

STEVENS COURTS HOUSING PROJECT  
(USHA Housing Project Tex. 14-2)  
2220 West 15th Street  
Texarkana  
Bowie County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-3550

Black and White Photographs  
Written Historical and Descriptive Data

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**Southwest System Support Office**  
**National Park Service**  
**P.O. Box 728**  
**Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504**

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Location: 2220 West 15th Street  
Texarkana  
Bowie County  
Texas

The Stevens Courts Housing Project site is bounded on the north by West 16th Street, on the east by Milam Street, on the south by West 15th Street, and on the west by Peach Street. The location of Stevens Courts is shown in Figure 1.

The Stevens Courts Housing Project site is located at latitude: -94.069003, longitude: 33.431040. The coordinate was taken at the main entry of the Administration Building on November 12, 2010, using a GPS mapping grade unit accurate to +/- 3 meters after differential correction. The coordinate's datum is NAD 1983. The Stevens Courts location has no restriction on its release to the public.

Present Owner: City of Texarkana  
Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Public Housing

Significance: Stevens Courts was one of two housing projects built for the Housing Authority of the City of Texarkana, Texas in 1941. These were the first public housing constructed in Texarkana using funding provided by the United States Housing Act of 1937.

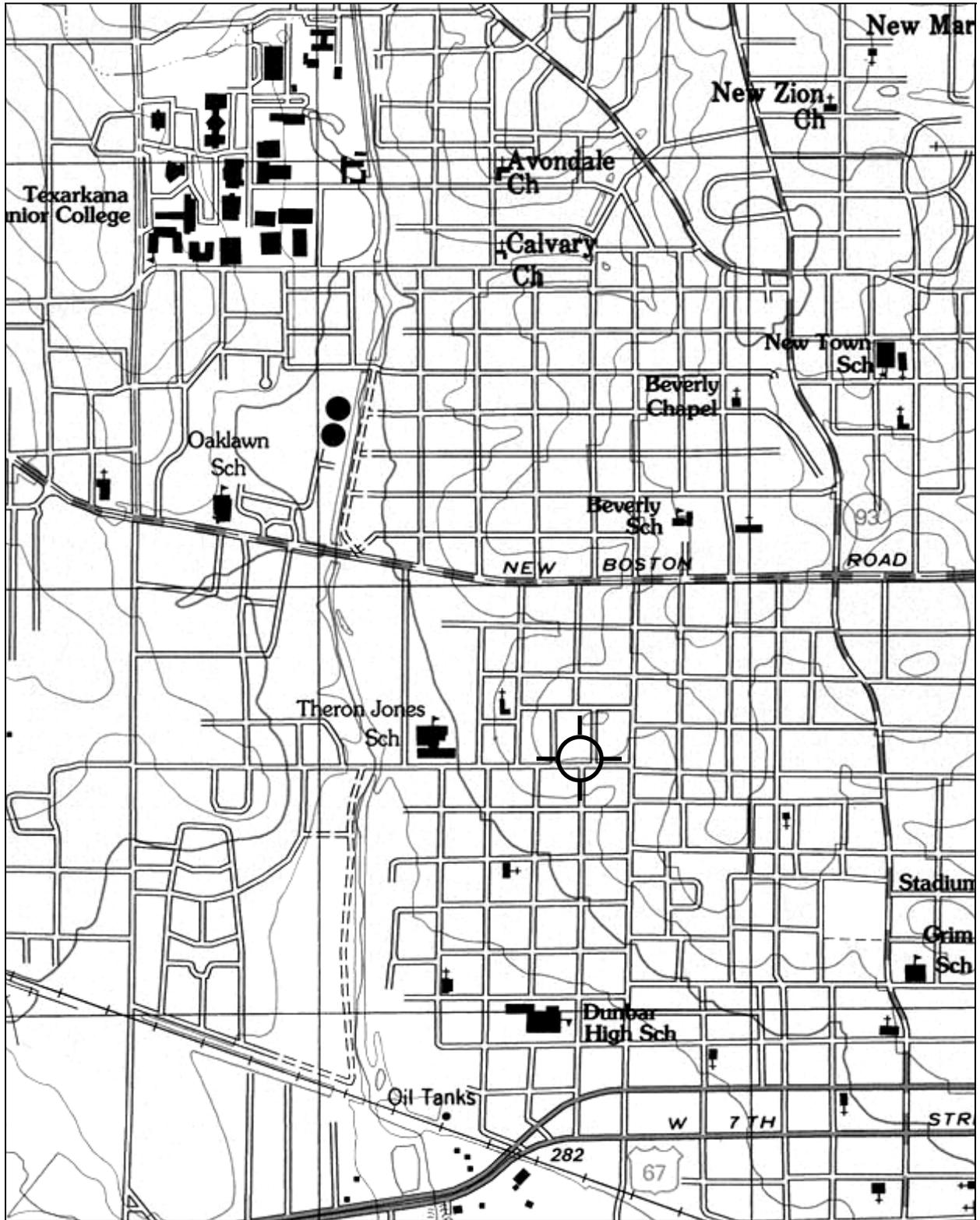


Figure 1. Location Map. Source: USGS Texarkana, TX-AR 7.5' Series Quadrangle Map, 2001.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date(s) of erection: 1941
2. Architect(s): J. N. McCammon - Bayard Witt, Texarkana, Texas.
3. Landscape Architect: Morrison & Carter, Fort Worth, Texas.
4. Structural Engineer: Frank Chappell.
5. Mechanical Engineer: Zumwalt and Vinther, Dallas, Texas.
6. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: USHA Housing Project Tex. 14-2 (later designated Stevens Courts Housing Project) was constructed for the Housing Authority of the City of Texarkana, Texas (now the Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas).
7. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Hardy Brothers Construction Company (General Contractor),
8. Original plans and construction: As designed, Stevens Courts consisted of fifteen buildings—fourteen two-story residential units and an administration building—laid out around a large open field. The distribution of the residential buildings was as follows:
  - Four Plan Type 1A (Buildings 1, 2, 13, and 14)
  - Eight Plan Type 4 (Buildings 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 12)
  - Two Plan Type 5 (Buildings 7 and 8)

Two service drives, extending from West 15th Street to West 16th Street, divided the complex into eastern, central and western segments. A formal network of internal concrete walkways connected the units to one another and to sidewalks along the streets on the periphery of the site. Another site feature was an octagonal “spray pool” and drinking fountain to the west of the Administration Building.

