RAMSEY HOMES
(Buildings I-IV)
(Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133)
East side of the 600 block of North Patrick Street
Alexandria
Independent City
Virginia

HABS VA-1511
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RAMSEY HOMES
(Buildings I-IV)
(Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133)

HABS No. VA-1511

Location: East side of the 600 block of North Patrick Street
Building I. 912 and 914 Wythe Street / 625 and 627 Patrick Street
Building II. 619, 621, and 623 Patrick Street
Building III. 609, 611, 613 and 615 Patrick Street
Building IV. 605 and 607 Patrick Street / 913 and 915 Pendleton Street

Present Owner/Occupant: Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority (ARHA) / Tenants

Present Use: Affordable Housing

Significance: The Ramsey Homes were designed by Alexandria architect and architectural historian Delos H. Smith, FAIA, of Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects in the Modernist style in 1941 and completed by the United States Housing Authority (USHA) by 1942. The property contributes to the Uptown/Parker-Gray Historic District, which is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and is located within the locally zoned Parker-Gray District. The district comprises most of the northwestern quadrant of the 1797 street grid and consists of small row houses and town houses, local businesses, and warehouses, highway-oriented buildings on U.S. Route 1, and public housing units. Ramsey Homes contains 15 units in three foursquare quadruplexes and one L-plan triplex. They contribute to the historic district in the areas of social history and architecture, as "an example of the housing constructed with public funds, between 1940 and 1945, for defense workers during World War II" (Necciai and Drumond 2008). They are individually significant due to their association with African-American defense workers and affordable housing.

Historian(s): Anna Maas, MUEP, Principal Architectural Historian
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Project Information: The Board of Commissioners of ARHA determined that the property should be redeveloped to provide more units of affordable housing and meet goals within their 2012-2022 Strategic Plan, the Braddock East Master Plan (BEMP), and the City-adopted Housing Master Plan. ARHA requested HABS documentation to assist in understanding the evolution of the property and to use in its potential interpretation. City Council overturned a decision by the Parker-Gray District Board of Architectural Review (BAR) and granted a permit for demolition on September 12, 2015. Either all buildings will be demolished, or one or more may be incorporated into plans.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection:

   1941-42

2. Architect:

   Delos H. Smith, FAIA, of Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects, 220 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia; Robert K. Thulman, Mechanical Engineer; Associated Engineers Inc. The firm's architects were Delos H. Smith, FAIA, junior partner J. M. Billings, and engineer Sheldon Werner.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses:

   April 16, 1941: Edward S. Holland, Jr., Certified Land Surveyor, 624 King Street, Alexandria, completed a "Property Line Map" for Defense Housing Project VA-44133 for the Housing Authority of the City of Alexandria. This plan, included with both sets of architectural drawings in 1941, showed 16 lots on the south side of Patrick Street between Pendleton and Wythe. Labeled 19-34, each measured 22' wide and 87' deep. Parcel 1 included Lot 19, Parcel 20 included Lot 20, Parcel 3 included Lots 21-33, and Parcel 4 included Lot 34.

   July 8, 1941: The United States Federal Government purchased the four vacant parcels from Edward E. Lawler, R. S. Reynolds, Marguerite F. Graham, and Julian M. Dove (Alexandria Deed Book 176:7). The property was managed by the United States Housing Authority (USHA), Nathan Strauss Administrator, under the Federal Works Agency (FWA), John M. Carmody Administrator. USHA became the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA) in February 1942.

   Four buildings with 15 units were completed in 1942 and occupied by African-American defense workers that November (NHA 1942a). In 1947, Alexandria City Directory listed the residents of the Ramsey Homes for the first time, including Carneal Coffee, USA (perhaps the Army); Cleveland B. Tivy, Clerk War Dept.; Will Daniels, barber; George W. Witherspoon, auto mechanic; and Charles E. Smith, janitor. All were noted as African American (Directories available at the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch, Special Collections).

   October 6, 1946: The *Washington Post* reported, "Three large war housing projects in Alexandria-elected at a cost of $2,712,000-are now up for sale." FPHA gave the city the first chance to buy Chinquapin Village, Cameron Valley, and Ramsey Homes, all of which housed 2,000 people. FPHA designated the buildings permanent, but city official contended that they were temporary, and the Mayor claimed the housing did not meet city building codes and were thus substandard.

   July 26, 1951: FPHA entered a contract with ARHA for conveyance of low-rent housing "after the termination of the use of the project as defense housing during the Korean emergency" (United States 1956:48).

April 30, 1953: The Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority purchased the Ramsey Homes from the Federal Public Housing Authority (Alexandria Deed Book 356:407). The buildings have served as affordable housing units from 1953 to the present.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

   Fabcrete Corporation, Richmond, Virginia supplied "Fabcrete", a pre-cast unit of cementitious material that did not require interior framework (Patent No. 259,885). The name of the builder and/or contractor is currently unknown.

5. Original plans and construction:

   July 15, 1941: Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects completed the first set of plans for the Ramsey Homes. The original plan submitted was for three buildings. Building A and C were to contain four units, including a living room and kitchen on the first floor and two bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. The architects described Building B as flats and included one three-room unit, three four-room units, and three five-room units. Each were to have shiplap siding, brick accents, and large cupolas. The landscape plan called for plantings, alley parking, patios, clotheslines, play area, and a spray basin (On file at ARHA).

   October 10, 1941: Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects submitted a second design, which was used by USHA. The second option prescribed three four-unit Modernist foursquares and a three-unit L-shaped building with more economical materials such as "Fabcrete". The plan shows the elimination of large cupolas in favor of small skylights over each bathroom as they were located in the core of the buildings and could not have windows. The plan included parallel parking in the alley, hexagonal clotheslines labeled "yard clothes dryers", and a simple paved play area within the L of the triplex. Sheet 5 has specifications for a wood plaque that reads "THESE HOMES WERE BUILT BY THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES FOR THE DEFENDERS OF THIS NATION Franklin D. Roosevelt President by United States Housing Authority for Federal Works Agency". If this was used it is no longer evident on the property (RG 196, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Architectural and Engineering Plans, the National Archives at College Park Maryland).

   November 22, 1941: The construction contract was awarded (NHA 1942a).

   July 31, 1942: The project was under construction and 95 percent complete with an estimated cost of $78,590 (NHA 1942a).

   September 18, 1942: The project was under construction and 97 percent complete with an estimated cost of $79,940 (NHA 1942a).

   October 2, 1942: The project was under construction and 99 percent complete with an estimated cost of $79,940 (NHA 1942a).

   October 30, 1942: The status of the project had not changed (NHA 1942a).

   November 30, 1942: Six units were occupied, eight units were available, and one unit was incomplete (NHA 1942a).

6. Alterations and additions:

By the 1970s, aerial imagery shows that ARHA removed the original door surrounds, skylights and flat roof and constructed large walled patios and hipped roofs. They likely added stucco and altered window placement at this time, removing coupled windows in favor of single windows

August 15, 1995: Sorg and Associates prepared plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community. The plan called for a Colonial Revival makeover, showing vinyl replacement windows with clip-on six-over-six muntins, inoperable aluminum shutters, and replacement vinyl paneled doors. The BAR approved the plans for exterior renovations with the stipulation that the doors and shutters be hunter green and that the faux muntins not be used, leaving the windows one-over-one. Stucco and brick were patched and repaired. The kitchens and bathrooms were renovated. Chain-linked fencing was replaced with black metal picket fences and the clotheslines and paved play area removed and sodded with grass. The current location of trees and fencing is different from the original.

B. Historical Context:

The history of public housing in the United States provides a context in which to analyze the architectural design and styles of the built environment at the Ramsey Homes project site, as well as the situation of the historic and modern residents of the project. A neglected area in the writing of urban history is the physical environment. It is very likely that the built environment reflects and shapes human behavior (Gardner 1981: 64). Most literature on low end housing has concentrated on tenements and urban reform in the late nineteenth century (Gardner 1981: 66). In recent years, interest has shifted to the evolution of public housing policy and design.

Public Housing in Early America

In rural or agrarian socio-economic milieus, such as much of the United States prior to the twentieth century, families typically built houses for their own use. Industrialization in the nineteenth century radically altered the social relations of building, working, and living. Increasingly over time, dwellings were built by hired labor and sold at market prices; those who could not afford such housing collected in slums.

> In the early stages of our history, settlers built their own homes, good or bad, with their own hands and some help from their neighbors. Much of our farm and rural housing is still in this stage. When we came to town building and industrialization, private business enterprise took over the job. It has had no competition until recently, and the result is a larger acreage of worse looking slums than can be found in any other allegedly civilized country. Private enterprise rise can offer no alibi. That is simply what happened as a result of laissez faire and the free working of supply and demand (Wood 1940: 83).

Prior to the American Revolution (1775-1781), responsibility for caring for Virginia's poor rested with Anglican parishes. However, after the British were defeated, the Anglican Church was disestablished, and the responsibility shifted to the local governments (U.S. Department of the Interior 1937; Ward 1980; Watkinson 2000; Roach 2002). Public housing, with its current

connotations, is a product of the early twentieth century, in the eighteenth century the term "public house" referred to an *ordinary*, an inn or tavern.

The Alms House

Circa 1800, the town of Alexandria erected a poor house and work house at the northwest corner of present-day Monroe Avenue and Route 1. Inmates and the keeper of the poor house likely lived in the main building, which was a large, two-and-a-half-story, seven-bay, Federal-style brick structure (U.S. Department of the Interior 1937; Ward 1980; Watkinson 2000; Roach 2002). The building displayed Flemish bond brickwork and featured a hipped roof with pediment, dormers, and four interior chimneys. The symmetrical façade was arranged around a two-story, projecting center pavilion. The center pavilion contained an arched entrance that incorporated a fan light and sidelights; a Palladian window occupied the second story of the projecting pavilion. The interior displayed a rectangular, longitudinal-hall plan with central entrance.

The ledger of Robert Hodgkin, who became keeper of the Alexandria Poor House in 1861, provides valuable information about the operation of the Poor House between 1861 and 1863 (Miller 1989; Ward 1980). Hodgkin's record of the operations of the Alexandria Poor House documents that, despite the disruptions to the local economy, he was still able to purchase a variety of foodstuffs, including fresh meat, salt beef, flour, butter, bread, molasses, cornmeal, herring, and pickled codfish. He also purchased "20 bushels rye for coffee" (Ward 1980: 65). These purchases supplemented the vegetables produced on the Poor House farm. In January 1862, the livestock on the farm included "three horses, two cows, one bull, and nineteen hogs" (Ward 1980: 66).

In January 1862, Robert Hodgkins prepared a list of the people, livestock, furnishings, and agricultural implements at the Poor House for submission to the "committee on the poor," which oversaw the institution. At that time, thirty-eight inmates lived at the Poor House, along with eight members of Robert Hodgkins's household. The Poor House ledger for 1861-1862 contains two sections, one for the alms house and one for the work house. According to local historian Ruth Ward, who analyzed the ledgers, "The ledger entries dealing with the work house indicate that most inmates were sent there for thirty days, although some were sentenced to six months." During the period covered by the ledger, at least two inmates of the work house, John Crisman and Kate Thompson, ran away (Ward 1980: 66). In January of 1863, one inmate delivered a child at the Poor House. The ledger also mentions three deaths in 1862: James Buckhannon, an unnamed boy who drowned, and a "German who died at poor house" (Ward 1980: 65-66).

Philanthropic and Limited Dividend Housing

Until the Depression, most American leaders believed that the private market, with a helping hand from private philanthropy, could meet the nation's housing needs. The antecedent of public housing, philanthropic and limited dividend housing of the late nineteenth century, though privately built and operated, shared some similarities with later public housing. For instance, philanthropic and limited dividend housing was also faulted for plain appearance (Gardner 1981: 67). In the early twentieth century, a few unions and settlement house reformers built model housing developments for working class families, mostly in the northeastern United States and without government subsidy.

Public Housing in the New Deal

Overview

Prior to the 1930s, the federal government had no role in housing private citizens; the social welfare of the public, in terms of housing, was left entirely to local governments and private charities (Robinson et al: 1999b: 5). The Great Depression of the 1930s focused the nation's attention on "the inequities of the housing market and on the smoldering slum problems … devastated home ownership and the residential construction industry" (Robinson et al: 1999b: 1:12).

Public housing in the United States was first implemented during the 1930s when many Americans lost their homes and livelihoods as a r esult of the economic crises of the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded with the Federal Housing Act of 1934, which established the basic format for public housing in which the government subsidizes the market value of the housing, and the creation of the Federal Housing Association (FHA) (Trotter 1958; Gotham 2000: 296). Public housing in the New Deal was also an employment program, as under the National Industrial Recovery Act, the formation of the Public Works Administration (PWA), which developed and built the first housing projects in the United States, led to the creation of many jobs in the construction industry (Aiken and Alford 1970).

The socio-political environment during the early years of the Great Depression accommodated reformers who believed that that the federal government should subsidize social housing and build a noncommercial alternative housing sector. Many American housing activists envisioned public housing for the middle-class as well as the poor.

The Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932

The first significant New Deal measure targeted at housing was the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932. This act created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), a federal agency authorized to make loans to private corporations providing housing for low-income families. Also in 1932, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board was established to make advances on the security of home mortgages and establish a Home Loan Bank System. The act did little to assist individual homebuyers. The average home loan at that time required very short-term credit, with terms generally ranging from three to five years. Large down payments, second mortgages, and high interest rates were commonplace.

The Housing Act of 1934

As the economic situation worsened, the National Housing Act of 1934 was passed to relieve unemployment and encourage private banks and lending institutions to extend credit for home repairs and construction. Under the Act of 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was created. The responsibilities of the FHA, now a federal agency under the Assistant Secretary for Housing-Federal Housing Commissioner, are to improve housing standards and conditions; to provide an adequate home financing system through insurance of mortgage loans; and to stabilize the mortgage market. Two mortgage insurance programs were established under Title II of the Act of 1934: Section 203 mortgage insurance for one to four family homes; and Section

207 multifamily project mortgages. The Act of 1934 also authorized the FHA to create the Federal National Mortgage Association, or Fannie Mae, which was chartered in 1937.

Helen Alfred, Executive Director of the National Public Housing Conference, summarized the rationale for the act, its means, and its goals:

> Recognizing the social importance of housing to all the people, and the value of a home construction program as a medium of reemployment in a great key industry, the Federal government has taken a hand. The removal of blighted areas and rehousing of the lower-income groups at rents which they can afford to pay has not been accomplished by speculative builders or limited dividend corporations. This new policy of the Federal government, as expressed in the terms of the National Industrial Recovery Act, presents an opportunity to make rapid progress toward the solution of our housing problem. In conformity with the provisions of the Act, the Government has made large sums of money available for the purpose of clearing slums and erecting low-rent dwellings. These funds will be advanced in the form of loans and outright grants. Private corporations, including limited dividend companies, can merely obtain loans for their projects. Public agencies, in addition to loans, can obtain subsidies amounting to thirty percent of the cost of labor and materials (Alfred 1934: 23).

Alfred also summarized the necessity for states and local communities to pass legislation and charter local authorities that would make implementation of law possible:

> The policy of the Government presents an opportunity for a vigorous battle against indecent housing conditions. The Government is doing its part; the next steps must be taken by local communities. As stated above, the outright grants will be given only to public bodies. Only five States now have the power to create housing boards or authorities with full power to acquire unhealthy areas, clear slums, and construct and operate dwellings. These States are California, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Enabling legislation is pending in a number of extraordinary sessions of State Legislatures ….civic and welfare groups, members of the clergy, women's organizations and progressive labor leaders are uniting to promote sentiment in their local communities favorable to the creation of municipal housing authorities. Most of the municipal legislation is being patterned after a bill prepared in New York City under the supervision of the National Public Housing Conference. Under the terms of this bill, it is recommended that a municipal housing authority be created and that a board be appointed by the Mayor. This board is to have power to issue its own bonds and to sell them to the Federal government. It will have placed at its disposal an effective procedure for acquiring land by condemnation or purchase, for clearing, replanning and rebuilding unhealthy and blighted areas, and finally to manage and operate dwellings when completed. The Government loans will be repaid out of the rents collected (Alfred 1934: 23).

Critics of the Housing Act of 1934 have pointed to the act's failure to assist lower income families most in need of housing aid and feel it did little to improve inner city housing; it promoted the single-family detached dwelling as the prevailing mode of housing, which

perpetuated suburban sprawl and it intensified racial segregation. Critics of the FHA have seen racially discriminatory policies and practices of the agency associated with mortgage insurance and lending, appraisal guidelines, and home building subsidies (Gotham 2001: 309).

Many New Dealers, including Eleanor Roosevelt, Harold Ickes, Aubrey Williams, and Harry Hopkins, acknowledged and worked to mitigate the effects of race on public policy; for instance, it was mandated that African Americans, who comprised about 10 percent of the total population, and 20 percent of the poor, would collect at least 10 percent of welfare assistance payments and various New Deal relief programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) allocated 10 percent of their budgets to African Americans (Leuchtenburg 1963:244-246). President Roosevelt appointed an unprecedented number of African Americans to second-level positions in his administration; these appointees were collectively called *the Black Cabinet.* These efforts were largely responsible for the transition of black political organizations from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party by 1936, forging the political alliance between African Americans and the Democratic Party that still exists. Few efforts, however, were extended to ending racial segregation or guaranteeing the civil rights of racial minorities. The CCC was organized in racially segregated units; however, pay and working conditions were equitable (Leuchtenburg 1963: 256-257).

Reformers and Housers - Ideals and Designs for Social Housing

Even before the onset of the Great Depression, a cadre of progressive American architects and planners had come to believe that fundamental restructuring of national residential patterns was needed. These design professionals and other reform-minded citizens, including urban and labor activists, envisioned the development of attractive and affordable alternatives to single-family suburbanization, which had become endemic by the 1920s (Mayer 1935: 400). Albert Mayer, among other advocates of the rethinking of the American domestic landscape, saw new social housing not only as a solution for the problems of impoverished slum dwellers but a necessary step toward providing better lives for all Americans:

> The slum and the blighted district -- urban and rural - are only the most spectacular manifestations of the bad conditions under which almost all of us live. The people who live in slums can't afford to live in decent places. Those who can afford to don't get anything really satisfactory, unless they shift around with the shifting, sprawling city and suburb. Lack of play spaces and convenient parks, noise, exposure to traffic accidents, encroachment of business, overcrowded roads and streets and subways -- these affect the well-to-do only in less degree than they afflict the poor. The well-to-do shift to new areas, and the poor move into the abandoned unsatisfactory areas. If this sounds an exaggeration to anyone, let him simply visit the derelict areas that were good neighborhoods twenty, fifteen, ten years ago.
>
> …the housing problem is twofold. First, there is the lack of reasonable planning and stability which makes our entire physical environment unsatisfactory. Then there is the problem for something like two-thirds of our population who haven't the money to pay for physically decent housing--whose income or relief wage or relief dole is not enough to pay the sum of real-estate taxes, current interest and

> amortization on cost of land and building, and adequate maintenance. On top of these permanent elements there is the impending housing shortage, which will affect both groups. The problem of the two-thirds is bluntly one that involves redistribution of wealth. The physical solution is similar for all: planning and construction of projects on a sufficiently large scale so that they can be free from traffic dangers and extraneous noise, can contain facilities for recreational and community life, and can achieve the economies of large-scale planning and its amenities of proper orientation to air and sunlight. Such projects must be so related to the larger community of which they are a part that they are within convenient reach of daily work, of shopping districts, of larger recreational and park areas (Mayer 1935: 400).

Catherine Bauer [Catherine Krause Bauer Wurster], born May 11, 1905, in Elizabeth, New Jersey, was a leading member of a group of early twentieth-century idealists known as *housers,* social reformers, mostly women, committed to improving housing for low-income families. On the basis of her belief that social housing could produce good social architecture, and impressions made on her by the widespread suffering during the Great Depression, she became a great advocate for the poor in the struggle for housing. Bauer was a charismatic figure in the reform movement, and one of its greatest theorists. Her classic *Modern Housing* (1934) made her an authority on social housing and she co-authored the Housing Act of 1937.

Bauer was significantly influenced by American urban critic Lewis Mumford and European and expatriate American artists and architects in Europe including Fernand Léger, Man Ray, Sylvia Beach, and the architects of change group: Ernst May, André Lurçat, and Walter Gropius.

European ideals and designs for social housing that had developed in the 1920s were adopted and implemented in the United States in the 1930s. The goal of the houser movement, beyond the creation of a supply of adequate, government-funded affordable housing for the urban poor, was the establishment of an ordered environment for the urban poor that would eventually lead to the elimination of urban slums. European urban planning concepts such as *Zeilenbau*, or a plan that arranged buildings in parallel rows, to take advantage of maximum light and ventilation, were adopted for many projects. Limited traffic flow with planned circulation patterns, pedestrian walkways, courtyard areas and open spaces with park-like settings were also emphasized in the designs (Robinson et al: 1999a: 18). Most projects were designed to a human scale and were well landscaped. Some included private or semi-private garden spaces.

Ultimately, the uninspired, sterile, and institutional designs that began to characterize American public housing fell far short of the communitarian, European-style projects that the housers envisioned.

