

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: Robert J. LaFortune Tower

Other names/site number: OKLA 73-13

Name of related multiple property listing: Tulsa Public Housing 1966-1975

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

2. Location

Street & number: 1725 Southwest Blvd.

City or town: Tulsa State: OK County: Tulsa

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national **statewide** **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A **B** **C** **D**

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
<p>In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>6</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>6</u>	<u>0</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

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, CONCRETE

Narrative Description

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

Summary Paragraph

The Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District (1975) is located at 1725 Southwest Boulevard in Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma. The nominated property consists of an eleven-story Modern Movement apartment tower and five one-story fourplexes. The centered high-rise tower is oriented south and has an offset rectangular plan. A partial basement sits under the west block of the building. A poured concrete structural system supports each floor and a flat roof. The north and south elevations feature a regular pattern of balconies on the second through eleventh floors. The narrower east and west elevations are largely uninterrupted brown brick. On the interior, the first floor contains the public lobby, offices, common kitchen, and community rooms. The upper floors feature a repeating pattern of one-bedroom and efficiency studio units organized along a centered double-loaded corridor. Five one-story fourplexes are located to the north and south of the tower. The fourplexes are of similar concrete and brick construction as the tower. Vinyl lap siding covers the primary elevations. The rectangular buildings contain four one-bedroom units with mirrored footprints. A flat roof covers each building with shed roofs rising at the living rooms. On the interior, the units have a living room, galley-style kitchen, bathroom, and

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bedroom. The buildings sit on a five-acre site that fills the majority of a city block. Three asphalt surface-lots provide vehicular access and parking on site, and a series of concrete walkways and patios allow for circulation between buildings. The remaining open space on the site is greenspace with minimal landscaping. The LaFortune Tower Complex retains historic integrity with few alterations since its construction.

Narrative Description

SETTING & SITE

The LaFortune Tower Historic District, located at 1725 Southwest Boulevard, sits west of the Arkansas River less than two miles southwest of downtown Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma (*Figure 1*). The five-acre site fills most of the city block bound by Southwest Boulevard (west), 19th Street (south), S. Olympia Avenue (east), and 17th Street (north). US-75 highway is located less than a mile west of the property. The blocks immediately south and east are a mixture of single-family homes and apartment buildings with some commercial and light-industrial businesses along Southwest Boulevard west of the property.

Historically, the east side of the area that now encompasses the nominated property contained single family homes. Commercial buildings lined the west side of the site along Southwest Boulevard.¹ When the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved the plans for the construction of the LaFortune Tower complex, the Tulsa Urban Renewal Authority, who owned the site, subsequently cleared it between 1972 and 1973.² An OSU Medical Campus (circa 2003) is located one block north of the property across 17th Street. The surrounding blocks retain much of their historic residential character (*Figure 2*).

Brick walls define the north and east property lines of the district, where it abuts other residential properties. These distinctive walls have a geometric “breezeblock” design (*Photo 7*). Historic plans indicate that these date to the original construction (*Figure 3*). Two concrete walks and a paved driveway provide access from 19th Street to the center of the site. A second driveway and two additional concrete walks provide access from the west end of the site at Southwest Boulevard. There is a bus shelter at the mid-point of the west property line, providing access to downtown via Southwest Boulevard. There are three asphalt surface parking lots on the site that

¹ This is based on available historic images from historicaerials.com 1967 (earliest available), 1980, and 1995.

² "Public High-Rise Planned," Unidentified newspaper (c. 1972-1973): np, clipping in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

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provide a total of 101 parking spaces. One small rectangular lot fills the southeast corner of the site; a circular drive with parking along the west end of the curve fills the southwest corner of the site; and a large, interconnected lot abuts the north and west elevations of the tower and continues along the north elevation of two of the fourplexes to the north of the tower. A concrete patio/plaza with a small grass lawn at the center fills the open space between the north elevation of the high-rise and the fourplexes to the north (*Photo 6*). Concrete walkways connect the high-rise to the fourplexes at the south, east, and north edges of the site and provide circulation throughout the open spaces of the property. The remaining greenspace is minimally landscaped. Some large trees are interspersed within the green areas.

ROBERT J. LAFORTUNE TOWER

The Robert J. LaFortune Tower (LaFortune Tower) is an eleven-story high-rise, set back from the roadways at approximately the center of the site. This building is the focal point and primary resource of the five-acre property. It has an offset rectangular plan and flat roof. The exterior walls are clad in brown brick. Continuous concrete balconies dominate the north and south elevations. Exterior windows and doors were replaced in the mid-2000s unless otherwise noted.

SOUTH (PRIMARY) ELEVATION (*PHOTOS 1 & 2*)

The primary elevation of the high-rise tower faces south (*Photo 1*). The offset plan divides the south elevation into two, ten-bay rectangular blocks with the east block stepping forward. The first-story acts as a base to a repeating pattern of balconies that dominate the upper stories to the edge of the flat roof. Non-historic aluminum and glass sliding doors fill the historic opening at the center of the elevation. This is the main entrance. Aluminum and glass assemblies fill four storefronts to the west of the entrance. A wood pergola with a flat corrugated metal roof provides shade at the west end of the façade. Though the roof has likely been replaced, the pergola appears in historic renderings and is a part of the original design (*Figure 4*). Aluminum and glass assemblies fill five similar openings on the first story of the east block. Some panes of glass have been covered with painted boards or have a reflective coating applied, but the overall assemblies appear to be historic.

Continuous concrete balconies span each upper story. They extend six feet from the façade, and vertical metal supports add additional structural integrity to the balconies. These supports, which divide both blocks into ten bays, give the elevation a grid-like appearance. Painted plywood

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dividers, spaced every twenty feet along the continuous balconies, correspond with the number of units per floor.³ Black metal picket railings line the balconies between the vertical metal supports at the outer balcony edges.⁴ The east and west blocks have an identical pattern of aluminum and glass sliding doors in bays 1, 3, 6, 7, and 10 that provide unit access to the balconies. No windows or doors pierce the rear balcony walls of bays 4, 5, and 8 on either block. On the west block, an aluminum 1/1 hung window pierces bays 2 and 9 and on the east block a single window of identical configuration pierces bay 9. Bay 2 on the east block is uninterrupted brick.

EAST & WEST ELEVATIONS (PHOTOS 2 & 5)

The simple east and west elevations are identical uninterrupted brown brick walls. Bump-outs at the center of each elevation enclose the stairwells that provide circulation from the first-floor lobby through the eleventh floor. Painted balcony separators and the concrete balcony bases are visible at the north and south end of each of these elevations, where they overhang. There are no door or window openings on these elevations. Brown brick clads the east/west walls of the offset north/south elevations, these elevations also have no openings.

NORTH ELEVATION (PHOTOS 3 & 4)

The north elevation is nearly identical to the south elevation. The north elevation faces an open courtyard at the center of the site and an asphalt surface parking lot (*Photo 4*). A non-historic aluminum and glass door fills a secondary entrance at the center of the elevation. Aluminum and glass storefronts, identical to the south elevation, fill a series of openings on the first floor of both blocks. Opaque beige panels fill the glazed panels of some of the storefronts. A concrete stair with metal railing runs parallel to the west block and provides access to the basement.

Like the south elevation, continuous concrete balconies span the width of floors two through eleven. They are identical in design to the south elevation; six feet wide with painted plywood dividers every twenty feet that correspond with units. A pattern of aluminum and glass sliding doors and aluminum 1/1 hung windows pierce the north elevation mirroring the south elevation.

INTERIOR (PHOTOS 12 TO 23)

³ "LaFortune Tower Construction is Near," *Tulsa Tribune* (3 August 1973): np, clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

⁴ Historic photos show horizontal painted railings on the balconies. The black metal railings are not historic, though the date of this alteration is unknown (*Figure 8*).

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A central, offset double-loaded corridor runs the length of the building on all floors (*Photo Maps 3 to 5*). The first floor contains community spaces, administrative offices, a common kitchen, and maintenance rooms. A partial basement occupies the area under the west wing of the building and houses mechanical equipment and storage spaces. Floors two through eleven contain studio and one-bedroom apartments. Two elevators grouped at the mid-point of the central corridor provide vertical circulation throughout the building. Two enclosed switchback stairs, one at the west end of the west block and one at the east end of the east block, provide a secondary means of egress.

Many of the utilitarian 1975 finishes remain throughout the building. Where new materials have been installed, most replace in-kind conditions. A comprehensive set of historic plans is not available; however, historic reflected ceiling plans show suspended acoustic tile ceilings in corridors and public spaces, and textured gypsum board in apartments (*Figure 5*). Walls are painted drywall. A newspaper article from the period of construction, indicates that community rooms will have vinyl floors to accommodate the heavy use of group activities.⁵ Corridors, community rooms, and apartments retain vinyl floors with vinyl base, though it's unknown if this is original material or replaced in-kind. Bathrooms have non-historic ceramic tile floors. Administrative offices have non-historic luxury vinyl plank (LVP) flooring.

