

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Hist-6 Rev 6/83

State of Connecticut
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 566 3005

IDENTIFICATION

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Building Name (Common): Bushnell Tower | (Historic) Bushnell Tower/Bushnell Plaza |
| 2. Town/City: Hartford | County: Hartford |
| 3. Street & Number: 1 Gold Street | |
| 4. Owner: Bushnell Tower Condominium Association, Inc. | |
| 5. Use (Present): Residential/Commercial | (Historic): Residential/Commercial |
| 6. Accessibility to Public: Exterior Visible from Public Road: Yes | |
| Interior Accessible: No | |

DESCRIPTION

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 7. Style: Modernist | Date(s) of Construction: 1966 - 1969 |
| 8. Materials: Reinforced Concrete Type: Poured | |
| 9. Structural System: Load-bearing Masonry | |
| 10. Roof: Near Flat with Parapet | Material: Membrane |
| 11. Number of Stories: 27 | Dimensions: 52' x 55' x 312' |
| 12. Condition (Structural): Good | Exterior: Good |
| 13. Integrity (location): On Original Site | Alterations: No |
| 14. Related Outbuildings or Landscape Features: Plaza/Underground Parking Garage/Pool | |
| 15. Surrounding Environment: Urban/High Building Density/Bushnell Park | |

16. Interrelationship of Buildings and Surroundings:

The Bushnell Tower and Plaza in downtown Hartford occupy the northern half of the city block bounded by Gold Street on the north; Main Street on the east, and Wells Street on the south and west (Exhibit A- site plan). The tower, which is located in the northwest corner, is separated from its raised concrete plaza at the northeast corner by a driveway that runs between Gold and Wells streets. At the center of the site, the driveway widens to divide around a circular pool with fountain and the ramp for the underground garage (Photographs 8, 9). The plaza promenade, which is bordered by a low concrete wall, is accessed by two sets of stairs on the site and also from a stairway at the corner of Gold and Main streets (Photograph 10). Retail stores below the plaza deck face inward towards the access road (Photograph 11). Later redevelopment on this block (not part of this nomination) includes the 1978 Metropolitan District Commission Building at the southeast corner (555 Main Street) and a ten-story curvilinear apartment building in 1979 on the southwest (100 Wells Street), the latter structure a replacement for a second matching tower originally planned for the site (Photograph 12).

Surrounding notable sites and structures include Bushnell Park and the State Capitol to the west (Photograph 13); Center Church and the Ancient Burying Ground across Gold Street to the north; Travelers Square, the 1965 addition to Travelers Tower to the northwest; and the Wadsworth Atheneum, City Hall, and State Library across Main Street to the east and south.

DESCRIPTION (Continued)

17. Other Notable Features of Building or Site

The Bushnell Tower, one of the tallest poured concrete buildings in Hartford, is composed of three interlocking forms that reflect the interior spatial arrangement (Photographs 1, 2, 3, 4; Exhibit A - floor plan). Although the composition of individual elevations varies, three sides of the tower (east, north, and west) display the same major design elements: smooth concrete walls framing large rectangular grids of windows with cast concrete sills; bordering vertical rows of projecting balconies; and ribbons of flush and recessed windows. The partially enclosed balconies, which have simple pierced, cast-concrete balustrades, are located near or at the outside corners. The large window grid is omitted on the plainer south elevation, which was originally designed to face a matching elevation on the twin tower, which was never realized.

The main entrance to the tower at the southeast corner of the building is surmounted by a large, half-round glass transom, a shape that is repeated in the bronzed metal projecting canopy over the revolving door assembly, an original feature also in a bronze tone (Photograph 5). The lobby, finished with marble veneer and a terrazzo floor, has fixed floor-to-ceiling windows along the east side (Photographs 6, 7). The suspended lighting here repeats the design of the free-standing, outdoor light fixtures with multiple globes used on the site.

SIGNIFICANCE

- 18. Architect:** Ioh Ming Pei FAIA (b. 1917), I. M. Pei & Associates
now Pei Freed Cobb & Partners, New York, New York
Associate: Henry F. Ludorf (1900-1977), Hartford, CT
- Builder:** Associated Construction,
Hartford, Connecticut

19. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE (See continuation sheets.)

