

II. THE NEIGHBORHOOD UNIT

The above title is the name which, to facilitate discussion, has been given to the scheme of arrangement for a family-life community that has evolved as the main conclusion of this study. Our investigations showed that residential communities, when they meet the universal needs of family life, have similar parts performing similar functions. In the neighborhood-unit system those parts have been put together as an organic whole. The scheme is put forward as the frame-work of a model community and not as a detailed plan. Its actual realization in an individual real-estate development requires the embodiment and garniture which can be given to it only by the planner, the architect, and the builder.

The underlying principle of the scheme is that an urban neighborhood should be regarded both as a unit of a larger whole and as a distinct entity in itself. For government, fire and police protection, and many other services, it depends upon the municipality. Its residents, for the most part, find their occupations outside of the neighborhood. To invest in bonds, attend the opera or visit the museum, perhaps even to buy a piano, they have to resort to the "downtown" district. But there are certain other facilities, functions or aspects which are strictly local and peculiar to a well-arranged residential community. They may be classified under four heads: (1) the elementary school, (2) small parks and playgrounds, (3) local shops, and (4) residential environment. Other neighborhood institutions and services are sometimes found, but these are practically universal.

Parents have a general interest in the public school system of the city, but they feel a particular concern regarding the school attended by their children. Similarly, they have a special interest in the playgrounds where their own and their neighbors' children spend so many formative hours. In regard to small stores, the main concern of householders is that they be accessible but not next to their own doors. They should also be concentrated and provide for varied requirements.

Under the term "residential environment" is

included the quality of architecture, the layout of streets, the planting along curbs and in yards, the arrangement and set-back of buildings, and the relation of shops, filling stations and other commercial institutions to dwelling places—all the elements which go into the environment of a home and constitute its external atmosphere. The "character" of the district in which a person lives tells something about him. Since he chose it, ordinarily, it is an extension of his personality. One individual can do but little to create it. It is strictly a community product.

It is with the neighborhood itself, and not its relation to the city at large, that this study is concerned. If it is to be treated as an organic entity, then it logically follows that the first step in the conversion of unimproved acreage for residential purposes will be its division into unit areas, each one of which is suitable for a single neighborhood community. The next step consists in the planning of each unit so that adequate provision is made for the efficient operation of the four main neighborhood functions. The attainment of this major objective—as well as the securing of safety to pedestrians and the laying of the structural foundation for quality in environment—depends, according to our investigations, upon the observance of the following requirements:

Neighborhood-Unit Principles

1. *Size*.—A residential unit development should provide housing for that population for which one elementary school is ordinarily required, its actual area depending upon population density.

2. *Boundaries*.—The unit should be bounded on all sides by arterial streets, sufficiently wide to facilitate its by-passing by all through traffic.

3. *Open Spaces*.—A system of small parks and recreation spaces, planned to meet the needs of the particular neighborhood, should be provided.

4. *Institution Sites*.—Sites for the school and other institutions having service spheres coinciding with the limits of the unit should be suitably grouped about a central point, or common

5. *Local Shops*.—One or more shopping districts, adequate for the population to be served, should be laid out in the circumference of the unit, preferably at traffic junctions and adjacent to similar districts of adjoining neighborhoods.

6. *Internal Street System*.—The unit should be

for that purpose a number of plans and diagrams in which they have been applied will now be presented.

The first is a plan prepared by Mr. Robert Whitten in connection with his research into "The Economics of Land Subdivision."¹ It repre-