First Floor (Photos 12 to 14)

The main (south) entrance provides access to the central lobby through an aluminum and glass vestibule (*Photo 12*). Administrative offices and a reception desk occupy the southwest corner of the lobby with mailboxes and restrooms along the northwest wall (*Photo Map 3*). Two elevators on the east wall of the lobby provide circulation throughout the building. North of the elevators, the secondary entrance leads to the north courtyard through an aluminum and glass vestibule. The central corridor extends east and west from this centralized lobby. The east corridor organizes the community room, common kitchen, library, and storage areas (*Photo 13*). The community room spans the width of a building (*Photo 14*); a collapsible partition separates the large room into two smaller sections. Administrative offices and a staff bathroom occupy the south side of the west corridor. One two-bedroom apartment along the north side of the west corridor historically housed the building manager but is today a rented unit. It is the only two-bedroom unit in the building. Storage rooms fill the remainder of the north side of the east corridor.

⁵ "LaFortune Tower Construction is Near," np.

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Residential Floors (Two to Eleven) (Photos 15 to 23)

The second through eleventh floors are identical (*Photo Maps 4 & 5*). A central, offset double-loaded corridor organizes the apartments, with the elevator lobby and laundry room at the center (*Photos 15 to 17*). Twelve studio units and six one-bedroom units occupy each floor. On the west corridor, the two east and west units on both sides of the corridor are one-bedroom units; the center six units are studios. On the east corridor, the two east units on both sides of the corridor are one-bedroom units; the remaining six apartments are studios. The historic layout remains. A laundry room occupies the space directly south of the centralized elevators (*Photo 17*), and trash chutes are integrated into the wall north of the elevators (*Photo 15*).

One-bedroom units feature a combined living/dining area that fills half of the unit (*Photo 22*). The other half of the unit contains a bedroom along the exterior wall (*Photo 23*), a galley-style kitchen along the corridor wall and a bathroom and storage closet in between. Studios feature a combined living/sleeping area that occupies roughly half of the unit lengthwise (*Photos 18 & 19*). An L-shaped kitchen (*Photo 21*) and a bathroom (*Photo 20*) fill the other half of the unit. All apartment units share similar finishes and fixtures, and each has access to a private balcony.

FOURPLEXES

The five one-story fourplexes around the perimeter of the site to the south, east, and north of the tower are each a contributing building. The primary elevations face the tower, creating interior courtyards sheltered from the roadways. Each fourplex has a rectangular plan that consists of two pairs of mirrored apartments that share a centered entrance. Flat roofs cap each fourplex; shed roofs extend up from the flat roofs over each living room.

PRIMARY ELEVATIONS (PHOTOS 6 & 8)

The primary elevations of each of the five fourplexes face into the center of the site, towards LaFortune Tower. Brick walls and metal fencing enclose the primary elevations and create small private yards in front of each unit (*Photo 6 & 8*). The primary elevations are flat with no ornament. Vinyl siding clads each façade between brick endcaps. The high points of the steeply pitched roofs are above the primary elevations. The roofs slope towards the rear of each block, leveling out to a flat section at the rear. Each of the smaller end blocks has a sliding glass door and two clerestory windows at the roofline. The larger center block has two sliding glass doors and four clerestory windows at the roof line. Metal slab doors fill apartment entrances in the connectors between blocks.

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SIDE ELEVATIONS (PHOTO 5)

Brown brick clads the side elevations that align with the garden walls. No openings pierce these walls. The steep roof profile is exposed on the side elevations where it rises above the primary elevation and levels out at the rear.

REAR ELEVATIONS (PHOTO 5)

At the rear, a historic brick wall separates each unit to create rear yards. Black metal fencing encloses the outer edge of these small yards (*Photo 5*). Brown brick clads the rear elevation of the fourplexes. Painted vinyl gutters line the edges of the flat roofs. At end blocks, painted metal downspouts drain into the ground. Each of the units has a single non-historic pedestrian door fit into a historic opening. Painted panels fill the transom levels.

INTERIOR (PHOTOS 9 TO 11)

On the interior, a living room and a bedroom fill one half of the floor plan (*Photo Map 2*). The living rooms are open to the full height of the pitched roof, with clerestory windows on the primary elevations (*Photo 9*). Bedrooms are located at the rear of the unit where the ceilings are lower (*Photo 11*). The other half of each unit houses a galley-style kitchen (*Photo 10*), bathroom, and storage closet.

INTEGRITY

The Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District retains historic integrity from the time of construction in 1975. It remains in its historic *location*, southwest of downtown Tulsa. The *setting* remains largely intact since some single-family homes and commercial buildings were cleared for the construction of the apartment buildings prior to 1975. Some new construction, such as the OSU Medical Campus to the north, have been added since the period of significance. The overall residential character to the east and south remains, and Southwest Boulevard remains a commercial corridor as it was during the period of significance. Both the site and the buildings themselves have undergone few alterations since their construction and retain integrity of *design*. The buildings remain set back from the roadways, with the fourplexes oriented around the tower to create interior courtyards and insulated green space. Significant character-defining features of the buildings' design include the tower's the off-set rectangular plan, regular pattern of balconies on the north and south elevations, interior double-loaded corridors, and centrally located

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elevators, the fourplexes' steep pitched roofs, garden walls, and living room open to the full height of the ceilings. The units within the tower and in the fourplexes, and community spaces on the first floor of the tower retain their historic configuration. *Materials* throughout the buildings are mostly historic and compatible. Brown brick and concrete elements remain on the exteriors of all buildings. Many historic interior finishes remain including suspended acoustic tile ceilings, textured gypsum board, and laminate flooring. As mentioned in the Multiple Property Documentation Form, *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*, evaluating *workmanship* in public housing buildings from this era is difficult due to reduced evidence of artisans' labor and skill.⁶ Materials were chosen for their efficiency and cost effectiveness rather than their decorative nature or highly specialized methods of installation. The district's retention of historic location, setting, design, and materials effectively communicates the *feeling* of an *association* with public housing in the 1970s.

⁶ Emily Lenhausen and Amanda K. Loughlin, *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*, multiple property documentation form (August 2021): F-32.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1975

Significant Dates

1975

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Murray Jones Murray (architects)

Netherton-Solnok & Associates (engineers)

Cowen Construction Inc. (general contractor)

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

Constructed between 1973-1975, the Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of SOCIAL HISTORY. This complex, which includes a high-rise tower and five fourplexes, joined two other public housing projects, Pioneer Plaza (1969) and Hewgley Terrace (1970), constructed to specifically house low-income seniors in Tulsa. Significantly, the complex was the first public housing project in Tulsa not developed using the turnkey method. From its founding in 1966, the Tulsa Housing Authority (THA) embraced the development of public housing units through this method established under the Department of Housing and Development in 1966. Turnkey construction authorized private developers to design and construct housing units which were then sold to the THA. Increased public distrust of the turnkey program delayed the construction of the LaFortune complex, planning for which began in 1972. In order to move the project forward, the THA developed the property under the conventional housing method. Instead of relying on a private developer, the THA hired the architects and builders themselves. Construction of the Robert J. LaFortune Historic District began in the fall of 1973, and its buildings opened to residents in the fall of 1975. This project represents the last development created by and for the THA between 1966-1975. The period of significance, 1975, represents the year it opened, helping to relieve the shortage of low-income senior housing in the city. Due to the year it opened, Criteria Consideration G applies. The property is eligible because the THA developed it to meet senior housing needs along with Pioneer Plaza and Hewgley Terrace. The Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District is nominated under the *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975* multiple property document. The property is unique as a collection of related buildings that includes a tower and one-story buildings. The LaFortune Tower dominates the property and is an intact example of the High-rise Housing Project property type.

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

The passage of the 1965 Oklahoma Housing Authorities Act enabled municipalities throughout the state to form public housing authorities. These authorities were partnerships between local and state agencies and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The city of Tulsa established the Tulsa Housing Authority (THA) in 1966 to administer public housing programs for the city's most vulnerable citizens. During its first operation year, 1967,

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the THA provided two hundred forty (240) public housing units in Tulsa. Of these, fifty (50) units (21 percent) were specifically for elderly residents earning less than \$3,000 annually.⁷

The THA prioritized the creation of senior public housing. By 1970, the city had two new senior housing towers, Pioneer Plaza (1969) and Hewgley Terrace (1970). In 1972, the THA authorized the construction of the Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District as the third housing project for low-income senior citizens in the city. When construction of the LaFortune development commenced in November 1973, THA oversaw 700 senior citizen units of the total 3,034 units in the city. The two existing low-income senior developments were fully rented, and waiting lists illustrated the still-urgent need for low-income senior housing units.⁸ The LaFortune Tower development directly met this need by adding two hundred apartments to the THA inventory.