SOURCES

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- Garvan, Alexander. *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't*, 2nd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2002.
- Hartford Architecture Volume One: Downtown*. Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1980.
- Hartford Courant*, 1960 – 1976.
- Pei, I.M. "Cast-in-Place Technique Restudied." *Progressive Architecture* 41 (October 1960), p.158-175.
- Pei, I.M., et al. "New Thinking on Office Buildings." *Architectural Forum* 99 (September 1953), p.107-129.
- _____. "The Search for Postmodern Architecture." *Crit 4* (Fall 1978).
- Servus Management Corporation Archives, Hartford, Connecticut. Construction drawings (1966); historic photographs and brochures.
- von Boehm, Gero. *Conversations with I.M. Pei: Light is the Key*. New York, Munich, London: Prestel, 2000.
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- <http://arch.virginia.edu/dcplaces/dcmall/working/malleast/eastwing/htm>.
- <http://www.algonet.se/~pwh/pwpei.htm>.
- <http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/linpei/linpei.html>.
- <http://www.choate.edu/alumniparent/publications/bulletin/w.s99/htm/mellon.htm>.
- <http://decker.colorado.edu/matsuo/build/near/>.
- <http://www.floornature.com/worldaround/artcolo.php/6/en/arch21>.
- [http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/I. M. Pei.html](http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/I._M._Pei.html).
- <http://www.pcf-p.com/a/i/loc/ct/ct.html>.
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- <http://www.pcf-p.com/a/f/>.

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Photographer: Cunningham, July-August, 2004
Negatives on File: State Historic Preservation Office

Photographs

1. Bushnell Tower, east and north elevations, camera facing SW
2. Bushnell Tower, north elevation (from Ancient Burying Ground), camera facing S
3. Bushnell Tower, west and south elevations, from Bushnell Park, camera facing NE
4. Bushnell Tower, south elevation with entrance, camera facing N
5. Tower entrance, camera facing NW
6. Tower Lobby, camera facing SE
7. Tower Lobby, camera facing NW
8. Site, camera facing N towards Gold Street
9. Site from above, camera facing SE
10. Plaza from above, camera facing NE
11. Storefronts under plaza, camera facing S
12. MDC Building and 100 Wells Street, camera facing S
13. Panoramic view from 16th floor: Bushnell Park and Capitol Building, camera facing W

Exhibits

- A. Site Plan
- B. Typical Floor Plan
- C. Rendering of Site with Twin Towers
- D. Location Map

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HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

BUSHNELL TOWER
1 Gold Street, Hartford, CT
19:1

Historical or Architectural Importance

Historically important for its central role in the planned revitalization of downtown Hartford, Bushnell Tower was designed by I.M. Pei, a prolific master architect noted for his worldwide contributions to the Modern urban esthetic. A notable precursor to the ordered geometry and sculptural form that later informed Pei's more mature Modernist work, Bushnell Tower is the only Connecticut example among the many high-rise concrete buildings produced by I.M. Pei & Partners, his first independent architectural firm, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While fully responsive to the demands of the dominant automobile culture, the overarching urban design rationale at this time, the exceptional merit of Pei's dynamic design for the Bushnell Tower lies in a subtle interplay of form and function, a "refreshing alternative" to the more typical International-style glass boxes of the period.¹

Historical Importance

Urban renewal, the federally sponsored approach to planning and development that transformed so many American cities after World War II, was established by Title I of the Housing Act of 1949. For Hartford, it began in 1952, when Title I advance planning funds were obtained for Constitution Plaza (1961-1963), designed as the eastern gateway to the city. In 1960, when Constitution Plaza was still in the development stage, plans were initiated for Bushnell Plaza, as it was originally named, the centerpiece of a comprehensive downtown master plan designed by the Baltimore firm of Rogers, Taliferro, & Lamb. In the presentation to the city in April 1960, the planners called for luxury apartments, with space for tenant parking, professional offices, and retail businesses for the 6.7-acre site between Main Street and Bushnell Park. They also proposed that Gold Street be realigned to join Atheneum Square and a one-acre strip along its length was set aside as a greenbelt.

Bushnell Plaza was heartily endorsed by major civic and business groups, including the Committee for Hartford, the Hartford Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Board of Trade, and Urban Redevelopment Committee of Great Hartford. In a series of editorials in the Hartford Courant, leaders of these groups urged voters to approve a \$1,850,000 bond issue to underwrite the city's cost for planning. The bond issue was approved by an overwhelming majority in November 1960, but construction did not actually begin until April 1966. The intervening six years were consumed with selecting a developer and architect, financing of the project, condemnation and acquisition of the property, demolition of existing buildings,² and new sewer construction.

Bushnell Plaza eventually was subsidized by local, state, and federal funds and a mortgage insurance guarantee from Federal Housing Administration (FHA), making it very attractive to developers.³ Of the seven development firms responding to the initial bid requests, Capitol City Associates of Hartford (with Reynolds Aluminum Service Corporation of Virginia, a venture partner) was one of the finalists selected to submit specific proposals with development plans. Capitol City, a new local development corporation, which included Associated Construction and four construction supply companies, had already selected the architectural firm of I.M. Pei & Associates for the projected \$10.5 million project. As was customary, a local architect, Henry Ludorf, soon joined the firm as an associate for the duration of the project.

