



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 291/06

Name and Address of Property: **Windham Apartments**
420 Blanchard Street

Legal Description: Bell's 5th Addition, Block K, Lot 12

At the public meeting held on August 16, 2006, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Windham Apartments at 420 Blanchard Street as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standard for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction.

DESCRIPTION

Present Context and Site Features

The subject building is located in Seattle's Denny Regrade neighborhood, which is a mix of new and older low and mid-rise commercial and multi-family residential buildings. It is sited on Lot 12, Block K, of Bell's 5th Addition, on the northwest corner of 5th Avenue and Blanchard Street. The lot measures 60' wide by 108' deep, and the building footprint occupies the whole parcel. Paved concrete sidewalks immediately abut the east and south edges of the property. To the west is a paved, 16'-wide alley that runs north-south through the block. Immediately to the north is a low, two-story brick building. Mature deciduous trees are planted along the sidewalk edges, providing a visual screen between the building and the adjacent streets. The site slopes down slightly from west to east, for an overall grade change of approximately 4'-6". Pylons and the elevated concrete structure for the 1962 Monorail run along the center of 5th Avenue, passing near the east façade of the Windham Apartments.

The Building

The Windham Apartments is a seven-story, concrete-frame, Classical Revival style apartment building with a rectangular plan at the first floor and a U-shaped plan at the upper floors. The property is in good condition and has had few alterations since its construction in 1925. Exterior walls are finished with brick veneer and cast stone details on the primary façades, and cement plaster on the secondary façades. Constructed of reinforced concrete columns and floors with hollow clay tile infill walls, the building has a concrete foundation, a

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partial basement for sprinkler and boiler rooms, and a concrete slab roof. On top of the flat roof are an elevator penthouse, and two stairs extend to the roof level. Columns are set at 13'-3 1/4" on center in the east-west direction, providing eight bays, and 11'-11 7/8" on center in the north-south direction, providing five bays. Outer walls are composed of 8" hollow clay tile, while interior partition walls are 6" hollow clay tile. Floor-to-ceiling height is noted in the 1937 tax record as 10'-6" for the first floor and 9'-4" for the second through seventh floors.

The primary façade, which faces south onto Blanchard Street, and the east (5th Avenue) façade of the building are arranged in the classically-derived composition of base, shaft, and capital. The first story provides the base, composed of brick laid in running bond, with every fifth row recessed. The stripe effect conveys a horizontality or solidity on which the upper floors of the building rest, and gives a rusticated impression. The main entrance is centered in the south façade and features a modest cast stone surround with Doric details and entablature. This surround projects slightly from the wall plane and encompasses two bays, measuring approximately 26' wide. The slight projection of the two center bays is carried up the full height of the façade, further emphasizing the entrance. Two fluted Doric columns support the full entablature, including triglyphs with guttae, unadorned metopes, a dentil course, and a cornice. Small florettes detail the necking of the columns. The entrance is deeply recessed and raised above grade, accessed from the sidewalk by four steps. Flanking the entryway are two windows, slightly recessed into the surround.

The second through fifth stories of the building provide the shaft, divided from the base below and "capital" above by a narrow cast stone string course. The standard brick is laid in running bond, but continuous vertical joints between window bays draw the eye up and appear almost as pilasters. Between the sixth and seventh story are two cast stone string courses bordering a continuous soldier course of brick, to form a clear division. Above the seventh-story windows is a frieze band and projecting sheet metal cornice, with large dentils. The building is capped by a brick parapet with cast stone coping. Two rectangular, cast stone medallions decorate the center two bays at the seventh story. The medallions feature a "W" shield surrounded by swags and ribbons.

The fenestration lends a rhythm to the primary façades. On the south façade, the pattern is A, B, B, A, A, B, B, A, with "A" consisting of paired windows and "B" consisting of two smaller, single windows at every story. (The only exception is the main entrance and surround.) On the east façade, the pattern is A, B, B, B, A. The "B" windows on the east façade are the same height as the "A" pairs. All windows have steel lintels, soldiered brick headers and rowlock sills. Windows were originally double-hung, 1:1-light wood sash, but have now been replaced with vinyl sash. The original wood frames remain, and the newer windows are the same size and have a profile very similar to the originals.

