

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 31-49

1. Name of Property

historic Ken-Gar - Palisades Recreation Center
 other Ken-Gar Recreation Building (preferred)

2. Location

street and number Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park, 4140 Wexford Drive not for publication
 city, town Kensington vicinity
 county Montgomery

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name M-NCPPC
 street and number 8787 Georgia Avenue telephone 301-495-2595
 city, town Silver Spring state MD zip code 20910

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Land Records liber 1632 folio 17
 city, town Rockville tax map HQ31 tax parcel P617 tax ID number 00968976

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
 Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
 Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
 Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
 Recorded by HABS/HAER
 Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
 Other: M-NCPPC

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Total
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown	Number of Contributing Resources	
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	previously listed in the Inventory	
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:	<u> </u>	

7. Description

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Condition

excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

SUMMARY

The Ken-Gar – Palisades Recreation Center is located in the Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park in Kensington, Maryland. This structure is composed of two temporary Federal surplus buildings that were originally used by the U.S. Army during World War II. When the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) received these buildings as a donation in 1953, it altered the exterior appearance to better assimilate this public facility into the surrounding suburbia. The building now is leased as a daycare center.

SITE

The Ken-Gar Recreation Building consists of two separate rectangular pre-fab structures merged to create an L-shaped facility. Located off Wexford Drive, this facility is the focal point of the 19.853 acre Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park. The site features a playground, softball and baseball fields, multi-use fields, and tennis courts. A trail takes patrons behind the building to a bronze marker that notes the former Newport Mill that used to stand further down the valley of the park in the 19th century along Rock Creek. That site is the location where Josiah Henson, an enslaved man, had a spiritual conversation. This connection is the reason that the community has placed a plaque on the façade of the building commemorating Henson. Very little planting up near the building remains, and none of it is believed to reflect the original landscape plan.

EXTERIOR

The L-shaped frame building is faced in vertical wooden planks. Concrete steps lead from the parking lot up to the building on a hillside, and a paved walkway surrounds the building.

The three-bay, one-story north façade, which measures approximately 20 feet wide, holds the central doorway flanked on either side by double-hung 2/2 horizontal muntin windowson its gabled end.

The two-bay, east façade measures approximately 20 feet wide and has two double-hung 2/2 horizontal muntin windows. The northern side of the area where the two temporary buildings were merged has three-bays, while the opposite side has two bays. Five double-hung 2/2 horizontal muntin windows sit on the two façades.

The south rear elevation is four bays wide, and measures approximately 24 feet wide. A wooden handicapped-accessible ramp entry on the gabled end leads out to a paved driveway leading to the parking lot. A projecting hood extends outward over the rear entryway. Three double-hung 2/2 horizontal muntin windows sit to the right of the doorway.

The west façade measures 50 feet and is six bays wide. Six double-hung 2/2 horizontal muntin windows sit on this façade. This section of the building fronts Wexford Drive and Rock Creek.