ROBERT J. LAFORTUNE TOWER & FOURPLEXES

The LaFortune Tower development diverged from previous THA developments in two significant ways. For one, this was the first public housing project in Tulsa to use the conventional development method. From the beginning of the federal public housing program, public housing authorities like the THA selected and acquired sites, hired architects to design the buildings, and selected builders through a competitive bidding process, the “conventional” method. In 1966, HUD implemented a new development process known as turnkey construction. Under this model, private developers undertook all aspects of the project under guidance from the housing authority and HUD. When finished with the project, housing authorities like the THA, then purchased the property. When first established, also in 1966, the THA embraced this turnkey program, using this model to complete all public housing projects until LaFortune. By the early 1970s the turnkey model became the target of public opposition and suspicion. Proponents argued it was efficient and allowed for more rapid development opportunities, but Tulsa residents grew concerned about the potential for fraud and misuse when granting contracts to private developers.⁹ In response to this opposition, THA announced in July 1971 that they would switch operations to the conventional model. The Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District was the first, and only, housing project built by the THA under the conventional model.

⁷ Equivalent to roughly \$28,000 in 2024. Although administered by the THA, these leased units were in the Bliss Hotel in downtown Tulsa. Ginnie Graham, “Once-Cluttered Housing Agency Cleaned Up,” *Tulsa World* (28 January 2007): 16. Formerly located at 123. Boston Avenue, the Bliss Hotel was demolished in 1973.

⁸ “LaFortune Tower Construction is Near,” np.

⁹ Lenhausen and Loughlin, *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*, E-20.

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It also was the first project regulated by new THA policies that required the project team to seek out and include input from affected citizens and groups as a part of the design process, an oversight on previous projects. This new policy encouraged the construction of housing in areas of need and influenced the design of LaFortune Tower. The multiple buildings and protected green space gave the complex a residential feel.

SITE SELECTION

THA noted proximity to downtown as an important factor in planning senior housing projects because it allowed residents to maintain a lifestyle they knew, as well as retain access to important goods and services.¹⁰ In addition to services such as transportation, the THA also stressed the importance of established relationships to the health and happiness of elderly public housing residents. A 1970 study later released by the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Committee found that the largest concentration of elderly residents in Tulsa was in the downtown area. Of these residents, between six and seven hundred sought THA housing.¹¹ Public housing sites located near downtown helped current and future residents of THA buildings maintain connections and conveniences and provided Tulsa seniors “a place to go” for vital human interaction.¹² For this reason, public housing senior projects completed under the THA were typically located near downtown. The construction of LaFortune Tower at 1725 Southwest Boulevard in west Tulsa reflects this practice.

CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING HISTORY

Planning and design for LaFortune Tower began in early 1972 with an extensive research effort. This process was in part mandated by a new THA policy requiring architects to consider input from affected communities when designing housing projects.¹³ Murray, Jones, Murray Architects designed the 201-unit housing complex, which included 181-units in an eleven-story high-rise tower and an additional twenty units in five fourplexes on the site. The property manager rented the one two-bedroom unit in the tower, leaving two hundred apartments available for seniors. The apartments, combined with the community spaces on the ground floor,

¹⁰ “Elderly People’s Need for Housing Urgent,” *Tulsa Daily World* (6 December 1970): I-7.

¹¹ “Elderly People’s Need for Housing Urgent,” I-7.

¹² “Elderly People’s Need for Housing Urgent,” I-7.

¹³ “Public High-Rise Planned,” np.

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totaled 100,000 square feet of usable space.¹⁴ In October 1973, THA award the final construction contract to Cowen Construction Inc. at a cost of \$4,151,900.¹⁵ The bid process also engaged Netherton-Solnok & Associates, engineers.¹⁶ With senior residents in mind, THA also retained Roff Jensen, a Chicago-based safety consultant.¹⁷ Significant safety features of the building included two-hour fire rated walls, sprinkler systems in the core of the building, backup generators and heat sensors for the elevator system, specialized vent systems in the hallways to minimize smoke accumulation in case of fire, and a flat roof designed for helicopter landings in an emergency.¹⁸ The parking lots were specifically laid out so that fire trucks could maneuver around the grounds and access all parts of the building, and balcony access from every unit intentionally facilitated rescue in case of fire. Five percent of the total construction budget was spent on safety assessment and features aimed at supporting elderly residents.¹⁹

In addition to safety concerns, many aspects of the design encouraged social interaction and increased quality of life for residents. The first floor of the tower included a clubroom for social gatherings and community meetings, a health club with exercise room, a common kitchen, a library, and a barber/hairdresser.²⁰ Residential floors included convenient, centralized amenities like trash chutes and laundry facilities that required residents to leave their units and interact. Tom Hares, Director of the THA, emphasized this in August 1973, “Tenants will have to bring out their trash and garbage to central areas. Laundry will be in central areas...getting out and mixing is a boon to the older tenants.”²¹ A booklet produced by the THA in 1979 lists offsetting the corridors to bring natural light into the elevator lobbies and providing access to nature on balconies and in green spaces as important factors in LaFortune’s design.²² The THA booklet also indicates that the goal of the unique multi-building site design was to “create residential

¹⁴ The Housing Authority of the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma (THA), “Robert J. LaFortune Tower Housing for the Elderly,” Unpublished promotional brochure (27 December 1979), 1, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

¹⁵ “LaFortune Towers Work Awarded to Cowen Firm,” *Tulsa Tribune* (25 October 1973): np, clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

¹⁶ THA, “Robert J. LaFortune Tower...,” 1.

¹⁷ “LaFortune Tower One of Safest High-rises in Nation is Claim,” *Tulsa Tribune* (11 April 1975): np, clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

¹⁸ “LaFortune Tower One of Safest...,” np.

¹⁹ “LaFortune Tower One of Safest...,” np.

²⁰ “LaFortune Tower Construction is Near,” np.

²¹ “LaFortune Tower Construction is Near,” np.

²² THA, “Robert J. LaFortune Tower...,” 1.

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character and sense of place by grouping single story four-plex cottages around the tower.”²³ This site design created interior courtyards and open space sheltered from the main roadways. These green spaces encouraged outdoor recreation through the inclusion of horseshoe and shuffleboard courts.²⁴ A circa 1972 architect’s rendering shows the intended use of this community-focused outdoor space (*Figure 6*). To supplement programming and amenities offered onsite, bus shelters at Southwest Boulevard provided easy transportation to downtown Tulsa.

Construction commenced November 16, 1973. The building opened on September 8, 1975, almost two years later (*Figures 7 & 8*). Residents officially began occupying the units in October 1975. Requirements limited applicants to singles with an annual income of \$4,000 or below and couples with a combined income of \$4,600 or below.²⁵ Maximum annual rental fees equaled \$1,000 (for studios) to \$1,150 (for one-bedrooms) 1975.²⁶ US Senator from Tulsa, Dewey Bartlett, spoke at the building dedication. He championed the city’s investment in affordable senior housing to serve “the largest segment (of the population), and yet in many ways the most neglected.”²⁷ He called LaFortune Tower “an acknowledgement and return on investment of senior citizen contributions.”²⁸ The THA named the complex for the Mayor of Tulsa at the time, Robert J. LaFortune (1970-1978) whose support was instrumental in getting the complex built.

LaFortune Tower added two hundred senior housing units to the city’s inventory at a time when the two earlier senior developments reached full capacity almost immediately after opening and maintained waiting lists. A *Tulsa Tribune* article from August 1974, speaks to how planning and construction of LaFortune Tower was closely linked with the two earlier senior housing developments, Pioneer Plaza and Hewgley Terrance. Don Brooks, manager of senior housing told the paper, “Things learned in building and operating Pioneer Plaza were incorporated in Hewgley Terrace. LaFortune Towers being built in West Tulsa will combine the best factors of both high-rise units.”²⁹ Applications for LaFortune Tower opened over a year before

²³ THA, “Robert J. LaFortune Tower...,” 1.

²⁴ “LaFortune Tower Construction is Near,” np.

²⁵ “LaFortune Tower One of Safest...,” np. Equal to over \$22,700 and \$26,100 respectively in 2024.

²⁶ “LaFortune Tower One of Safest...,” np. Equal to over \$5,600 and \$6,000 respectively in 2024

²⁷ “LaFortune Tower Lauded,” *Tulsa Tribune* (3 October 1975): np clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

²⁸ “LaFortune Tower Lauded,” np.

²⁹ Wilma Matkin, “Theme Song Says a Lot About Life in High-Rise Units,” *Tulsa Tribune* (August 28, 1974): B1.

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construction was completed, and if the other two projects are any indication, the need was great and interest in renting the units was high.³⁰

As the *Tulsa Public Housing* MPD notes, the opening of LaFortune Tower marked the end of the era of public housing built by and for the THA. “In keeping with national trends and legislative changes at the federal level, including the passage of the 1974 Community Development Act, the THA shifted its focus away from housing unit production in the mid-1970s.”³¹ The THA instead refocused on rent subsidies.³² The Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District physically represents the era of public housing construction in Tulsa.