9. Alterations and additions: Stevens Courts had very few site modifications since 1941 and largely retained its original appearance. The spray pool and drinking fountain were not present in 2010. A small laundry building (demolished prior to December 2010) was added to the north of the Administration Building at an unknown date. The layout of Stevens Courts in 2010 is shown in Figure 2.

B. Historical Context

Public Housing in the United States, 1937-1981

Stevens Courts was the second of five housing projects built by the City of Texarkana in the 1940s and 1950s using federal funding provided by U.S. government. Texarkana's public housing program was part of a larger movement to house the poor that started in Europe in the 1920s. In 1937, federally assisted public housing was introduced in the United States with the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Act, also known as the Housing Act of 1937. Many planners, architects, and social workers saw public housing as a way to fulfill the government's "responsibility" to ensure that decent, affordable housing was available to all. Originally conceived not for the poorest of the poor, public housing was intended to help the "submerged middle class" who were struggling and jobless during the Depression. After World War II many of the working class could afford to buy a home because of VA and FHA loans. These loans, however, were targeted at whites. This helped to get whites out to the suburbs, while leaving African Americans in the city. In addition to providing affordable housing, public housing provided construction jobs. At first, very strict tenant policies were enforced. The Housing Act of 1949 offered subsidized housing priority for very low income people, and set maximum rents. Public housing started moving away from supply-based models and toward subsidized private development and demand-based delivery-systems, such as housing vouchers. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 led many advocates for the poor to push for income limits on public housing, which started a shift in the public housing population. Through the 1980s and 1990s, the public housing population continued to shift to the most disadvantaged and poorest in society.

Local governments initially selected sites for public housing. The federal government didn't get involved in site selection until the early 1960s. Racial segregation of housing projects was a deliberate decision on the part of local housing authorities in order to prevent conflict in their communities and maintain the racial makeup of neighborhoods. In addition to perpetuating segregation, public housing did not help to increase the housing supply. The Housing Acts of both 1937 and 1949 had goals of slum clearance and urban renewal, and therefore required that for each new unit built, a sub-standard unit must be torn down.

Even from the beginning, Congress funded fewer units than were authorized. It was expected that most operational and maintenance costs would be covered by rental income. Maintenance needs were often neglected. Rising rent and reduced services led to discontent and rent strikes in the 1960s. There has been no large-scale funding for new public housing since 1981. Section 8 subsidies and tax credits have largely replaced public housing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.A. Stoloff, "Summary of Public Housing."