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INTERIOR

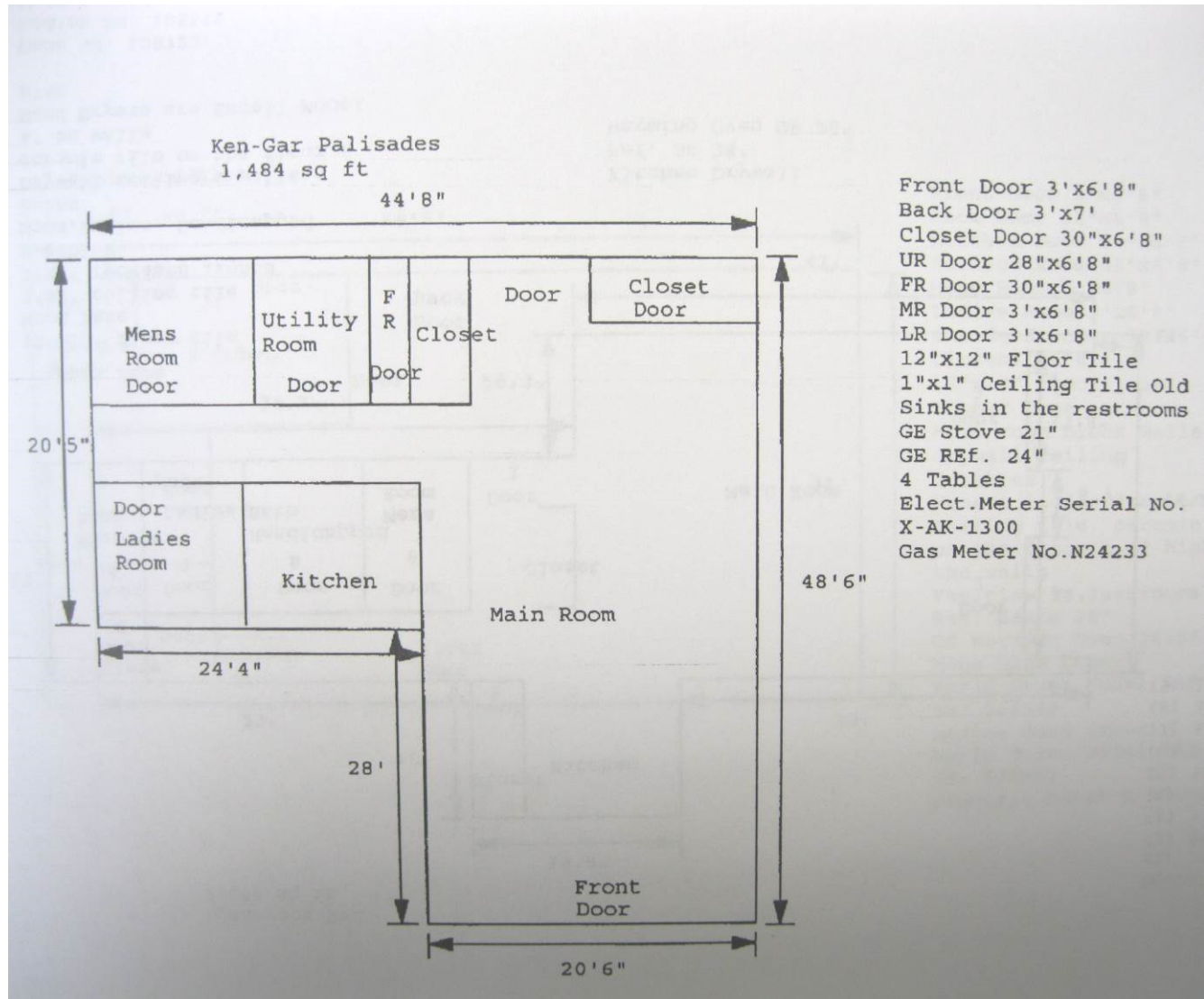
The interior of this 1,484 square foot building is divided into a large, open meeting space, with kitchen and restroom wings off to the side. There is also a janitor's closet next to the restrooms, and additional closets toward the rear of the building. The knotty pine paneling, popular in interior spaces through the early and mid-20th century, is found intact throughout most of the large open room. The building has an acoustical tile ceiling and fluorescent lighting. New bamboo flooring was laid by Parks staff in August 2012.

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Facilities Management Plan of Ken-Gar, 2002. Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Specific dates	Architect/Builder	DOD-Naval Ordnance Lab/M-NCPPC
Construction dates c1942-45; 1956		

Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

SUMMARY

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) was founded in 1927 as a stream-valley park system protecting the headwaters of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. In addition, the Commission's charge was to oversee subdivision review and the creation and maintenance of a recreational park system. Along the stream valleys and, later, in the neighborhood and regional parks, the Commission augmented the natural landscape with the construction of buildings to house indoor recreation activities, such as parties, club meetings, scouts, daycare, and summer camps.

