings along the national mall, as well as L'Enfant Plaza and the Tenth Street Mall. While the plan made accommodations for resident parking, it also promoted easy access to citywide bus transportation as well as ready pedestrian access to employment. Town Center Plaza was in fact an early, innovative attempt to design a mixed use development. To the east and west of Town Center's central commercial module were its twin residential modules, each composed of three elements; a pair of apartment buildings, an interposed courtyard, and buffering parking lots. Town Center East is an essentially intact such module. However, it is also an outstanding example of a residential complex incorporating modernist design principles in its own right, and has functioned successfully even without the full construction of the Town Center commercial module envisioned by the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan.

The courtyard plays an important role in the success of Pei's design. Courtyards, which are no less essential to Pei's module than its buildings, are a vital feature of classical Chinese architecture and play an important role in his body of work. Courtyards are common in government and temple complexes, as well as in dwellings ranging from palaces to relatively modest houses. The courtyard is the essential integrating element of the siheyuan, or residential quadrangle, and can compose as much as 40% of its area. It is an enclosed exterior space, often separated from the street by a wall whose gate opens into a shallow entry area that conceals the courtyard's true dimensions. The sides of the courtyard are lined with inward-facing buildings that have narrow verandas, which create covered circuits for movement that intersect with symmetrical footpaths and mediate between the buildings' interior space and the courtyard.

An important element of the classical courtyard is that, although its walls and surrounding buildings maintain privacy, "the sky appears to reach to distant horizons unobstructed by parts of dwelling or neighboring buildings."<sup>75</sup> Formal courtyards are often hard-surfaced, with perhaps a few carefully-sited trees,<sup>76</sup> although lesser courtyards in the same complex might contain gardens. Thus the traditional Chinese courtyard is simultaneously a space for family and other

<sup>75</sup> Ronald Knapp. *The Chinese House: Craft, Symbol, and the Folk Tradition*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1993), 12-13.

<sup>76</sup> Kenneth Treister. *Chinese Architecture, Urban Planning, and Landscape Design*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press. 1987). 14,

Town Center East

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

social interaction, a link in a processional route, and a stimulus for spiritual reflection and aesthetic contemplation.

Pei's thoughts about "the nature of urban spaces" are eloquently presented by his 1964 essay of the same name, which implicitly links this concept to Chinese tradition by quoting Lao-tse's remark "a city's essence, like a vessel's, also lies in its voids – public spaces."<sup>77</sup> Pei comments that "a city, so far from being a cluster of buildings, is actually a sequence of spaces enclosed and defined by buildings." For Pei, spaces bear a heavy responsibility in the urban framework, as "well-developed ones raise the ordinary rituals of life to a high level of intensity and purpose." He identifies four aesthetic factors which determine the success of a space. The first is scale, as the scale of the enclosing facades must compliment that of the space itself. The second is "the shape and extent of the bounding surface," as the space "needs to have enough of an enclosure to define it." The third is the formality of the design, which includes the enclosure, the arrangement of the space, and even the motifs of the objects within the space. Fourth is, of course, the element of light. In addition, Pei notes that no urban space can be successful "unless it has a social, economic, and political purpose."

Pei's four aesthetic and three socio-politico-economic factors for successful spaces were realized in the residential modules of the Town Center Plaza, which reflect the concept of the Chinese courtyard. The paired apartment buildings are divided by the park-like courtyard and paralleled by veranda-like first story arcades beneath the buildings' overhanging upper stories. The courtyard was originally separated from the public streets and the commercial module's parking lots by brick walls penetrated for the footpaths which wound throughout the site and connected the buildings. Separated by the courtyard against the skyline, these apartment buildings added a sense of space and openness to the view. The courtyard has a symmetrical and mass-defining relationship to the building facades. It is a void whose shape and scale are both complemented by the enclosing facades of the apartment buildings and in turn help to define them as surfaces. In addition, the presence of the courtyard beyond the glass walls of the lobby allow a visitor arriving at the front entrance to essentially "look through" the building into a green space, giving a dimension of openness and expansiveness uncommon in the constricted sightlines of a typical urban building.