SIGNIFICANCE & REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

The Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District is significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History because of its association with the efforts of the Tulsa Housing Authority (THA) to fill the on-going demand for low-income senior housing in the city.³³ As discussed in the *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975* MPD, the Tulsa Housing Authority constructed the LaFortune complex using the conventional rather than the turnkey method implemented in 1966 by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Prior to LaFortune, the THA produced all public housing using turnkey construction, allowing developers to construct the projects and sell to the THA. LaFortune is the first, and only, low-income senior public housing constructed in Tulsa under the conventional model. LaFortune also was one of the first THA projects to incorporate the input of affected communities in the planning and design of housing in the city of Tulsa. The project added two hundred units to the senior-housing inventory and helped to relieve waitlists for Pioneer Plaza and Hewgley Terrace. The LaFortune Tower complex was also the last purpose-built public housing to be constructed in the city of Tulsa before THA shifted focus to rent subsidies.

As a High-rise Housing Project, LaFortune Tower meets the registration requirements laid out in the *Tulsa Public Housing* MPD. It retains a high degree of integrity, especially related to location, design, materials, association, and feeling. The location of LaFortune Tower, just southwest of downtown, was a direct effort to reach the large number of elderly residents living

³⁰ Matkin, “Theme Song...,” B1

³¹ Lenhausen and Loughlin, *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*, E-22.

³² Lenhausen and Loughlin, *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*, E-22.

³³ Lenhausen and Loughlin, *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*, F-28.

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downtown and in need of affordable housing. When construction began in 1973, the two existing low-income senior housing complexes had waiting lists. Additionally, the building has a unique multi-building layout that created a residential atmosphere by grouping one-story fourplexes around the apartment tower and creating greenspaces sheltered from the roadways. It included amenities such as community rooms and easy access to public transportation.

CONCLUSION

Opened in 1975, Robert J. LaFortune Tower Historic District was the third senior housing project and last development constructed by and for the Tulsa Housing Authority. It was the first, and only, housing project constructed under the conventional model. The six-building complex (one eleven-story tower and five one-story fourplexes) added two hundred purpose-built public housing units for seniors in Tulsa, addressing a severe shortage that the two earlier senior housing projects were unable to satisfy. The project site was selected to allow residents to maintain access to the conveniences of downtown Tulsa via public transportation, while the building design integrated safety and modern conveniences tailored to improve the quality of life of residents and create a sense of community. LaFortune Tower is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of SOCIAL HISTORY, as it reflects a change in policy at THA that led to the conventional method of construction and a was built to help alleviate shortages in housing for low-income senior citizens. LaFortune Tower is a High-rise Housing Project property type described in the *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975* multiple property document.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

“Elderly People’s Need for Housing Urgent.” *Tulsa Daily World* (6 December 1970): I-7.
Accessed on Newspapers.com.

Graham, Ginnie. “Once-Cluttered Housing Agency Cleaned Up.” *Tulsa World* (28 January 2007): 16. Accessed on Newspapers.com.

The Housing Authority of the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma (THA), “Robert J. LaFortune Tower Housing for the Elderly,” Unpublished promotional brochure, December 27, 1979, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

“LaFortune Tower Construction is Near.” *Tulsa Tribune* (3 August 1973): np clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

“LaFortune Tower Lauded.” *Tulsa Tribune* (3 October 1975): np clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

“LaFortune Tower One of Safest High-rises in Nation is Claim.” *Tulsa Tribune* (11 April 1975): np clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

“LaFortune Towers Work Awarded to Cowen Firm.” *Tulsa Tribune* (25 October 1973): np clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

Lenhausen, Emily and Amanda K. Loughlin. *Tulsa Public Housing, 1966-1975*. Multiple Property Documentation Form (August 2021).

Matkin, Wilma. “Theme Song Says a Lot About Life in High-Rise Units.” *Tulsa Tribune* (28 August 1974): B1.

“Public High-Rise Planned,” Unidentified newspaper (c. 1972-1973): np clipping in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.

Tulsa Housing Authority Archives. Historic Plans.

“Tulsa Housing Authority Senior Citizen Housing Projects.” *Tulsa World* (May 11, 1975)

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Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File. Oklahoma Room. Tulsa City/County Public Library.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 5.08 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: **36.136331** Longitude: **-96.006021**
2. Latitude: Longitude:
3. Latitude: Longitude:
4. Latitude: Longitude:

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

The Tulsa County Assessor describes the property as 5.08 Acres in Subdivision: RIVERVIEW PARK SECOND ADDN RESUB (35748). Legal: BLK 2 Section: 11 Township: 19 Range: 12.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary represents the current and historic parcel associated with LaFortune Tower.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Molly Maguire, Historic Preservation Specialist, with Amanda Loughlin National Register Coordinator

organization: Rosin Preservation

street & number: 1712 Holmes St.

city or town: Kansas City state: MO zip code: 64108

e-mail molly@rosinpreservation.com

telephone: 816.472.4950

date: April 2024

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

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Photographs

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

Photo Log

Name of Property: **Robert J. LaFortune Tower**

City or Vicinity: **Tulsa**

County: **Tulsa County**

State: **Oklahoma**

Photographer: **Brad Finch, f-stop Photography**

Date Photographed: **March 2024**

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

01 of 23: SW elevation LaFortune tower, view NE

02 of 23: W elevation of LaFortune Tower from parking lot, view NE

03 of 23: NW elevation of LaFortune Tower, view SE

04 of 23: N elevation of LaFortune Tower and interior courtyard, view SW

05 of 23: E elevation of LaFortune Tower and N/E Fourplexes, view W

06 of 23: S/SE Fourplexes and front courtyard, view E

07 of 23: N boundary wall, view NE

08 of 23: Primary elevations of N Fourplexes

09 of 23: N fourplex living room, view S

10 of 23: N fourplex kitchen, view S

11 of 23: N fourplex bedroom, view NW

12 of 23: First floor lobby, view SW

13 of 23: First floor, E corridor, view W (typ.)

14 of 23: First floor community room, view S

15 of 23: Eleventh floor elevator lobby, view SE (typ.)

16 of 23: Eleventh floor W corridor, view W (typ.)

17 of 23: Eleventh floor laundry room, view SE (typ.)

18 of 23: Unit 605 efficiency, view S (typ.)

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- 19 of 23:** Unit 605 efficiency, view N (typ.)
- 20 of 23:** Unit 605 efficiency bathroom, view S (typ.)
- 21 of 23:** Unit 605 efficiency kitchen, view E (typ.)
- 22 of 23:** Unit 1109 one-bedroom, view NE (typ.)
- 23 of 23:** Unit 1109 one-bedroom, bedroom, view SE (typ.)