The PWA - Public Housing Design and Construction

The Public Works Administration (PWA) was created as a federal agency under the National Industrial Recovery Act in June 1933. The agency's mission was to provide employment, stabilize purchasing power, improve public welfare, and contribute to a revival of American industry through management of the construction of public works and housing.

Horatio Hackett, a Chicago architect and engineer with limited experience in housing reform issues, was placed at the head of the PWA's Housing Division; consultants on staff included architects Alfred Fellheimer and Angelo R. Clas (Robinson et al: 1999a: 21-23).

Several subordinate units were organized within the Housing Division of the PWA; the Branch of Land Acquisition which handled property acquisition and supervised site development; the Branch of Plans and Specifications, staffed by architects, engineers, landscape architects, and cost estimators, who worked closely with local architects and engineers; and the Branches of Construction and Management, which were responsible for the final aspects of project development, including slum removal, construction supervision, and administration of tenant services.

In the first years of its existence, the PWA Housing Division oversaw all phases of site development for public housing projects, excepting the style in which the buildings were built; that was, at least theoretically, left to the local architects (Robinson et al: 1999b: 19).

As PWA public housing scholars Michael W. Strauss and Talbot Wegg wrote:

> …the style of buildings, whether they should be "modern," colonial, Spanish, or what-not, was on the whole left to the decision of local architects. They had only one watchword, simplicity. As a result there is, to the layman's eye, great variety in the exterior design of projects. New York, Chicago, Camden, Cleveland, and some others are modern; Jacksonville and Miami are of typical design; Charleston recalls the graciousness of its heritage; Boston is in keeping with the New England tradition; Dallas suggests the distinctive architecture of the Southwest (Strauss and Wegg 1938: 68).

The autonomy of local architects in design decisions proved problematic; PWA officials determined that most American builders were incapable of designing large-scale public housing projects that met the high standards of the Housing Division. Months before the first federally funded public housing project, First Homes, opened in Manhattan's Lower East Side on December 3, 1935, the Plans and Specifications Branch began the preparation of a series of plans for the basic units of public housing complexes, including apartments and row houses of all types and sizes. These plans were published in May 1935 as *Unit Plans: Typical Room Arrangements, Site Plans and Details for Low Rent Housing*, and were adopted by most local architects involved with public housing projects and became the standard for PWA public housing design (Robinson et al: 1999b: 19).

Over time, the use of standardized plans and model unit designs became more and more evident. Although the original rationale for this approach stemmed from observed deficiencies in the design skills of local architects, the ultimate effect was a net loss of freedom of design and architectural innovation. Further, economy increasingly dominated other considerations of design and construction.

Typical American public housing projects of this period included multi-family, low-rise residential buildings and an ordered site plan that arrayed the buildings around open spaces and recreational areas; buildings generally occupied less than 25 percent of the site. The most common building forms were several-story walk-up apartments and row houses, often

constructed of brick, simply designed and generally well-built (Robinson et al: 1999b: 21-22). Attached dwellings were popular with designers of public housing complexes, being more economical in both construction and operating costs (Robinson et al: 1999b: 21-22).

A community center, typically a one-story building containing management offices, recreation rooms or classrooms, and a hall for community functions such as dances or meetings, was usually integrated into the project. Management offices, maintenance buildings, garages, nursery schools, and buildings originally containing retail or office spaces comprised a non-residential component at some sites (Robinson et al: 1999a: 18-19, Robinson et al: 1999b: 21-22). Larger projects often included multiple commercial and community buildings and manifested as almost self-contained communities within the surrounding neighborhoods. These sometimes included heating plants, generally characterized by a tall smokestack (Robinson et al: 1999a: 18-19).

Spartan utilitarian design characterized the interior spaces of the individual residential units. Most units included one to four bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and bathroom. Room sizes were minimal and the shapes generally regular. Walls were most often painted concrete block or plaster partitions; floors typically asphalt tile or linoleum over concrete, with the occasional use of wood parquet where costs and availability permitted. Units included modern conveniences; a gas range and electric refrigerator in the kitchens and full bathrooms (Robinson et al: 1999a: 19-20).

Each project was subject to both strict cost controls and minimum standards of appearance and livability. Various cost and space saving strategies were employed including open cupboards and closets and suite type plans as interior hallways were considered wasted space. Units were almost always situated to take advantage of maximum natural sunlight and ventilation, and arranged to maximize the privacy of residents (Robinson et al: 1999a: 19-20).

Factors in determining the location of public housing projects within local communities included proximity to employment opportunities, slum clearance, existing transportation and infrastructure development, and availability of suitable land. City blocks were often combined to form superblocks (Robinson et al: 1999b: 21-22).

Designers sought to invest the project's residents with a sense of communal identity, distinct from its surrounding neighborhood, through the deliberate site plans and the design and form of the buildings. Public art was also an important component of early PWA-era projects and some later designs. The earliest PWA projects successfully integrated European design theories and contemporary American housing reform philosophies; the best of these achieved very high standards of design, site planning, and construction (Robinson et al: 1999a:19).

Slum Clearance

Housing reformers during this period were divided over the issue of slum clearance. In the 1930s, most American cities included slum areas, neighborhoods characterized by substandard housing of various types, occupied by the very poor, often ethnic or racial minorities. Many believed that slums were breeding grounds for crime and a major public health problem. Traditional reformers believed that slum clearance served to eliminate blighted and overcrowded neighborhoods while the building of new low-income housing on former slum

sites allowed the poor to continue to live near their places of employment. Others, including Bauer and many housers, believed that slum clearance was a waste of time and money that primarily benefited the real estate industry. Opponents of slum clearance contended that new housing built on former slum sites, even with public financing, would often be too expensive for the dispossessed tenants. Lewis Mumford, an icon of the houser group, wrote: "if we wish to produce cheap dwellings, it is to raw land that we must turn... The proper strategy is to forget about the slums as a special problem…. When we have built enough good houses in the right places, the slums will empty themselves" (Robinson et al 1999b: 29).

Legal issues related to slum clearance proved to be a major obstacle for the PWA Housing Division projects. Early on, the PWA was determined to prove the feasibility of combining slum clearance with the construction of low-rent housing. Numerous PWA acquired sites that had been slum neighborhoods were condemned under the power of eminent domain. As some slum sites had hundreds of owners with whom the PWA had to negotiate, acquisition was sometimes very complicated. As a result of various legal challenges to condemnation proceedings before 1936, the PWA built all subsequent housing on vacant land or in sites for which it could negotiate clear title (Robinson et al 1999b: 37).

United States Housing Act of 1937

As previously discussed, the Housing Act of 1934, although responsible for several major public works housing projects, was quite limited in scope. In December 1935, Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York began a campaign to push a broader housing bill through Congress (Robinson et al 1999b: 33). In a speech before the NPHC, he defended his stand on public housing against attack from the political right:

> The object of public housing … is not to invade the field of home building for the middle class or the well-to-do ... Nor is it even to exclude private enterprise from participation in a low-cost housing program. It is merely to supplement what private industry will do, by subsidies which will make up the difference between what the poor can afford to pay and what is necessary to assure decent living quarters (Robinson et al 1999b: 33).

Lobbyists for the private sector housing industry, amongst other groups, organized opposition to the new bill. One of the strongest and most vocal rebuttals to the philosophy of Wagner and his allies came from the president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), Walter S. Schmidt, of Cincinnati:

It is contrary to the genius of the American people and the ideals they have established that government become landlord to its citizens … There is sound logic in the continuance of the practice under which those who have initiative and the will to save acquire better living facilities, and yield their former quarters at modest rents to the group below (Robinson et al 1999b: 33).

Other business organizations followed suit, with the National Association of Retail Lumber Dealers, the U.S. Building and Loan League, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also

expressing fierce opposition to public housing legislation (Robinson et al 1999b: 33). The public housing activists responded by painting a bleak picture of the state of American housing:

> …AT LEAST A THIRD OF OUR HOUSING IS BAD ENOUGH TO BE A health hazard, but not all in the same way or to the same degree. The coverage of moral hazard is less than that of physical hazard, which is fortunate, as its effects are worse. About two fifths of our housing is rural, divided more or less evenly between farm and non-farm. The Farm Housing Survey made in 1934 shows an appalling lack of modern sanitation and conveniences, except in a few favored regions. To call 80 percent of our farmhouses substandard is an understatement (Wood 1940: 83).

Wood found data on urban housing conditions in the 1930s, derived from the *Real Property Inventories* housing field surveys conducted from 1934-1936, also disturbing. The structural condition of only 39 percent of urban homes was considered good, 44.8 percent needed repairs, and 16.2 percent was considered poor; 4.4 percent of urban dwelling units had neither gas nor electric lighting, 14.6 percent lacked a private indoor toilet, 19.9 percent had no bathtub or shower, and 17.4 percent of occupied dwellings were crowded or overcrowded (Wood 1940: 83). According to Wood, "to call a third of the nation or a third of those who live in urban communities 'ill-housed' can hardly be an exaggeration (Wood 1940: 83)." "One-third of a nation" became a rallying cry for the public housing movement (Robinson et al: 1999b: 34).

Enacted as law, the 1937 United States Housing Act, with the objective of providing affordable housing to the poorer segments of the population, provided stringent new cost guidelines to public housing projects that led to an increased emphasis on economy and greater standardization in American public housing:

> It is the policy of the United States to promote the general welfare of the Nation by employing its funds and credit, as provided in this Act, to assist the several States and their political subdivisions to remedy the unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions and the acute shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of lower income and, consistent with the objectives of this Act, to vest in local public housing agencies the maximum amount of responsibility in the administration of their housing programs (United States Housing Act of 1937, Sec. 2; 42 U.S.C. 1437).

The new legislation revived the failing Red Hook housing project in New York City; however, it also tightly controlled the project's budget. The total cost per room was cut to nearly half that of earlier PWA efforts in New York City, and the project density far exceeded that utilized in earlier public projects in the city (Robinson et al: 1999b: 40-41).

The issue of slum clearance was also revisited in the 1937 act. Senator David I. Walsh, a proponent of slum reform from Massachusetts, added the "equivalent elimination" provision to the bill, which required the local authority to remove substandard slum units from the local housing supply in a "substantially equal number" to the public housing units it built. The local authority could meet this requirement by "demolition, condemnation, and effective closing" of substandard units, or through rehabilitation by "compulsory repair or improvement." This provision was supported by many commercial landlords, who feared that expanded housing

supplies would lower the rents that could be charged for their rental properties (Robinson et al: 1999b: 37).

United States Housing Authority

The United States Housing Authority, or USHA, was created under the 1937 Housing Act. This federal agency was designed to lend money to the states or communities for construction of low-cost public housing. Unlike the centralized organization of the earlier PWA Housing Division, which was responsible for every component of project planning and administration, operations at the newly established USHA were increasingly decentralized.

Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes successfully lobbied Congress to place the USHA within the Department of the Interior; however, President Roosevelt appointed Nathan Straus, a man strongly disliked by Ickes as the USHA administrator. This appointment resulted in Ickes distancing himself from the public housing program (Robinson et al: 1999b: 39).

Under the USHA, responsibility for initiating, designing, building and managing housing projects was given to local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), while the Washington bureaucracy provided program direction, financial support, and consulting advice. In effect, site analysis, land acquisition, tenant distribution, and project design were handled by PHAs under the relatively strict constraints of the Federal program and the USHA furnished technical guidance, design assistance, project review, and issued program standards, management guidelines, design models, architectural standards, and building prototypes (Robinson et al: 1999b: 45).

Regarding the impact of increased standardization and restrictive budgets under the USHA on architectural style in public housing, it is clear that design creativity suffered during this period, continuing a trend that had actually begun under the PWA. Economy of materials and design trumped experimental and new design alternatives, resulting in what some critics have labeled an "unnecessarily barracks-like and monotonous" look. The social-psychological elements of project planning that had formed the core of the housers' vision were replaced by the goal of meeting minimum human needs of clean air and light within increasingly limited budgets. Although many new modern housing units were built, most were devoid of the artistic or aesthetic styling of earlier projects (Robinson et al: 1999b: 45).

As with the PWA projects, attempts were made to instill a sense of community in the public housing projects financed by the USHA. PHAs were encouraged to organize a variety of social, educational, and recreational events for the residents of the local complexes, most of which included a neighborhood community center. Choirs, nondenominational children's Bible schools, card clubs, dancing classes, nursery schools, and neighborhood newsletters were amongst the activities and programs employed (Robinson et al: 1999b: 43). The USHA also attempted to increase public support for its programs and the new housing projects using city newspapers and government printed material, ground breaking and dedication ceremonies, tours of model homes, and radio broadcasts (Robinson et al: 42).

Criticism of Public Housing in the New Deal

In its earliest phase, the American efforts in public housing were inspired by modern architectural theory, progressive social ideals, and the praxis of urban activists; however, it soon foundered due to political squabbling, pressures from private sector builders, racial prejudice, classism, and uninspired design. Although a high degree of technical excellence was mandated by USHA for public housing design after 1937, the buildings generally showed investment in healthier and safer designs over aesthetic considerations. There was also long-standing social bias toward plain public housing (Gardner 1981: 67). Bias of this type might be supported by identification with property values as an expression of socio-economic status and a zeal for protection of private property rights (Hooks 2001:139).

Some historians, including Richard Pommer, have blamed the failures of public housing in the United States almost entirely on the architecture and design. Pommer explained that modern architecture was not embraced by the architects of American public housing projects due to the separation of housing designs, which remained traditional, from other building forms. Pommer added, "…the degradation of public housing in [the United States] resulted as much from the contempt of it and its inhabitants expressed by these purely architectural values as from the political-economic compromises necessary to sell it to the real estate owners, the rural politicians and the bureaucrats" (Pommer 1978: 264).

Housing and urban planning scholar John F. Bauman noted that the private housing market has long undermined government programs in public housing. This antagonism from the private sector, together with factors associated with racism and classism, such as the resistance of the middle class to living in proximity to the poor or racial minorities, the idea of public housing as transitional and the failed aesthetics of public housing design have resulted in the current state of public housing. Bauman stated, "The nexus of privatism and racism has foreclosed serious attempts by either public or private agencies to make low income housing into more than a poor house…" (Gardner 1981: 66).

Public Housing in the 1940s

Overview

As President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved industry toward war production and abandoned his opposition to deficit spending, the PWA became irrelevant and was abolished in June 1941. Although Congressional interest in public housing had begun to diminish in the late 1930s, the onset of World War II would lead to renewed interest, redirection, and expansion of Federal housing efforts. As the United States increased industrial capacity in response to the expanding conflict, established manufacturing centers such as Chicago and Detroit, as well as new manufacturing sites, experienced a great influx of population which again drew attention to the inadequate stock of urban housing. Good quality and inexpensive housing for defense workers and their families became a component of the war effort, leading to the revivification of the American public housing program after 1941. The goal of the program, however, was dramatically altered from the provision of housing for low-income families to housing defense workers on the home front (Robinson et al: 1999b: 46).

Despite the patriotic rationale of the new public housing efforts, private enterprise and its supporters in Congress again formed opposition, arguing that federal involvement in housing should be limited to loans and mortgage guarantees to support private construction and, at most, the construction of publicly funded temporary housing. Political battles continued between public housing advocates and business interests and their allies, Republicans from rural constituencies and congressional conservatives, including Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia. Opponents of public housing tried to derail defense housing funds being appropriated to the USHA and feared that public housing would emerge after the war to compete with private enterprise. The success of such attacks on government-built defense housing severely limited the extent of the public housing program during the war (Robinson et al: 1999b: 46).

The Lanham Act of 1940

In opposition to the USHA, a new housing bill that would severely restrict Federal efforts to build public war housing was sponsored by Republican Congressman Fritz Lanham of Texas. The Lanham Act, enacted as law on October 14, 1940 (54 Stat. 1125), was designed to provide relief for defense areas found by the president to be suffering from an existing or impending housing shortage. In such cases, the Federal Works Administrator was empowered to acquire "improved or unimproved lands or interests in lands" for construction sites by purchase, donation, exchange, lease, or condemnation. The Lanham Act provided $150 million to the Federal Works Administration to provide federally built housing quickly and cheaply in the most congested defense industry centers. It emphasized both speed in construction and economy of materials.

The Lanham Act represented a radical departure from previous federal public housing policy. It waived the low-income requirement for tenancy and made defense housing available to all workers facing the housing shortage. It also ordered local authorities to set fair rents at variable rates to be within the financial reach of all families employed in defense industries. The act exempted local authorities from the "equivalent elimination" clause, no longer requiring the demolition of an equal number of slum housing units for all public housing units built. Interestingly, the new policies conformed to the vision of earlier housers, such as Mumford and Bauer; public housing was becoming available to a more diverse section of American society, not only the most impoverished, and expensive, time consuming, and wasteful slum clearance was no longer mandated (Robinson et al: 1999b: 47).

Between 1940 and 1944, about 625,000 units of housing were built under the Lanham Act and its amendments with a total appropriation of nearly $1 billion.

War Trailer Projects

During World War II, the great majority of the public housing units, over 580,000, were of temporary construction, such as plywood dormitories and trailers (Robinson et al: 1999b:52). Government built trailer camps became a common sight on the home front landscape during World War II:

> Across the length and breadth of America at war can be seen compact colonies of strange little cottages on wheels. These vehicles, each boasting all the comforts of home on a miniature scale, are known as trailers. A group or colony of them is a

> trailer camp. They are used to house workers in American war industries and other plants which have sprung up like giant mushrooms all over the United States. An owner, with his auto, which. pulls his trailer, may journey 500 to l,000 miles to join some trailer camp near the factory where he intends to work …
>
> People do not live in trailers because they like the idea of being gypsies, but generally because there are few houses to rent in the big war industry centers. So as a last resort they buy or rent a trailer, or even make one. Each trailer is built on two or four wheels and towed behind the owner's automobile. There are thousands of these trailers gathered in colonies near the nation's war plants.
>
> There were not quite 200 trailers in the camp. There were four neat rows of them and a few more scattered under the trees in front of a wooded ravine. Two white, roughly macadamized roads let through the trailer village. In about the middle of the camp stood the office and utility buildings. The office building was a bare room with a concrete floor and on the wall was a poster advertising war bonds. At the end of the room was a small office which served as renting bureau and post office. Stretching down one side of the room was a store where one could buy everything with the exception of fresh fruit and vegetables; fish and fowl. There was every kind of delicatessen -- sausages, salami, cheeses and potato salad and great stocks of sardines and canned salmon, canned goods and groceries. There was a small selection of such meats as chopped beef, pork chops and stew meats. There were oranges, bananas, cakes and bread (Vorse n.d.).

As early as 1940, war trailers were being distributed to areas in need of housing for defense workers. In the National Housing Agency publication, *Standards for War Trailer Projects* (NHA 1942b), it was stated that trailers were to be used as expedient and temporary housing for defense workers, were to be transferred to other locations once adequate housing facilities became available, and were to be held to minimum construction standards due to their temporary nature. Additional guidelines suggested site selection in consultation "with local housing authorities, planning agencies, municipal officials, military authorities, industrial experts, and other persons in a position to give information and advice" (NHA 1942b:1). The primary criterion for site selection was proximity and convenient access to the war activity, usually a defense plant of some type.

Sites were to be, when possible, within walking distance to the war activity, "2 miles for men and 1 mile for women" (NHA 1942b:i). "For economy and speed of construction," site layout conformed to existing topography and utilized existing drainageways; water lines and sanitary sewers were installed on-site; storm sewers were not built (NHA 1942b:5, 15). Construction of paved roads accessing the site if not already present and sidewalks within the site were mandated (NHA 1942b:6). Acceptable site density was considered to be "12 to 18 trailers per acre of usable land" (NHA 1942b:i). Example site plans were included in the manual.

Service trailers or buildings ancillary to the residential trailers and their arrangement in the site plan were also specified in the standards. Community Facilities included "Community Toilets," to be located within 200 feet of the residential trailers; "Community Laundries," within 300 feet; and "Collection Stations" for "refuse, garbage, sink waste, water supply, and ashes" within 150 feet. Outdoor lighting was recommended to "supplement street lighting" on walkways between

the residential and ancillary structures (NHA 1942b:7). Larger trailer camps, sites with fifty or more dwellings, were to be provided with on-site management and maintenance services, social or activity centers, outdoor recreation areas, health service facilities, and commercial facilities unless it could be demonstrated that adequate off-site facilities of these types were available to camp residents. Reduction or omission of such facilities required the approval of the Washington office of the Federal Public Housing Authority (NHA 1942b:9).

With the end of the war in 1945, the FPHA was required, under the Lanham Act, to dispose of the temporary housing units, over 320,000 extant family dwelling and dormitory units at that time (NHA n.d.). The agency experimented with the reutilization of temporary war housing, in whole or in part, as barracks, utility buildings, and even rural dwellings and actively promoted the sale of such structures in domestic and foreign markets (NHA n.d.). The success of this program and the number of such structures that continued in use after the war is not known. Spring Bank Trailer Camp were located on U.S. 1, in Fairfax County, south of the City of Alexandria (Netherton et al 1992:622). A segregated Farm Security Administration (FSA) Trailer Camp for African Americans was present in Arlington, Virginia, by 1942.

Although few details relevant to this facility have been located at this time, a community building including "a well laundry" supplied with new aluminum Maytag Commander washing machines was located within the camp (Lupton 1996: 21).