Besides light and a view of green in an intensely urban setting, the courtyard provides a stage for the "ordinary rituals of life" envisioned by Pei. (Illustrations 3a and 3B) Although no readily-apparent trace of Zion, Bren's original landscaping remains and a portion of its space has been annexed for parking, the Town Center East courtyard remains a space that conveys these original purposes and serves its original aesthetic and social functions. As interviews with several generations of residents attest, it is a popular gathering spot which offers residents a relaxing respite from the city pavement. Its volumetric function in terms of light, ventilation, and visual relationship to the plane of the facades and forms of the apartment buildings remains intact despite these changes at the ground surface level.

<sup>77</sup> I. M. Pei. "The Nature of Urban Spaces" in Ransom, Henry, editor. *The People's Architects*. (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, for the William Marsh Rice University. 1964), 64-75.

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

More than sixty years after the formulation of initial plans, Southwest's modernist urban design and architecture remain controversial. Its harshest critics contend that its development plan achieved monotony, creating:

Concrete slab apartments raised on *piloti*, all very similar to one another, with open spaces no one could use... The mega eight-story apartment buildings with kindred names: Capitol Park, Capitol Plaza, Town Center Plaza, Town Square Apartments, Harbour Square, Waterside Plaza, look alarmingly alike.<sup>78</sup>

However, these criticisms seem overstated and exaggerated. It seems inconceivable that Pei's cool, sleek glass and balcony-less, smooth concrete facades might be confused with the variegated textures and asymmetries of Smith's Harbour Square or the concrete and beige brick of Keyes, Lethbridge, and Condon's balconied Tiber Island. The implication that the Town Center East courtyard is an underutilized space is refuted by the testimony of residents, who speak appreciatively of the:

sense of being outside when inside because of the view-framing windows [which overlook the courtyard] ... playing ball with grandchildren ... enjoying a yoga class on the grass... good times on the lawn with 'every weekend, parties galore,' including some next door EPA employees who reciprocated with invitations to parties. The open space is a small oasis in the city...

The historical role of Town Center East in the development of Southwest Washington and its contribution to modernist residential planning as a successful functional space are only part of its significance. Indeed, Town Center Plaza apartment modules are aesthetic architectural masterpieces, of which Town Center East is an intact example. In the more than fifty years since their construction, the Town Center apartment buildings have won numerous accolades. The jury that awarded Pei an FHA First Honor Award for Residential Design at the beginning of 1964 pronounced itself "impressed by the straight-forward design, the dignity of the building, the feeling of quality it evokes, and the use of concrete as an exterior finish. In a perceptive 1969 *Washington Post* feature-essay, Richard F. Heyer called them "an example of just how clean architectural styling can be and still exhibit a touch of being svelte," and noted that "the particular color of the concrete will change repeatedly during a sunrise, assuming the various colors of the sky."<sup>79</sup> In his classic Washington architectural history *Best Addresses*, James M. Goode wrote, "the most striking aspect of Pei's buildings... is the emphasis on glass, which gives them a beautiful skin."<sup>80</sup> Antoinette Lee has written of the ingenious subtle effects conveyed by Pei's bold forms:

<sup>78</sup> District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office Study, quoted in David Maloney, *Staff Report: Town Center West*, May 24, 2006, Addendum, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Richard F. Heyer. "Town Center Apartment Design Seen Setting Sleek New Pace," *Washington Post*, Nov 1, 1969, D28.