Figure log

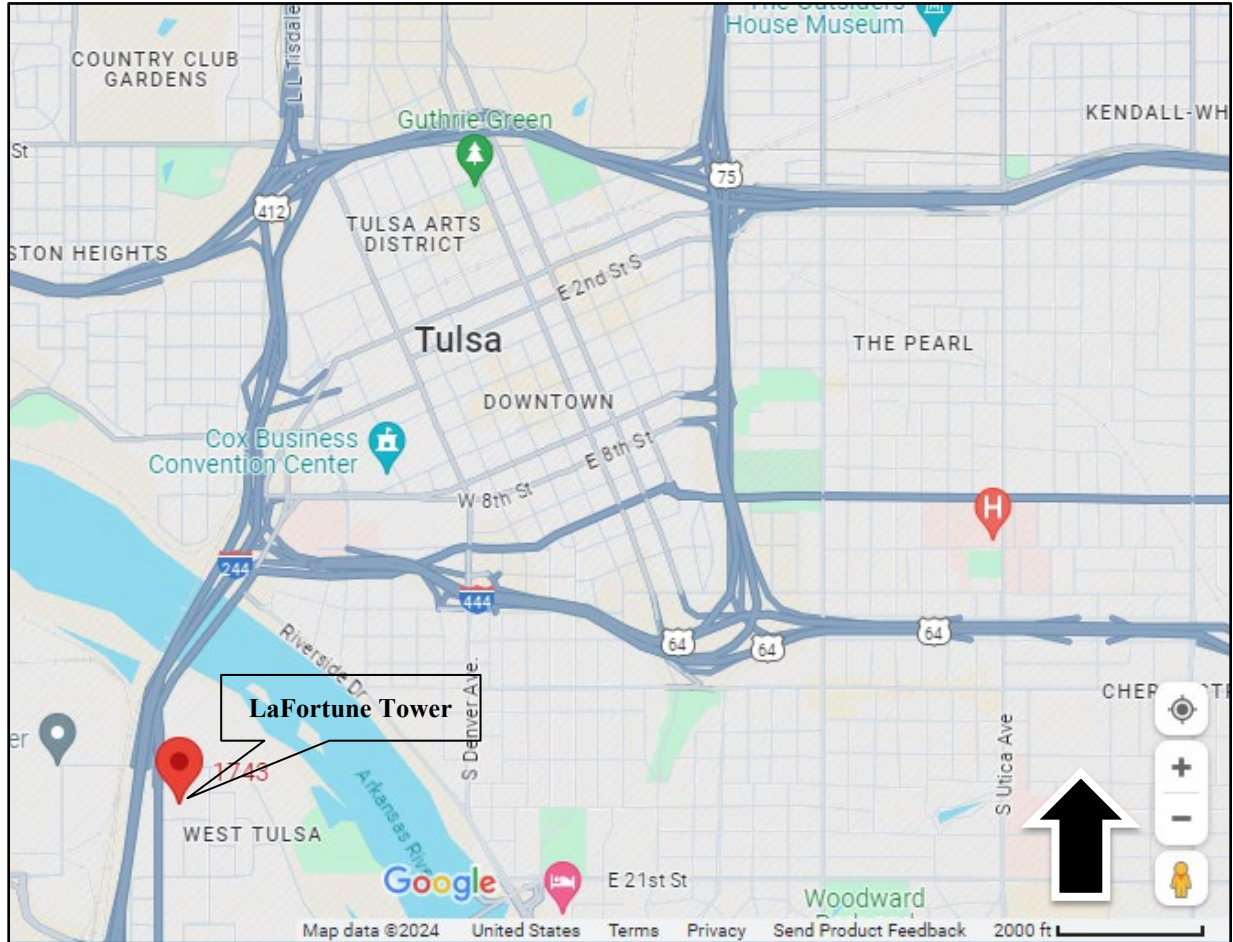
- Figure 1.** Contextual Map
 - Figure 2.** Boundary Map
 - Figure 3.** Historic Site Plan
 - Figure 4.** Architectural Rendering
 - Figure 5.** Historic First Floor- RCP Plan
 - Figure 6.** Rendering of outdoor space
 - Figure 7.** Construction Photo
 - Figure 8.** Balcony Detail Construction Photo
-
- Photo Map 1.** Exterior and site
 - Photo Map 2.** Interior Fourplex (typ.)
 - Photo Map 3.** Interior Tower First floor
 - Photo Map 4.** Interior Tower Sixth Floor (typ. efficiency studio)
 - Photo Map 5.** Interior Eleventh Floor (typ. one-bedroom)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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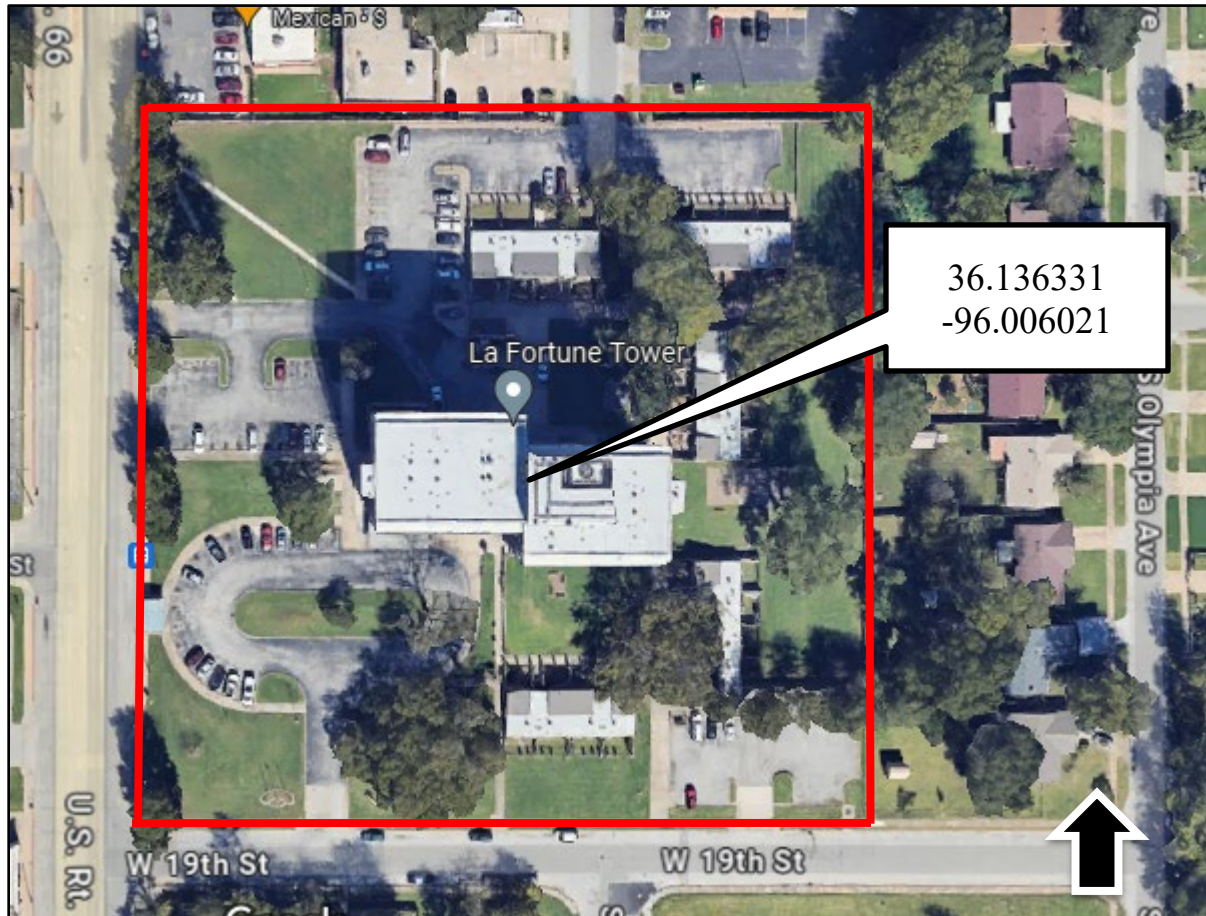
Figure 1. Contextual map, showing LaFortune Tower within Tulsa. Base Map: Google, 2024.



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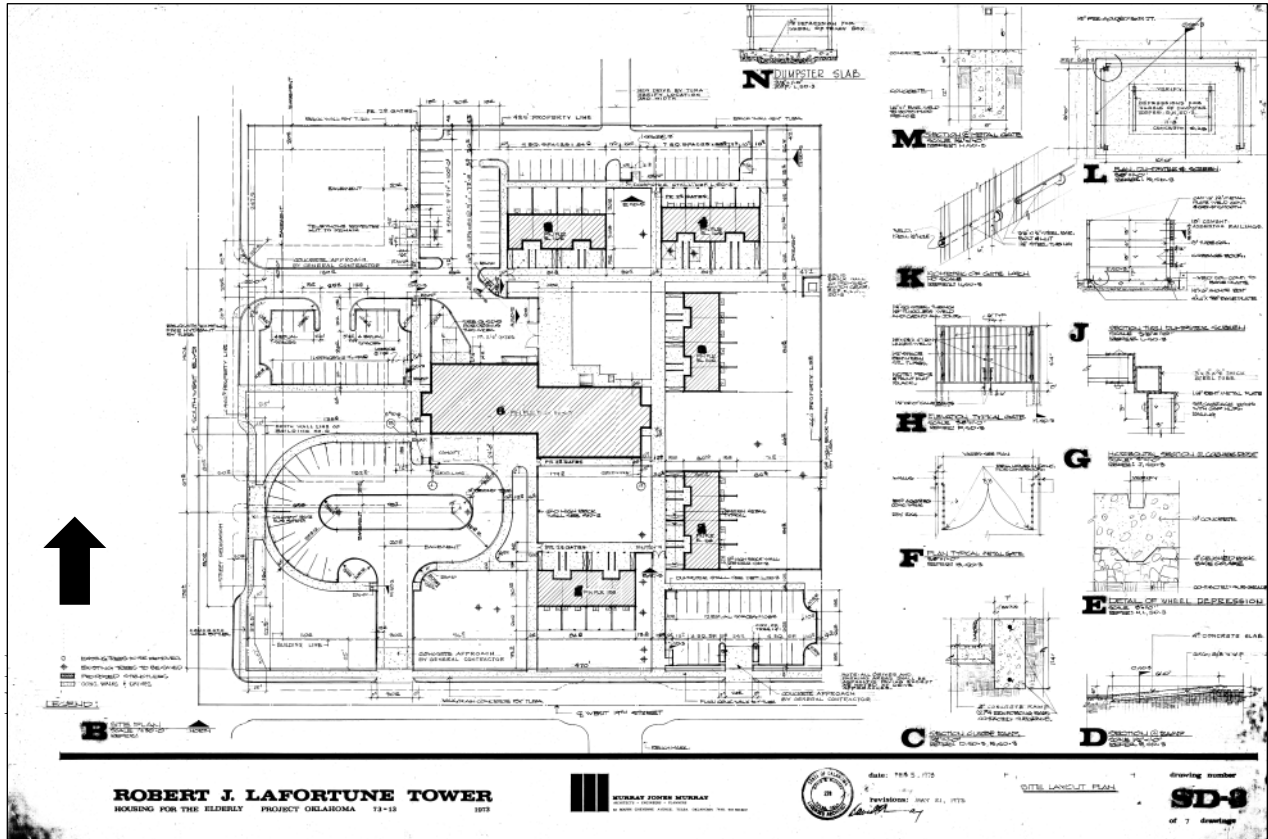
Figure 2. Boundary map. Boundary shown in red line. Base map: Google 2024.