As M-NCPPC approaches its 100th anniversary and out of a mission to provide cultural resource stewardship, the Montgomery County Department of Parks has identified park recreation buildings worthy of preservation. Currently, there are 30 buildings that serve or have operated as recreation buildings (now termed park activity buildings) throughout the 35,000 acre park system.¹ Originally, there were at least 41 of these community facilities. Some of these structures were "purpose-built," while others were converted to recreational use. In order to show a history of the evolution of park activity buildings over the lifetime of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (1927 to present), the Department of Parks' Cultural Resources Stewardship Section proposes to preserve at least one building from each of the five respective park community/recreation building eras.²

***Era I: The Origins of the M-NCPPC Park System: 1927-1940**

***Era II: The World War II-Era Buildings: 1941-1946**

***Era III: Conversion of World War II Federal Surplus Buildings: 1953-1956**

¹ 2007 M-NCPPC *Catalog of Recreation and Ancillary Buildings* defines recreation buildings as "operated for the benefit of the general public, rented by the hour with Fees set by the Park Commission, reserved through Park Permits, and maintained by the Department of Parks Central Maintenance Divisions."

² In addition to recognizing the recreation buildings still standing, it is worth identifying the (at least) eleven structures that have since been demolished or transferred to the Montgomery County Recreation Department: Cabin John Recreation Center (off MacArthur Blvd.), Garrett Park Estates Community Building, Jesup-Blair Cabin, Kensington Park Community Building (off Frederick Ave.), Long Branch Recreation Center, Randolph Hills Recreation Center, Rosemary Hills Recreation Center, Scotland Community Building, Sligo Avenue Recreation Center, Sligo Cabin, and Wheaton Woods Recreation Center.

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***Era IV: Purpose-Built Community Recreation Centers during Cold War Suburbanization: 1950-1990**

***Era V: Repurposing Structures to Become Activity Buildings, 1937-1968**

Five recreation buildings are being individually nominated to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. Each is the best representative of each of the different eras. Ken-Gar was selected to represent Era III.³

The Ken-Gar Recreation Building is a structure made of two standard-plan pre-fab buildings originally constructed during World War II by the Army. Created to meet the post-war recreational needs in down county, Parks architects renovated the structures to have a domestic architectural appearance that was fitting for the surrounding suburbia. This facility has strong architectural integrity, retaining details of the mid-20th century period. The land nearby it remains undeveloped. Therefore, Ken-Gar Recreation Center meets the following criteria of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 24A-3:

- 1(a) has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the County, State, or Nation;
- 1(d) exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the County and its communities;
- 2(a) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction;

NARRATIVE HISTORY

During the 1940s, the Commission began to consider buying or accepting donated surplus Federal structures for recreational activities. Military housing/storage surplus, for example, was a nice fit, as the open shape of these structures could accommodate a large number of patrons and the simplicity of materials made them an affordable alternative to the rustic lodges constructed in the 1930s and early 1940s. As Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) converted these old temporary buildings into inviting public structures, it opted to employ the Ranch style design to integrate these park facilities into surrounding neighborhoods. The Ranch style, which originated in the mid-1930s, gained popularity in the post war years with the spread of suburbs and the availability of larger building lots which permitted sprawling floor plans. This strategy is best embodied at the Ken-Gar Recreation Building, located near Rock Creek. Here, two separate pre-fab structures were joined to create a welcoming community center for the Ken-Gar community. Opened in 1956, this building was an actively permitted facility but currently it is now leased and utilized as a day care center.

Era III: Conversion of World War II Federal Surplus Buildings: 1953-1956

Representative Buildings: "Pre-Fab"

- Hillandale (pre-1946/1953, rear "T-6" Section)

³ For further information on the various design periods, see MIHP nomination forms for Meadowbrook, Pinecrest, Veirs Mill, and Norbeck.