<sup>80</sup> Goode, 409.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

At the ground level, the paired columns [which serve as dividers between the window tiers] become single columns that appear rooted into the ground, providing the effect of a colonnade for the lobby.<sup>81</sup>

*The AIA Guide to Washington, DC* cites Town Center's dramatic originality: "Pei's original apartment complex, unlike many in the area, has neither townhouses nor balconies, nothing could detract from the buildings' lean, tight-skinned modern silhouette."<sup>82</sup>

Like many of Pei's works, the apartment buildings are characterized by bold geometric massing, an austere sense of form, and considerable attention to subtleties of texture and detail. The variation in size between the alternating tiers of paired large horizontally-aligned "picture pane" windows and the smaller vertically-aligned windows creates visual contrast across the façade, as does the contrast between the protruding concrete band that accommodates the windows and the surface of the *pilotis* and façade. The interplay of the large glass surface area, smooth-finished white concrete and shiny aluminum accent lines of the windows in Pei's original material are still present in the northeast building, and these qualities are retained in the retrofitted but appropriate materials utilized in the southeast building. As Heyer noted, in addition to the glass, the concrete takes on the colors of the sky depending upon the season of year, time of day, and weather of the hour, contributing an infinite series of variations which can be remarkably dramatic in their effect. Guided by the efforts of the HPO, the buildings have retained these qualities while incorporating technological efficiencies which were not available at the time they were constructed.

Thus, despite changes to the Town Center site, Town Center East retains its essential character and achieves significance as a contribution to the broad patterns of our history, as well as embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, representing the work of a master, and possessing high artistic values.

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<sup>81</sup> Lee, 244.

<sup>82</sup> Christopher Weeks. *The AIA Guide to Washington, DC*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 279.

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

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Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

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Cole, Fischer, and Hogow Advertising. *Town Center Plaza: A Webb & Knapp Residential Community*. (New York: Cole, Fischer, and Hogow Advertising for Webb & Knapp, nd)

Webb & Knapp. *Panorama of Southwest Redevelopment*. (New York: Webb & Knapp, nd)

**Newspapers and Periodicals**

"FHA Honor Awards for Residential Design," *Architectural Record*, Volume 135, (Jan 1964): 143-162.

*New York Times*

*Washington Post*

*Wall Street Journal*

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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: \_\_\_\_\_



Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** approximately 3 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: 38° 52' 40.23" N (38.877841) Longitude: 77° 0' 56.45" W (-77.015681) (1001 Third Street SW)
2. Latitude: 38° 52' 37.57" N (38.877103) Longitude: 77° 0' 56.59" W (-77.015719) (1101 Third Street SW)
- 3.
4. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Town Center East  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

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

Located in Square 0542, the Town Center East site includes the apartment buildings at 1001 Third Street SW and 1101 Third Street SW, as well as the grassy and paved areas in-between the buildings and the parking courts on the north and south sides of the site. The site includes lots 79, 835-868, 869, (open areas and parking area in the courtyard), 2001-2123 (1101 Third Street SW), 2124-2251(1001 Third Street SW), 816 and 821 (north parking court), and 817 (south parking court).

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries are based on current lot lines that correspond with the significant elements of Town Center East as depicted on the historic site plan.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: D.P. Sefton, Architectural Historian  
organization: Waterfront Tower Condo Association and Southwest Neighborhood Assembly (SWNA)  
street & number: 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, SW  
city or town: Washington, D.C. state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip  
code: \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
date: May 4, 2013

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**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.)

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

### 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: Town Center East

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County:

State: D.C.

Photographer: Peter Sefton and Kim Williams

Date Photographed: May and November 2013

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

View of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW looking southwest showing south and east elevations  
1 of 15

View of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street looking south showing north elevation  
2 of 15

View of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street looking southwest showing north elevation  
3 of 15

View of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street looking west showing east end elevation  
4 of 15

Detail of corner window at southeast corner of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW; view looking northwest  
5 of 15

View looking easterly from loggia at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
6 of 15

View looking west from loggia at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
7 of 15

Detail of column at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
8 of 15

View of Entry door at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW looking north through lobby to central courtyard

Town Center East

Washington, D.C.