The north and west façades of the building are secondary, facing the alley and a neighboring lot. They are unadorned and finished with cement plaster, which is painted. Above the first story, the footprint of the building changes, with the western portion of the north wall stepped back. Windows on these façades are single or paired, with simple painted concrete sills.

The Windham Apartments interior is characterized by double-loaded corridors, plastered walls and ceilings, carpeted hallways, and painted single panel doors. The entry lobby is more embellished, featuring a terrazzo floor, stained mahogany trim, and a coved ceiling with ornamental plaster cornice. Double-leaf, wood-paneled and glazed doors open into the lobby from the entry vestibule. The terrazzo floor, which extends into the entry vestibule, has a yellowish-ochre field, separated from a dark tan border by a brass strip and checkerboard pattern tesserae. The lobby walls are wood-paneled at the lower portion and papered above. Decorative plaster brackets ornament the corners of the two doorways that divide the lobby from the corridor on each side. A bank of brass mail boxes is inset into the north wall of the lobby.

The building has 59 apartments – 52 studios and seven one-bedrooms. The floor plan is consistent on floors two through seven, with eight apartments per floor. The units are accessed from an L-shaped, double-loaded corridor which terminates in an exterior, unenclosed exit stair at the west end of the building. Five apartments are located on the first floor, along the south and east edges of the building. An elevator is located on the north side of the lobby and main corridor, east of center. Immediately east of the elevator is an interior stair. Interior apartment finishes typically consist of oak floors, painted plaster walls with painted wood base and molding, fir floors in closets, and hexagonal tile floors in bathrooms. Woodwork in the apartments was originally stained rather than painted. Some apartments have wall-to-wall carpet laid over the oak floor. Unique, pivoting metal-framed Murphy beds remain in some apartments.

Today, the Windham Apartments remains a fine example of the efficiency apartment building type that was prevalent in Seattle's growth period of the mid 1920s. The building is virtually unchanged since its construction, and is still occupied by single, working professionals – the type of tenants for whom it was originally constructed – and retains many of the original interior features that made the building appealing to residents in 1925. On the exterior, the original architectural features are intact. The use of brick and cast stone as finish materials in a classical façade composition, with regular, generous fenestration, exemplify the qualities found in the comparative buildings of its type.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Development of the Denny Regrade Neighborhood

The Windham Apartments is located at the corner of 5th Avenue and Blanchard Street, in the Denny Regrade neighborhood. Originally Denny Hill, the relatively flat topography of the neighborhood was established through a three-phased regrading project masterminded by Seattle City Engineer Reginald Heber Thomson. Thomson's intent was to encourage development through the construction of straight, level roads and water systems in the city. The first phase of the undertaking was completed in January 1899, and leveled 1st Avenue from Pine Street to Denny Way. Between 1903 and 1911, the second phase was carried out, covering the area between 2nd and 5th Avenues from Pike to Cedar Streets. The deepest cut, 107 feet, was at 4th and Blanchard. A block away, the future site of the Windham Apartments was included in this second phase of the Regrade. In 1910, the City's Municipal

Council Plans Commission hired planner Virgil Bogue to produce a "civic vision" for the regraded area. Bogue, who had worked with the renowned landscape architecture firm of the Olmsted Brothers, produced a grand Beaux-Arts scheme with radiating plazas that were lined with Neoclassical style buildings. Had Seattle voters not soundly rejected this plan in 1912, the current site of the Windham would have been almost the exact center of the new civic plaza. Instead, construction in the Regrade was fairly sluggish and consisted primarily of relatively low-scale, predominantly brick buildings.

The third and final phase of regrading Denny Hill occurred between 1928 and 1930, and reduced the hill's eastern slope. This phase encompassed the area between 5th and Westlake Avenues and between Virginia and Harrison Streets, which included the blocks across the street (5th Avenue) from the Windham Apartments. During the subsequent years, the leveled Denny Regrade neighborhood grew very slowly, as is evidenced by photos from later years, with many vacant lots and some isolated commercial and apartment buildings. Drawn to the area by cheaper land and relative proximity to downtown, auto dealerships, warehouses, service garages, and gas stations were gradually established in the area, along with retail facilities and low-rise apartments. The business district did not expand into the regraded area as anticipated, due largely to the Depression and war years. The dynamic economy of the 1920s declined dramatically, and virtually all building construction was halted in the early 1930s. A 1937 aerial photo shows a high percentage of lots to the northeast of the subject property as yet undeveloped. In fact, substantial development did not begin again in the Denny Regrade area until the 1970s; prior to that, vertical expansion within the central business district seemed to be the preferred development option.

