

May 14, 2017

Mr. Paul Loether  
Chief, National Register of Historic Places and  
National Historic Landmark Program  
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Loether,

I am requesting that the Sunnyside Gardens Historic District be considered a candidate for a National Historic Landmark.

Architects Clarence Stein (1882-1972) and Henry Wright (1878-1936) provided the leadership in designing and constructing Sunnyside Gardens as the first in a series of experiments that would advance a new type of community design for an emerging industrial society. Their progressive design included affordable housing and open spaces enhancing the quality of life for the working people. These experimental "Garden cities" were influenced by the ideals of Englishman Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), the founder of the international Garden city movement.

Sunnyside Gardens (built from 1923 to 1928) provided the basis for eight other experimental Garden cities, located in seven states. Six of these Garden cities have been designated National Historic Landmarks because of their significant contributions to the nation. These are **Radburn**, New Jersey (built from 1928 to 1933); **Chatham Village**, Pennsylvania (1929 to 1932); **Baldwin Hills Village**, California (1938 to 1941); **Greenbelt**, Maryland (1935 to 1937 and 1941); **Greendale**, Wisconsin (1935 to 1938); and **Greenhills**, Ohio (1938 to 1947).

The Sunnyside Gardens Historic District is located in Queens, New York. This district consists of Sunnyside Gardens (built from 1923 to 1928) and the related Phipps Garden Apartments (1930 and 1935).

The majority of residential buildings are row-houses of two to three stories (563 in number) on 10 city blocks. These houses are organized around inner courts (24 in number) that contain large gardens held in common. This district also provides other types of housing to meet the needs of its residents, such as co-ops and apartments (an example is Phipps Garden Apartments).

The open spaces of Sunnyside Gardens' inner courts have been extended to a greater extent in its private park (the largest of two in New York City) and the community's tree-lined streets. All these spaces compromise 70% of the community's design. Some commercial storefronts and a small number of garages on the periphery complete this district, which covers 50 to 60 acres.

Wright was responsible for the site planning, while Frederick L. Ackerman (1878-1950) served as "architect of the blocks of houses". Ackerman was highly experienced in both the design and technical execution of affordable housing for working people. Previously in World War I, he served as chief of design for public housing under the United States Shipping Board's Emergency Fleet Corporation.

Stein worked closely with landscape architect Marjorie Sewell Cautley (1891-1954) in creating the open landscaped spaces. Marjorie Sewell Cautley has been evaluated as the earliest pioneer in designing the modern community landscapes and one of the most important women landscape architects in the first half of the twentieth century (see Thaisa Way's *Unbounded Practice* [2009]).

The National Park Service has previously recognized the national impact of the Sunnyside Gardens Historic District based on the following sources:

- Listing as a National Register property (September 7, 1984).
- Documentation as the first site in the American Garden city movement theme study. This study was part of the Baldwin Hills National Historic Landmark nomination that I prepared (January 3, 2001).
- Documentation of its seminal role in the design of six related Garden cities' National Historic Landmark nominations (1999 to 2017).

At Sunnyside Gardens Historic District, the skillful combination of residential buildings and common open spaces with commercial storefronts continues to serve as a model, both nationally and internationally, of how a community can be designed to meet the needs of the modern urban society for economic sustainability and life-affirming values. Clarence Stein described the design and construction of Sunnyside Gardens, Phipps Gardens Apartments, and the other Garden cities in his book *Toward New Towns in America* (1957). This work was used internationally as a textbook for urban planning during the latter part of the twentieth century.

During its ninety-three existence, the integrity of Sunnyside Gardens Historic District remains very high because of the dedicated commitment of its residents in preserving and protecting this community. They have supported both the National Register nomination (1984) and the recent New York City Landmark nomination

(2007). Consequently, the site's historic district elements have been thoroughly evaluated, and then documented in these nominations.

In addition, the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance, an active grass-roots organization, continues to monitor and advise on preservation activities of this site. Their efforts have earned awards and special commendations from New York City and State, the Historic Districts Council, and Queens Civic Congress (see *sunnysidegardens.us* for current projects).

During the last decade, the leadership of Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance has established a close relationship with Cornell University's Clarence Stein Institute. It received three fellowships to further preserve the community's history. During the last six years, the Alliance has assisted me with my Cornell University fellowships in establishing preservation standards to meet the challenges of disasters and climate change. See *LandmarkWatch.org* for more details.

The leadership of the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance has given support to this Letter of Inquiry.

Thank you for your consideration of this revised letter of inquiry (the first was sent on April 14th). Please contact me at [dorothyfuewong@me](mailto:dorothyfuewong@me) or 213-537-0777 if you have any questions.

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Los Angeles, California 90012

cc: President Herbert Reynolds, Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance  
City Councilman Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer  
Representative Joseph Crowley  
Senator Charles (Chuck) Schumer  
Senator Kirsten Gellibrand