Name of Property

County and State

9 of 15

Interior of lobby at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW looking northeast towards entry to courtyard  
10 of 15

Interior of lobby at 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW looking southwest towards front entry door  
11 of 15

View looking southwest showing north elevation of 1001 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
12 of 15

View looking north from upper floor of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to south elevation of 1001 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW showing courtyard between  
13 of 15

View looking west showing east end elevation of 1001 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
14 of 15

Interior view looking out from upper floor apartment in northeast corner of 1101 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW  
15 of 15

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

**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.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

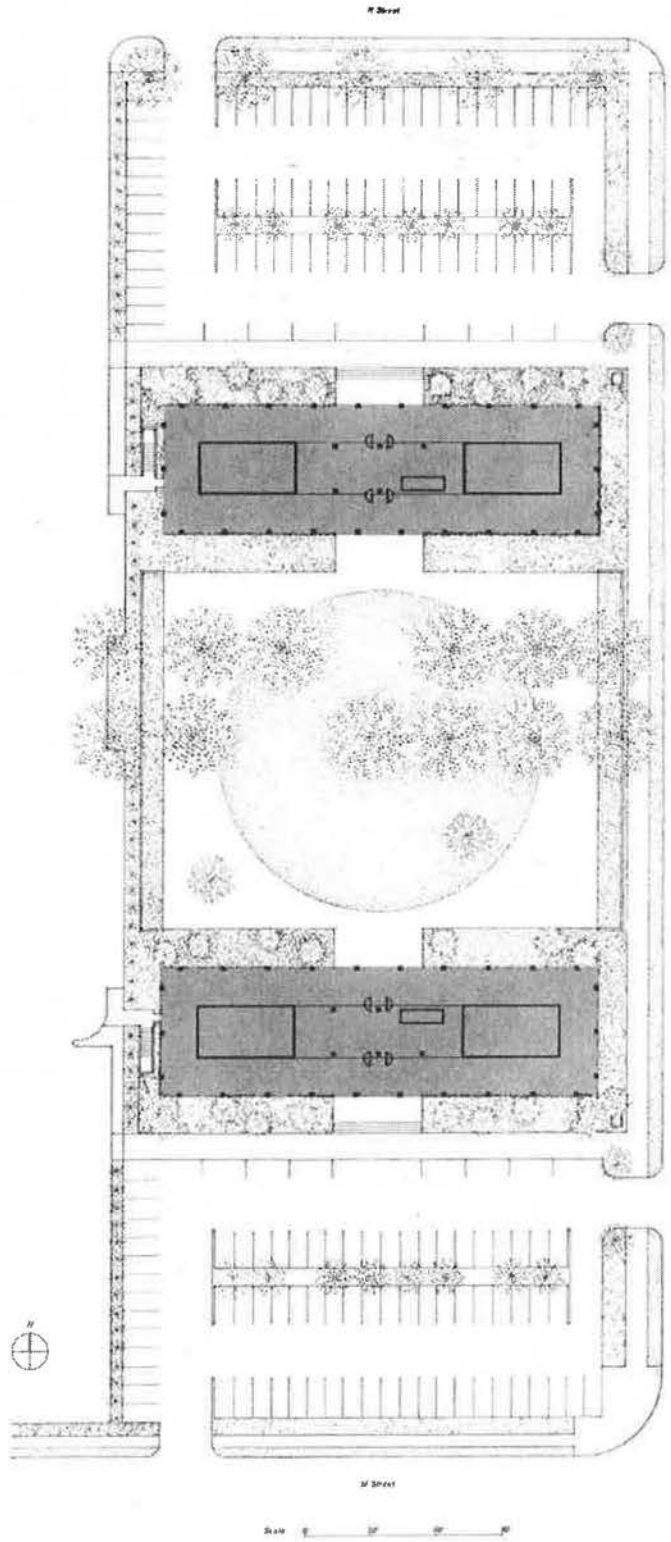
National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Town Center East
Name of Property
Washington, D.C.
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Historic Plans and Photos

Page 1

TOWN CENTER PLAZA EAST, WASHINGTON, D.C.