The Housing Act of 1949

After World War II, any effort to extend public housing policy was vigorously contested by special interest groups, sometimes referred to as the real estate lobby, including the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB), the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Savings and Loan League, and the National Association of Retail Lumber Dealers.

In 1945, legislation to extend the public housing appropriations of the 1937 Housing Act, which had been suspended before the war, was introduced in Congress. This legislation reached the U.S. House of Representatives as the Taft-Ellender-Wagner (T-E-W) Bill in 1948. Although it was bitterly fought by the real estate lobby and its political allies, after the election of Harry S. Truman as President of the United States in 1948, a popular mandate for passage of the bill was perceived. The T-E-W Bill was signed into law in July 1949 as the Housing Act of 1949. The act called for the production of more permanent public housing across the United States. Under Title I of the act, the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) was authorized to provide capital grants and loan guarantees to local agencies for use in urban renewal; large scale land acquisition and slum clearance; under Title III, the Public Housing Administration (PHA) was authorized to allocate federal funds to local housing authorities for the construction of 810,000 public housing units over a six year period (Robinson et al: 1999b: 100).

Although the Housing Act of 1949 was nominally an extension of the United States Housing Act of 1937, it was also a great compromise between advocates of housing reform and the real estate lobby (Robinson et al: 1999b: 100).

Public Housing After 1949

Overview

In the perceived prosperity of the postwar years, public housing remained an integral part of Federal housing policy but received limited attention and funding. The rapid growth of population in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century and the concentration of this population in urban areas led to new problems in housing and the need for government to address these problems. Under the Housing Act of 1949, beginning in the 1950s, numerous massive public housing projects, typically high-rise complexes were constructed in urban areas across the country (Robinson et al: 1999b: 57).

In terms of design, public housing projects after 1949 were characterized by a simple, unified appearance. Standardization and economy became the most important elements of design; the "stripped modern" exterior architectural detailing of most public housing resulted in an institutional appearance. These later complexes also had much higher site densities than earlier projects, having both taller buildings with more units, and a greater number of buildings per site. The interiors of later public housing complexes also contrasted with the earlier ones, typically having smaller units with smaller rooms, connected by long hallways. Also, unlike earlier small-scale projects that were designed to blend with their surroundings, public housing in the second half of the twentieth century tended to stand out in the urban landscape (Robinson et al: 1999b: 57).

Many critics of the public housing system in the 1950s considered it tied to humanistic sentiments and not focused on practical methods of assisting the poor. They claimed that the bureaucracy involved in the public housing system was inefficient and significantly decreased the funds that were actually used for housing, that public housing tended to result in more racially segregated communities within cities, and that the demand on collective cooperation and unity necessary in public housing, due to the close quarters in which tenants lived, was often unreasonable. The most significant federal housing legislation to be enacted between 1949 and the 1970s was the Housing Act of 1959, which established a direct loan program for senior citizens in need of housing aid.

Although local housing authorities continue to be supported with federal funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal government no longer pays to build housing projects. HUD organizes all public housing in the United States. Federal programs begun in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Section 8 Housing Program and HOPE VI have involved government encouragement of and partnership with private sector entities to provide low cost housing and to redevelop distressed public housing projects as mixed communities. Since 2001, HUD has increasingly diverted funds from public housing toward home ownership programs. Many such programs including the "Renewing the Dream" tax credit work to encourage private sector housing developers to construct housing for low income residents. HUD has also formally recognized the persistence of inequalities in the conditions of housing for racial minorities and persons with disabilities.

Section 8

In reaction to the problems associated with the aging stock of public housing and increased requirement for low cost housing for those in need, the U.S. Congress passed legislation enacting the Section 8 Housing Program in 1974, which Richard Nixon signed into law. Section 8 encourages the private sector to construct affordable homes and assists poor tenants by giving a monthly subsidy to their landlords. This assistance can be project based, "which applies to specific properties", or "tenant based," which provides tenants with a voucher they can use anywhere vouchers are accepted. Since 1983, almost no new project based Section 8 housing has been produced. Effective October 1, 1999, existing tenant based voucher programs were merged into the Housing Choice Voucher Program, which is today the primary means of providing subsidies to low income renters.

HOPE VI

In 1989, a National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing was named and charged with proposing a National Action Plan to eradicate severely distressed or obsolete public housing by the year 2000. The HOPE VI program, formerly known as the Urban Revitalization Demonstration Program (URD), was created for the purpose of revitalizing severely distressed or obsolete public housing developments. HOPE VI was authorized by the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act of 1993. It was also authorized, with slight modifications (amending Section 24 of the 1937 Housing Act), by Section 120 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992. PHAs located in one of the 40 most populous U.S. cities and PHAs on HUD's Troubled Housing Authority list are eligible to apply for HOPE VI funds.

Public Housing in Alexandria

Overview

The history of public housing in the City of Alexandria may be traced to the last years of the 1930s, beginning with the establishment of the Alexandria Housing Authority and planned USHA slum clearance efforts in the city. In the early 1940s, several temporary public housing projects for defense workers - war trailer camps - were established in the city. Several permanent public housing projects, including Ramsey Homes, were constructed by 1945. Segregation of the city's public housing appears to have been a constant component of the system. In 1965, with the integration of two African American families into the previously "whites only" Cameron Valley Homes, project efforts to remedy this situation were made (WP 1965: C1).

The Alexandria Housing Authority

In June 1939, the Alexandria Housing Authority was formally established as a public agency under the Housing Authority Law, Chapter 1, Title 36 of the Code of Virginia of 1938, as a result of work done by the local Council of Social Agencies and the Woman's Club. Reportedly, the municipal authorities were originally opposed to the creation of the agency; however, the city appropriated $3000, granted as a loan, to fund the Authority, pending anticipated financial assistance from the USHA. In 1940, the agency had one permanent full-time employee, the executive director; two part-time typists; and an architect hired on a contingent basis (Woodbury 1940: 140). Later renamed the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA), the primary mission of the agency has been to provide sanitary and safe dwelling accommodations

to persons of low income at affordable rents in the city. ARHA's annual operating cost and capital funding for the upkeep and maintenance of ARHA properties are funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The City appoints the nine members of the ARHA Board of Commissioners.

Slum Clearance in Alexandria

In a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* in December 1935, a citizen of Alexandria expressed outrage at the paper's hostility to the emerging federal housing program and its contention that local government could handle the housing crisis:

> In my own hometown I know of no present or past attempts to remove the slum dwellings or even discuss the possibility of removing them. Shacks that were formerly grog shops and houses of worse repute are now renovated with a coat of paint, brass dooor-knockers [sic], green shutters, foot scraper, and a tub and are rented to the stupid petit bourgeois for fabulous sums while the former inhabitants are turned out to shift for themselves and develop bigger and better slums by their shifting…your "local government" is a non-entity and has failed to alleviate conditions… (WP 1935: 8).

In October 1939, the USHA earmarked $900,000 for use by the Alexandria Housing Board in a program of slum clearance and the construction of "200 family units that may be individual dwellings, row houses or single apartments." Provisions for slum clearance mandated that for each unit constructed an existing unit would be renovated or razed. The units were expected to rent from between $14 and $18 monthly and were to be made available to families earning less than $75 per month (WP 1939:12).

According to a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post*, slum clearance in Alexandria was underway by the beginning of 1941, the author informed:

> …of a situation which exists in the town of Alexandria…about the close of the year notices went out to various colored families living in Alexandria, in that area near the railroad tracks between Oronoco and Princess Streets, that because of the slum clearance in charge of the Housing Authority, these families must vacate the shacks in which they then lived and move to other homes so that better houses might be erected there.
>
> …However, they did not move…and on January 2, 1941 the wrecking crews came…Today I received word that the houses on Princess Street are having their roofs taken off…all those people living in that row of houses, including a child with a broken neck, will be entirely homeless, without even the shelter usually given to animals…Alexandrians are content to allow people to be treated worse than animals.
>
> It seems that the Housing Authority should have…ascertained whether there were enough places for these people to move… (WP 1941:10).

In a 1944 interview, Virginia's U.S. Representative Howard Smith noted "the extremely pressing problem of District slums and the dire need here for proper Negro housing." Smith remarked on the recent efforts toward slum clearance and public housing in Alexandria:

> Over in Alexandria we can see in a small way the blessings of slum clearance. There are two blocks down there of fine brick dwellings for Negroes, with backyards and plenty of air and sunlight. They replaced former slums. It is deeply gratifying to see the pride and self-respect which a decent place to live has engendered in the occupants of these homes. They are beautifully kept (WP 1944a:B1).

Proponents of the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Housing Bill of 1948 noted that Alexandria, with a population of about 75,000, had available only 421 rental housing units for low income families (130 units for white families, 291 units for African-American families), not including those allotted for military personnel (WP 1948:15). Former defense housing, including Ramsey Homes, was acquired by ARHA for use as public housing in the 1950s, and additional public housing was constructed in the 1950s and throughout the latter half of the twentieth century to address the housing needs of low-income families.

In 1985, a group called "The 16th Census Tract Crisis Committee" accused city officials of deliberately reducing and eliminating housing opportunities for African Americans in the city, beginning in the 1960s (*Washington Post* 1985: F1). They filed a complaint with HUD, that the constitutional rights of African Americans were violated by city actions. Backed by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, The 16th Census Tract Crisis Committee singled out the following city actions as violating the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (*Washington Post* 1985:F2). Among other things, they complained that the city was:

Using zoning code, code enforcement or condemnation to demolish homes occupied by African Americans without providing affordable alternatives;

Rejecting planned urban renewal projects and renovating housing units that were generally too expensive for African Americans;

Closing the historically African-American Parker-Gray High School and reselling the property for commercial and upper end housing use rather than low income housing; and

Enacting a 1984 ordinance that designated the Parker-Gray African-American community as a special preservation district.

Residents of the primarily African-American Parker-Gray neighborhood opposed the extension of the Old Town Historic District into the neighborhood as it would increase property values and property taxes and force them from their homes (*Washington Post* 1984:C1).

Ramsey Homes Defense Housing

During the Second World War, the United States Housing Authority (USHA) constructed Ramsey Homes, then known as Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, as permanent housing for African-American defense workers. Alexandria architect and

architectural historian Delos H. Smith, FAIA, of Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects, proposed two Modernist designs for the project. The first option consisted of three buildings comprising nineteen units, while the second option consisted of three four-unit foursquares and a three-unit L-shaped building constructed of more economical materials complex. The final plan included landscaping and a simple paved play area within the L of the triplex.

According to documents related to his nomination as a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Delos Hamilton Smith was born in 1884 in Willcox, Arizona, but graduated from high school in Washington, D.C. He received his bachelor's degree in architecture from George Washington University in 1906 and his M.A. from the same school in 1916. Smith concentrated heavily on ecclesiastical structures and was also an authority on early American architecture, presenting a study of over 250 colonial churches to the Library of Congress, publishing numerous articles on historic architecture, and serving on the Alexandria Board of Architectural Review for several years beginning in 1947. He and his firm also designed 440 public housing units, including the Ramsey Homes, for the U.S. Housing Authority in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Smith was made a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1952.

Approval for construction of Ramsey Homes was attained in November 1941. It was completed in November 1942. Some units were already occupied prior to the entire project's completion. The original residents of the complex were African American defense workers, but their identities were kept secret as a matter of national security. The 1945 Alexandria City Directory does not list the odd-numbered addresses on the 600 block of N. Patrick Street as a result of this policy. Similarly, photographs and information concerning the Naval Torpedo Station on the waterfront, which employed an integrated work force and where residents of Ramsey Homes may have worked, were similarly withheld from public access until after World War II (*Washington Post* 2014).

The Alexandria City Directory for 1947 listed the residents of the Ramsey Homes project in that year. Two of the listed residents, Carneal Coffee and Cleveland B. Tivy, appear to have been associated with the defense industry, their occupations listed as "USA" (perhaps the Army) and "Clerk War Dept." respectively. Other residents listed include Will Daniels, barber; George W. Witherspoon, auto mechanic; and Charles E. Smith, janitor. All of the residents were noted to be African American. The appearance of listings for the Ramsey Homes residents in 1947 reflects the end of the policy of secrecy that likely caused their omission from the wartime city directories, and the listed occupations of the residents suggests that the housing was no longer restricted to defense workers.

After World War II, the Federal Public Housing Authority sought to sell the Ramsey Homes; the City of Alexandria contemplated the purchase of the site, and the *Washington Post* reported that the Mayor of Alexandria claimed the wartime housing did not meet city building codes and were therefore "substandard" (*Washington Post* 6 October 1946:5). The property did not leave federal hands until 1953, when the ownership of Ramsey Homes was transferred to the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (Alexandria Deed Book 356:407), which remains the owner and manager of the property.

In 1959, ARHA noted that of its 4942 tenants, occupying 1,247 dwelling units across eight development projects including the Ramsey Homes, "...almost all came from dismal,

substandard, or overcrowded quarters," were "generally happy in their surroundings" and had greatly benefitted from public housing (ARHA 1959: 2).

Other Housing Projects in the Vicinity of the Ramsey Homes

Several other public housing projects have been constructed in the vicinity of the Ramsey Homes and the Parker-Gray District. The earliest projects were built in the 1940s, as either defense housing or slum clearance public housing. The following brief descriptions of public housing projects are presented in chronological order by construction date.

John Roberts Homes

The first public housing project completed in the Uptown/Parker-Gray area was the segregated "whites only" John Roberts Homes, built in 1941 in the block bound by Oronoco Street, E. Braddock Road, N. West Street, and the RF&P Railroad line. John Roberts Homes consisted of twenty-one wood-frame buildings each of which contained between four and ten units. The projects were razed in 1982 and replaced by the Colecroft residential development.

George Parker (Hopkins-Tancil Courts)

George Parker Homes, renamed Hopkins-Tancil Courts in the 1980s, were located on two blocks bounded by Fairfax Street, Royal street, Pendleton and Princess Streets. The housing consisted of two-story brick buildings constructed for military housing circa 1942 and later turned over to Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority for use as public housing units for low income African American families (WP: 2001).

Samuel Madden Downtown

The Samuel Madden Homes (Downtown), a 100-unit public housing complex, represents an early public housing development in the city, built between ca. 1942 and 1959. It was built adjacent to the George Parker Homes and, together, the projects occupied two contiguous blocks, bounded by Pendleton Street to the north, Princess Street to the south, North Royal Street to the east, and North Pitt Street to the west. The earliest units were two-story brick buildings constructed for military housing circa 1945 (WP: 2001).

The project, named for the first African-American pastor of the Alfred Street Baptist Church, was initiated as part of a program of slum clearance, with the "blighted" area extending well beyond the site of the public housing units, and including areas north of Madison Street and west of N. Fairfax Street. After clearance, some of the land became the location of temporary houses built to provide displaced families a place to live while the Samuel Madden Homes were under construction.

Samuel Madden Uptown

Samuel Madden Homes (Uptown) were built in 1945, in the 900 blocks of Patrick and Henry Streets and the 1000 block of Montgomery Street, and are a non-contiguous element of the Samuel Madden (Downtown) project several blocks to the east of the Parker-Gray District. The Samuel Madden Homes and the later James Bland project were all the work of architect Joseph Saunders, and are very similar in design. Each project includes side-gabled brick row houses, sometimes with six or more repeated in a row, and placed around landscaped garden areas that are oriented to face into the north-south streets.

Through oral history interviews with residents who lived in the neighborhood and in the Samuel Madden Homes and James Bland Homes public housing projects in the 1940s and 1950s, it has become apparent that little distinction was made by the residents between the Samuel Madden Homes (Uptown) and the later and adjacent James Bland Homes projects. Typically, both were known as "the projects." Perhaps due to confusion associated with Samuel Madden Homes (Downtown), Samuel Madden (Uptown) is frequently referred to as James Bland by area residents.

James Bland

The James Bland Homes occupied two entire and three partial city blocks bounded by First, N. Patrick, Madison, N. Alfred, Wythe, and N. Columbus Streets. Constructed in 1954 and 1959, the project was named for James Alan Bland, a nineteenth-century African American musician and songwriter. Although formally integrated, the complex became almost entirely African American after the completion of the project. The James Bland project is currently in the process of being redeveloped as mixed low-income and market-rate housing units.

Jefferson Village

The Jefferson Village public housing complex was built in 1968 at the corner of Princess and N. West Streets. The buildings are brick row houses and apartment structures built in a late Modern Movement style.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

   Buildings I, III, and IV are identical two-story quadruplexes with low-pitched hipped roofs. Building II is an L-plan two-story triplex with a cross-hipped roof. The square shape of three of the buildings and the replacement of flat roofs with hipped ones after 1964 altered their style from vernacular Modernist to vernacular Prairie foursquares. Alterations made in 1995 introduced Colonial Revival elements with vinyl paneled doors, vinyl windows, and inoperable aluminum shutters.

2. Condition of fabric:

   The buildings have been well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:

    a. Triplex building width (excluding porch extension) - 45' x 43’6.5”

    b. Quadplex building width (excluding porch extension) – 43’6” x 36’5”

2. Foundations: Poured concrete

3. Walls: Fabcrete, cement blocks with stucco

4. Structural system, framing: Fabcrete, cement blocks

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Poured concrete. Entrances are inset and paired side-by-side such that each quadruplex has two facing north and two facing south. The triplex has one facing south and two facing north. Pent roofs project over concrete pads which extend into the yard and are surrounded by a concrete and stucco half walls with precast concrete coping.

6. Chimneys: Metal flue

7. Openings:

    a. Doorways and doors: Paneled vinyl or metal doors are roughly centered on each unit.

    b. Windows and shutters: Paired one-over-one windows with brick aprons are situated next to the doors towards the interior dividing wall on the north and south elevations. Larger one-over-one windows are situated on the opposite side of the door towards the corner of each building. The elevations facing the east and west contain two one-over-one windows on each floor of each unit, for a total of eight symmetrically positioned windows. They are all vinyl replacement double-hung sashes flanked by decorative aluminum louvered shutters dating to 1995.

8. Roof:

    a. Shape, covering: Hipped (Buildings I, III, IV) and Cross-hipped (Building II) with continuous membrane or a bituminous asphalt product

    b. Cornice, eaves: Vinyl dating to 1995

    c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Raised skylights removed between 1964 and 1979

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: There is a small living room (17’7” x 11’7”) with a closet under the stairs and a kitchen (9’x 9’) with open utility closet on the first floor of each unit. Two small bedrooms (14’5” x 9’5”) and one full bath (8’ x 10’) are located on the second floor.

2. Stairways: One stairway with wooden risers is located opposite the main entry door in the living room and runs across the length of the living room. It has a solid half-wall rail.

3. Flooring: Vinyl composition tile or carpet

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster

5. Openings:

    a. Doorways and doors: The only exterior door is metal with six Colonial Revival panels and measures 3' wide. The bedroom and bathroom doors are wood with two simple panels and measure 2'6" wide.

    b. Windows: Simple trim and sills

6. Decorative features and trim: Simple crown molding

7. Hardware: Mass-produced contractor-grade brass

8. Mechanical equipment:

    a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Gas furnace (originally coal-fired with coal chutes), Window-unit air conditioning, exhaust fans in bathroom dating to 1995 (originally ventilated by skylights)

    b. Lighting: Mass-produced contractor-grade fluorescent and incandescent fixtures installed 1995

    c. Plumbing: Updated in kitchen and bathroom 1995

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design:

The property was originally surrounded by chain-linked fencing, which was replaced with black metal picket fences in 1995. It also contained a paved play area within the L of the triplex, which was removed and sodded with grass in 1995.

Sheet 8 of the final site plan dated October 10, 1941 provided the following "List of Plants" (Smith 1941b):

To be furnished & planted
Quantities are approximate only

Shade Trees (Deciduous)

1. Ailanthus Glandulosa (Tree of Heaven) – 4
2. Gleditsia Triacanthos (Honey Locust) – 3
3. Robinia Pseudoacacia (Black Locust) – 18

Flowering Shrubs (Deciduous)

4. Spirea Van Houttei (Van Houtte Spirea) – 15
5. Viburnum Dentatum (Arrow Wood) – 15

Hedge Plants

6. Ligustrum Begalum (Regals Privet) (Evergreen) – 57 (Actually L. obtusifolium var. regelianum, Regel Privet)
7. Crataegs Cordata (Wash. Thorn) (Deciduous) – 85

Vines

8. Ampelopsis Tricuspidata (Japanese Creeper) (Deciduous) – 8
9. Eyoonymus Patens (Evergreen Bittersweet) (Evergreen) – 30
10. Hedra Heliz (English Ivy) (Evergreen) – 8

Historic aerials show that it was generally followed. The 1995 renovation plans note that English Ivy was removed from the property. Any historic plant material left at that time was removed.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary and Unpublished Sources

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E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Additional research in the Records of the Public Housing Administration at the National Archives at College Park Maryland may yield more information. Conducting an oral history project with long-time residents of the neighborhood would also add to the understanding of the housing.