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Figure 3. Historic site plan showing THA constructed brick walls at the N and E property lines.
[Source: Murray Jones Murray Architects, 1973.]



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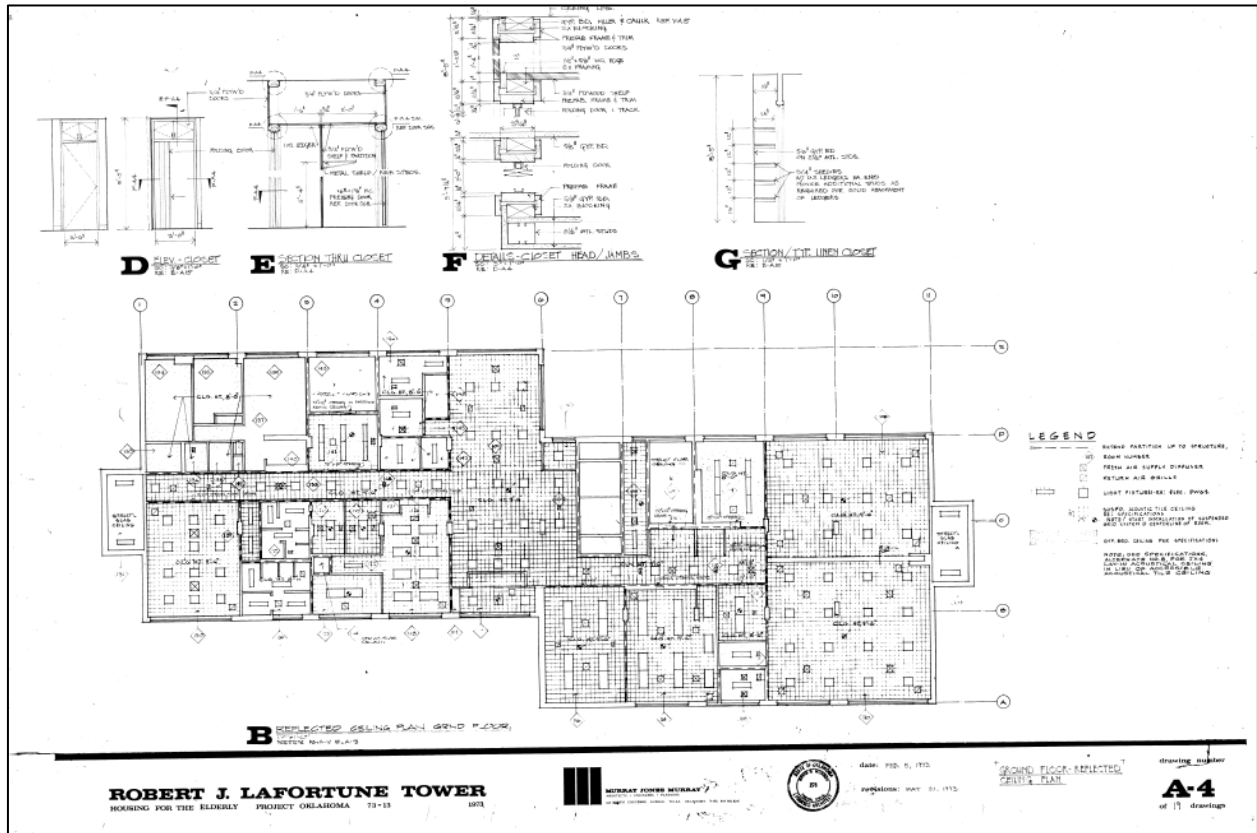
Figure 4. Architectural renderings c. 1979. [Source: THA published booklet, Tulsa Public Library]



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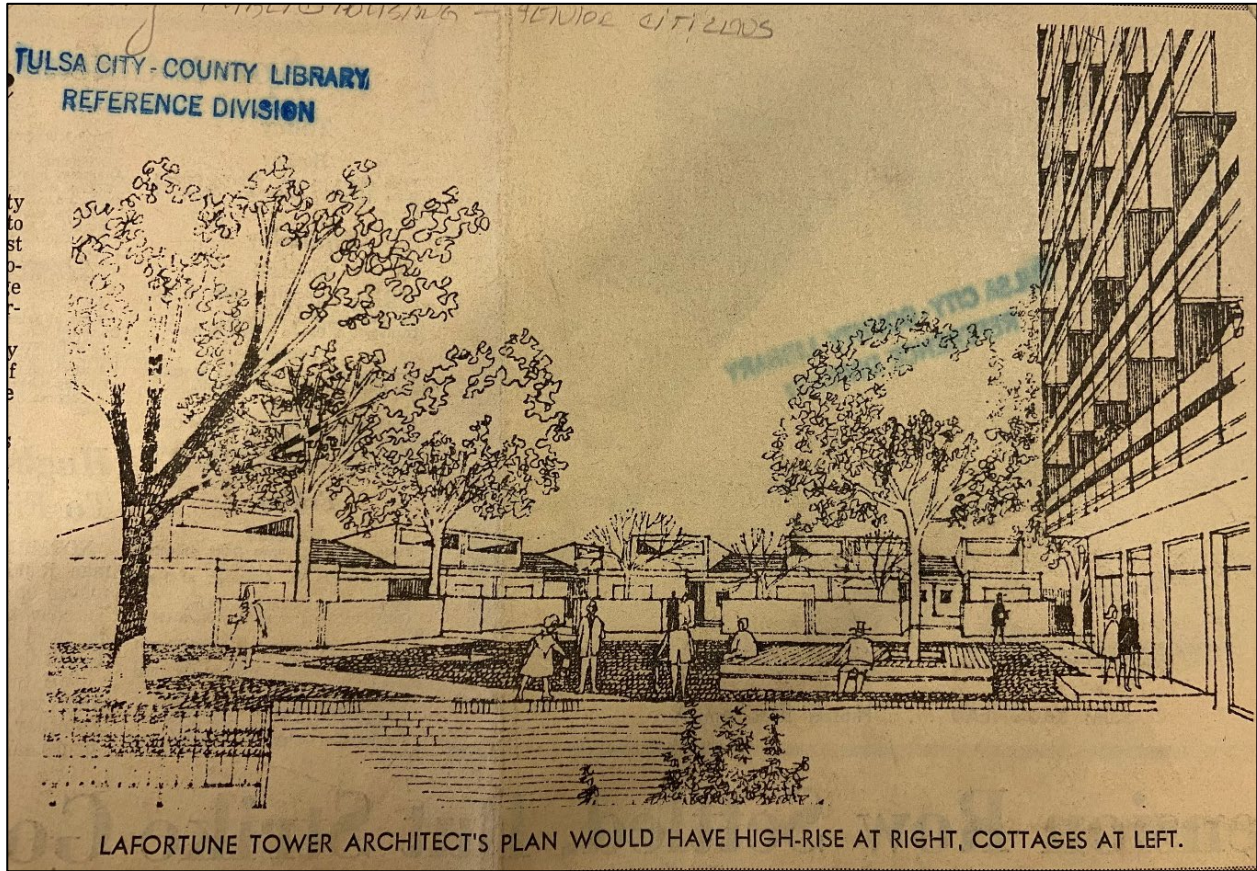
Figure 5. Historic RCP plan, first floor. [Source: Murray Jones Murray Architects, 1973.]



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Figure 6. Rendering of outdoor space at the N elevation of the tower. [Public High-Rise Planned," np.]