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Address: Hillandale Local Park, 10615 New Hampshire Avenue, Hillandale

- Ken-Gar (pre-1946/1956, "T-2/T-3" Sections)

Address: Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park, 4140 Wexford Drive, Kensington

Candidate(s) for Preservation:

- Ken-Gar: eligible for the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*

Local publicity was generated over the transfer of architectural property from White Oak Naval Ordnance Laboratory (NOL) to M-NCPPC. A July 24, 1956 *Washington Post* article describes "six prefabricated houses formerly used for experimental purposes were turned over to M-NCPPC yesterday by the Naval Ordnance Laboratory. The houses, worth about \$35,000, will be remodeled as community buildings and set up in recreation centers. The centers are Wheaton Woods, Ken-Gar-Rock Creek Palisades, Hillandale, Westmoreland Hills, and Randolph Hills."⁴ On the same day, the *Evening Star* photo caption states: "The first of six prefabricated houses that the Naval Ordnance Laboratory has turned over for use as recreational buildings in nearby Maryland parks, is inspected by Sidney M. Oliver, vice-chairman of the M-NCPPC, and Capt. W.W. Wilbourne, commander of the naval laboratory at White Oak, Md."⁵ The location of the first delivery was not specified. The original use and date of fabrication of these buildings is unknown, but Bob Ridgway of the White Oak Laboratory Alumni Association reported that when NOL was under construction, numerous trailers and temporary buildings lined Bowditch Road. The last remaining temporary buildings at NOL were those at the scrap yard: T-1, which was a garage use for the original fire truck, and T-5, which functioned as the ordnance office.

In 1955, M-NCPPC had proposed 74 new recreational areas in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, as disclosed in the 13 January edition of the *Washington Post*. One of the areas revealed to the Commission's Citizens' Advisory Council was Ken-Gar Rock Creek Palisades. Because Ken-Gar encompassed less than 10 acres, it was deemed a local center. M-NCPPC purchased the land that once was the encampment for the Civilian Conservation Corp who was stationed in Garrett Park while completing various tasks, such as constructing the Meadowbrook Recreation Building, in the Rock Creek Park Extension during the Great Depression. The land, according to historian Munro P. Meyersburg, was marshy, hence it was "drained by the removal of a dam downstream and a new playground was built."⁶ The location of this new park, however, was closer to the new subdivision, Rock Creek Palisades, as opposed to the predominantly African American community of Ken-Gar, and these local children were not able to use these facilities as easily.⁷

⁴ "Parks Group Given 10 Buildings by Navy," *Washington Post* 24 July 1956.

⁵ M-NCPPC Archives, Saddlebrook.

⁶ Munro P. Meyersburg, "A History of Ken Gar." <http://home.earthlink.net/~ken-gar/id3.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

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By June 1956 the Ken-Gar Recreation Building Site Plan shows a purely rectangular building. The drawing identifies, very faintly, what appears to be the division of interior of space, with four rooms in the northern end of the building. Less than a month later, the July 1956 Ken-Gar Recreation Building Location Plan shows an enlarged structure, with two separate buildings merged to create an L-shaped facility. The notes specify the structure would include "Navy Buildings No. T-3 and Section of T-2 (24'4" X 20'4"). The T-3 Section fronts Rock Creek and to the east behind the longer block is the T-2 Section. It is possible that M-NCPPC needed to attach the smaller T-2 building to accommodate the four interior rooms identified in the June 1956 drawing. These knotty-pine paneled rooms are still intact today, serving as a men's bathroom, women's bathroom, a kitchen, and utility room/closet. In short, the building size and configuration has not changed any since July 1956. Unlike Hillandale which suffered structural damage, Ken-Gar has a high level of integrity, retaining its original structure and materials.⁸

⁸ M-NCPPC Park (Microfiche) Records, Parkside Map Room. Ken-Gar Local Park File.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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M-NCPPC Archives, Saddlebrook. Collection includes M-NCPPC *Annual Reports*.
M-NCPPC Papers (Minutes/Proceedings), Maryland State Archives
Ken-Gar File, Parkside.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 46.7 acres (originally part of Rock Creek Stream Valley Park)
Acreage of historical setting 19.853 (Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park)
Quadrangle name Kensington Quadrangle scale: 1:24000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The historic environmental setting includes that part of the parcel associated with the recreation building and its functions in the Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park. The additional acreage in the parcel that is associated with Rock Creek Stream Valley Park (Units 3, 4 and 5 of the original park acquisition) does not function in association with the recreation building, and are therefore not part of the setting. It will exclude the Newport Mill archeological site.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Jamie F. Kuhns, Senior Historian, and Emma Byrnes, Cultural Resources Stewardship Section		
organization	M-NCPPC, Montgomery Parks	date	15 August 2013
street & number	9500 Brunett Avenue	telephone	301-650-4362
city or town	Silver Spring	state	MD