F. Supplemental Materials:

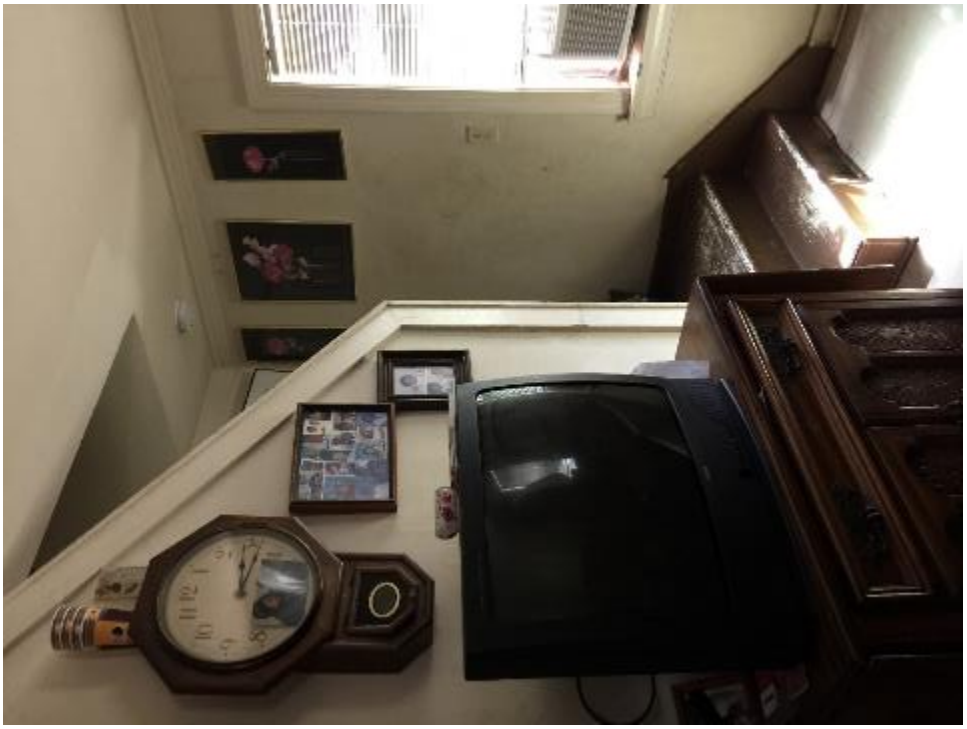
March 1957 Black and White Aerial Imagery of Alexandria, Virginia (USGS 1957).

Ramsey Homes, Building I (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

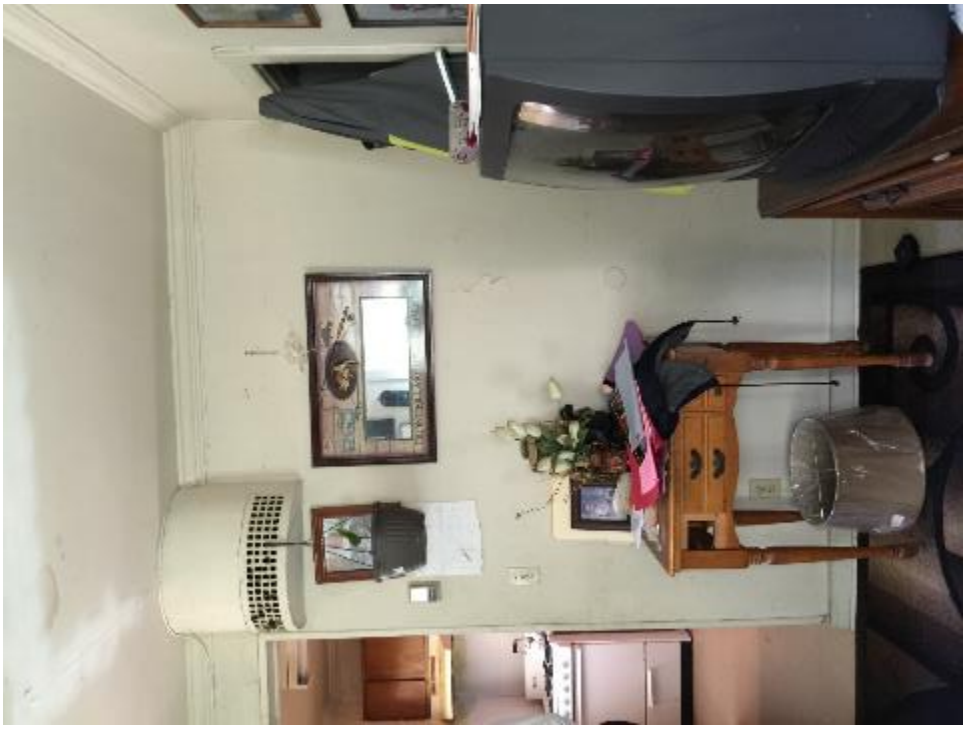
Ramsey Homes, Building II (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

Ramsey Homes, Building III (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

Ramsey Homes, Building IV (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)



Ramsey Homes, Typical First Floor Living Room and Stairway (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)



Ramsey Homes, Typical First Floor Kitchen, Living Room, and Heating Vent (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

Ramsey Homes, Typical First Floor Kitchen and Utility Rooms (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

Ramsey Homes, Typical Second Floor Bedroom (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

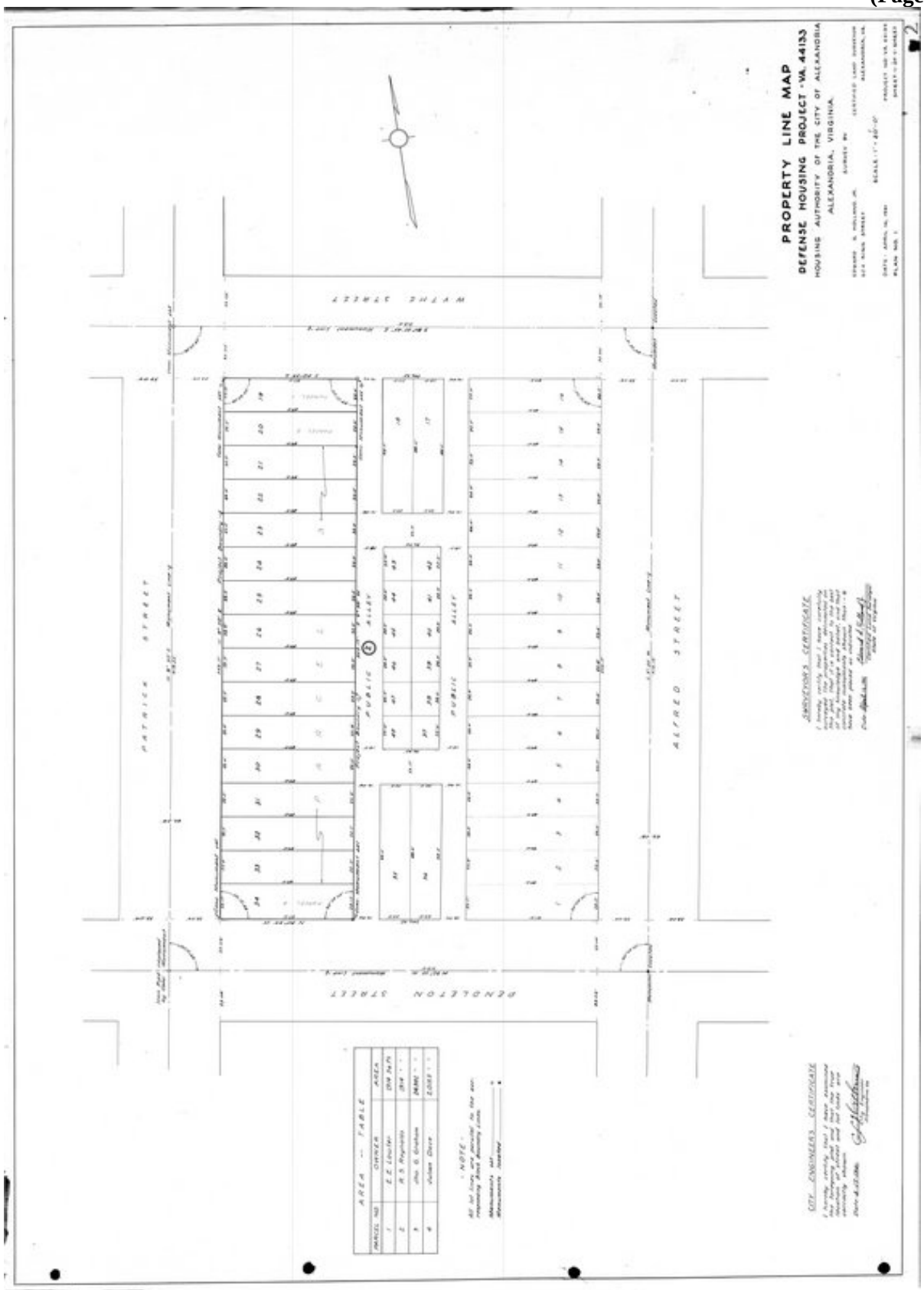
Ramsey Homes, Typical Second Floor Bathroom (Anna Maas, June 29, 2015)

The following pages contain images of measured drawings prepared for the Ramsey Homes in 1941 and 1995. They are from:

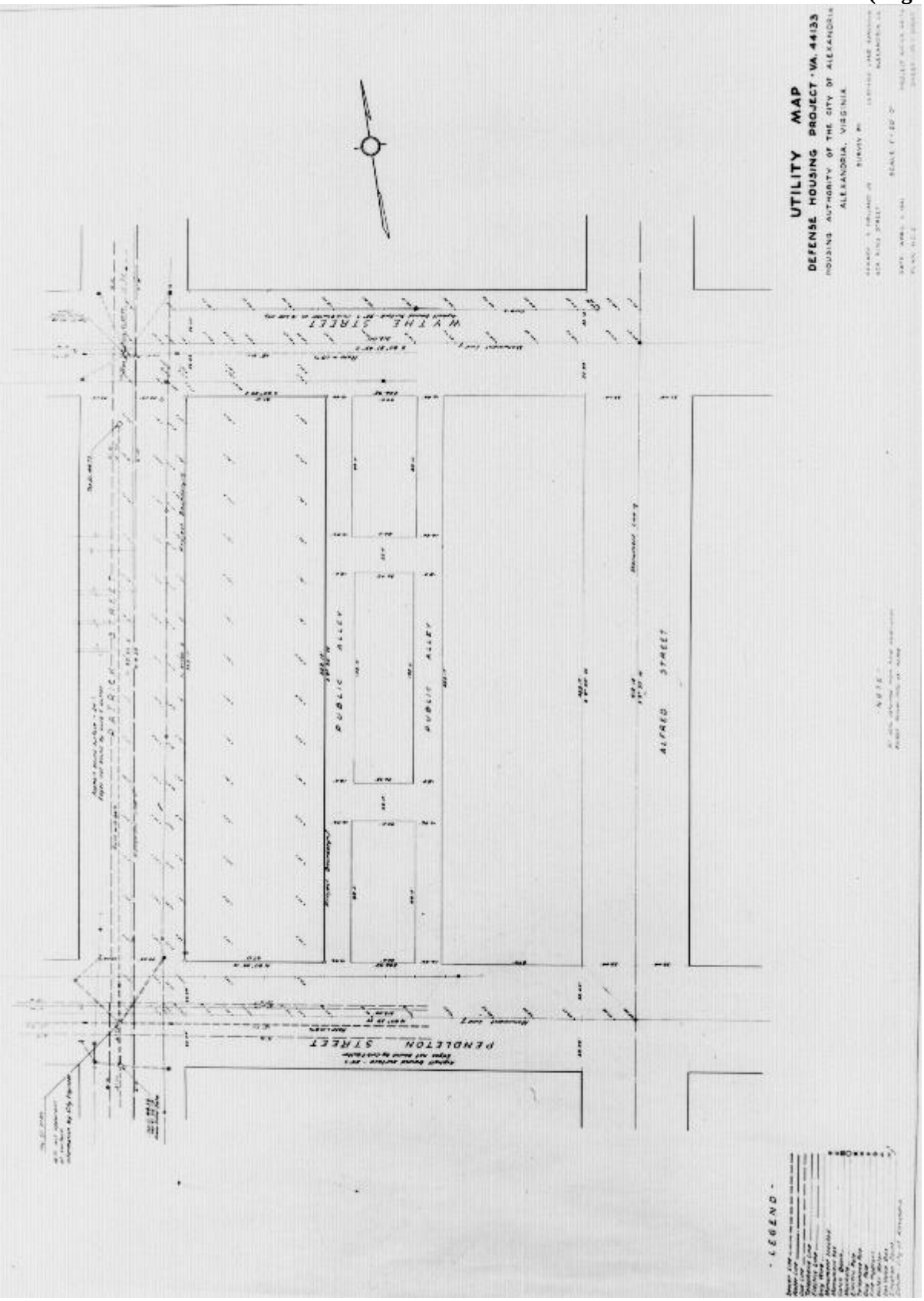
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133. Sheets 1-12. Prepared for the Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority by Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects, Alexandria, Virginia. On file at Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority. (Sheets 6 and 10 are missing.)

October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133. Sheets 1-8. Prepared for the Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority by Smith, Werner, and Billings Architects, Alexandria, Virginia. RG 196, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Architectural and Engineering Plans, the National Archives at College Park Maryland.

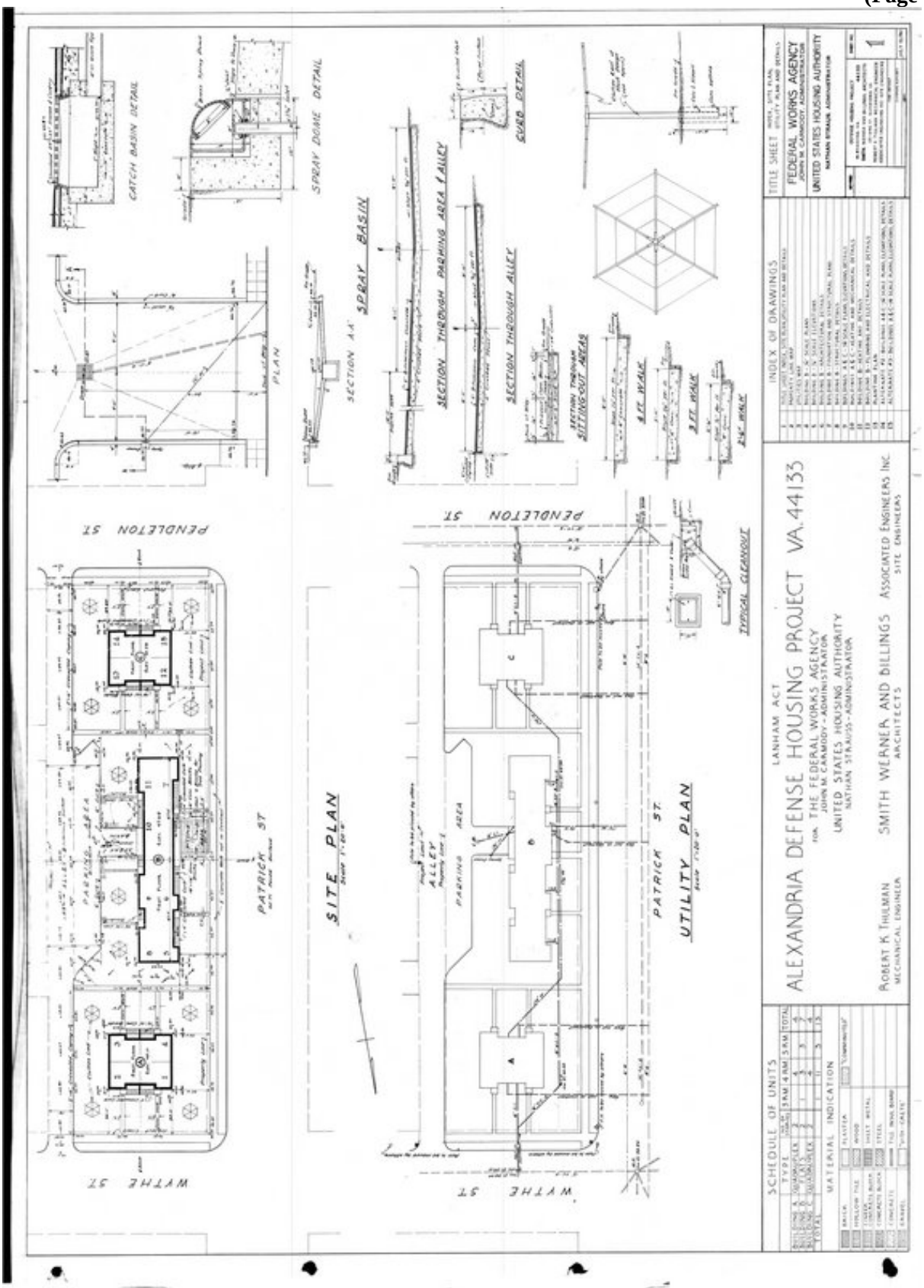
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Alexandria, Virginia. Prepared for Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority by Sorg and Associates, P.C. On file at Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority.



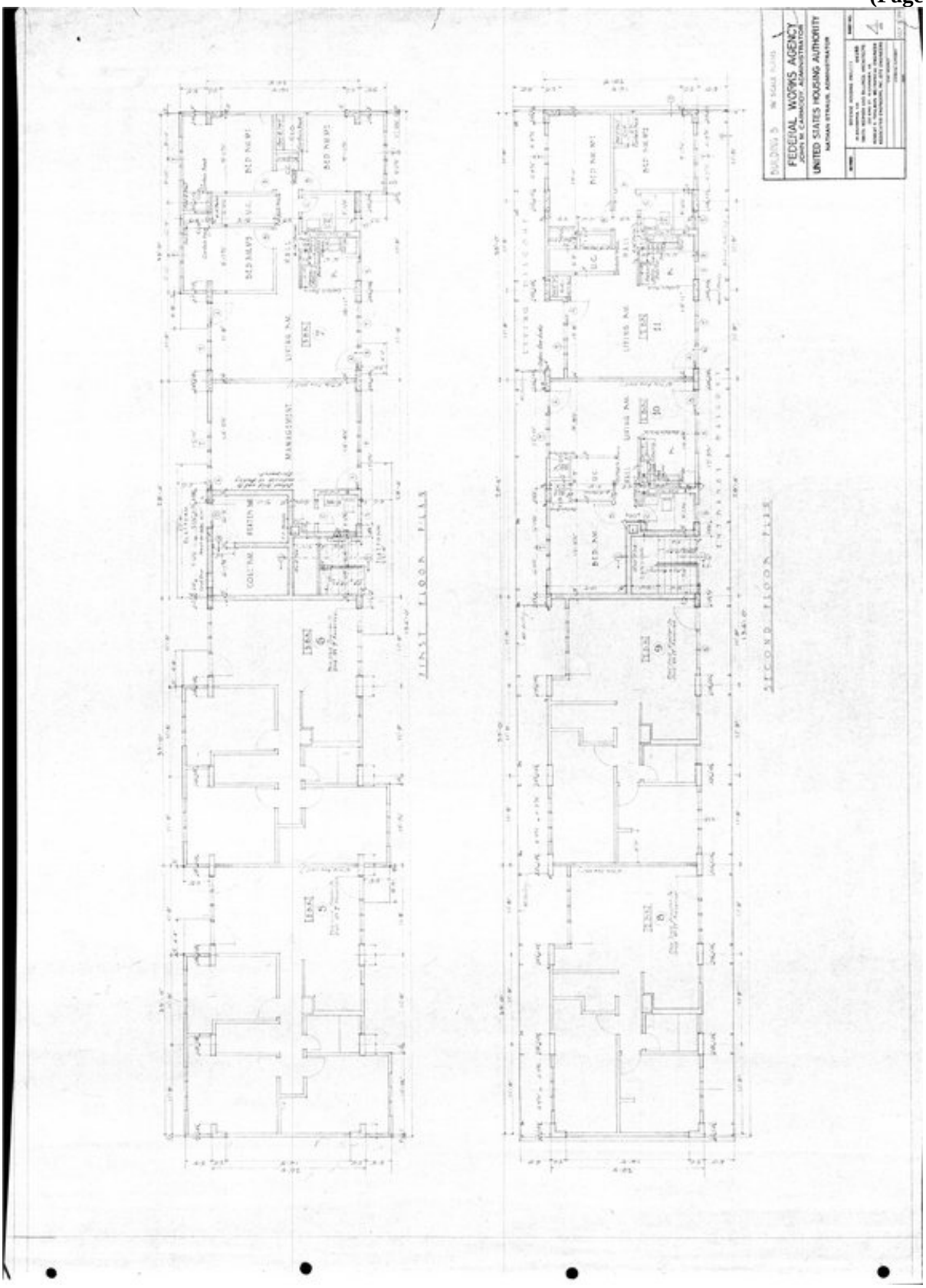
April 16, 1941, Property Line Map (Holland 1941), included as Sheet 2 in plans for Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133 (Smith 1941a, 1941b).