In 1963 I.M. Pei's design for twin 30-story towers (Exhibit C), the "best proposal" for the site, was unanimously recommended by a special advisory committee of experts in planning, architecture and real estate financing: Oindo

¹ *Hartford Architecture Volume One: Downtown*, Hartford Architecture Conservancy, p. 95.

² Although the Courant reported that buildings were scheduled to be razed in 1960, demolition did not actually get under way until 1966. In addition to two burned-out buildings that had been eyesores for years, the block was occupied by the Hublein Hotel, two movie theaters, Loew's Poli and Palace, and other small businesses such as the Silver Tap, which was owned by Mayor Kinsella and members of his family.

³ Since the City of Hartford had financed the planning with a bond issue, Bushnell Plaza was eligible for a Title I grant of \$5,500,000, representing 75 percent of total cost (instead of the customary two thirds). At the urging of the Hartford Redevelopment Authority, the project received a high priority for state funding as well, with \$651,000 set aside for Bushnell Plaza in January 1962, thus reducing Hartford's total contribution to only one eighth of the total net cost.

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BUSHNELL TOWER

1 Gold Street, Hartford, CT

19:2

Grossi, Dean of the School of Architecture at Pratt Institute; Christopher Tunnard, professor of urban planning at Yale University; and John Robert White, senior vice president of the investment consulting firm of Brown, Harris, Stevens, Inc., of New York.⁴ Lavishly praising Pei's design, the experts singled out his sensitivity to the institutional and cultural character of the area, especially the placement of the towers to afford "the maximum visual connection to Bushnell Park." His separation of the public and private areas of the site by a bisecting street was considered quite novel and innovative. Reflecting the typical urban mindset of the time, having the plaza shops face inward rather than onto Main Street was also considered another plus. Little was said at this time about the actual design of the towers, then the least developed part of the plan.

After several presentations by the three finalists to the Hartford Redevelopment Agency and the City Council, which included some discussion as to whether the height of the proposed towers was in compliance with city ordinances, Bushnell Development Corporation (now a subsidiary of Reynold's Metals Company) was officially nominated as the developer of Bushnell Plaza in April of 1964. The council vote was not unanimous. But any councilmen who had lingering doubts about the architect or the design of the project undoubtedly were reassured by Pei's newfound celebrity as the architect selected for the John F. Kennedy Library, reported in the *Hartford Courant* in December 1964 under the headline, "JFK Memorial Architect Designs Bushnell Plaza."

By 1966 the project was divided into two phases at the developer's request.⁵ As agreed, stage one was limited in scope to just one tower with 171 units, the plaza, stores and a 146-car parking garage, which would occupy only about two acres. Construction was further delayed by FHA concerns about some technical aspects of the concrete structure, which had to be resolved before the agency would guarantee the mortgage. In October the FHA insurance came through and Aetna Life & Casualty provided mortgage financing in the amount of \$4.5 million. For the topping-off ceremony in August 1968, Mayor Ann Unicello and the traditional evergreen rode up to the roof in a concrete bucket. In her speech that day, the mayor noted that the name of the development came from Bushnell Park, Hartford's original urban renewal project.

When the tower was ready for occupancy in late 1969, the advertising brochure, which touted the advantages of "skyline luxury in the new downtown Hartford," made much of this historical connection, and concluded that Horace Bushnell himself would have approved Pei's design. Model apartments were furnished and decorated by G. Fox & Company, then Hartford's leading department store. Although all the advertising held out the promise of a second tower, with the downturn in the rental market in the 1970s, construction of a second apartment building with a lower profile, quite different from Pei's twin tower, was delayed until 1979.⁶ Since that time Bushnell Tower has been converted to condominiums and several current owners have combined adjacent units into spacious apartments.

Architectural Importance

Leoh Ming Pei, who was born in Canton (now Guandong), China, in 1917, came to the United States in 1934 at age 17 to study at the University of Pennsylvania. He soon transferred to the architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, receiving a bachelor's degree in 1940. Pei completed his academic training with a master's degree in 1942 from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, which was founded by Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, the famed Bauhaus émigrés who revolutionized the architectural profession in the United States. Pei was a special protégé and lifelong friend of Breuer, who, along with Le Corbusier, are acknowledged as the major influences on his work. During

⁴ *Hartford Courant*, July 23, 1963. Two other local firms also submitted plans but it is likely that the only real architectural competition was provided by Gordon Bunshaft (Skidmore Owings & Merrill), the designer of Lever House in New York City, a recognized International Style icon.