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

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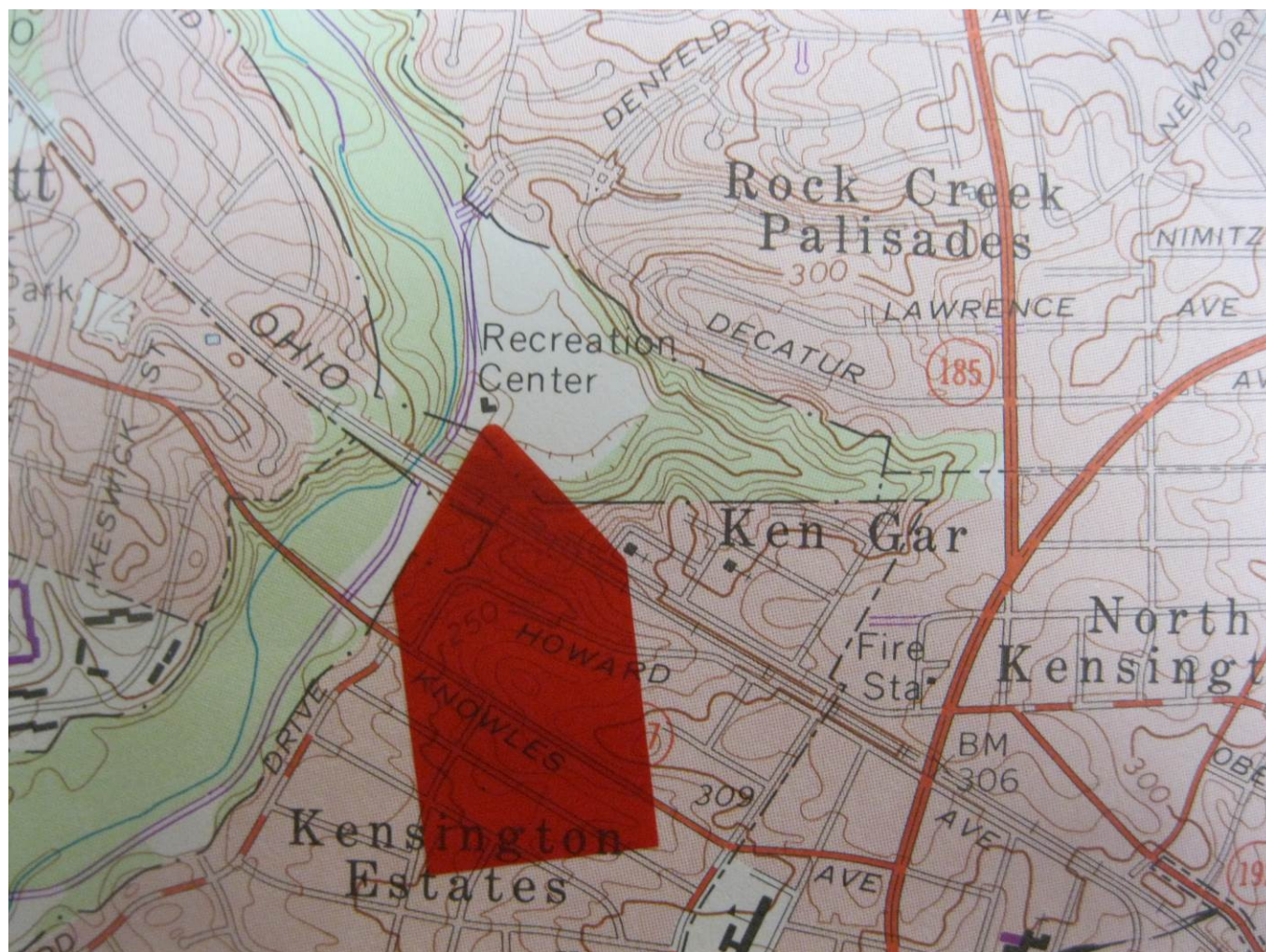


