

106 SUCCESS STORY

New Deal Public Housing Gets New Life Indianapolis, Indiana



“When Lockefield was built,
it became a source of pride
and of hope for the local
community...”

—NATIONAL REGISTER
NOMINATION
1983

THE STORY

During the New Deal, the Public Works Administration launched a program of federal public housing projects to provide needed low-cost housing. One of the first projects, Lockefield Gardens, was designed to maintain the spirit and vitality of its constituent African American community while offering a modern, modestly priced place to live. Completed in 1936, it became a national model for high design standards, superior construction quality, and innovative landscaping techniques. The federal government transferred the property to the City of Indianapolis in 1964 with a deed stipulation that it would be used for public housing until 2004 or would revert to the federal government.

THE PROJECT

In the 1970s, the City proposed demolishing the housing project using federal funds to expand campus housing for Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). The City claimed Lockefield Gardens had declined in quality, and other housing options for low-income residents existed. As a result, the apartments officially closed in 1976. However, the City could not proceed unless the reversionary clause was waived and the use of federal funds was approved for demolition.

THE 106 PROCESS

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency authorized to approve the waiver and use of federal funds, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue.

When the IUPUI project was proposed, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) requested HUD to obtain a formal determination whether the property was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Lockefield Gardens was determined

Photos: Above, Lockefield Gardens today;
Right, original Building No. 20 north view
and aerial view west of Lockefield Gardens
(photos courtesy Library of Congress)

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The apartment complex preserves the memory of a vibrant culture with today's residents of students and other city dwellers.

eligible as illustrating both America's commitment to adequate housing and its connection with Indianapolis' vibrant African American heritage.

In March 1977, HUD notified the ACHP that the consultation process had reached an impasse. To prepare its formal comments to the HUD Secretary, the ACHP hosted a public meeting in Indianapolis, where the community stressed the importance of Lockefield Gardens to their heritage and argued strongly against its demolition. Based on its review, the ACHP concluded that HUD's evaluation of the economic feasibility of reusing the property was not sufficient to enable the ACHP to comment. It requested HUD to further investigate alternatives to demolition, assessing the cost and feasibility of bringing the properties to code and market standards, and financing options. Based on the new alternatives analysis, HUD determined preservation of the entire property was not financially feasible, and large-scale demolition should proceed. An ACHP panel proposed a compromise in which half the complex would be preserved, allowing the other half to be demolished and rebuilt for rental housing. HUD considered the ACHP's comments and moved forward with partial demolition while awaiting the legal decision regarding the reversionary deed clause. In 1980, HUD approved the waiver of the deed stipulation, allowing the developer Midtown Economic Development Industrial Corporation and IUPUI to rehabilitate seven historic buildings along the main streetscape for continued use as housing while demolishing the remaining 17.

- Consulting Parties:**
- HUD
 - ACHP
 - Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer
 - City of Indianapolis
 - Midtown Economic Development Industrial Corporation
 - IUPUI

THE SUCCESS

Through the Section 106 review, the City of Indianapolis altered its original proposal for total clearance and renovated a deteriorated historic property that continues to serve the community. The rehabilitated buildings were brought up to current living standards, and 11 new infill buildings were designed to be sympathetic to historic buildings and landscape. The apartments are managed by a private company now and rented to tenants comprised mostly of IUPUI students and young professionals. The seven original buildings retained sufficient integrity to constitute a historic district, and Lockefield Gardens was formally listed in the National Register in 1983. The resulting combination of rehabilitation and new construction revitalized the surrounding neighborhood, while preserving the essence of the New Deal project.

This project is a powerful example of how historic buildings embodying high standards of design and construction can be utilized to provide improved living standards for contemporary residents by incorporating historic preservation principles. As an important part of Indianapolis' African American heritage, Lockefield Gardens was one of the first major Section 106 cases that emphasized cultural diversity within preservation and represents a rich, textured history still celebrated today.

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For more about
 Section 106 and
 the ACHP go to
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Preserving America's Heritage