⁵ As the Stage I blueprints show, economies were introduced as construction proceeded, most notably, the elimination of a grove of trees in concrete planters set into the deck of the plaza promenade.

⁶ MDC headquarters, the later addition to the plan for the complex, was designed by Russell, Gibson, von Dohlen and completed in 1978.

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BUSHNELL TOWER
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19:3

World War II, Pei, like many of his fellow architects, volunteered for government service, which was followed by an assistant professorship at Harvard. Pei, who became a naturalized citizen in 1948, and his wife, Eileen Loo, a Chinese émigré and fellow graduate student, were unable to return to China until after the Cultural Revolution.

I.M. Pei began his professional career as the director of architecture for the well-known developer and real estate mogul, William Zeckendorf and the firm of Webb & Knapp, Inc. In his search for the "greatest unknown architect in the United States," Zeckendorf sought the advice of Nelson Rockefeller; Pei was selected from potential candidates screened for the position by staff members at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Although the role as in-house architect for a developer actually delayed his professional acceptance in the field, Pei's years with Zeckendorf were invaluable. Few young architects of his generation had the opportunity to be the chief designer of major buildings. Fewer still were immersed in development financing and construction on a grand scale, as well as the complex local politics of urban renewal. According to urban planner and historian Alexander Garvin, some of the more influential and successful urban renewal projects in the country were produced by the Pei-Zeckendorf team, particularly their plans for the redevelopment of Southwest Washington (D.C.), credited with initiating the revitalization of one of the capitol's worst slums and its reconnection to the rest of the city, and Society Hill in Philadelphia, where Pei's three towers were the catalyst for a major renewal program, which had a strong historic preservation component.⁷ In 1950 Pei brought other young architects on board and founded I.M. Pei & Associates in 1955. Among the other projects completed for Webb & Knapp by the new team were Mile High Center in Denver, Kip's Bay, a housing project on Manhattan's East Side, and *Place de Ville* in Montreal, then the largest office complex in the world.

Bushnell Plaza was one of Pei's first commissions after he severed ties with Zeckendorf in 1960. Professional recognition and other major commissions soon followed. Society memberships included the American Institute of Architects (elected a fellow in 1964), the American Academy of Design (1965), and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1967). With recognition of his growing body international work came membership in professional societies in England, Japan, France, and China. Pei is best known for two major commissions: the Grand Louvre in Paris (1983-1989) and the East Wing of the National Gallery, for which he received the AIA Gold Medal in 1979. Paul Mellon, the sponsor for the East Wing also funded one of Pei's Connecticut buildings, the Paul Mellon Center for the Arts (1973) at Choate Rosemary in Wallingford, said to be the prototype for the National Gallery commission. Pei also designed the Pitney Bowes World Headquarters in Stamford (1986) and returned to Wallingford to design the Choate Rosemary Science Center, which was completed in 1989. The citation for the prestigious Pritzker Prize, awarded in 1983, summed up the architect's distinguished career with these words, "Ieoh Ming Pei has given this century some of its most beautiful interior spaces and exterior forms."⁸ Although I.M. Pei retired in 1990, his legacy lives on as the founding partner of Pei Freed Cobb & Partners. Considered one of the most eminently successful collaborations of the twentieth century, his firm has produced more than 200 major buildings and has been the recipients of more than 100 design awards, including 23 AIA National Honor Awards.

Bushnell Tower

While architecture of any age is a product of its time, this is particularly true in the Modern period. Any critical analysis of modern architecture requires some understanding of the goals and aspirations of the architects and the expectations of the public. Like many other architects in this period, Pei rejected the historic pedestrian-oriented urban streetscape to create isolated high-rise towers, often with the self-contained retail and parking facilities found here, essentially a reprise

⁷ Alexander Garvin, *The American City* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002), p. 252-254; 262-265.

⁸ Carter Wiseman, *I.M. Pei, A Profile in American Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), p.12.

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BUSHNELL TOWER

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of the futuristic highway city envisioned by Le Corbusier in the 1920s. For Pei, the creation of this new functionally integrated "urban organism" for the automobile age was the modern architect's highest goal.⁹ Embraced by city planners, this type of urban renewal project fundamentally redefined the traditional relationship between the city dweller and his environment. Even though the success or failure of this approach to urban redevelopment is still debated, Bushnell Tower evolved in this historic cultural context.