Figure 1. USGS Kensington Quad. Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

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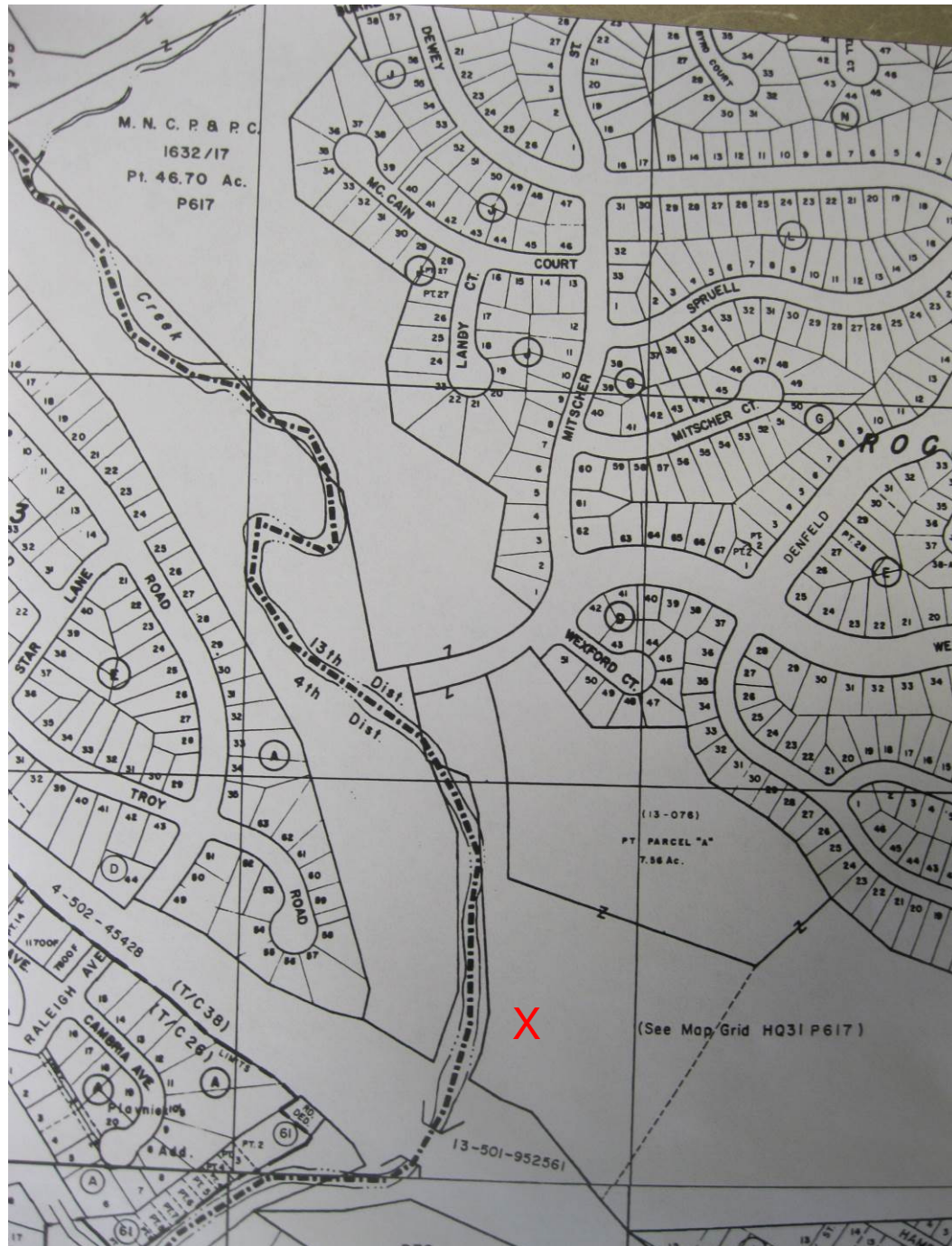


Figure 2. Tax Map: Property P617. Recreation center location is shown with an X. Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