Town Center East Site Plan  
(Courtesy Pei, Cobb Freed & Partners)

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Town Center East
Name of Property Washington, D.C.
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Historic Plans and Photos

Page 2



Construction photo showing Town Center Plaza structural details, 1960, photographer unknown (Courtesy of Antonio Barrenechea)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Town Center East

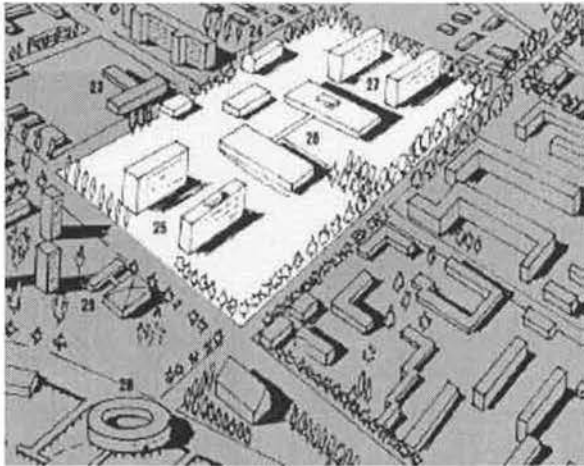
Name of Property  
Washington, D.C.

County and State

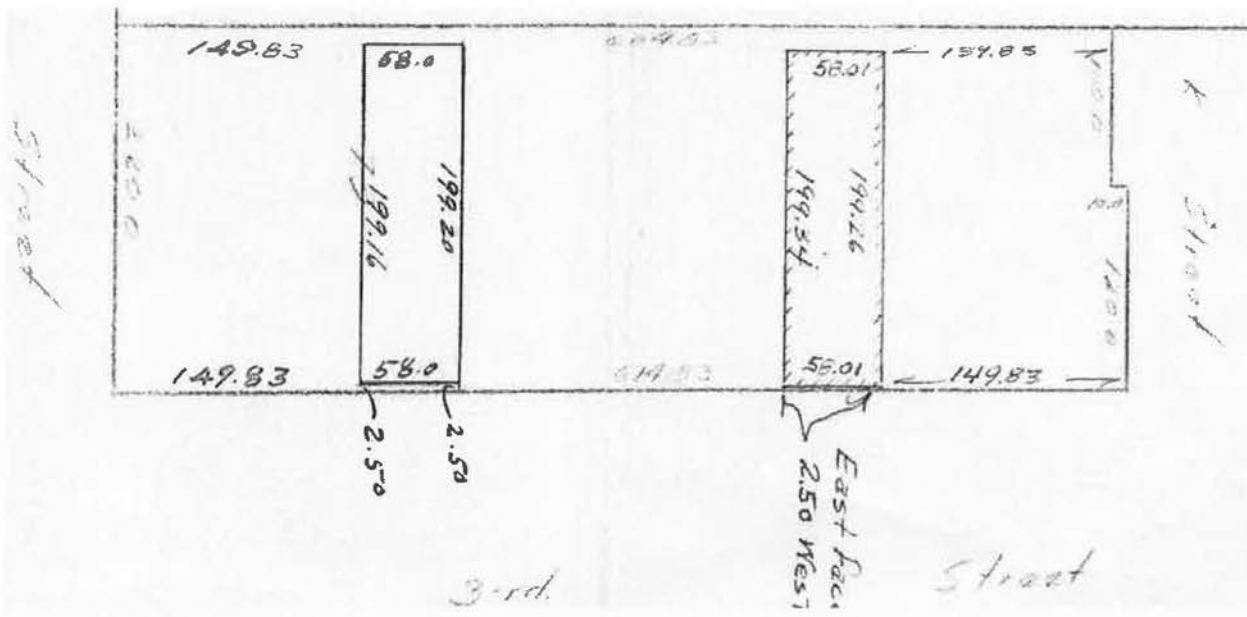
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Historic Plans and Photos

Page 3



(Left) Town Center Plaza, looking northeast from Sixth and M Streets SW, from Webb & Knapp Brochure (1961); (Below) Town Center East plat drawing for building permit (December 8, 1959)



**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Town Center East
Name of Property
Washington, D.C.
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Historic Plans and Photos