Apartment Buildings in Seattle

The history of apartment residences in Seattle contrasts with that in eastern cities due largely to Seattle's comparatively low population density. Even in periods of rapid growth, such as the early 20th century, Seattle's population continued to spread out from its center, with detached, wood frame housing, hotels, and boarding houses as the preferred typical dwelling types, rather than in-city apartments. The city's population ballooned during the first two decades of the 20th century and then stabilized in the 1930s. From a population of 80,671 in 1900, it rose to 237,194 in 1910; 321,931 in 1920; 363,426 in 1930, and 368,302 in 1940. The significant growth up to 1910 can be attributed primarily to annexations, but growth in the second decade represents the increase in residents in the city, creating a sharp rise in housing needs.

The apartment building as a residential type emerged in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, coinciding with this period of growth in Seattle. The term "apartment house" was used initially to describe middle-class, multi-family housing, as opposed to boarding houses or tenements without bathrooms and running water. The apartment dwelling unit contained many of the spaces and services characteristic of a single-family residence: hot and cold running water, a full kitchen and bathroom, living spaces, operable windows, and a recognized discrete address (Hunter, p. 210-212). This was in contrast to walk-up tenements, typical in lower-income neighborhoods in East Coast cities that contained "railroad flats" of linked rooms, often without running water or bathroom facilities.

In Seattle, a number of impressive high-style apartment buildings were constructed between 1910 to 1930 and promoted to middle- and upper-income clientele. Such apartments and apartment hotels included the Sorrento on First Hill, the Frye in Pioneer Square, and the Moore and Camlin at the north end of the downtown retail district. Convenience, tenant services, and extravagantly decorated common areas were hallmarks of these buildings.

During the same period of rapid growth, another type of apartment building emerged in Seattle – the efficiency apartment. These buildings offered smaller apartments (between 450 and 550 square feet) and limited tenant services, but their convenient downtown locations and affordable rates ensured their demand. (This is in comparison to single room units, which typically ranged from 100 to 180 square feet.) They were constructed of substantial, durable materials, such as concrete and masonry, and offered a greater sense of permanence, individual independence, and privacy. The monthly rents of \$30 - \$40 were affordable to the young, white-collar office and retail workers who chose to live close to downtown. The proximity of the Windham Apartments (and other efficiency apartments in the Regrade) to the central business district enhanced their appeal and attraction to residents in the 1920s.

Available either furnished or unfurnished, a typical efficiency unit consisted of a living room (often with a convertible Murphy bed), a compact kitchen and sometimes a dinette, a dressing room or large closet, and a private bathroom, with sink, toilet, and bathtub. In fact, the efficiency units with the larger main room may have actually provided greater flexibility for tenants than the smaller bedroom typically found in the one-bedroom units (Sheridan). Because the buildings often had H- or L-shaped plans and double-loaded interior corridors, all units had access to ample natural light and fresh air, through large operable windows. Unit kitchens were outfitted with cabinets, appliances, and running water. Prior to refrigeration, many units had "cooler cabinets" with screened openings directly to the outside for storing food items that needed to be kept cool. Each building typically had an on-site laundry facility and was kept clean and tidy by an on-site resident manager. Research has shown that many of the tenants were single women, unlikely to have children, and attracted by the building laundry facilities and built-in unit amenities (Sheridan). The buildings provided a minimal entry security system; in some buildings each unit was equipped with an intercom to the front entry.

The Windham Apartments embodies the distinct characteristics of the efficiency apartment building and provided the amenities typical for its type and period. The seven-story building is set back 23' from the lot line on the north side above the first floor, in order to provide light and ventilation to all the apartments in the building. Each of the 52 "efficiency" units and seven one-bedroom units, accessed off a double-loaded corridor, provide a living room, a full bathroom, a kitchen with a "cooler cabinet," a dressing room or large closet, and sometimes a convertible Murphy bed that could be folded up into a closet. The brief *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce* article announcing the contract for the building describes it as follows: "It will contain 59 two and three room suites, each completed with hardwood floors, tile bathrooms and built-in conveniences. The structure will be served by an automatic electric freight elevator and will be heated by a hot water heating system utilizing oil for fuel." The building plan and unit layouts which characterize this building type remain intact as designed and constructed, including interior finishes and fixtures.