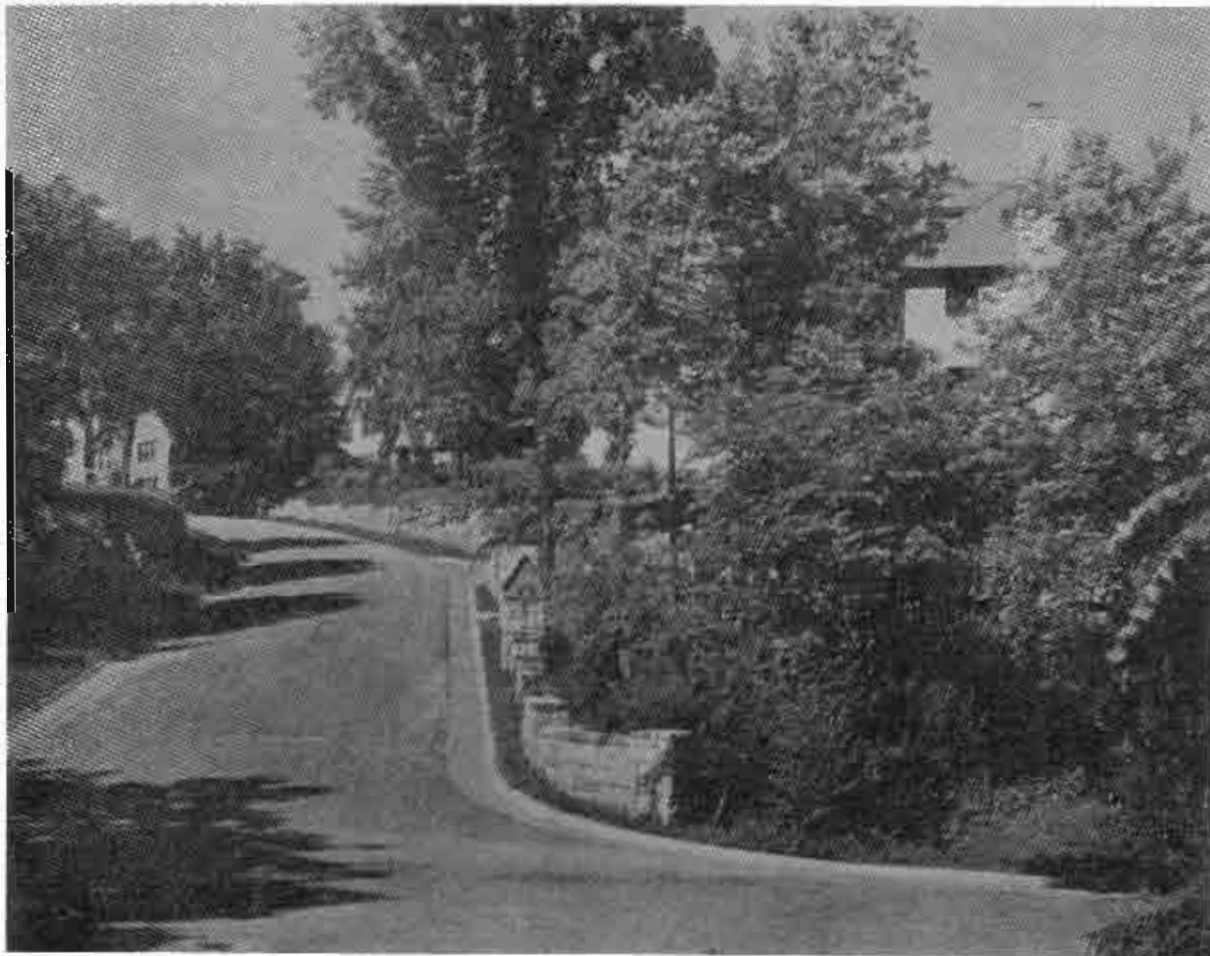


FIG. 9

Courtesy of the J. C. Nichols Companies

RESIDENTIAL "CHARACTER" AS EXHIBITED IN THE "COUNTRY CLUB DISTRICT" NEAR KANSAS CITY, MO.

provided with a special street system, each highway being proportioned to its probable traffic load, and the street net as a whole being designed to facilitate circulation within the unit and to discourage its use by through traffic.

Each of these principles will be fully discussed in succeeding chapters. It is desirable, first, however, to obtain a clearer picture of them, and

sents a conscious attempt to apply the above principles in a layout suitable for a development of modest homes in the suburbs. The second is a diagram suggesting the type of plan which might be devised for a more central area in the neighborhood of industry and business. For the third example there is presented the diagram of an

¹ See Monograph Three, Part III.

