

## Historic Resources Inventory – Essential Properties

### Colonial Village

**Address:**

Wilson Boulevard between North Veitch Street and North Rhodes Street

**RPC #:**

Various

**Current Owner(s):**

Various/Individual condo owners

Colonial Village I, II, and III  
c/o Legum & Norman, Inc.  
1903 Key Boulevard Arlington, VA 22201

Colonial Village Housing Associates  
(Colonial Village West and Colonial Village Commons)  
c/o Arlington Housing Corporation (AHC), LP-2  
2230 Fairfax Drive  
Arlington, VA 22201

Troy Street, LLC  
(Colonial Village Apartments)  
c/o Wesley Property Management Company  
Attn: Jackie Whi  
5515 Cherokee Ave., #200  
Alexandria, VA 22312

**Building Date:** 1936–1955

**Current Zoning:** RA 7-16

**Existing Protections:** Arlington County Local Historic District (all of CV3; part of CV2); Condos (only CV3)

**Current Development Pressure:** None

**Historic Designations:**

National Register Historic District, 1980

Virginia Landmarks Register, 1980  
Arlington County Local Historic District, 1978

**Significance Highlights:**

1. First large-scale garden apartment complex built in Arlington;
2. First ever FHA-financed project nationwide and national prototype for future projects;
3. Nationally recognized at time of construction;
4. Gustave Ring's first project in Arlington; and
5. Remaining product of vanishing record of Federal New Deal Program architecture.

**Significance Statement:**

Colonial Village Garden Apartment Complex was constructed in four phases between 1935 and 1940. It is recognized as exemplifying the early application of innovative garden city planning concepts to a low- and middle-income apartment complex. Specifically, these concepts include the use of low-density superblock development; clustering of apartment units into spacious, richly landscaped courtyards; separation of pedestrian and automotive traffic routes; the use of an undeveloped interior greenbelt, and the use of staggered setbacks in apartment design to permit increased ventilation and light. In addition to its innovations in apartment planning, Colonial Village is significant as the first Federal Housing Administration (FHA)-insured, large-scale, rental housing project erected in the United States. Intending Colonial Village to be a model for subsequent FHA-insured projects, FHA officials worked with developers to create a prototype apartment complex displaying what they considered to be exemplary site planning, landscaping, land density, dwelling layout, construction type, ventilation, and building orientation. Gustave Ring, the developer, was regarded as a pioneer in the garden apartment field for his work at Colonial Village and subsequent projects. Noted in Washington, D.C. for the construction of high-rise apartment buildings, Ring acquired the 50-acre lot in Arlington specifically for the purpose of constructing a multi-family, moderate-income housing development with Harvey Warwick as architect. During the Great Depression, a period during which many apartments were the subject of foreclosure, Ring sought financing for the Colonial Village project under Title II of the National Housing Act, but was rejected. Ultimately, with an alteration in the plan and reduction in rents, Colonial Village qualified as a low-cost housing project eligible under Section 207 of the National Housing Act and thus became the first FHA-insured project to be undertaken in the United States. As the National Register nomination states, "from a sociological and political view, the United States government through the FHA attempted to make the American dream of a suburban home come true for persons of low and moderate income," and Colonial Village was the first to assume such a development that nurtured a strong sense of community, which was so desperately needed during the Great Depression and subsequent years of World War II.

The influence of Colonial Village is profound as the immediately successful project was recognized nationally as a model of planning concepts for apartment development. The *Architectural Forum* called it “the most talked about project in the county.” The Urban Land Institute described it as “one of the outstanding developments of its kind in America.” The success of Colonial Village as the FHA’s pioneer project convinced investors that rental housing could be a safe investment. The sound planning principles expressed at Colonial Village combined with its appearance in over twenty articles between 1935 and 1940 garnered the complex national attention and led to the widespread emulation of its plan across the country.

The residential portion of Colonial Village was placed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places and as a Local Historic District in recognition of its innovative financing and prototypical design. The historic district includes 226 buildings, which encompasses all of the domestic and secondary outbuildings associated with Colonial Village. These buildings were designed by architects Harvey H. Warwick, Sr. (1935-1937/Phases 1-3) and Frances L. Koenig (1940/Phase 4), under the direction of developer Gustave Ring. The period of significance extends from 1935 to 1940 with architecture, community planning, economics, landscape architecture, politics/government, and social/humanitarian as the areas of significance under criteria A and C. The property is eligible under the Multiple Property Nomination, *Garden Apartments, Apartment Houses and Apartment Complexes in Arlington County, Virginia: 1934-1954*.

### **Summary Description:**

Although built in consecutive phases, the complex was designed as a single unit and thus presents uniformity of style, landscaping and planning. Colonial Village was developed as a superblock with six interior roads set into an irregular grid. Diagonally crossing the complex is an undeveloped greenbelt strip containing a variety of deciduous and evergreen trees as well as a small brook. Two other greenbelts are located to the northeast and the northwest. Landscaping is attributed to James K. Wright. The buildings occupy only 18% of the land. The 245 buildings, which include 1,055 apartments, stand two and three stories in height with deeply staggered setbacks. The brick buildings face onto spacious, well-landscaped courtyards that vary in size from intimate clusters of five and seven buildings to larger groups of up to thirteen buildings. The courtyards are defined by building placement, landscaping, brick walls, and iron fences.

The buildings are uniformly designed in the Colonial Revival style, with exterior walls of six-course American-bond brick veneer set on concrete foundations. Exterior detailing includes soldier-course window heads, denticulated brick cornices, a variety of wood pilasters and pedimented entry surrounds, round-arched window openings with raised keystones and springers, decorative relieving arches, false roof balusters, and brick quoins. Each building contains four to ten apartments including efficiency and one- or two-bedroom units. Tenants share fully equipped laundries and utility rooms located in the basements of selected buildings.

Apartments have fully equipped kitchens, tiled bathrooms, built-in radiators, and oak parquet and linoleum flooring.