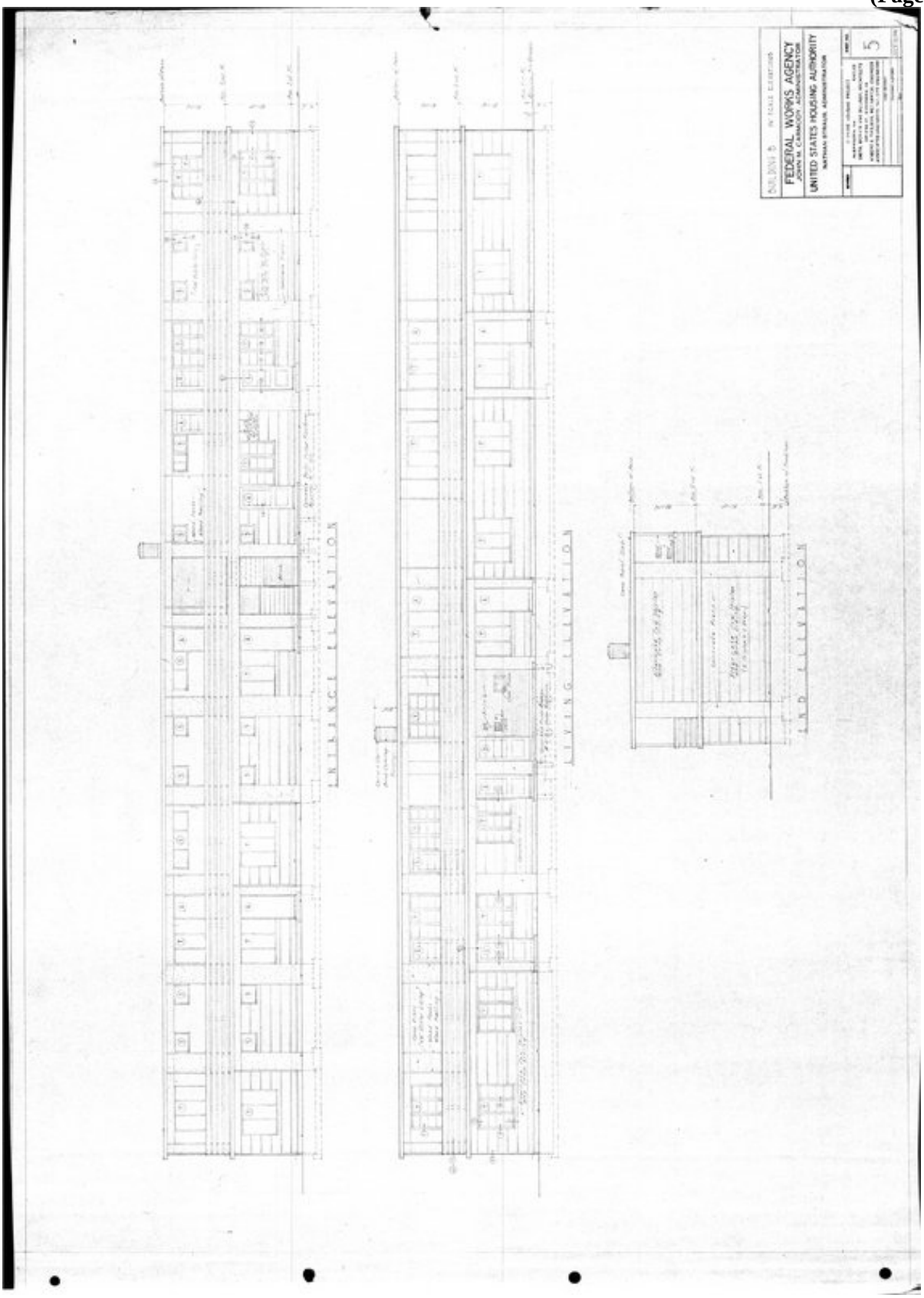
April 16, 1941, Property Line Map (Holland 1941), included as Sheet 3 in plans for Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133 (Smith 1941a, 1941b).



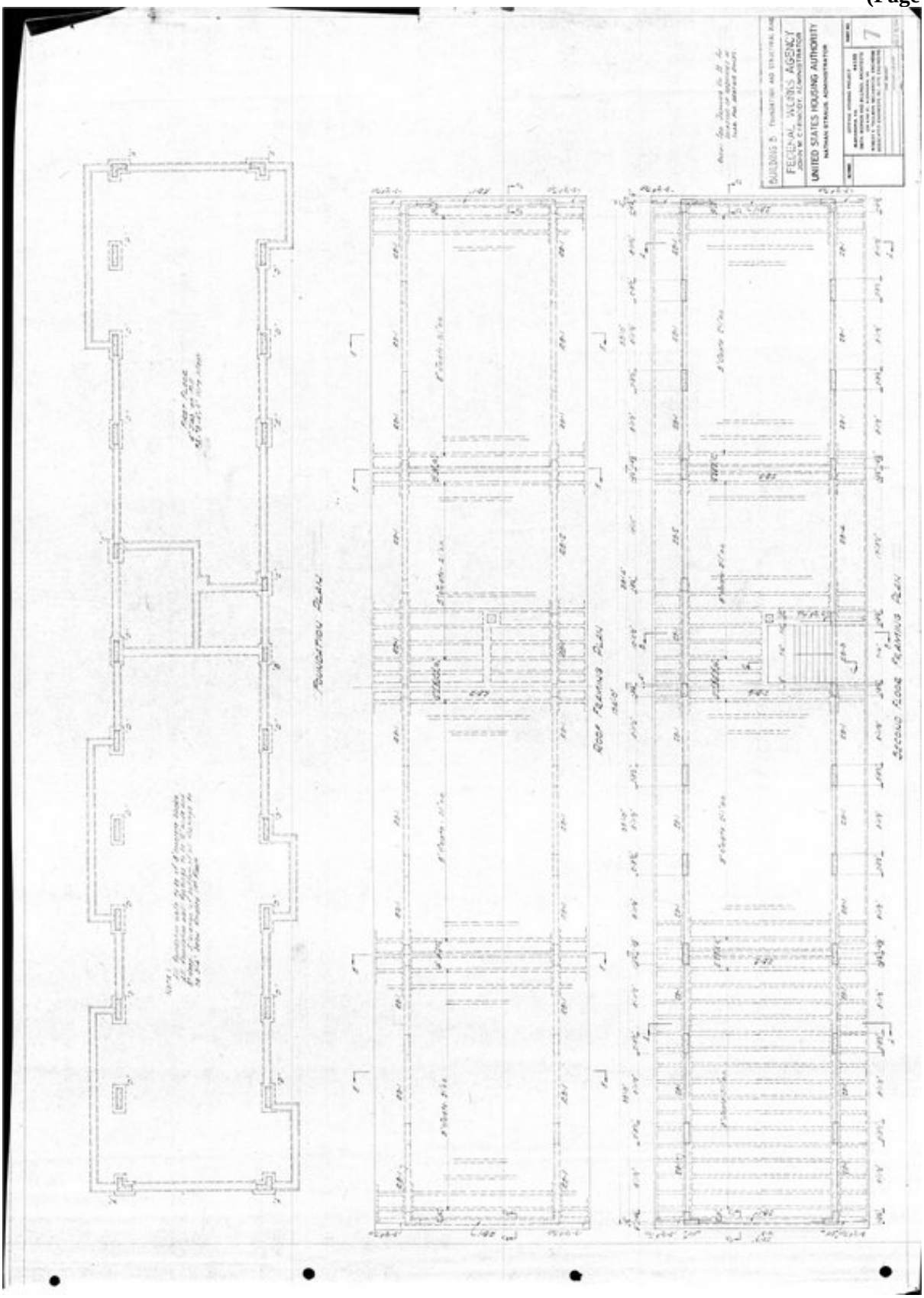
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 1, showing proposed site plans (Smith 1941a).



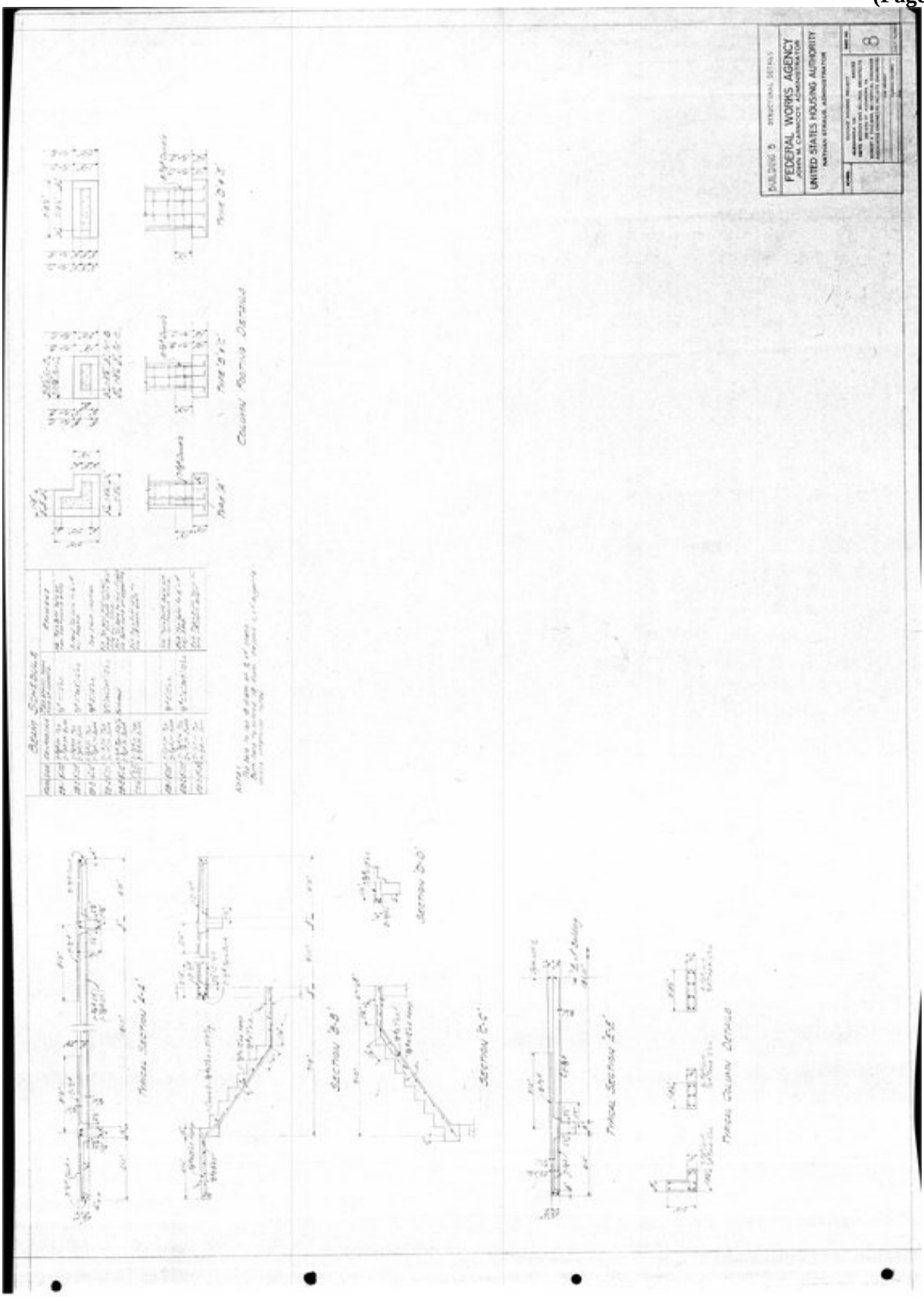
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 4, showing proposed first and second floor plans of flats (Smith 1941a).



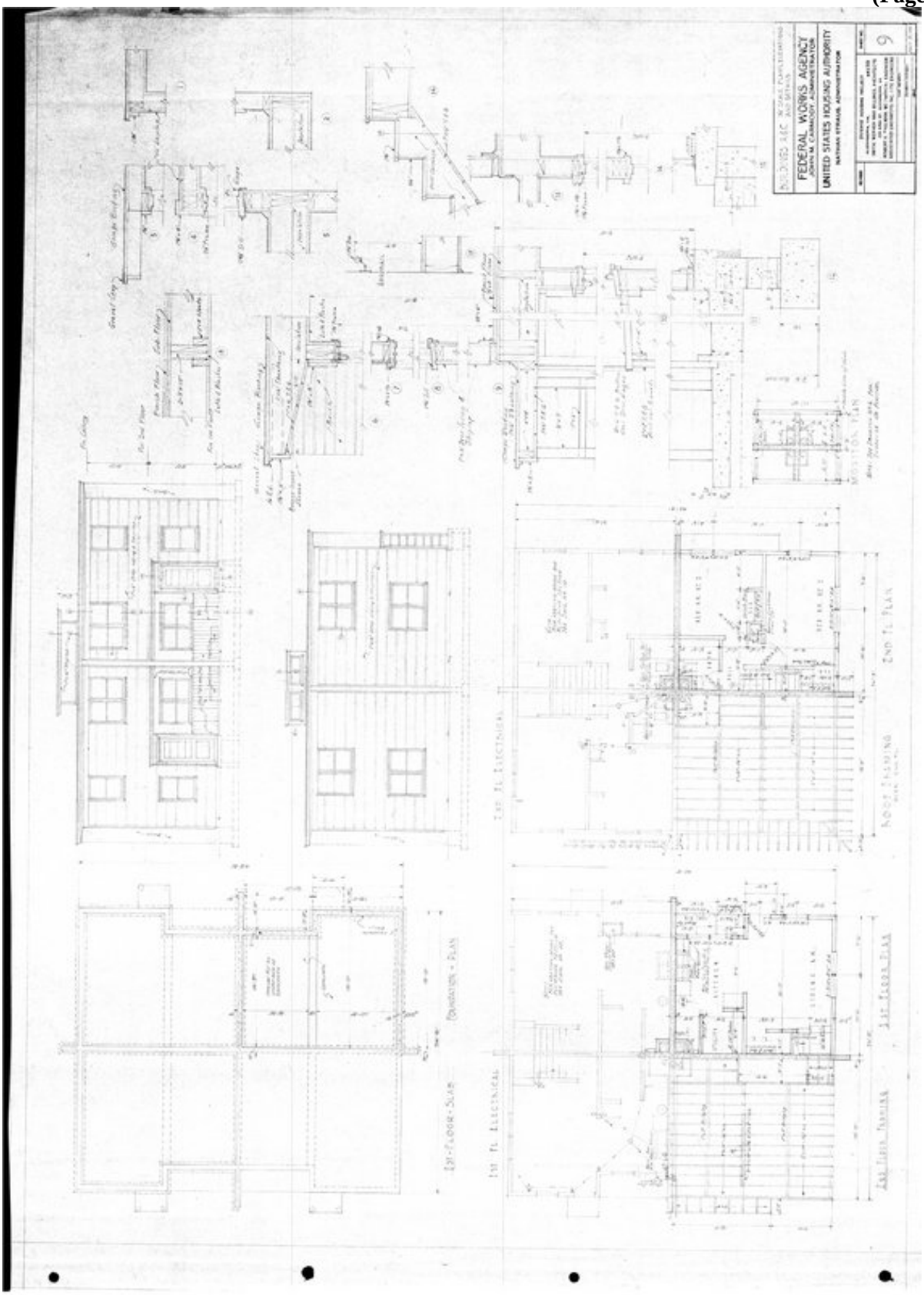
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 5, showing proposed elevations of flats (Smith 1941a).



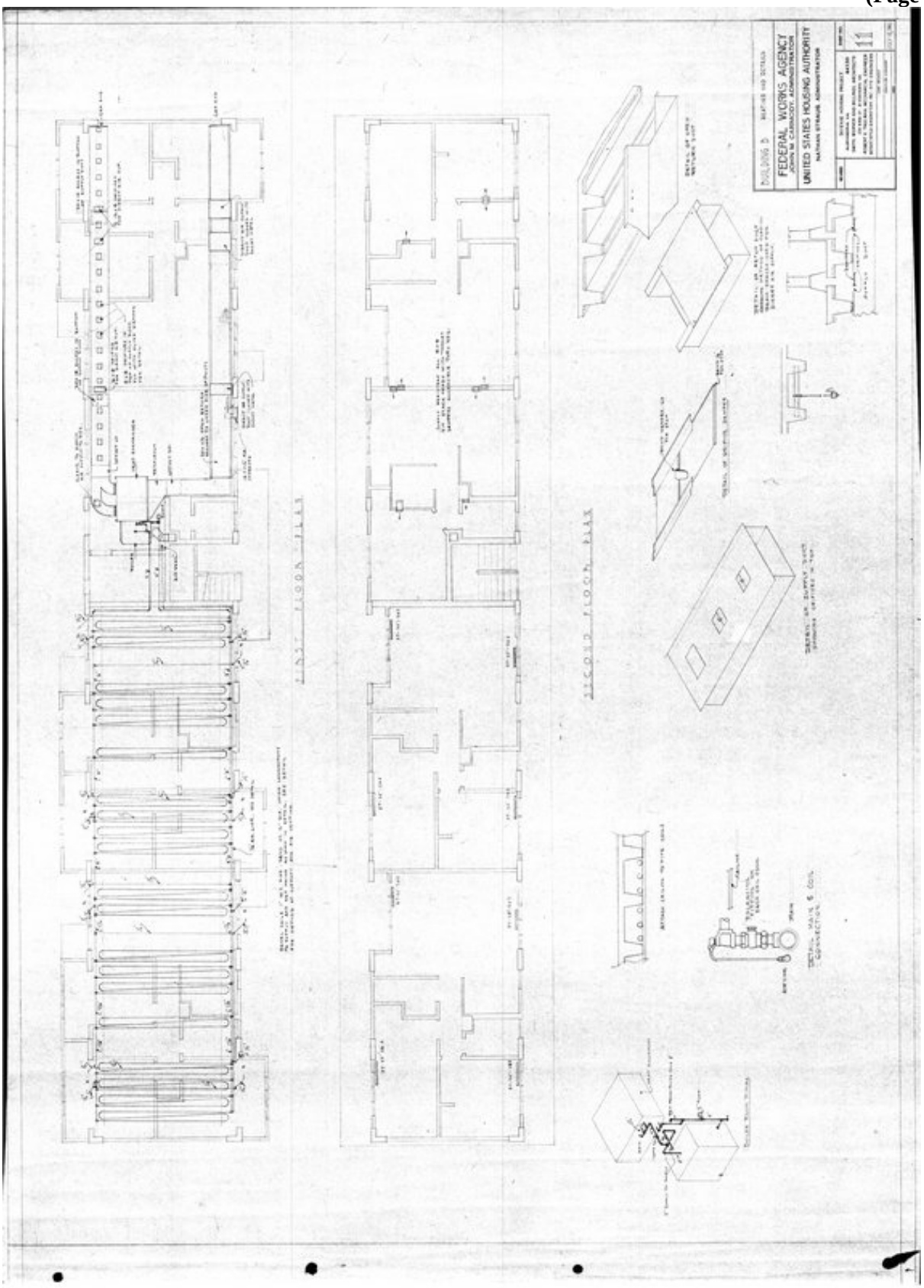
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 7, showing proposed foundation and framing plans of flats (Smith 1941a).



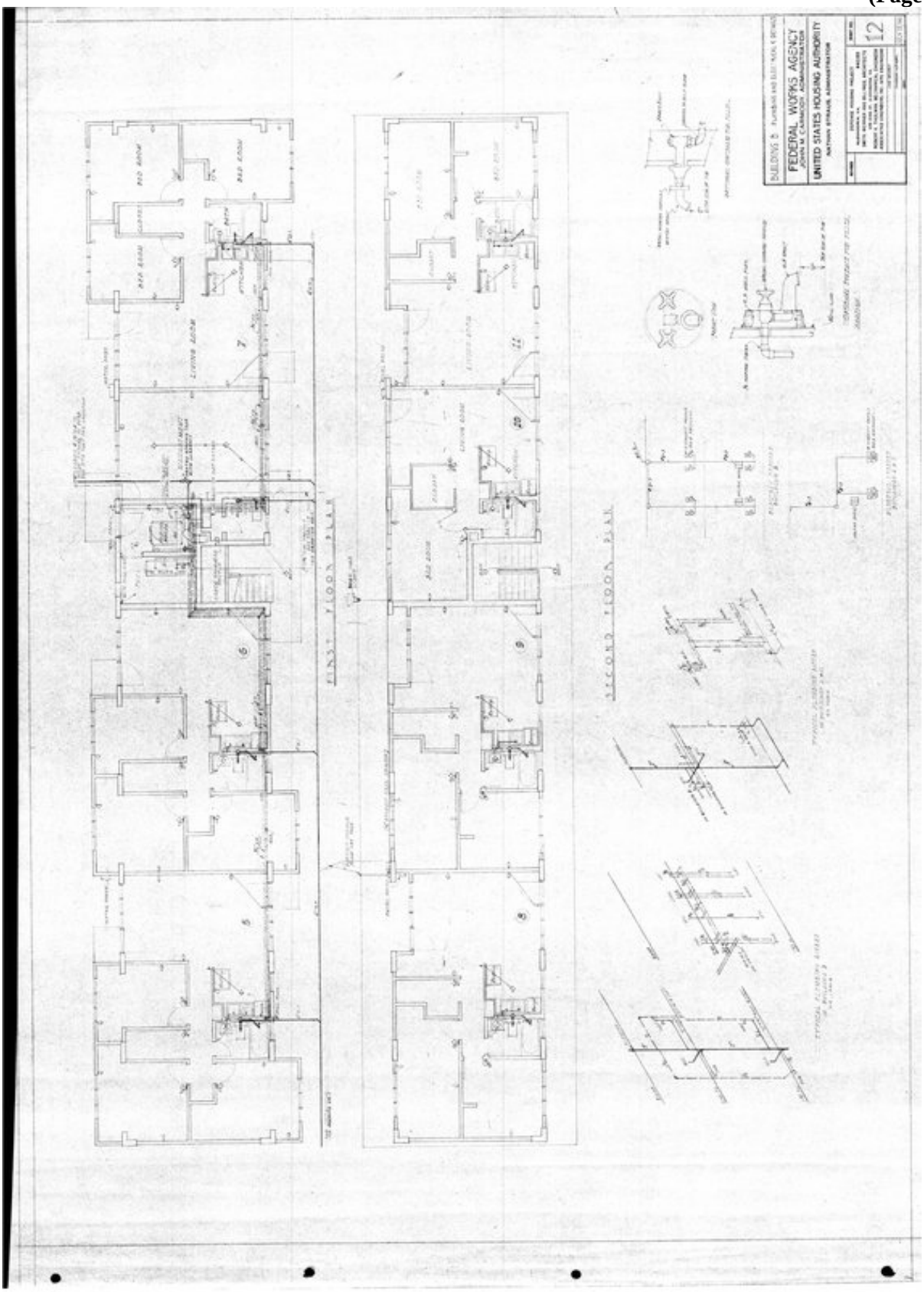
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 8, showing stairwell (Smith 1941a).