Visually and structurally, the Bushnell Tower dynamically engages the city from several directions. With its multiple facades and panoramic views, Pei's design makes the most of its prominent site in the heart of the downtown. Impelled by projecting balconies, the three principal elevations virtually revolve into one continuous façade. Granted that the illusion would have been intensified by the addition of a second tower as planned, but remarkably enough, the sensation of movement is accomplished by the manipulation of form and plan in a single tower. This "spinning of the facades" was first developed by Pei for the Philadelphia's Society Hill project in 1957 and University Plaza for New York University in the early 1960s.¹⁰ In those projects however, multiple towers are arranged on their sites in a pinwheel plan. The buildings themselves are more static Bauhaus boxes, with entire elevations composed of window grids bordered by smooth concrete, unrelieved by any other design elements. As was the case with his mentor, Marcel Breuer, these grids were the hallmark of most of Pei's early works (including the original plan for the Bushnell Tower in 1963), and became the signature style for I. M. Pei & Partners up through the early 1970s.

Whether they were designed by Pei himself, as was the case with Century City Apartments in Los Angeles (1965) and Hoffman Hall at the University of Southern California (1967), or in association with his partners, the residential and office towers produced by the firm in this period all bear the same distinctive Pei imprint.¹¹ This influence is seen in the several collaborations with Araldo Cossutta, such as the Cecile and Ida Green Center for Earth Sciences at MIT (1964), and Wilmington Tower, Wilmington, Delaware (1971), or the aforementioned University Plaza in New York City (1967), which was designed with James Freed. A similar conceptual consistency is also evident in contemporary buildings attributed solely to his partners: the Christian Science Center, 1970, designed by Cossutta, and Harbor Towers, 1971, designed by Henry Cobb, both located in Boston.

The final, more thoughtful, plan of Bushnell Tower was the most fully developed example from this period in the architect's career. Expressing a maturing urban design sensibility, Pei abandoned his original plan of 1963 to explore the more rigorous geometry that distinguished his later works, such as East Wing of the National Gallery. Although the Tower was one of the first of Pei's projects to more fully utilize the sculptural possibilities of poured concrete, certainly others in the field, particularly the Neo-Expressionists, also were experimenting with organic concrete forms. Pei's design is more closely related to the geometric volumes and voids of Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale University. Although Rudolph's Brutalist design also utilized a pinwheel concept, there it resulted in a chaotic interior layout. True to his Bauhaus principles, in the Bushnell design, Pei's rational interior plan is defined by the placement and design of exterior forms. Furthermore this integrated interior plan is exceptionally functional, and provides extraordinary vistas, especially from the upper floors of the building. In addition to their design function, the balconies, a feature that Pei once famously said had no place in the city, heightens this aspect of the urban residential experience. While the tower can be admired from street level, this unobstructed visual connection to the city and Bushnell Park is fully in keeping with Pei's conviction that architecture is an art form dedicated to the enhancement of the quality of public life.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64-67.

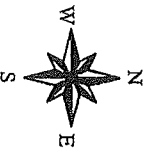
¹¹ Attributions for cited works are taken from the official "Catalog of Works" in *I.M. Pei: A Profile in Architecture*, 1990, pp. 306-311.