By 1925, when the Windham Apartments was built, demand for such apartment accommodations in Seattle exceeded supply. As City of Seattle Building Superintendent Robert Proctor noted in January of that year, "[t]he phenomenal apartment house . . . development experienced last year was the result of delayed activity in that line, just as now an active hotel construction program is needed to even up the lean years of the past" (*Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce*, January 24, 1925). During this period of high apartment demand, developers began to realize the advantages of investing in buildings with a larger number of units, effectively providing a greater return on their money. Lenders also looked favorably on efficiency apartment buildings, as they were seen as a positive alternative to the shared housing of the earlier decades.

The seven-story Windham Apartments was one of the tallest buildings in the neighborhood for many years, evidenced by period photographs. In addition to the Windham Apartments, seven other efficiency apartment buildings constructed in the 1920s remain in the surrounding area:

5th Avenue Court, 2132 5th Avenue (1922, 3 stories, 31 units)
Charlesgate, 2230 4th Avenue (1922, 3 stories, 60 units)
Stonecliff, 2602 4th Avenue (1923, 3 stories, 34 units)
Humphrey, 2205 2nd Avenue (1923, 6 stories, 74 units)
Devonshire, 420 Wall Street (1925, 3 stories, 62 units, also designed by Henry Bittman)
Davenport, 420 Vine Street (1925, 3 stories, 45 units, also designed by Henry Bittman)
Cornelius, 306 Blanchard Street (1925, 9 stories, 138 units)

Cursory investigations have revealed that, with the exception of the Stonecliff, these nearby apartment buildings have been maintained and are in relatively good condition on the exterior. Comparison of the Windham Apartments with these buildings indicates the common features, those which were characteristic of this building type in the 1920s. All the buildings are of masonry or concrete construction (according to King County tax records), finished with brick. All the buildings have some decorative trim, which is often cast stone but sometimes terra cotta. The structures are configured to allow light and air into all units, either with lightwells or setbacks along façades internal to the block, and have relatively large windows. Average unit sizes range from 425 square feet (in the 5th Avenue Court) to 520 square feet (Cornelius); however, dwelling interiors were not accessible for this report. The buildings typically had relatively modest lobbies and simply finished corridors, with plaster walls and wood doors and trim.

History of the Site and Construction of the Building

A 1912 Baist Map shows the area around the Windham site after it had been regraded. The entire subject block was vacant, as were the blocks immediately to the south and southwest. There were also no buildings shown on the east side of 5th Avenue between Battery and Lenora Streets, an area that had yet to be flattened in the third phase of the Regrade. Denny Public School was located approximately two blocks north of the subject site, as was Sacred Heart School and Church. By the time the subject building was constructed, the adjacent lot to the north was occupied by a two-story brick building.

By all accounts, 1925 was a boom year for construction in Seattle. The *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce* "Review of the Week" column on January 9, 1925 stated:

The first week of the new year has witnessed one of the most active building periods in the city's history. Projects announced and permits issued during the last few days call for an expenditure of more than a million dollars. Large fireproof apartments, store buildings, industrial structures, fraternity houses and homes are included in the work announced or started with apartment buildings far in the lead insofar as money involved is concerned.

Additionally, Henry Bittman is noted in the *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce* as architect for a number of projects in the first half of 1925, including an apartment building at 420 Vine Street, just four blocks north of the subject building.

The City of Seattle Department of Buildings issued permit number 244976 on May 8, 1925 for construction of the Windham Apartments. The permit identifies the owner as Real Estate Improvement Company, the architect as Henry Bittman, and the contractor as Albertson Cornell Brothers & Walsh. Cost of construction was estimated at \$250,000. Less than two weeks after the construction permit was issued, a brief article on the front page of the *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce* (May 20, 1925) announced the project and stated construction was to begin immediately. Inspection notes filed with the building permit indicate the footings were completed by the end of May 1925, and the roof slab was poured in early July.