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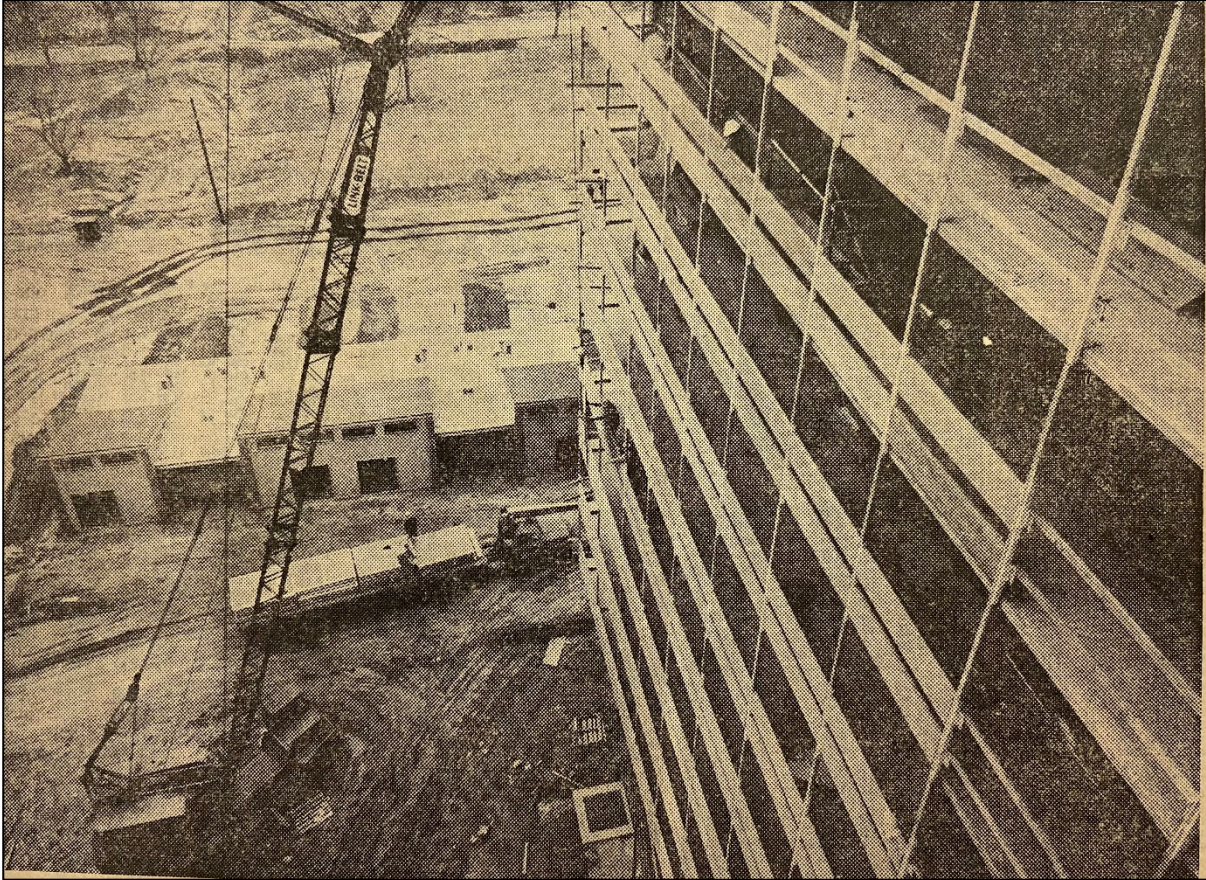
Figure 7. Construction photo c. 1973-1974. [*Tulsa Tribune*, clipping in LaFortune Tower file in Tulsa Public Housing Vertical File, Oklahoma Room, Tulsa City/County Public Library.]



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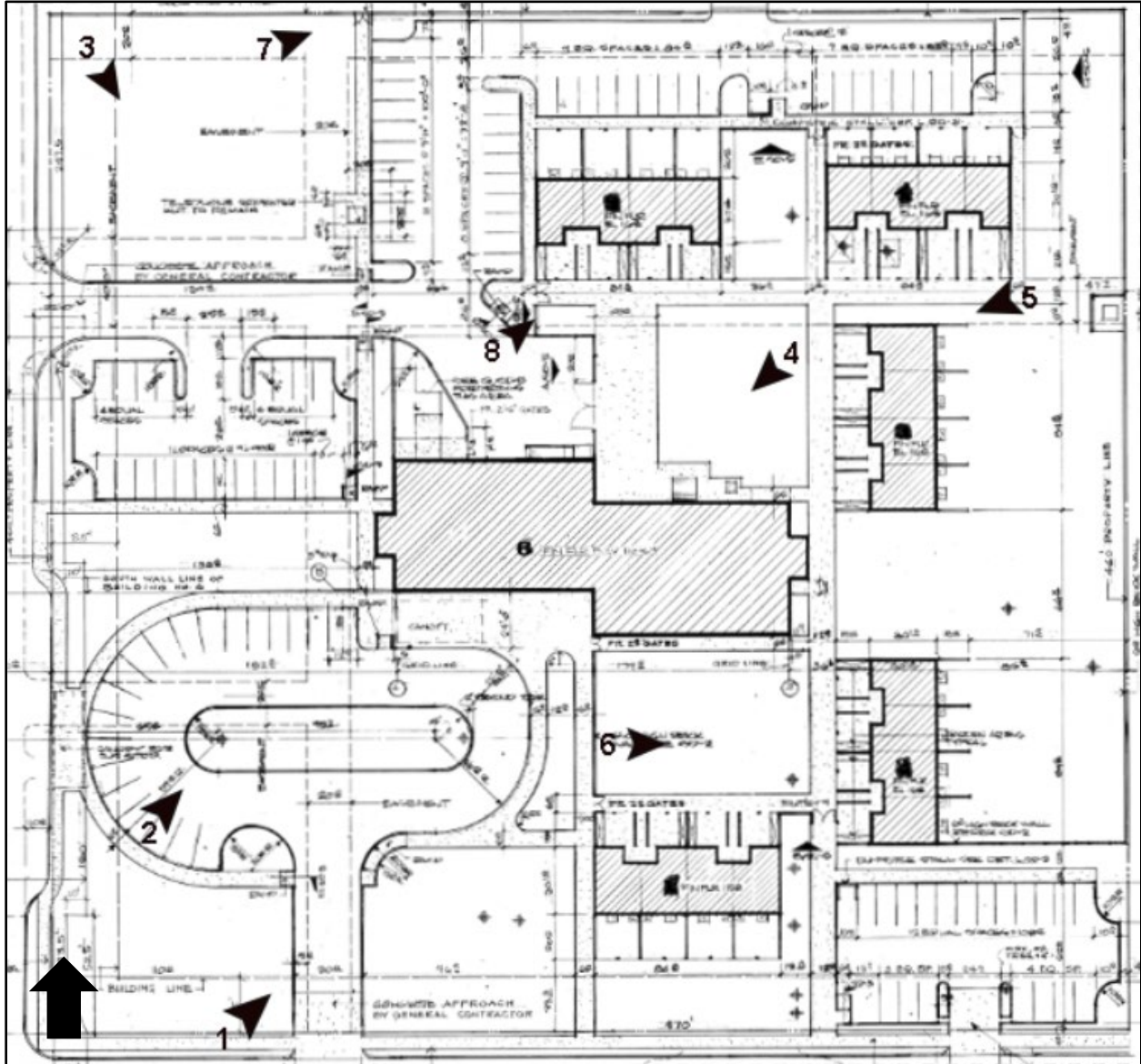
Figure 8. April 1975 construction photo, showing balcony details. [“LaFortune Tower One of Safest High-rises in Nation is Claim,” np.]



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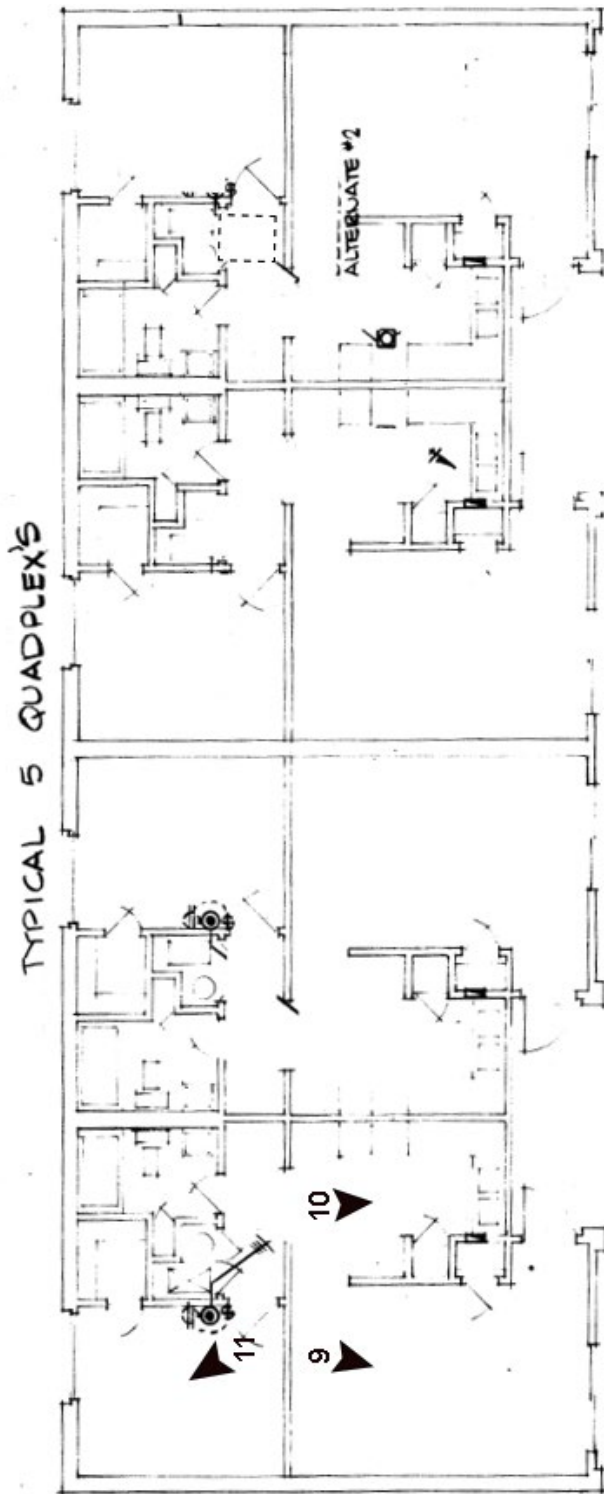
Photo Map 1. Exterior and Site Photo Plan. Not to scale