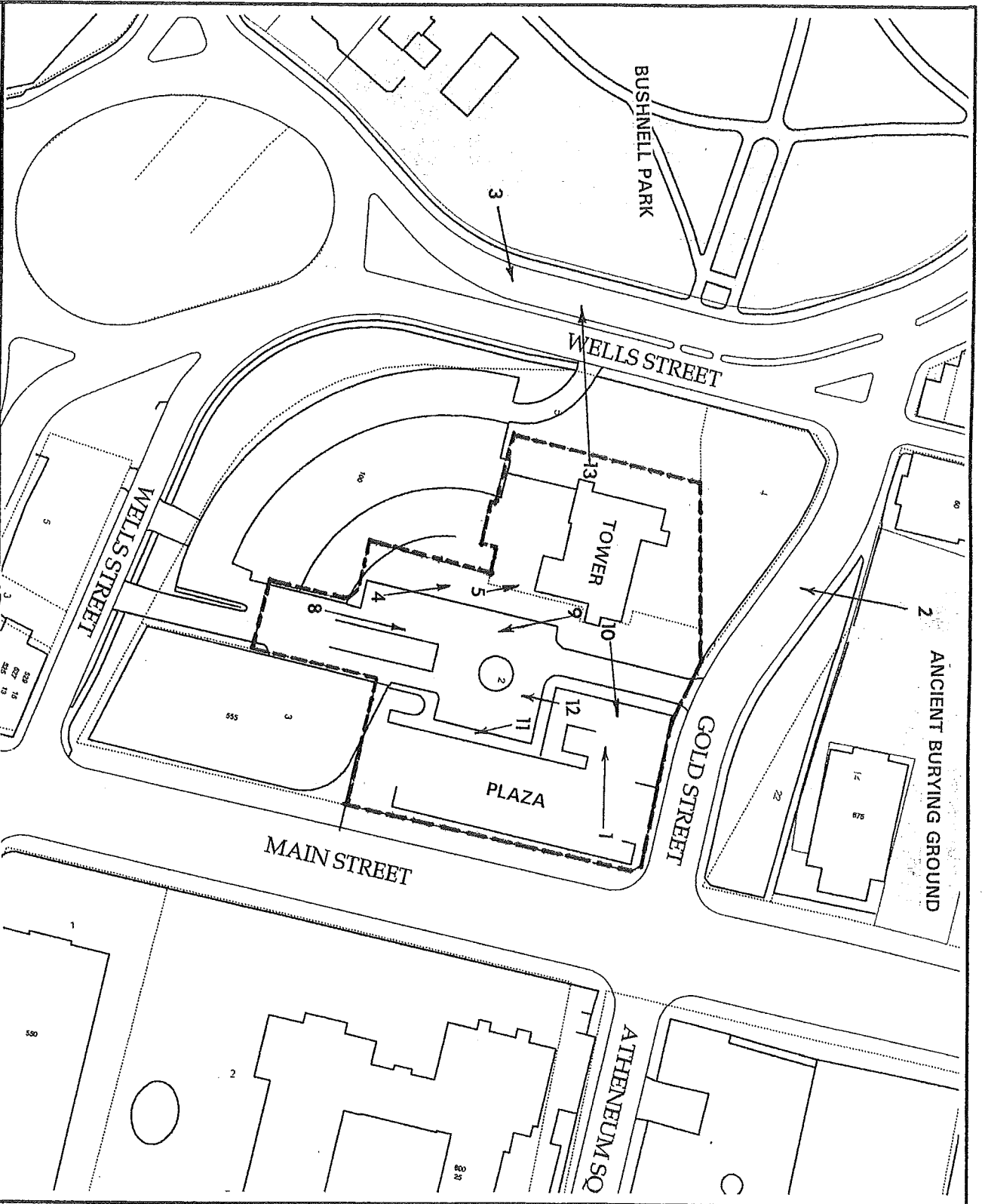
BUSHNELL TOWER
1 Gold Street, Hartford, CT