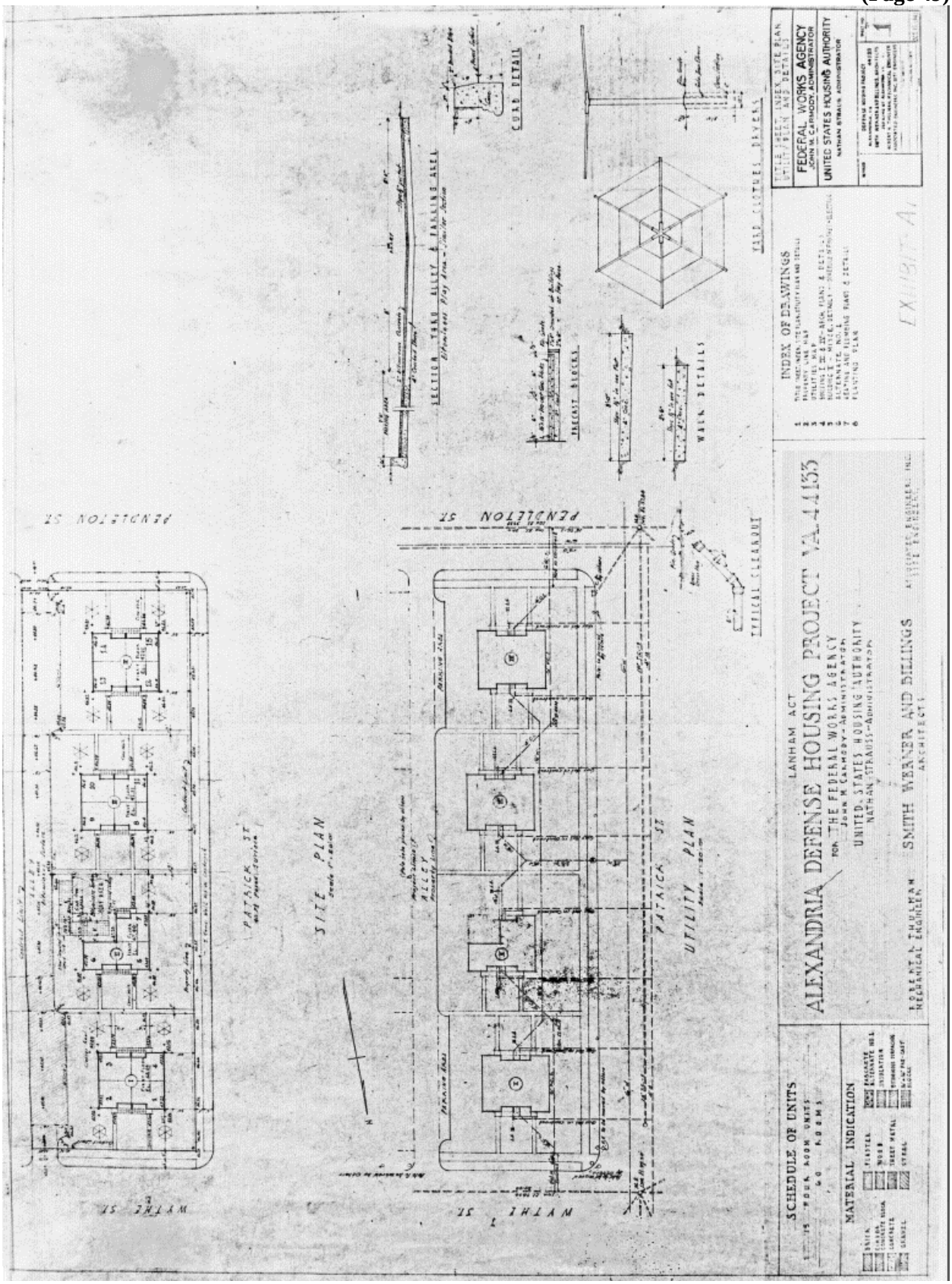
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 9, showing proposed plans and elevations of quadruplex (Smith 1941a).



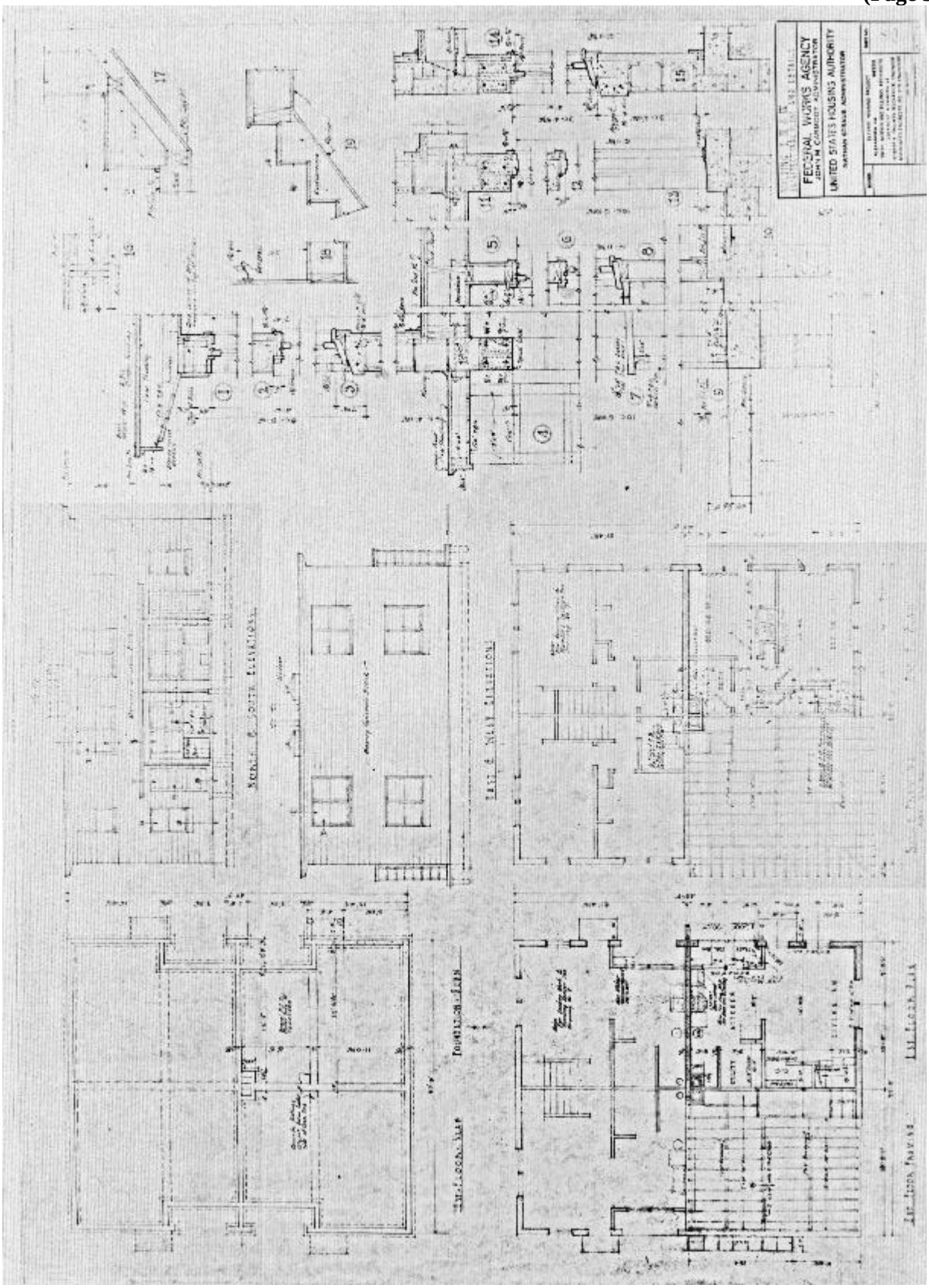
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 11, showing proposed plans of flats (Smith 1941a).



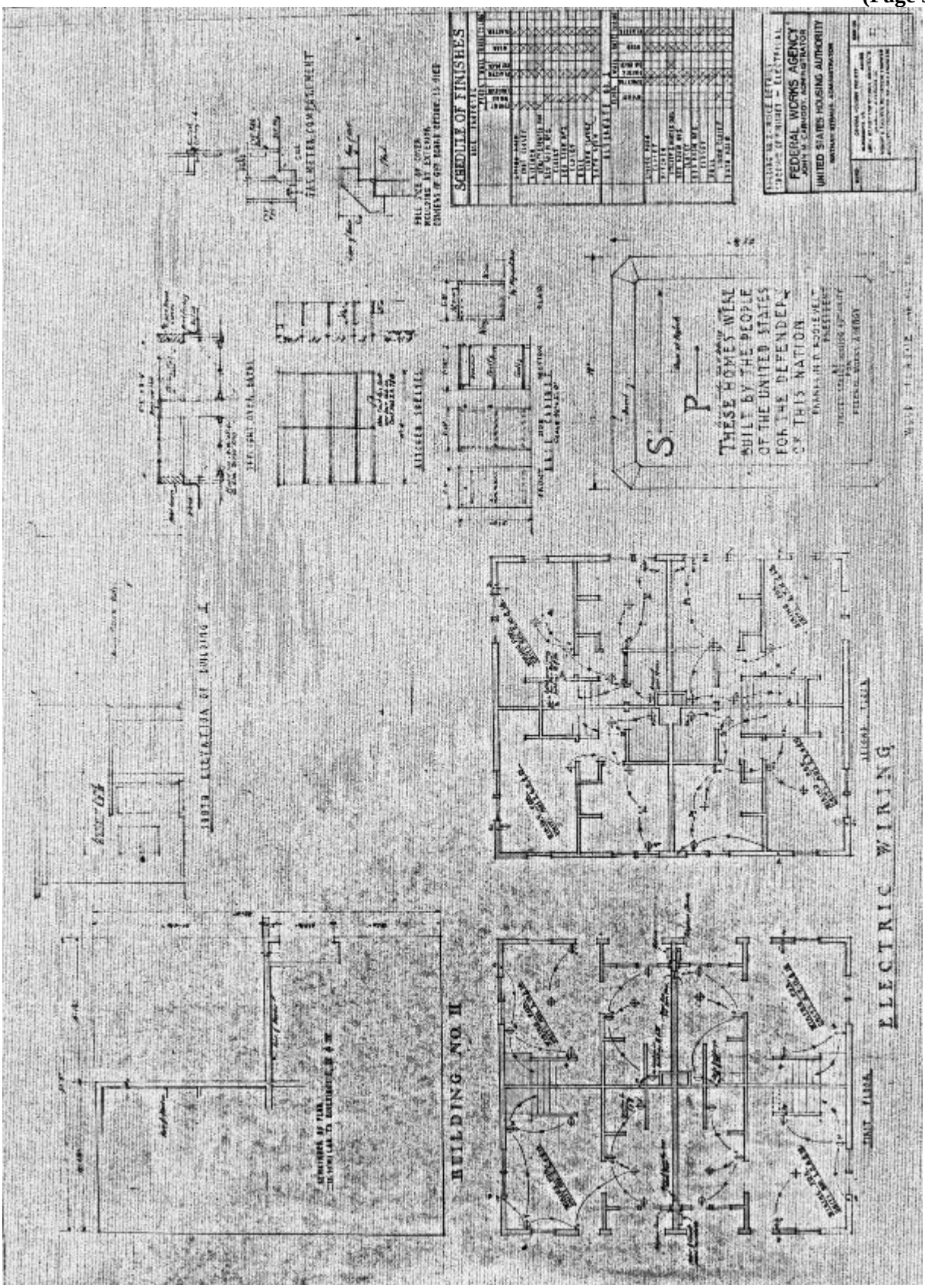
July 15, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 12, showing proposed plans and elevations of flats (Smith 1941a).



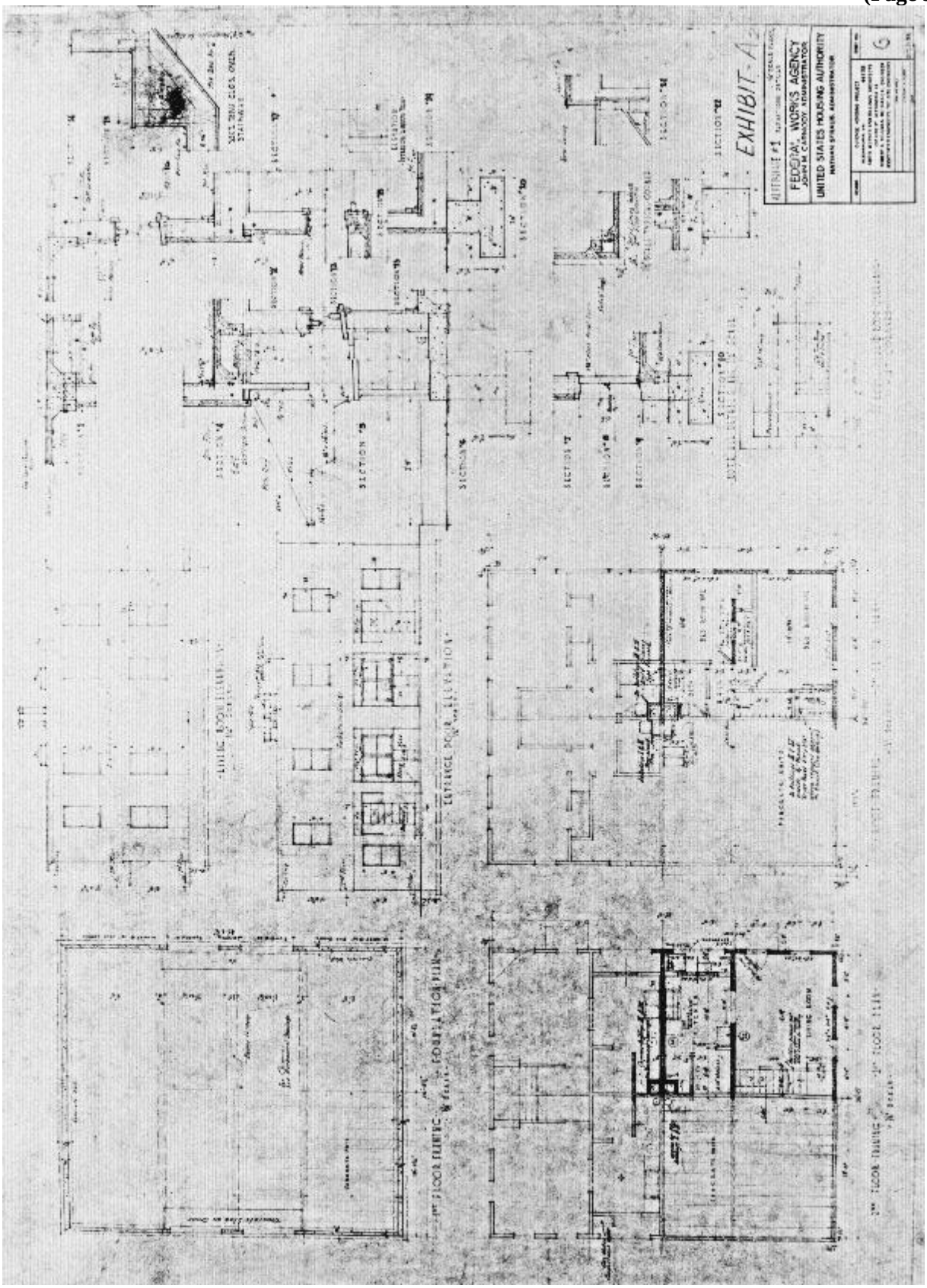
October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 1, showing proposed site plan (Smith 1941b).



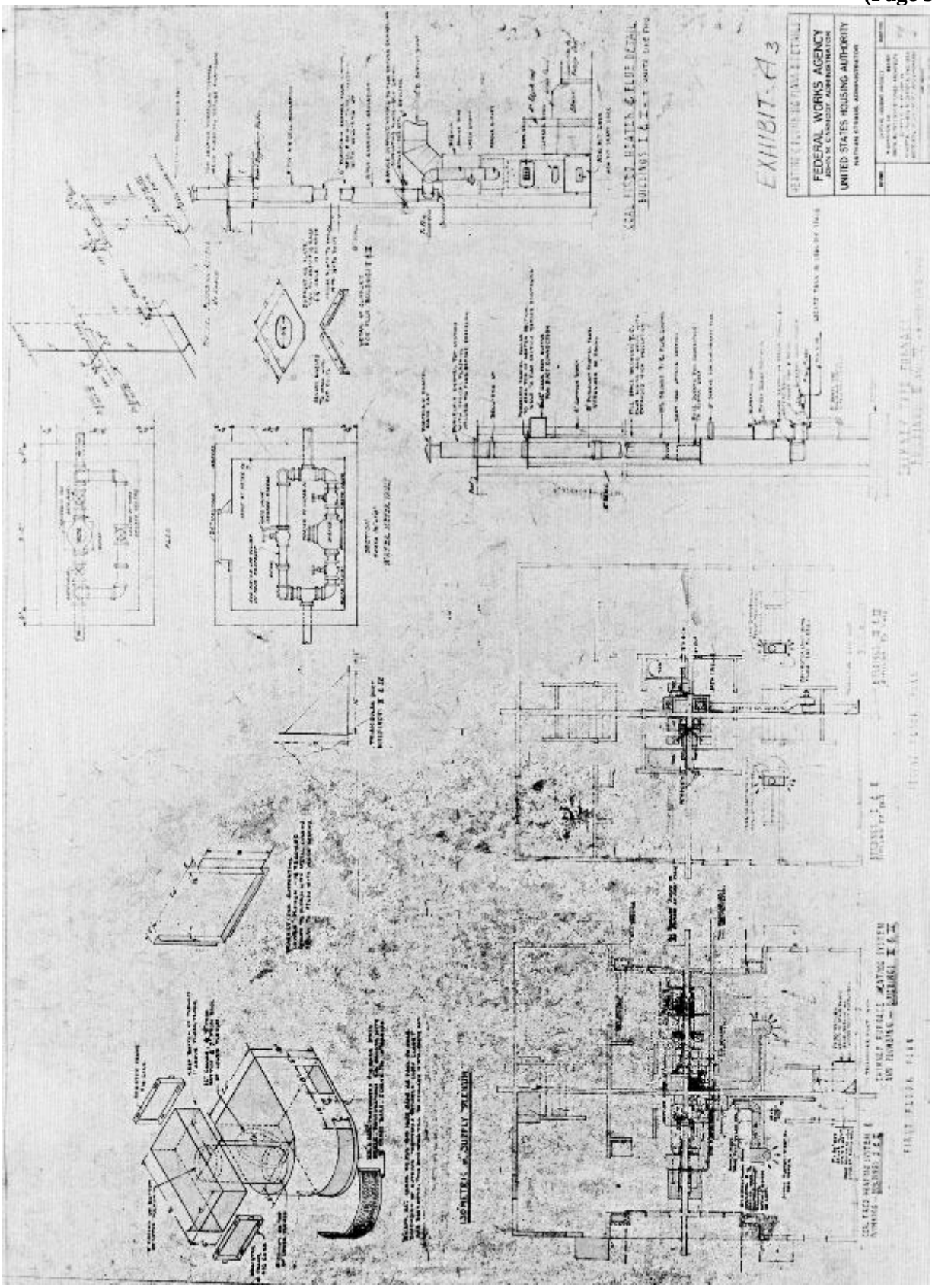
October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 4, showing proposed floor plans and elevations of qaudruplex (Smith 1941b).