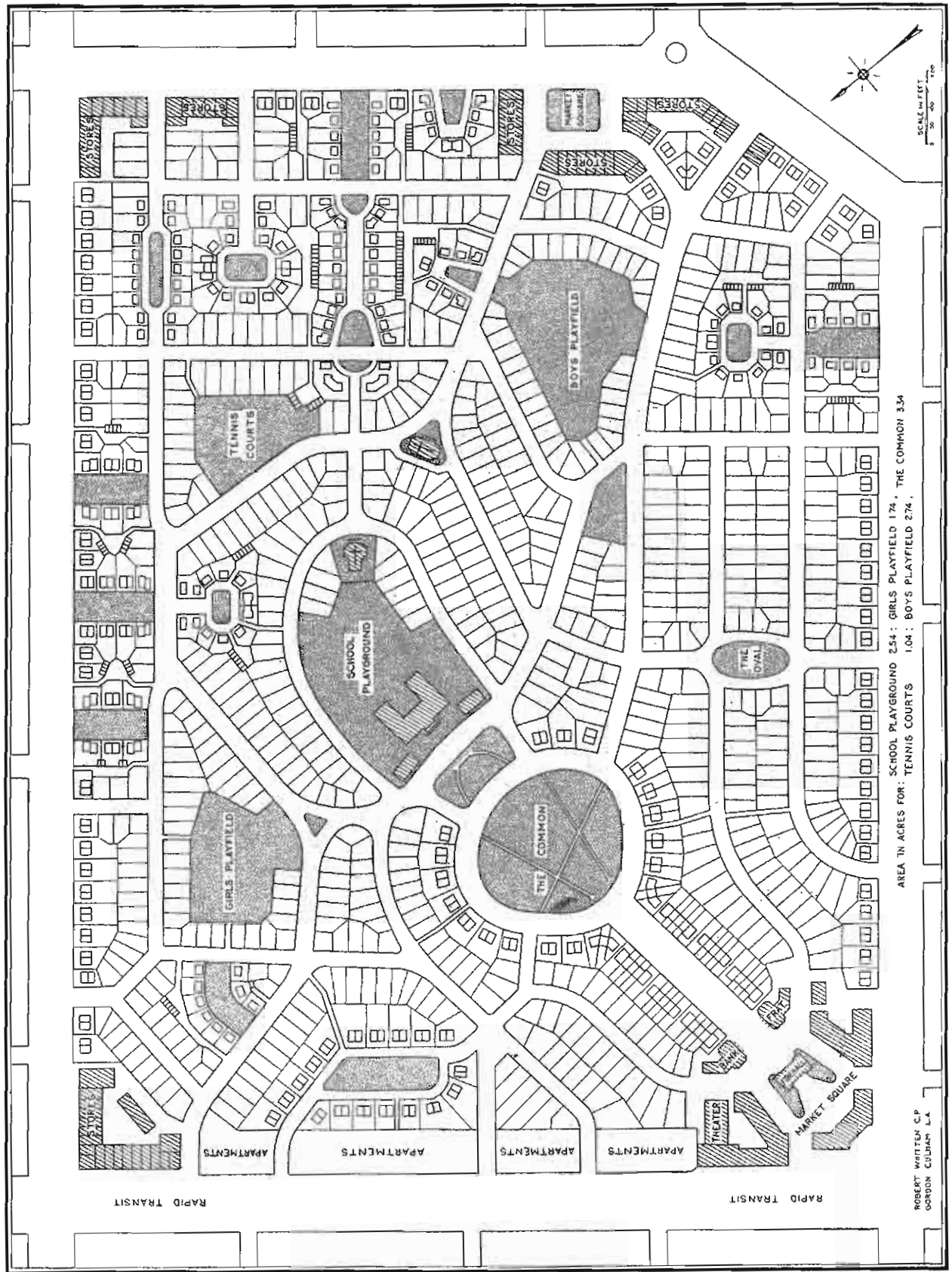


FIG. 10
 A SUBDIVISION FOR MODEST DWELLINGS PLANNED AS A NEIGHBORHOOD UNIT. (See also Figure 1 and page 338 in Monograph Three)