Page 4



(ABOVE) Rendering of Town Center Plaza by Robert Schwartz  
(BELOW) Early Photo of Town Center East Looking North, Northeast Tower with Courtyard  
Photographer: George Cserna (Courtesy of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners)





**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Town Center East
Name of Property
Washington, D.C.
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Historic Plans and Photos

Page 5



Early photo of Town Center Plaza apartment tower, date and photographer unknown.  
(Courtesy of Antonio Barrenechea)

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Town Center East
Name of Property
Washington, D.C.
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Historic Plans and Photos

Page 6



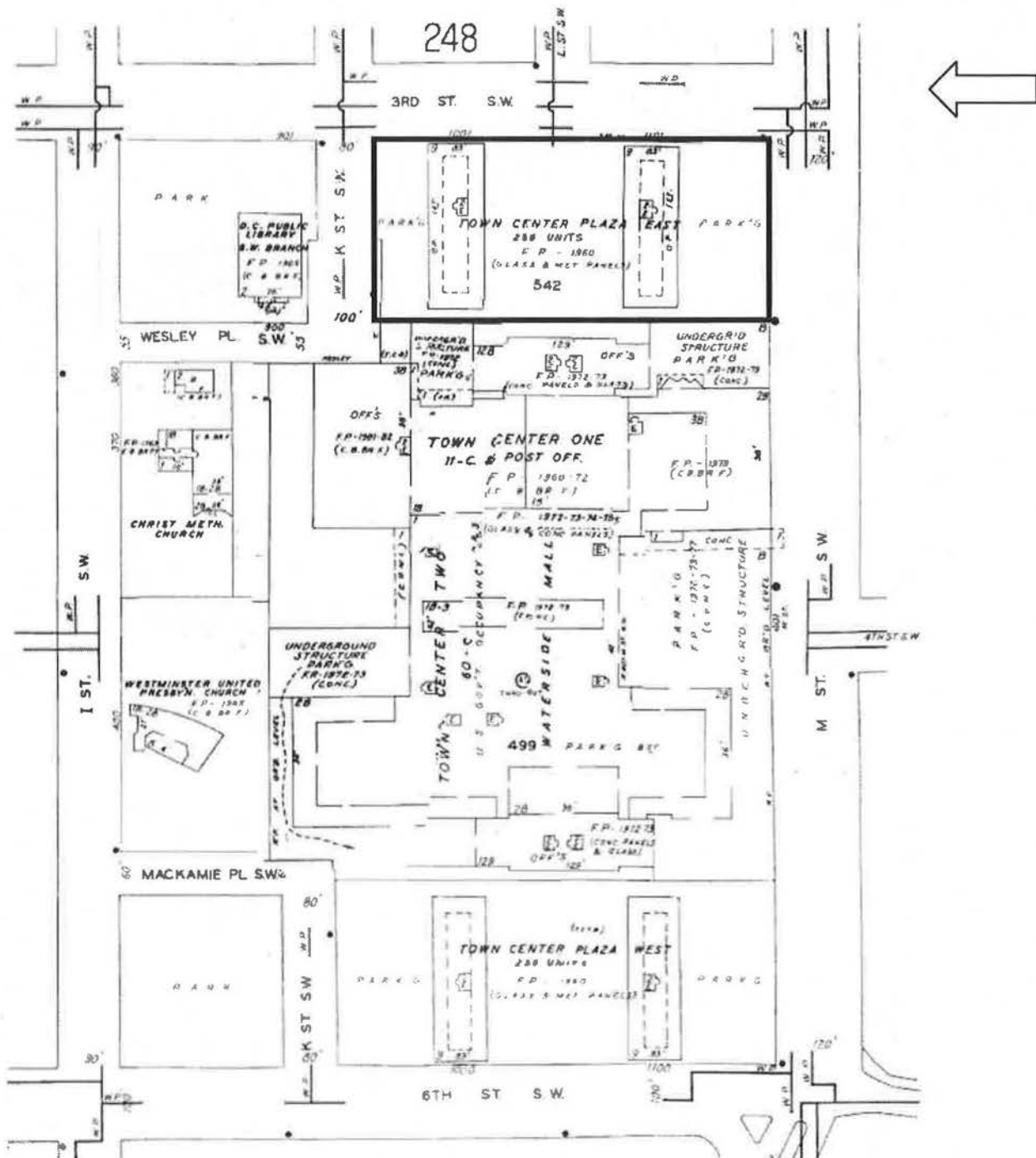
Post-construction photo of Town Center Plaza Apartment Towers showing courtyard privacy wall with egress,  
Photographer: George Cserna (Courtesy Pei Cobb Freed & Partners)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Town Center East
Name of Property
Washington, D.C.
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Maps Page 1