Henry W. Bittman, Original Architect

The Windham Apartments was designed by prolific Seattle architect Henry W. Bittman (1882-1953). Bittman grew up in Greenpoint, a New York City suburb. He later attended Cooper Union, where he studied engineering. He worked in Chicago as a bridge engineer for a short time, and came to Seattle in 1906. After a brief partnership with architect William Kingsley, Bittman began his professional career in Seattle as a structural engineer, specializing in the design of steel frames. He received his Washington State architect's license June 12, 1920 (No. 233), and launched a long, productive career as a commercial architect. Even though his practice expanded and Bittman brought on more staff, the firm name remained Henry Bittman Architect & Engineer. He was known for his "reliability, straightforwardness, integrity, and cost-consciousness" (Ochsner, p. 193). Bittman lived with his wife Jessie at 4625 Eastern Avenue, in a Tudor house he designed for them in 1914. He was a member of the Seattle Kiwanis Club, the Municipal League of King County, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the Broadmoor Golf Club. He worked as an architect until he died in 1953 at the age of 71.

Bittman designed commercial, industrial, and apartment buildings as well as hotels, civic buildings, and theaters, and his practice concentrated on the urban setting. Among his best-known buildings in Seattle are the Terminal Sales Building (1923), at 1322 1st Avenue; the

United Shopping Tower (1928-1931, altered, now the Olympic Tower), at 217 Pine Street; and the Eagles Temple (1924-1925, altered), at 1404 7th Avenue. Bittman buildings presently listed on the National Register include the United Shopping Tower, the Eagles Temple/Eagles Auditorium Building, the William Volker Building (1928), and the Monte Cristo Hotel (1925, Everett, Washington), and the Old City Hall in Fairbanks, Alaska. (A longer list of Bittman's local projects is attached to this report following the graphics section.)

Between 1924 and 1925, Bittman designed at least three apartment buildings in the Denny Regrade, one of which was the Windham Apartments. More modest in detail and ornamentation than some of his larger buildings, the Windham Apartments is nonetheless characteristic of Bittman's work. He typically employed a tripartite vertical scheme of base, shaft, and capital, which is evident in the subject building. The plan of each floor is straightforward, and the individual units demonstrate an efficiency of space and abundance of natural light. The other two known Bittman apartment buildings in the vicinity of the subject building are the Davenport, at 420 Vine Street, and the Devonshire, at 420 Wall Street. The Devonshire was built for Frank M. Stanley, who was active in Seattle real estate for more than 50 years. Mr. Bittman built the Davenport for himself, an indication that he was interested not only in designing buildings but also in the development opportunity they presented. The same contractor, Albertson Cornell Brothers & Walsh, constructed all three of these 1925 Regrade apartment buildings.

Real Estate Improvement Company, Original Owner / Developer

Unfortunately, little specific information has been discovered about the original owner/developer of the Windham Apartments. Articles of incorporation indicate that the Real Estate Improvement Company was licensed to do business in Seattle on October 1, 1917, with \$100,000 capital. The firm was formed to deal in property, insurance, mortgages, stocks, bonds, etc. Its three founding Trustees were S.W. Farquhar, William D. Comer, and George A. Bruce. The 1917 Polk Directory identifies Farquhar as a lawyer, Comer dealing in mortgage loans, and Bruce as the assistant secretary of the Washington Savings and Loan Association. Comer was included in a compilation of Seattle leaders published in 1924, which described him as a pioneer in the mortgage loan business and savings business in Seattle (Hanford, p. 430-433). On February 2, 1925, the Real Estate Improvement Company amended their articles of incorporation to include purchase, construction, or other acquisition and ownership of buildings and structures, as well as collection of rent or other compensation. At the same time, eight years after their initial incorporation, the firm increased their capital to \$5,000,000. These changes preceded the Windham Apartments building permit by almost exactly three months, likely indicating the commencement of the project. With trustees experienced in the real estate business, the Real Estate Improvement Company apparently chose to take advantage of the flourishing mid-1920s market. According to deed records, the firm appears to have held the property for 17 years, when in 1942 T.M. Donohoe, as a Trustee of the Real Estate Improvement Company, was listed at the grantor of the property. The property was sold to Windham Apartments, Incorporated.

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The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

The exterior of the building

Issued: August 28, 2006

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City Historic Preservation Officer

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