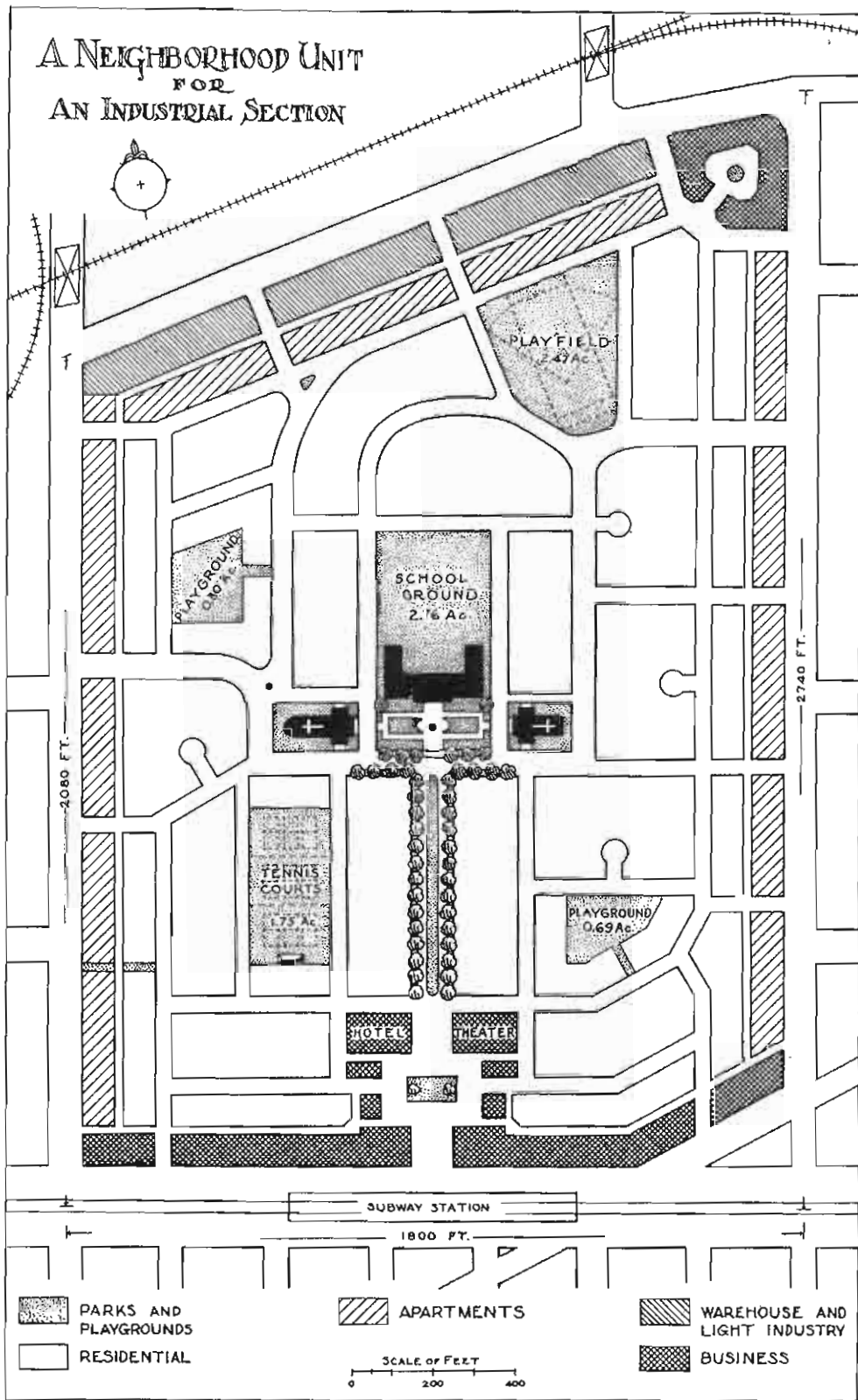


FIG. 11
SUGGESTED TREATMENT FOR A DENSER AND MORE CENTRAL DISTRICT

offered as a finished plan. The street layout is based upon a housing scheme providing for 2,000 families, of which 68 per cent are allotted to houses, some semi-detached and some in rows; and 32 per cent to apartments averaging 800 square feet of ground area per suite. On the basis of 4.5 persons in houses and 4.2 in suites, the total population would be around 8,800 people, and there would be some 1,400 children of elementary school age, a fine enrolment for a regulation city school. The average net ground area per family amounts to 1,003.7 square feet. If the parks and play areas are included, this figure becomes 1,216 square feet.

Recreation Spaces.—These consist of a large schoolyard and two playgrounds suitable for the younger children, grounds accommodating nine tennis courts, and a playfield adapted either for

baseball or soccer football. In distributing these spaces regard was had both to convenience and to their usefulness as open spaces and vistas for the adjacent homes. All should have planting around the edges, and most of them could be seeded, thus avoiding the barren aspect so common to city playgrounds.