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Photo Map 2. Interior Fourplex Photo plan (typ.). Not to scale



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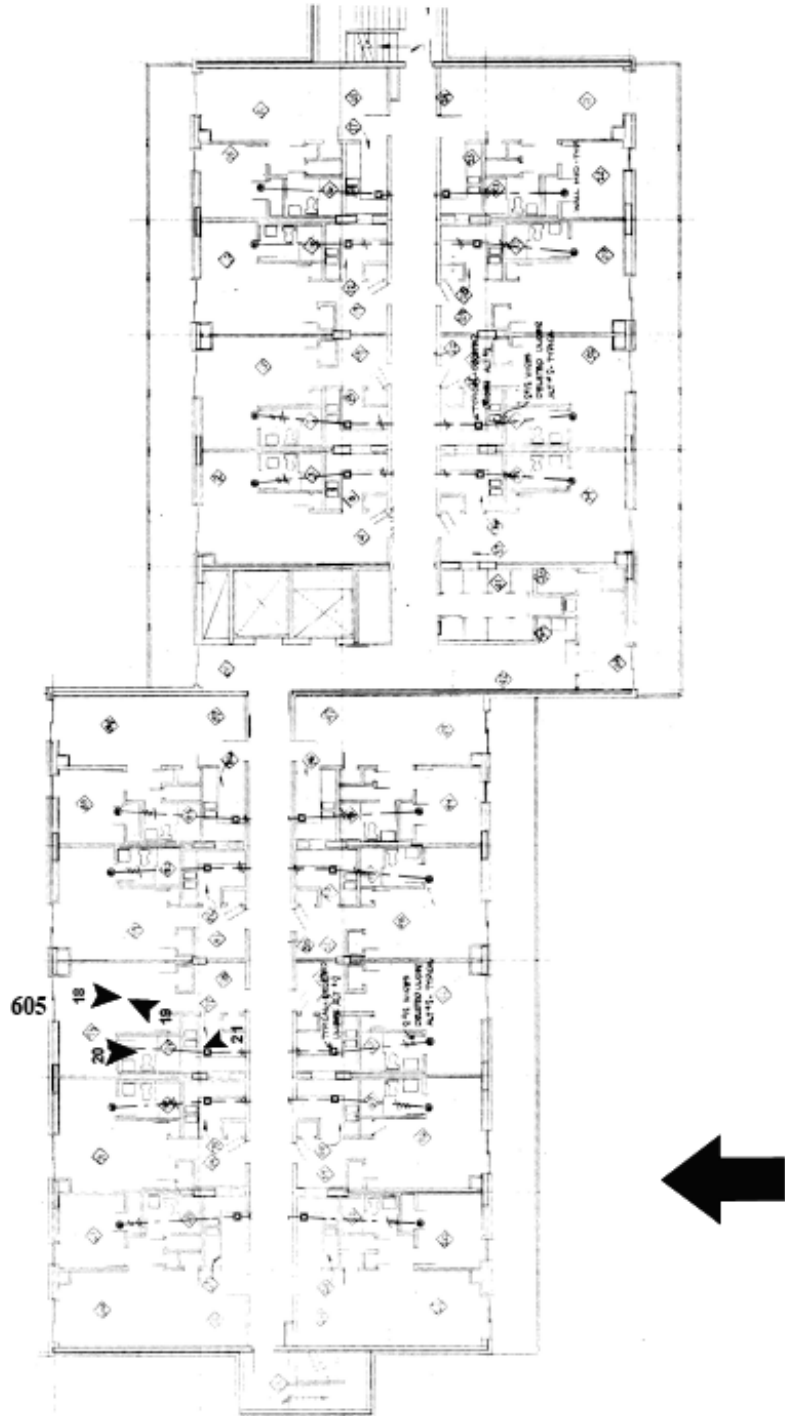
Photo Map 3. Interior First Floor Photo Plan. Not to Scale.



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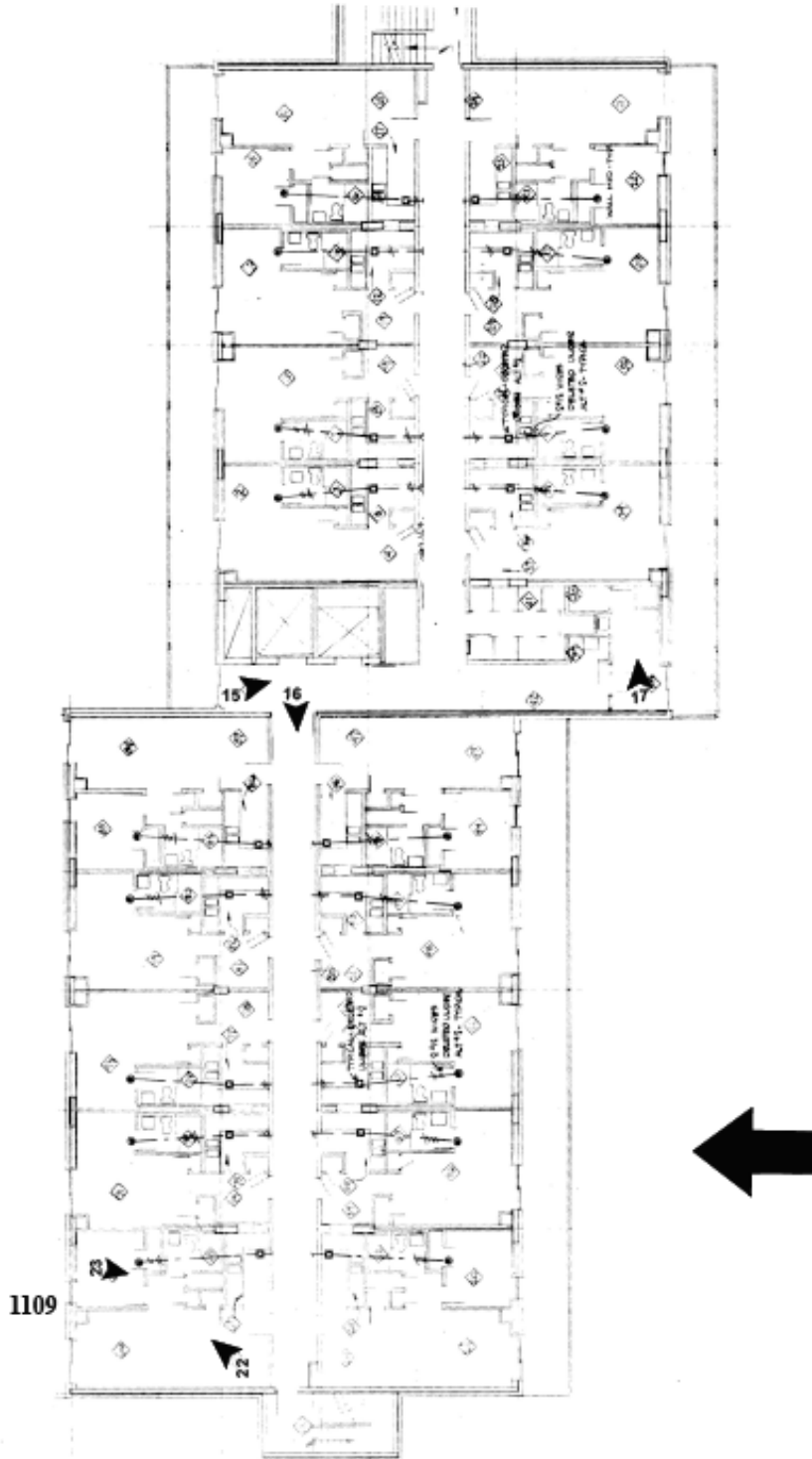
Photo Map 4. Interior Sixth Floor Photo plan. (typ. efficiency studio). Not to Scale.



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Photo Map 5. Interior Eleventh Floor Photo Plan (typ. one-bedroom). Not to Scale.





LAFORTUNE
TOWER
1976





























11

12





EXIT

WARNING
RESTRICTED AREA
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY



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