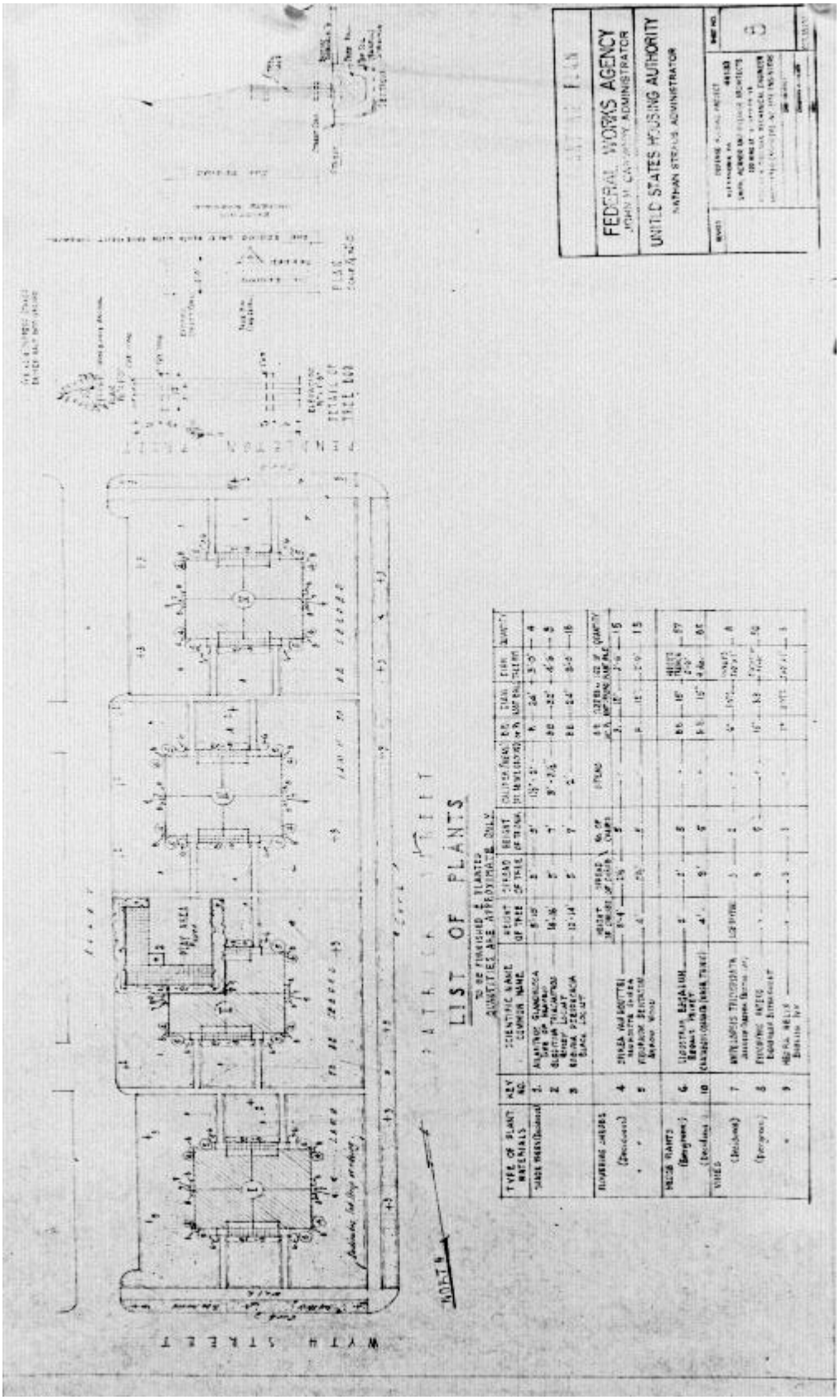
October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 5, showing proposed electrical plan and FWA plaque, which is not located at the property (Smith 1941b).



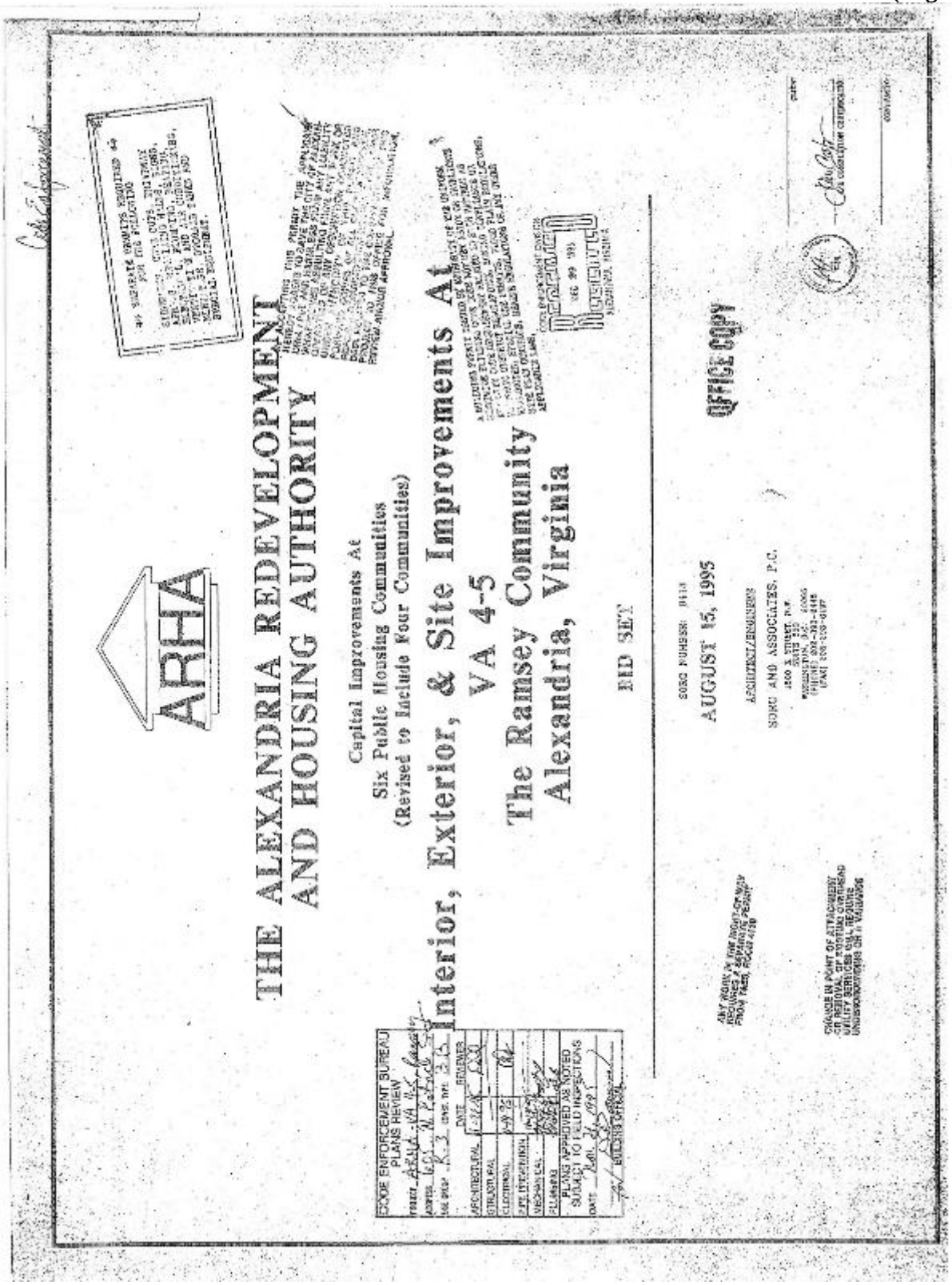
October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 6, showing proposed floor plans and elevations of qaudruplex (Smith 1941b).



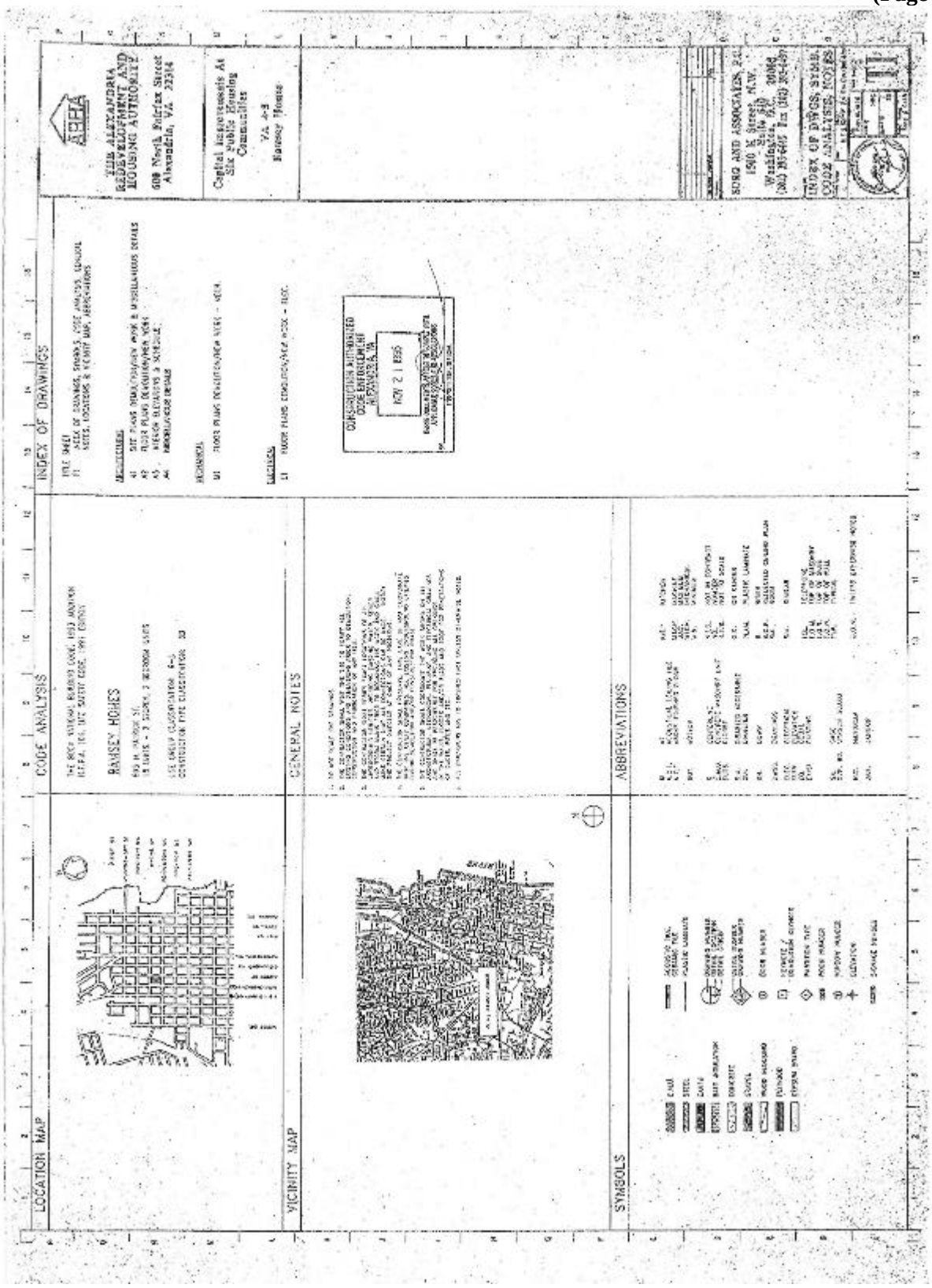
October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 7, showing proposed heating system. Coal chutes and furnace have been removed (Smith 1941b).



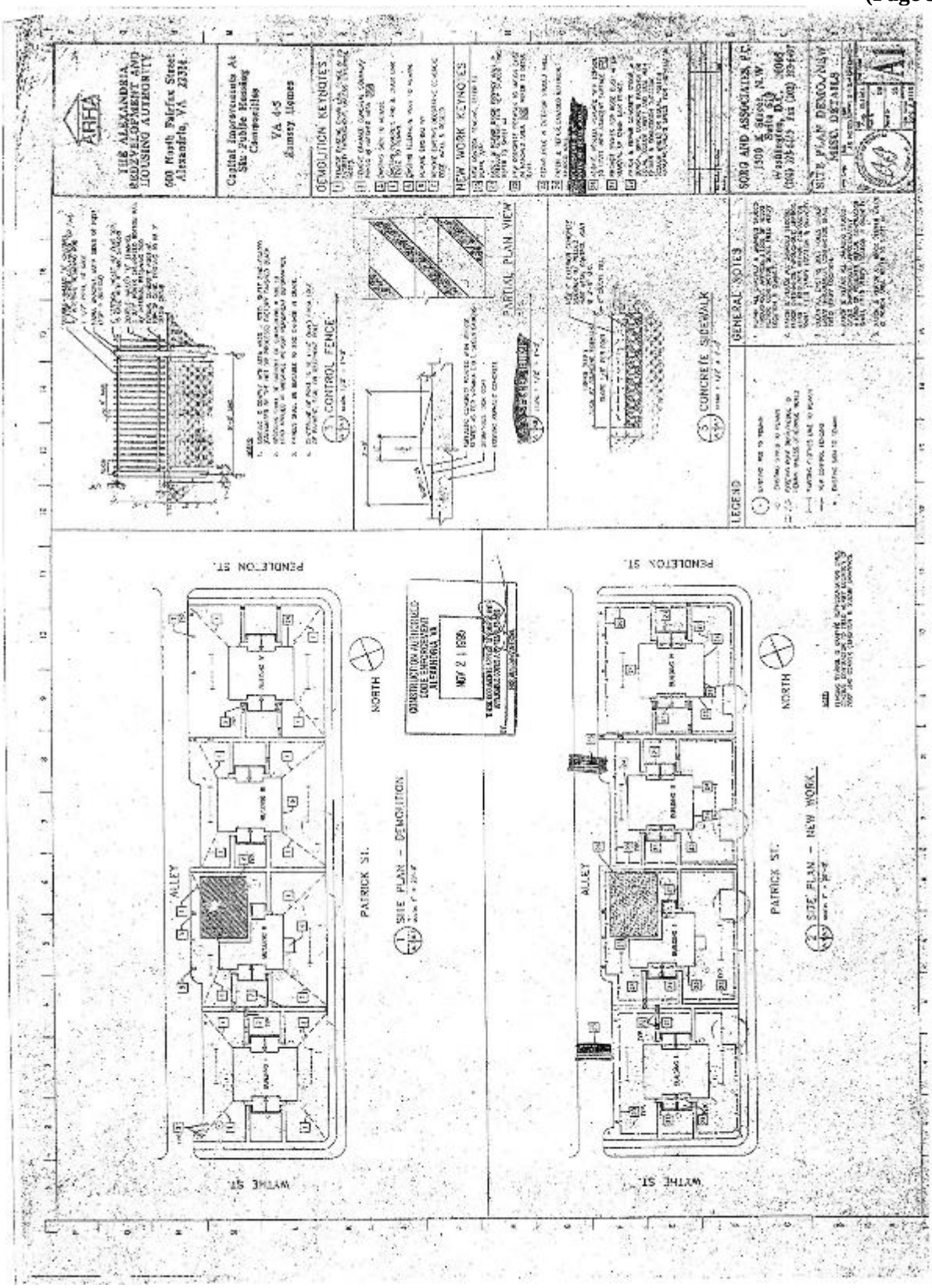
October 10, 1941, Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project VA-44133, Sheet 8, showing proposed list of plants (Smith 1941b).



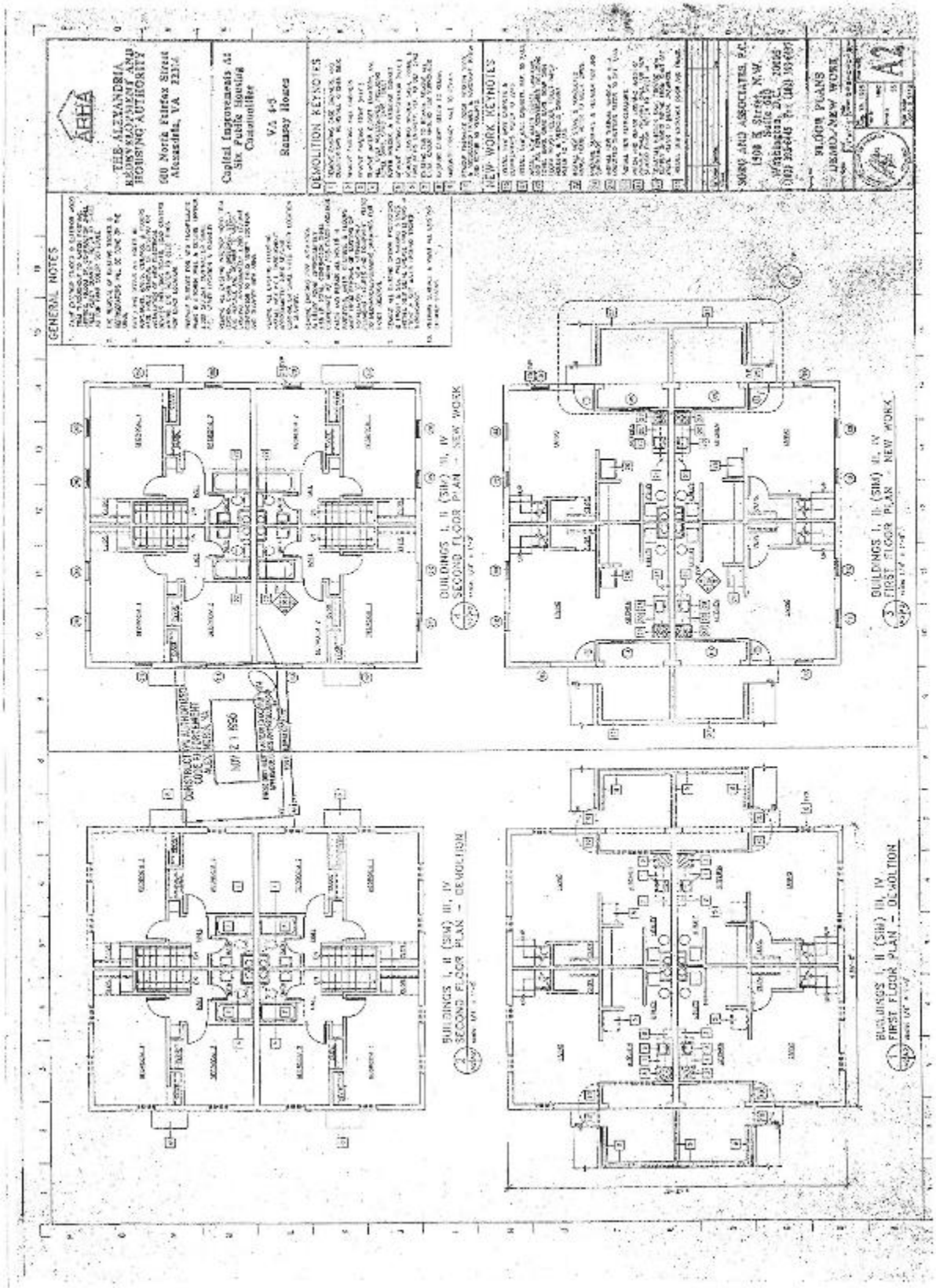
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Alexandria, Virginia, Cover Sheet (Sorg 1995).



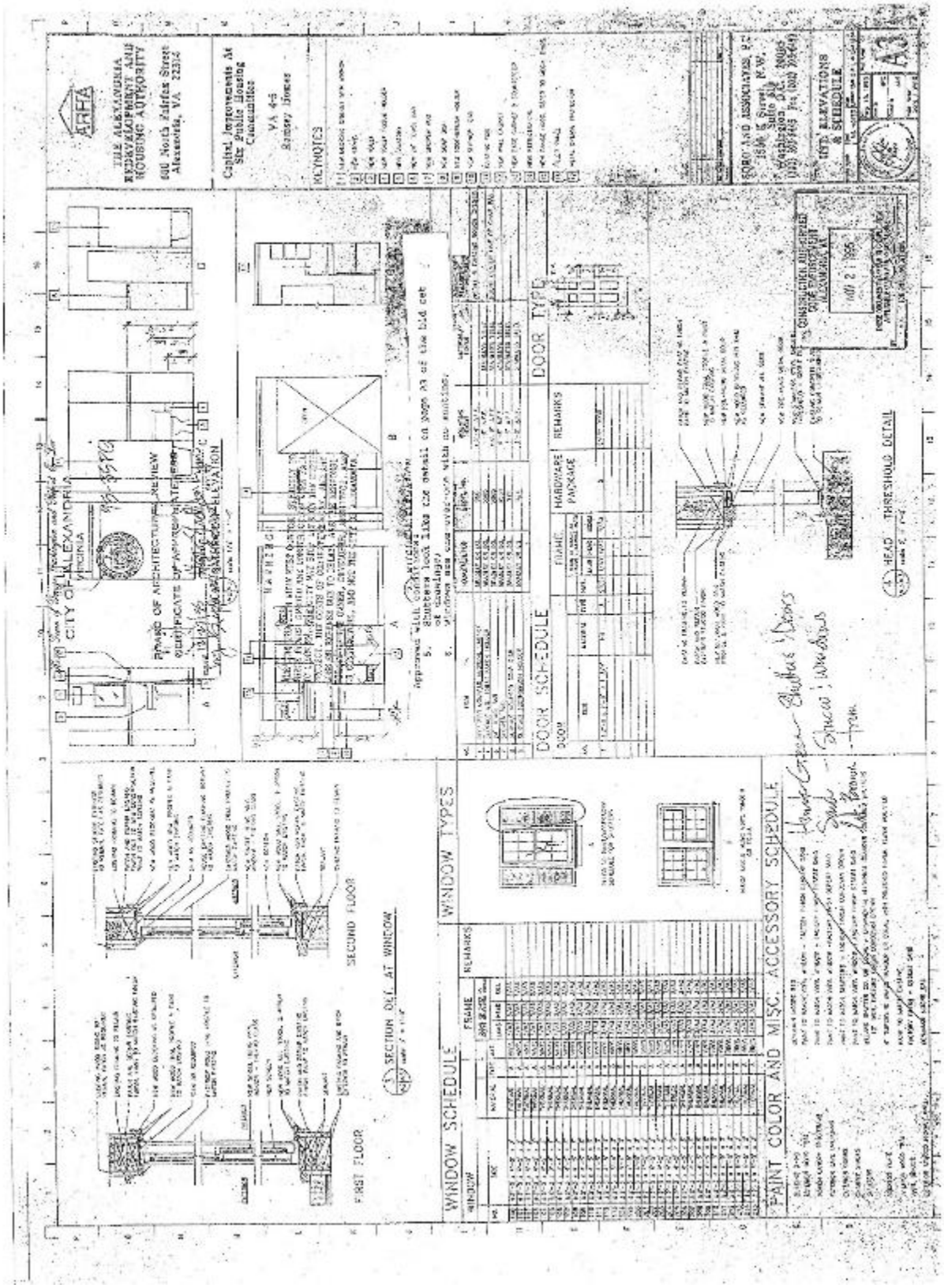
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet T1, showing location and abbreviations (Sorg 1995).