Community Center.—The educational, religious and civic life of the community is provided for by a group of structures, centrally located and disposed so as to furnish an attractive vista for the trunk street and a pivotal point for the whole layout. A capacious school is flanked by two churches, and all face upon a small square which might be embellished with a monument, fountain, or other ornamental feature. The auditorium, gymnasium, and library of the school, as well as certain other rooms, could be used for

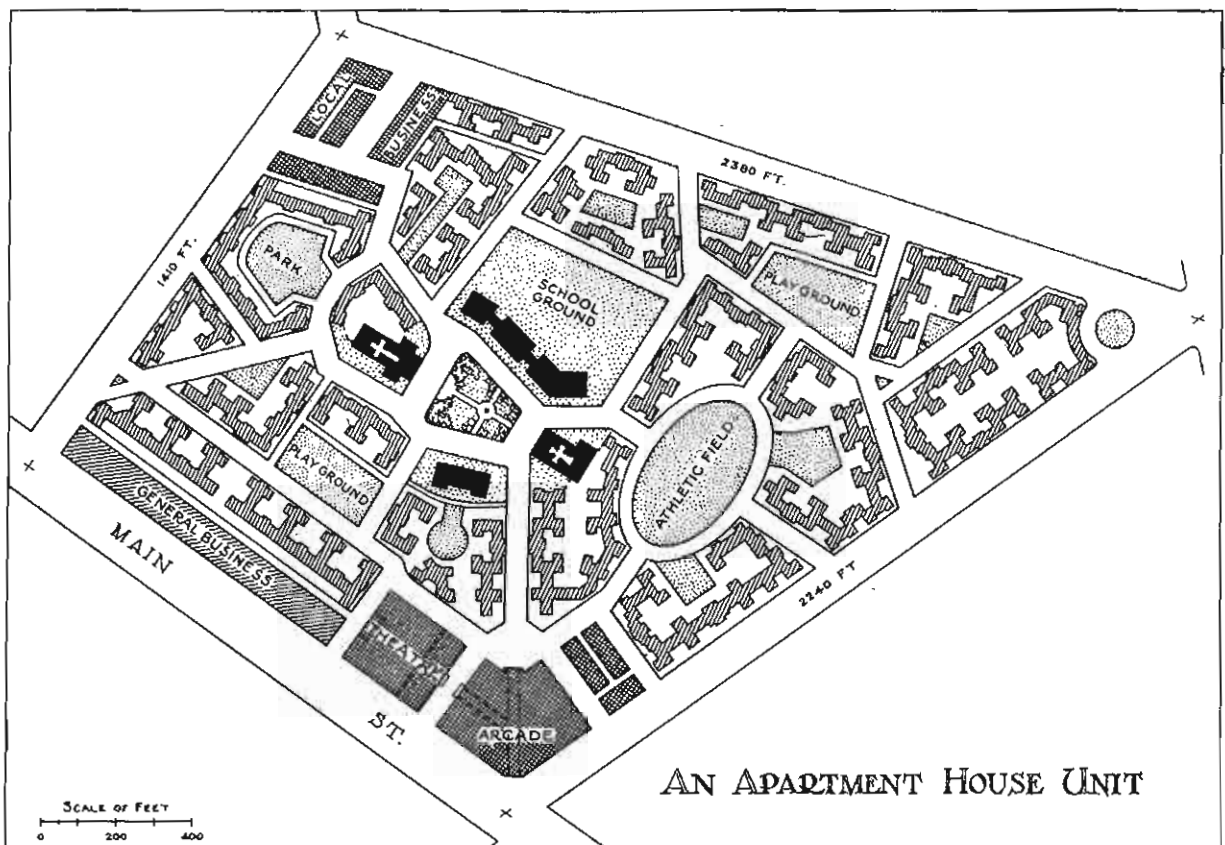


FIG. 12

A METHOD OF ENDOWING A MULTIPLE-FAMILY DISTRICT WITH INTERESTING WINDOW VISTAS, GREATER STREET SAFETY, MORE LIBERAL OPEN SPACES AND A NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

ground site are 200 feet wide and 670 feet long, a length which is found in several sections on Manhattan. In this plan, which borders a river, two streets are closed and two are carried through the development as covered roadways under terraced central courts.

were originally 60 feet, have been widened to 80 feet, the two 20-foot extra strips being taken out of the area of the development. The western boundary has been enlarged from 80 to 100 feet. The area given to street widening and to building set-back amounts to 89,800 square feet, or 11,800