Public Housing in Texarkana, Texas

In March of 1940, the City of Texarkana created the Housing Authority of the City of Texarkana, Texas (now the Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas or "HATT") to administer funding provided by the U.S. Housing Act of 1937. The law provided subsidies to be paid from the U.S. government to local public housing agencies for the purpose of constructing new housing for low-income families. The statute also carried the stipulation that when new public housing was built, an equal number of sub-standard houses must be removed, and in Texarkana, there was a great deal of sub-standard housing to be taken care of.

The Housing Authority of the City of Texarkana's (Housing Authority) organizational meeting was held in on March 1, 1940 at the McCartney Hotel on Front Street. Frank L. King, Ralston Crowder, Walter Hussman, John D. Raffaelli, Arthur E. Kackley and Raymond H. Albers were elected commissioners. Mr. King was elected chairman, and Mr. Raffaelli was elected vice president. Others present at the meeting were City Attorney Ed B. Levee and U.S. Housing Authority Adviser J. I. Campbell. Mr. Albers was elected secretary and was also hired as Executive Director. His first task was to conduct a survey of housing conditions in the city. The total population at that time was 17,019 with 11,892 white residents and 5,127 African Americans. The survey conducted by Mr. Albers showed that one housing project would not be enough to meet the needs of the city, especially since it was largely racially segregated at the time. At this point, the housing authority decided to seek funding for two housing projects, one for white citizens and the other for African American residents. The goals for these two housing projects were to reduce substandard housing and provide affordable housing for poor families in the area.

At a March 5th meeting, J.N. McCammon of Dallas and Bayard Witt of Texarkana were selected by the Housing Authority commissioners as architects for the two projects. It is not known if the two men had worked together previously or if this joint venture came about as a result of a voting deadlock.

Sites for the two housing projects were selected in mid-1940 and were designated Tex. 14-1 and Tex. 14-2. The Tex. 14-2 site would be bordered by West 16th Street on the north, West 15th Street on the south, Milam Street on the east, and Cherry Street (now Peach Street) on the west. The 1940 city directory shows that this area of Texarkana was populated by African Americans, and there were no non-residential properties except the Union Hill Baptist Church. The Tex. 14-1 site was in an area of the city solely populated by whites.

At the housing authority meeting in July 1940, the cost for the two projects was presented: \$1,060 for a survey, \$45,570 for the land, \$34,580 for architects' fees, \$2,830 for engineering work, \$1,525 for site survey work, and \$1,165 for landscape work. At this meeting, the commission also stipulated that local laborers be hired to construct the projects. The board then went to Fort Worth to

consult with U.S. Housing Administration staff for help in formulating management plans, setting rents, and creating preliminary budgets for Tex. 14-1 and Tex. 14-2.

In November 1940, the Housing Authority's commissioners opened construction bids, designated substandard homes for removal or demolition, and authorized legal means to acquire the real estate necessary for the two housing projects. Housing Project Tex. 14-1 was renamed Bowie Courts (presumably after the county), and Tex. 14-2 became Stevens Courts (no explanation appears in the minutes for the name selection). Housing Authority commissioners awarded Hardy Brothers Construction Company the general construction contract for \$759,740 and asked them to begin construction as soon as possible. They were given one year to complete the two projects.

In September 1941, Housing Authority commissioners designated the two housing projects for workers who were building the Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant (LSAAP) and Red River Ordnance Depot (RRAD). Construction of these facilities began in August 1941 and military activities commenced in the summer of 1942. During World War II, LSAAP produced munitions, while RRAD stored and shipped those munitions.

In November 1940, the Housing Authority established rental rates based on government GS rating and the size of the apartment. Rents ranged from \$25 a month for a one-bedroom apartment for a Grade 1, up to \$93 a month for a four-bedroom apartment for a Grade 14 worker.

In early 1942, both Bowie Courts and Stevens Courts were opened to house only white defense workers. It was not long, however, before Stevens Courts was designated as housing for African American workers in order to meet the needs of that community.

In February 1943, the Housing Authority established a list of eligibility standards for residents of Stevens Courts:

1. Families whose net income is below \$450 a year for a one bedroom unit, up to \$1975 a year for a four bedroom unit. (The average national income was approximately \$1975 per year.)
2. Families who conform to occupancy limits.
3. Families who constitute a "natural" family, or a cohesive family group.
4. Families who are living under housing conditions detrimental to health, safety, or morals, or who cannot find decent, safe, and sanitary housing at rents they can afford to pay.
5. Families conforming to the regulations adopted by the housing authority (including U.S. citizenship).
6. Families who are able to pay rents without additional sacrifice.