Site Plan showing Town Center East National Register Boundaries  
(From Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1991)

Town Center East Washington, DC



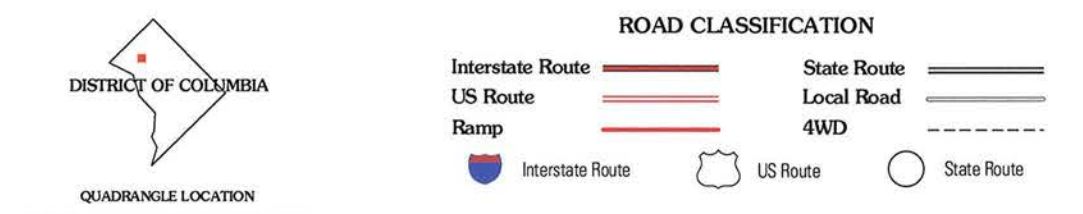
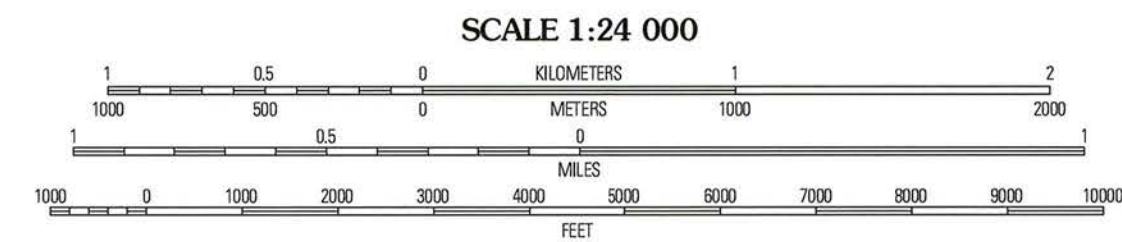
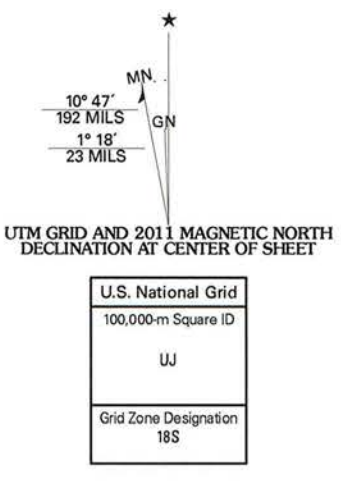
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



WASHINGTON WEST QUADRANGLE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA-MARYLAND-VIRGINIA  
7.5-MINUTE SERIES



Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)  
World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS84)  
Projection and 1 000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, Zone 18S  
10 000-foot ticks; Maryland Coordinate System of 1983,  
Virginia Coordinate System of 1983 (north zone)



Imagery: NAIP, June 2009  
Roads: ©2006-2010 Tele Atlas  
Names: GNIS, 2010  
Hydrography: National Hydrography Dataset, 2009  
Contours: National Elevation Dataset, 2008  
Boundaries: Census, IBWC, IBC, USGS, 1972 - 2010

WASHINGTON WEST, DC-MD-VA  
2011

Town Center East

















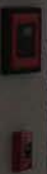








EXIT





PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE  
ZONING PROPOSAL









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Town Center East  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

DATE RECEIVED: 11/29/13 DATE OF PENDING LIST:  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 1/15/14  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13001071

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 1.15.14 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.