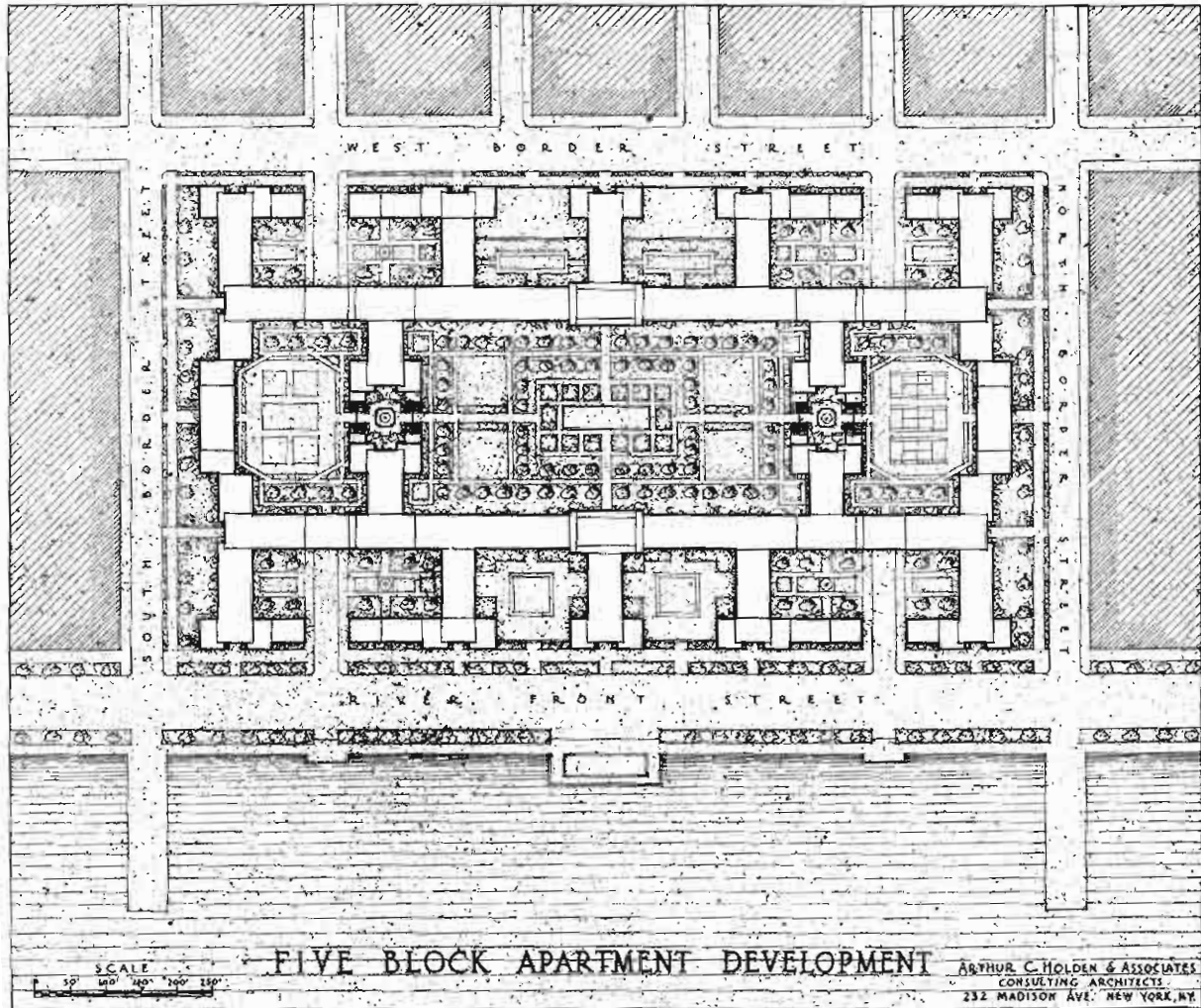


FIG. 13
HOW A SLUM DISTRICT MIGHT BE REHABILITATED (See page 108)

Ground Plan.—The dimensions of the plot between the boundary streets are 650 feet by 1,200 feet, and the total area is approximately 16 acres. The building lines are set back from the streets 30 feet on the northern and southern boundaries. Both of the end streets, which

square feet more than the area of the two streets which were appropriated.

It will be observed that the plan of buildings encloses 53 per cent of the total area devoted to open space in the form of central courts. The main central court is about the size of Gramercy