7. Families who are “reasonable” rent risks.

These eligibility requirements would be reviewed for each resident on a yearly basis, and defense workers whose incomes rose above a certain level would be forced to move out or pay one extra dollar per month for each \$50 they earned over the income allowable.

In October 1945, Housing Authority commissioners waived the substandard residence requirement for veterans and surviving families of deceased veterans because of the high number of unemployed and underemployed veterans in the Texarkana area.

In September 1947, Housing Authority commissioners re-defined sub-standard living:

1. No running water in current dwelling.
2. No electricity and/or gas.
3. No bath/shower or present bath/shower is unfit for use.
4. No inside toilet or inside toilet is unfit for use.
5. Toilet, bath, or kitchen is shared by two or more families.
6. Structure is unfit for use, or s in need of major repairs.
7. Acute crowding or doubling up.
8. Dwelling unit on alley or other undesirable location.

In January 1949, the Housing Authority revised its eligibility criteria. Instead of renting exclusively to defense workers, the general low-income population became eligible to occupy the two housing projects. In addition, the Housing Authority authorized the construction of 200 new units.

The Stevens Courts Housing Project housed thousands of people over nearly seventy years of service. After six decades, however, it became clear that it could not be updated to satisfy the U.S. disability requirements for public housing. In addition, a diminishing occupancy rate reflected dissatisfaction with the quality of housing provided. The following table illustrates the general decline of Stevens Courts:

	1943	1959	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
<b>Percent Occupancy</b>		85%			65%	41%	66%	37%
<b>Percent Employed</b>		70%	25%	16%	13%	10%	6%	0%
<b>Percent Single</b>	5%	80%	92%	94%	96%	91%	98%	96%

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved the Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas’s (now “HATT”) application for the HOPE VI program, which included demolishing Stevens Courts and constructing a new housing project, Pecan Ridge. Under the terms of a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Texarkana, Texas and the Texas State Historic

Preservation Officer, HATT will retain the administration building, which will become a cultural center and housing project museum.

Demolition of Stevens Courts began in November 2010 and was completed the following month.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The buildings of Stevens Courts were one to two story brick masonry buildings constructed in the Colonial Revival style in 1941. All buildings shared a general visual aesthetic, with decorative brick work, hipped roofs, small projecting porches, and double ventilators that mimicked chimneys (with the sole exception of the associated Administration Building). The fourteen residential buildings were arranged symmetrically around an open field.
2. Condition of fabric: Prior to their demolition, the residential buildings were well maintained and in good overall condition. The Administration Building is well maintained and in good condition.

### B. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The Stevens Courts Housing Project site (demolished residential buildings and surviving Administration Building) is located in the West Texarkana neighborhood of Texarkana, Texas, southwest of the intersection of US Highway 82 and State Highway 93. The site is bounded on the north by W. 16th Street, on the west by Milam Street, on the south by W. 15th Street, and on the east by Peach Street. The site, which occupies two oversized blocks roughly twice as large as the neighboring residential blocks, slopes gently downhill from north to south.
2. Historic landscape design: Little information, aside from a few photographs, was discovered that provides information about the historic landscape of the Stevens Courts Housing Project. The Site Improvement Plan, prepared by Morrison & Carter, was not located. The landscape plan for Stevens Courts' sister project, Bowie Courts, called for retaining existing trees where possible, and it is assumed that Stevens Courts would have had a similar arrangement. Prior to development, the land was farm and pastureland outside of the city limits. The buildings once surrounded a central grassy field, essentially left unimproved for recreational activity. Historic photographs indicate a site with few trees and shrubs planted at the main entrances to apartments.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas, 1611 N. Robison Rd., Texarkana, Texas 75501.
- B. Current Views: All 4"x 5" photos were taken by Ecological Communications Corporation in November 2010.
- C. Original Architectural Drawings: All original architectural drawings are held by the Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas, 1611 N. Robison Rd., Texarkana, Texas 75501.

D. Bibliography

Gordon M. Fisher. "From Hunter to Orshansky: An Overview of (Unofficial) Poverty Lines in the United States from 1904 to 1965". 29 November 2010. <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/povmeas/papers/hstorsp4.html#c3](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/povmeas/papers/hstorsp4.html#c3)>.

Dr. Beverly J. Rowe, "A History of Stevens Courts," written for the Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas.

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"United States Housing Authority." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2010. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 08 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/617672/United-States-Housing-Authority>>.

"Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant." 30 November 2010. <[www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/aap-lonestar.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/aap-lonestar.htm). >

Architectural Plans, on file at the Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas, 1940.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

- A. Federal Agency: United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
- B. Names and Affiliations of Those Preparing Documentation:  
Ecological Communications Corporation; Austin, Texas.  
Thomas Eisenhour, Project Manager, Historical Architect, Photographer  
Kurt Korfmacher, Architectural Historian  
Lara Newcomer, Historian  
Kathryn St. Clair, Architectural Historian
- C. Date Documentation Prepared: December 2010

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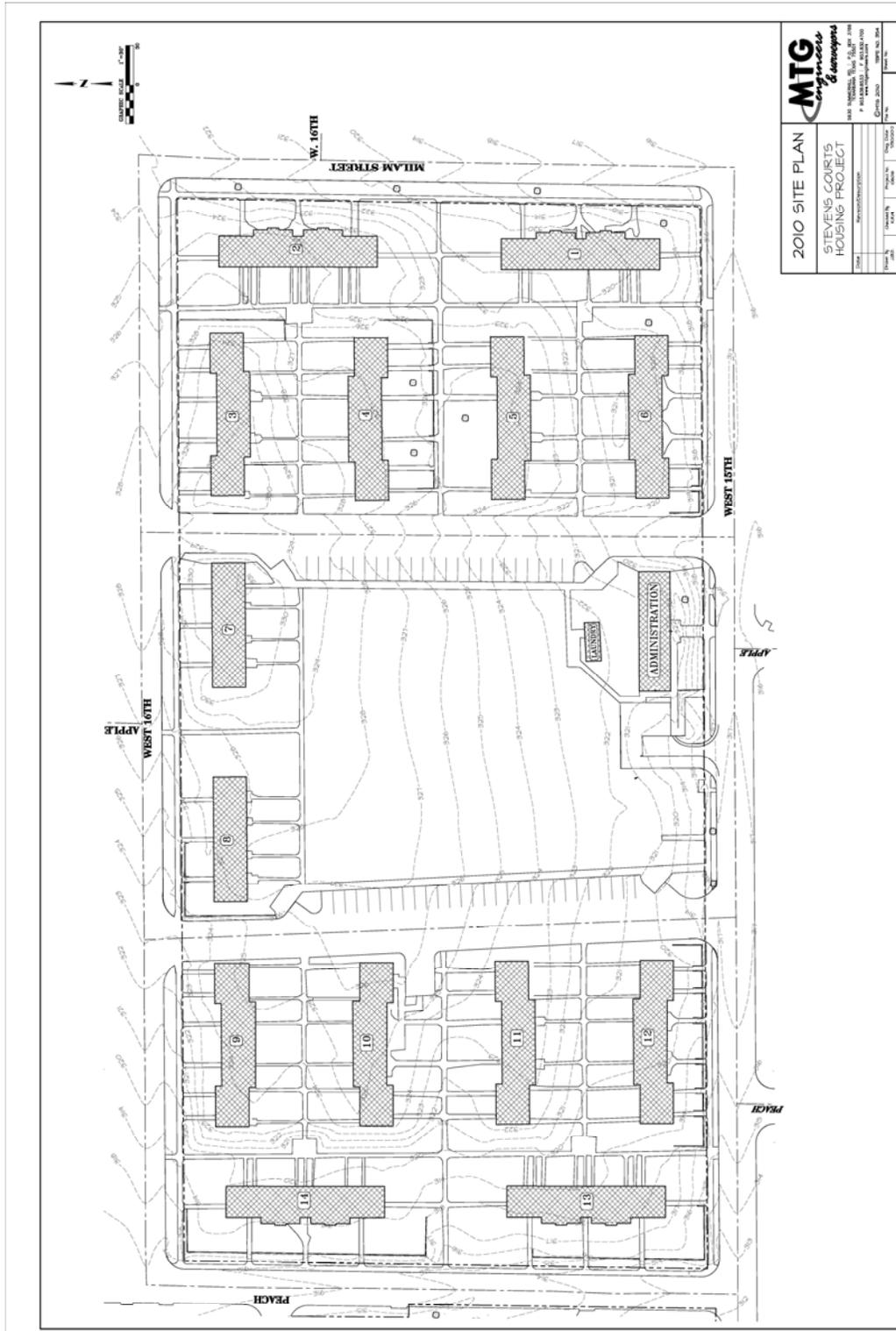


Figure 2. Site Plan, 2010. Source: MTG Engineers & Surveyors. Reproduced by permission.



Figure 3. Children enjoying the Spray Fountain, date unknown. The camera is facing northeast. Buildings 3, 4, and 5 can be seen in the background. Source: Housing Authority of Texarkana Texas. Photograph not copyrighted.