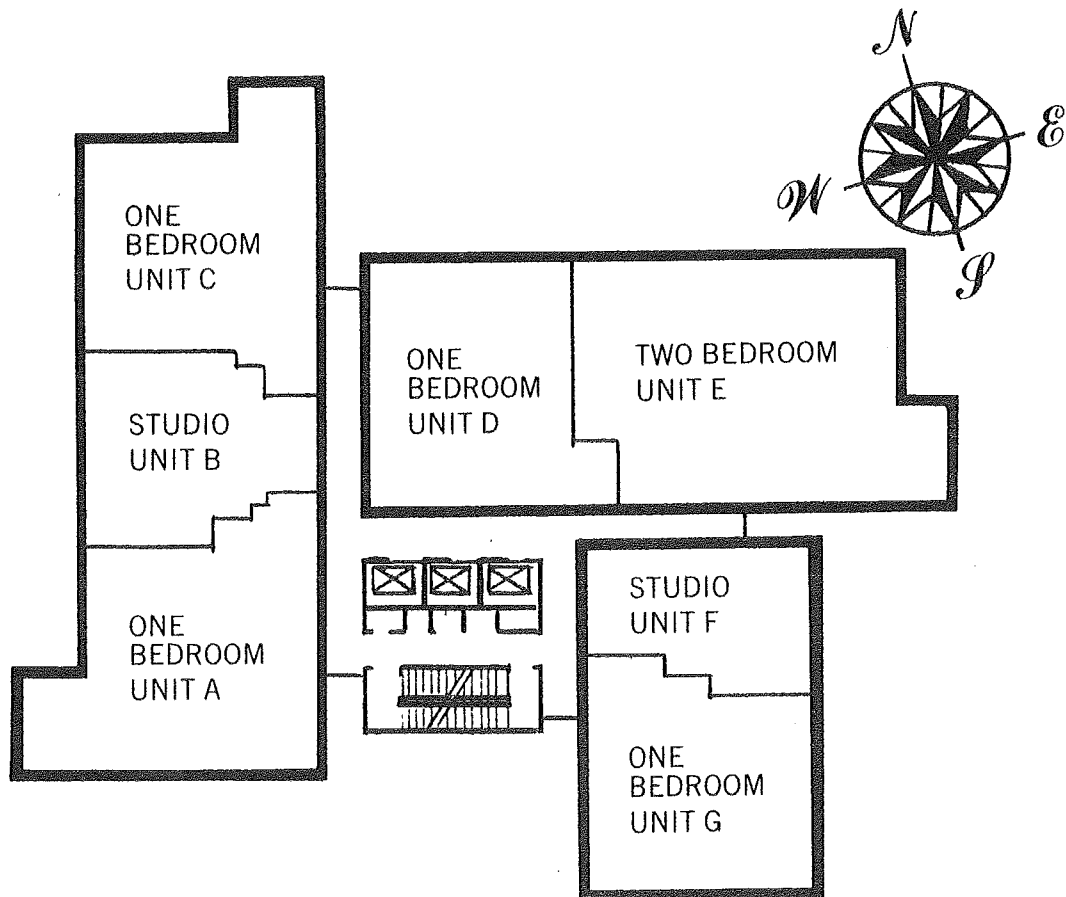
EXHIBIT A: SITE PLAN

Dashed Line: Property Boundaries
Arrows: Photograph Views



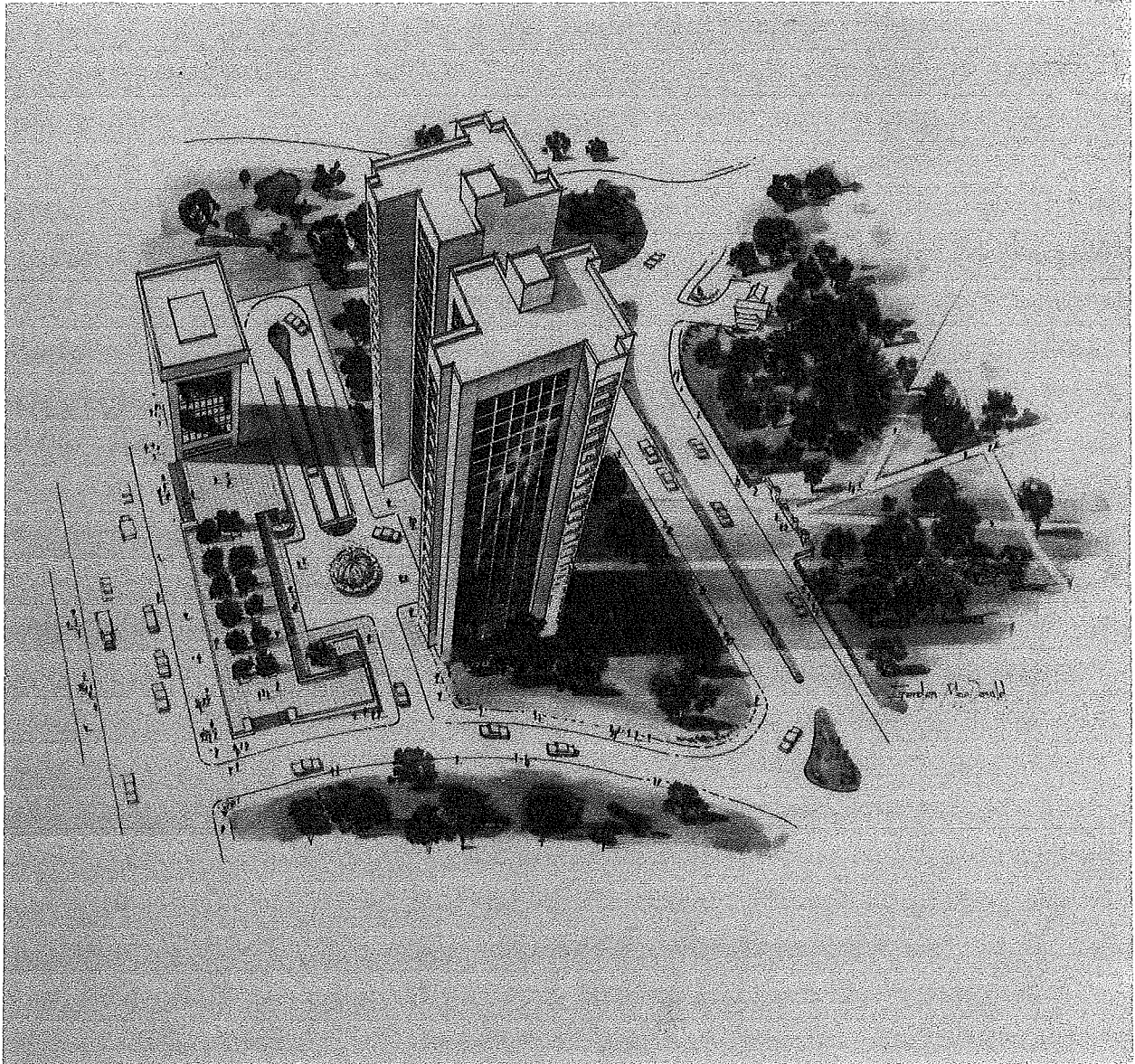
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DPW/GIS Services
Map Scale: 1" = 100'
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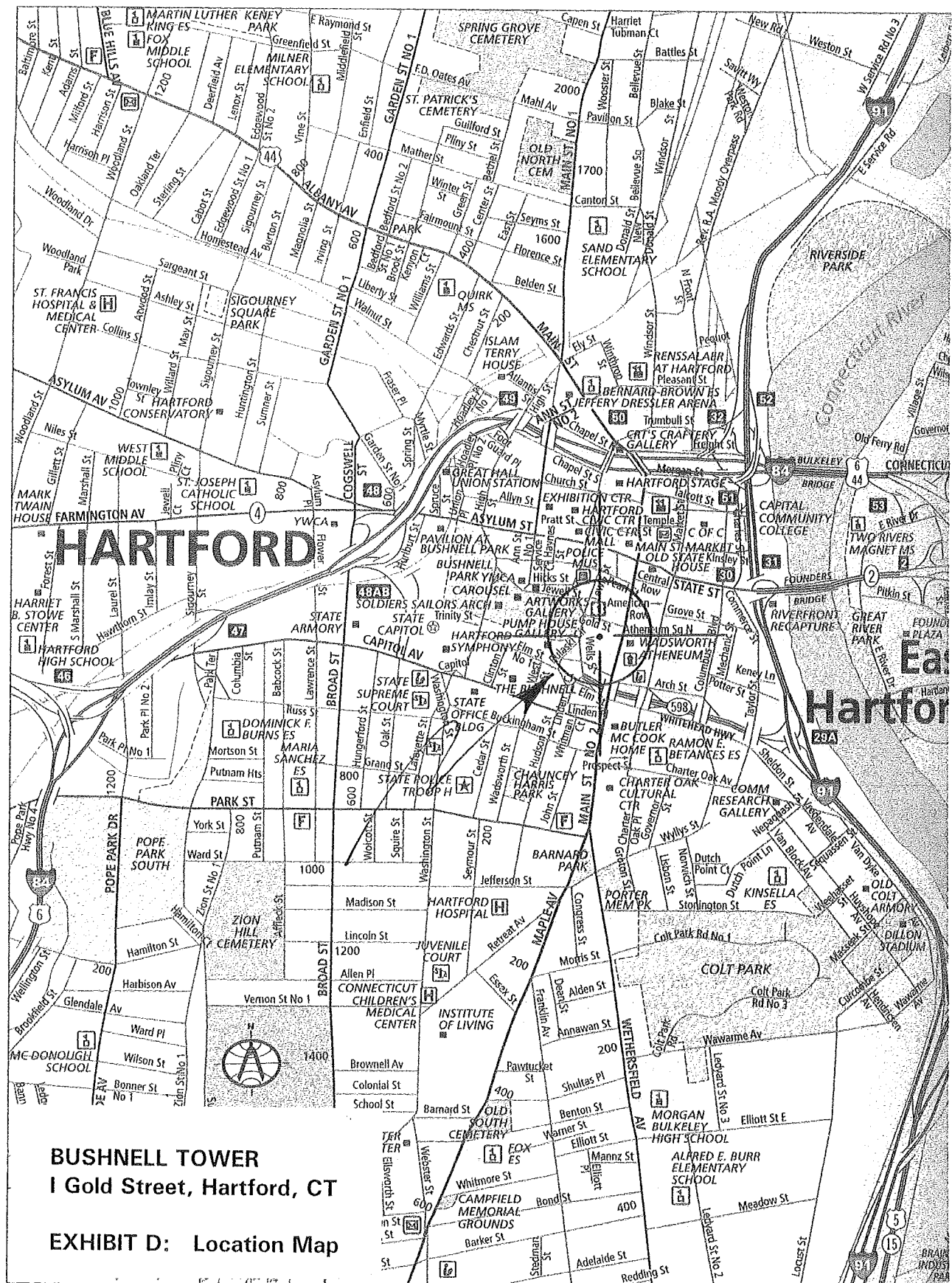
BUSHNELL TOWER
1 Gold Street, Hartford, CT

EXHIBIT B: Typical Floor Plan



BUSHNELL TOWER
1 Gold Street, Hartford, CT

EXHIBIT C: Rendering of Site with Twin Towers
Reproduced from *Bushnell Towers:*
Skyline Luxury Living in the new downtown Hartford, c. 1970



BUSHNELL TOWER
1 Gold Street, Hartford, CT

EXHIBIT D: Location Map