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## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**

Historic Landmark Case No. 16-13

### **Concord Apartments**

5805, 5807, 5809, 5811, 5813, 5815 and 5817, 5819, 5821, 5823, 5825 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Square 2794, Lots 18 and 19

Meeting Date: July 28, 2016  
Applicant: Hampstead Brightwood Partners LP (owner)  
Affected ANC: 4A

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Concord Apartments, two properties formerly known as the Park Vista and Pine Manor, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. HPO further recommends that the Board request the nomination to be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1938 to 1939, the period of the construction of the two buildings.

The properties merit designation under D.C. Criterion D (“Architecture and Urbanism”) and National Register Criterion C for “embody[ing] the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types... or... [being] expressions of... urban planning, siting or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia or the nation.” Specifically for representing a particular type of apartment building and for incorporating Art Deco and Art Moderne elements.

The properties are also significant under District of Columbia Criterion B (“History”) and National Register Criterion A in the areas of community planning and development and government, for being “associated with historical periods ... or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation,” in that they are associated with the physical and social development of the Brightwood neighborhood during the interwar period, as a consequence of transportation improvements and a new zoning ordinance.

The properties qualify for designation under the Multiple Property Documentation Form “Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945.”

### **Background**

Until the early twentieth century, the Brightwood area of northwest Washington remained mostly rural. It had been the site of important transportation routes from at least 1822, when the turnpike to Rockville was constructed. The road network was augmented during the Civil War to serve the line of defensive fortifications, but it was not until the implementation of the Highway Act and the construction of streetcar lines that the neighborhood’s population growth took off. Streetcars and bus lines and cheap land values induced considerable construction of multi-family buildings during the interwar period, and permitted by a new zoning ordinance,

they concentrated along the 14<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, especially around the intersection with Missouri Avenue.

Washington's most prolific architect was also one of its most prolific apartment designers. George Santmyers had already designed at least one apartment building in the vicinity when he took on planning the twin, U-shaped, three-story-and-basement, walk-up brick apartments known as the Park Vista and the Pine Manor. While Santmyers had done much of his earlier work in revival styles, he embraced modernism. Here, he employed vertical Deco arrays of glass block to light stair towers in projecting entry pavilions, as well as contrasting and projecting bands of brick "streamlining" in the Moderne manner. These gestures balanced each other and articulated long, horizontal fronts. Completed in 1939, the two apartment buildings typically housed couples employed by the government; young children were not welcome. With few parking spaces, the properties catered to downtown workers who were transit commuters. Construction corresponded with the peak of the federal government establishment during the Great Depression, an economic disaster that nonetheless created great construction demand locally, with most residential investment going to multi-family buildings.

### **Evaluation**

Following a thorough survey of pre-1946 apartments in the District of Columbia, the Board and the National Register of Historic Places adopted the Multiple Property Documentation Form "Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945," intended to designate quality examples of physical subtypes of the broader building type. The document's registration criteria were necessarily broad, to reflect the range of types and examples, the elite and the more modest, and to recognize examples in all parts of the city. And the Board has designated a similarly broad range, including in instances of low- and moderate-income rehabilitation projects. A few properties, lacking architectural or landscape merit, have been rejected.

Collectively and recently known as the Concord Apartments, the former Park Vista and Pine Manor apartments qualify for designation as representative examples of the "Conventional Low-Rise Apartment Building" subtype as described in the multiple-property form, because they share the characteristics of the subtype, namely, that they are purpose-built, between two and four stories tall, contain more than five units, but lack elevators. They qualify under the following registration criteria:

- A-3, for apartment buildings that are "part of clusters, corridors or districts that illustrate the patterns of development of the city;
- A-4, for buildings "that reflect economic forces... that altered the development of the city;
- C-5, for buildings "that reflect changes in aesthetic philosophies;
- C-6, for buildings "that illustrate expressions of architectural styles... influential to the aesthetic development of the apartment building...; and
- C-7, for buildings "that are the work of skilled architects..."

Experienced as he was, Santmyers was certainly assured with the layout of his apartments, a master in the broad sense of having thoroughly learned his craft. A few of his apartments are among the more notable in Washington. The Park Vista and Pine Manor are not master works, however, but fairly average examples that nonetheless characterize the rapid development of

Brightwood before World War II and the proliferation of middle-class apartments near mid century.

Their designs embraced modernity for the masses in still-conservative Washington.

The properties retain high integrity, as indicated by the photographs of the interiors. Outside, windows have been replaced, but the character-defining glass block remains.

Some paving has been added at rear, there are later fences, the plantings have changed, and a corner of the Pine Manor has been terraced with landscape timbers. But the overall landscape design remains and contributes to the character and significance of the properties. A berm bounds the west and north sides of the site, broad steps and concrete walks lead through gate piers to the center of each courtyard, framed by and providing a setting for the U-shaped buildings. A central roundabout is a focal point as a bed for major plantings, and it carries the walk around it to a central entrance and to branches to secondary doors. The landscape is otherwise characterized by foundation plantings and a lawn that wraps around the sides of the buildings, creating a buffer between them.