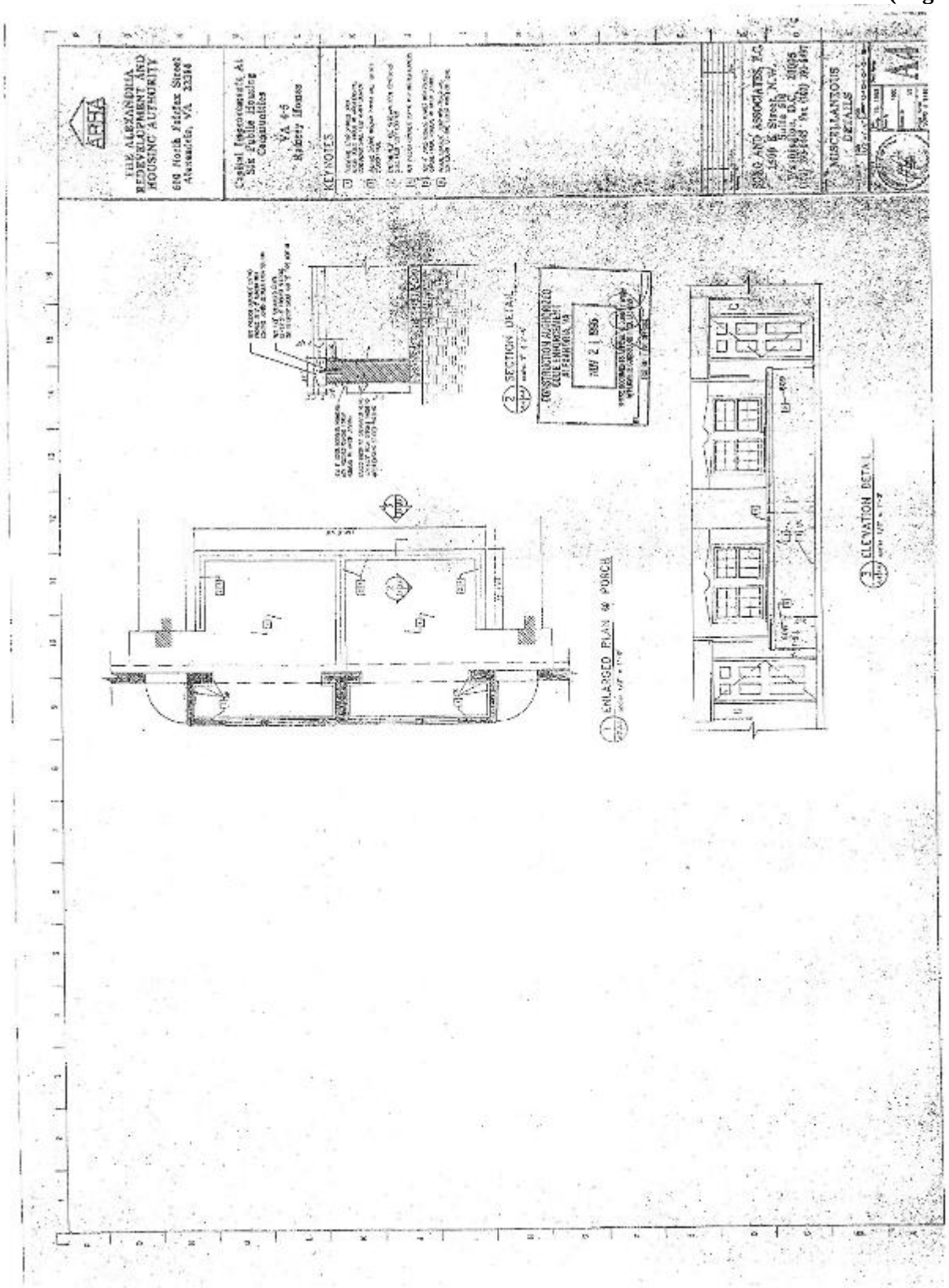
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet A1, showing existing conditions and new work on site plan (Sorg 1995).



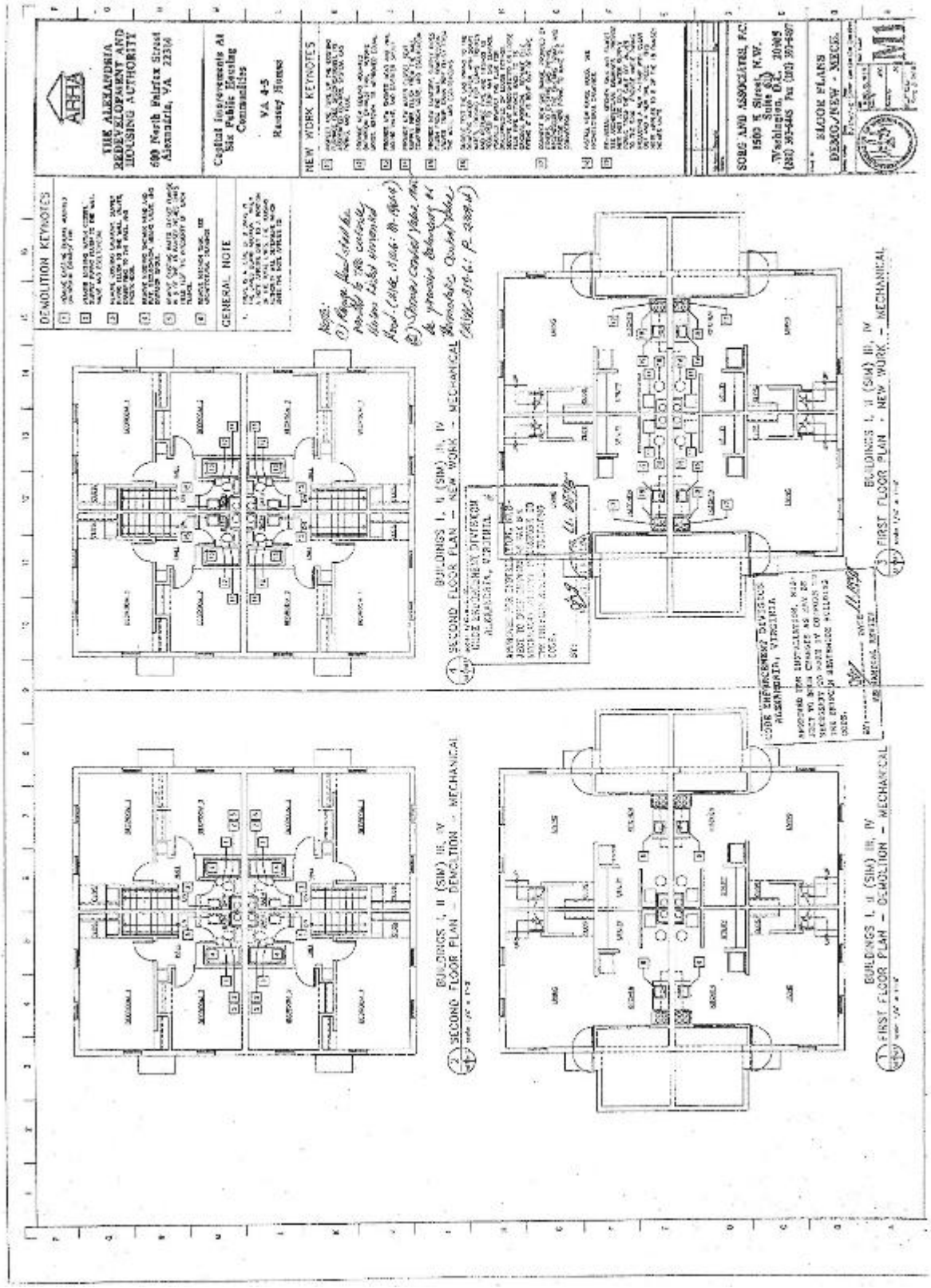
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet A2, showing existing conditions and new work on quadruplex floor plan (Sorg 1995).



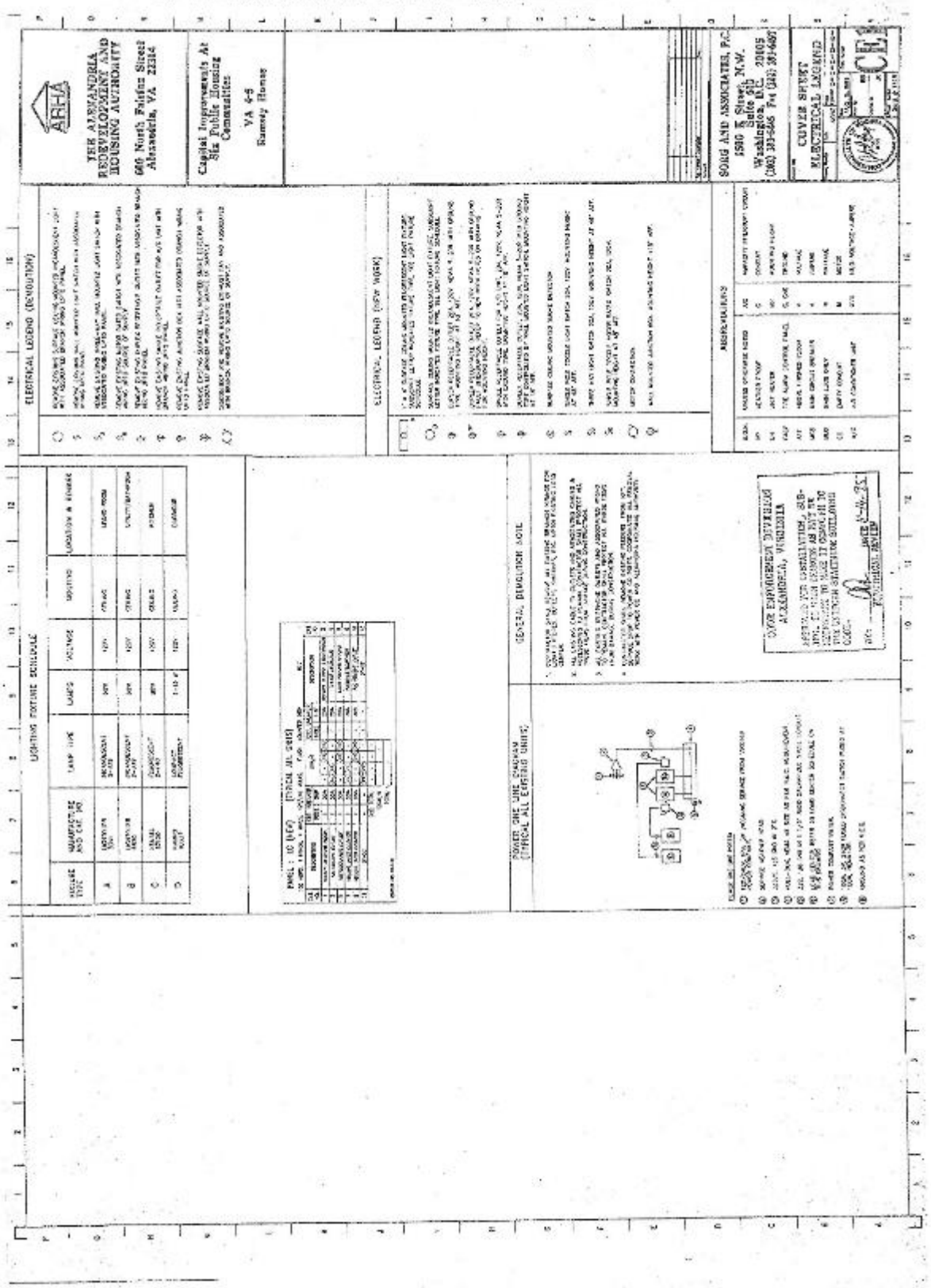
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet A3, showing existing conditions and new work on windows and doors (Sorg 1995).



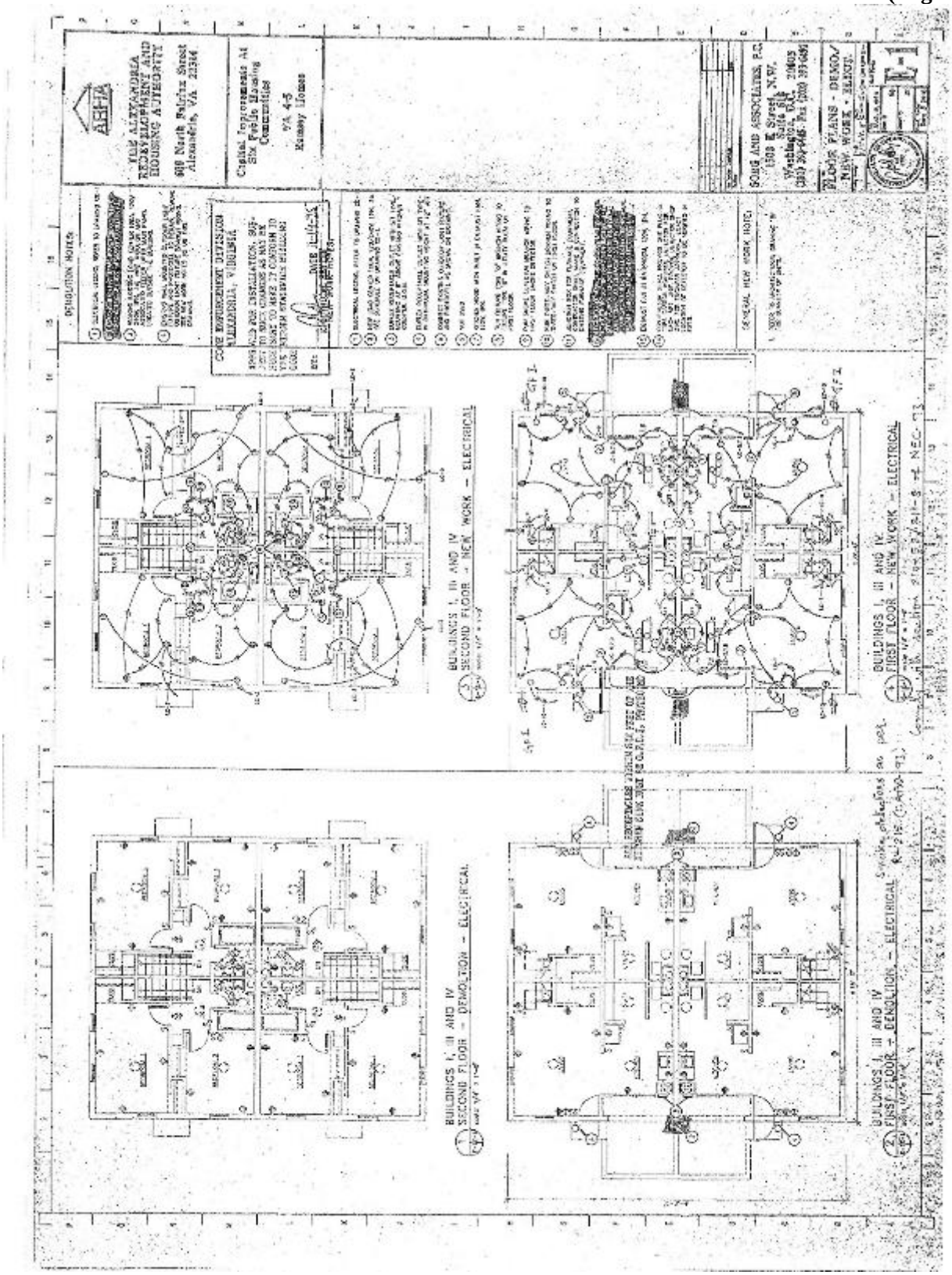
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet A4, showing existing conditions and new work on windows and doors (Sorg 1995).



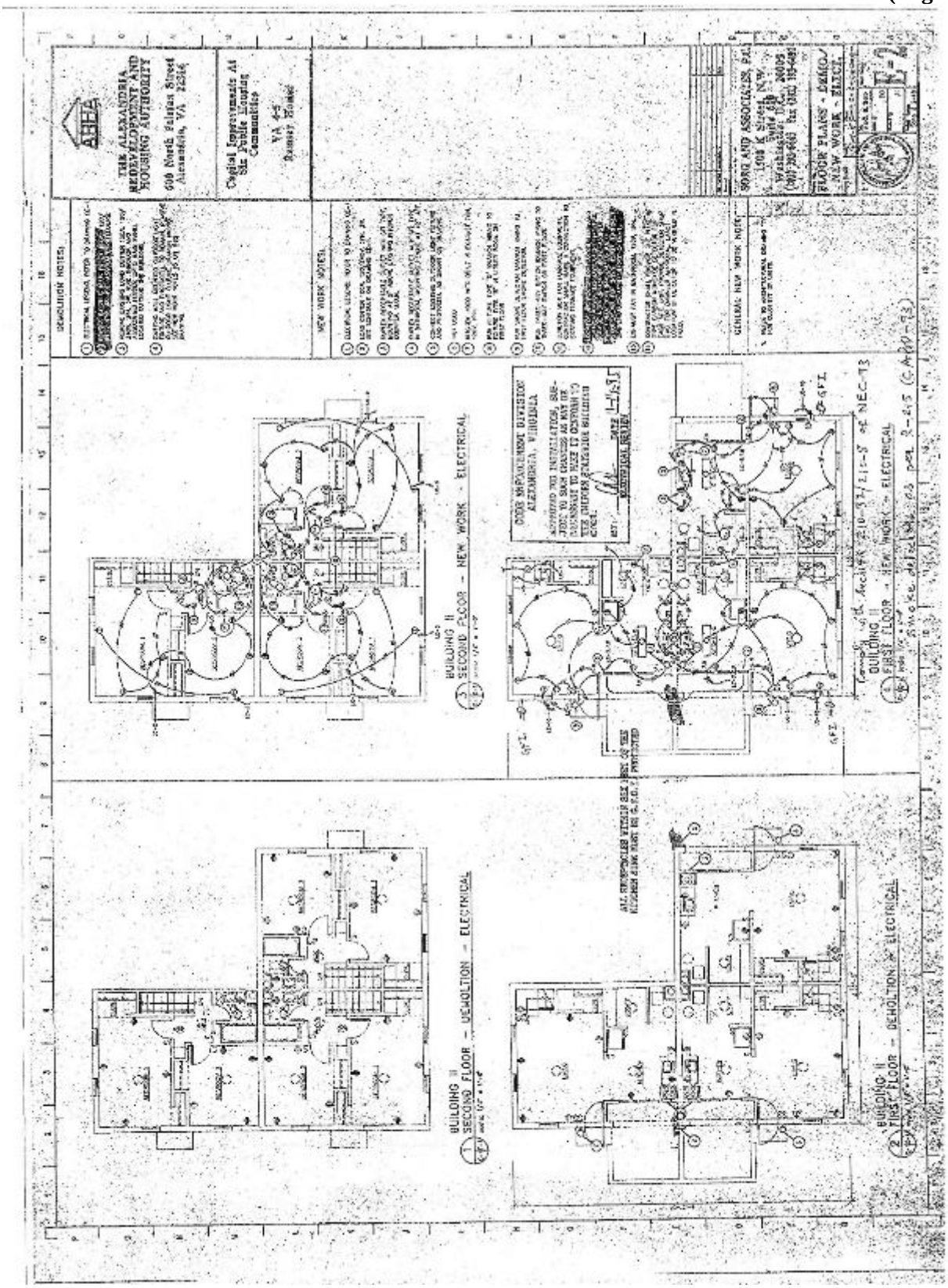
August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet M1, showing existing conditions and new work on quadruplex mechanical system (Sorg 1995).



August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet CE1, showing existing conditions and new electrical work (Sorg 1995).



August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet E-1, showing existing conditions and new work on quadruplex electrical (Sorg 1995).



August 15, 1995, Plans for Interior, Exterior, and Site Improvements at VA 4-5, The Ramsey Community, Sheet E-2, showing existing conditions and new work on triplex electrical (Sorg 1995).