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Figure 3. Aerial view of Ken-Gar Recreation Building at Ken-Gar Palisades Local Park, 2008. Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

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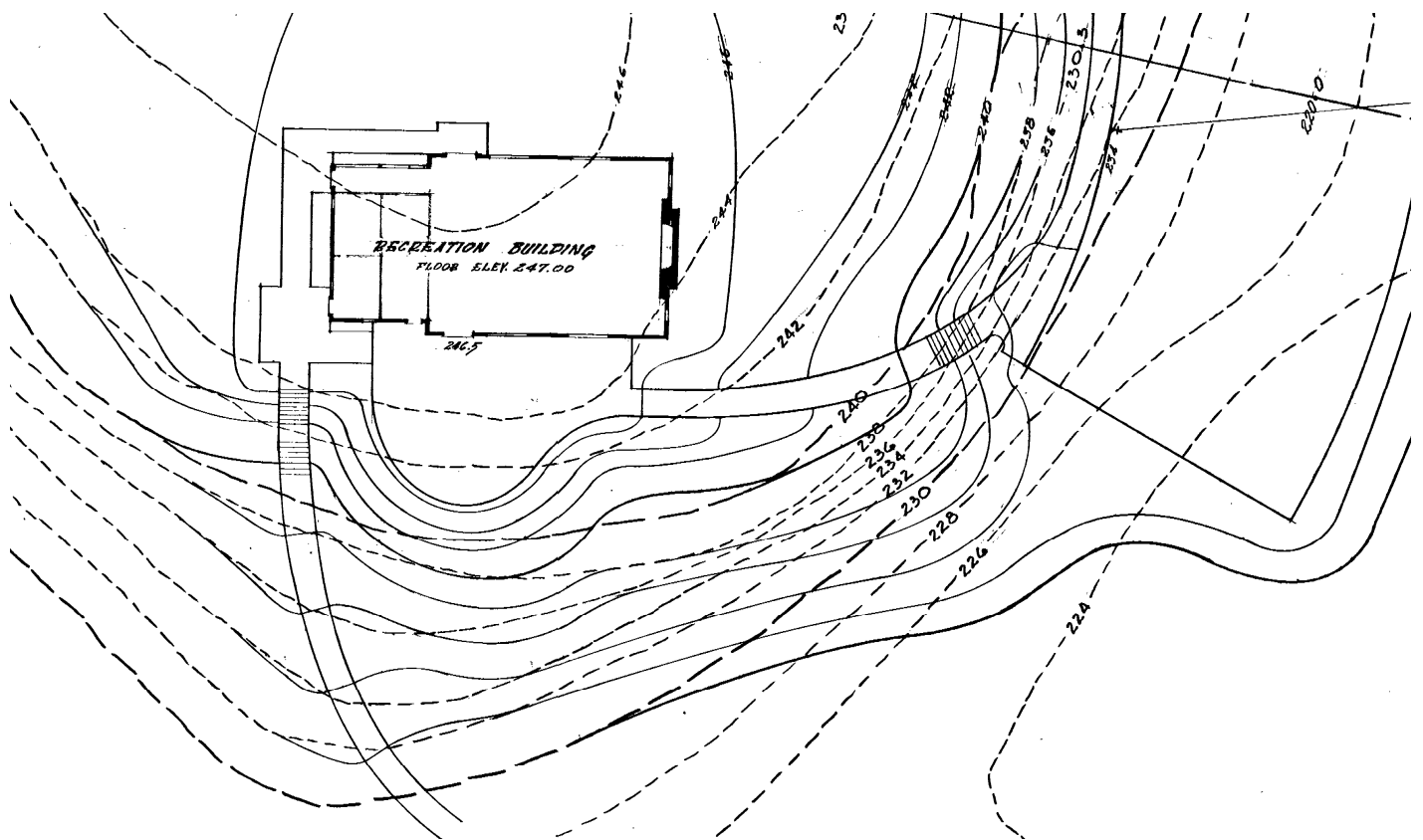


Figure 4. This site plan of June 1956 shows one rectangular building on site. "Recreation Building Site Plan," M-NCPPC

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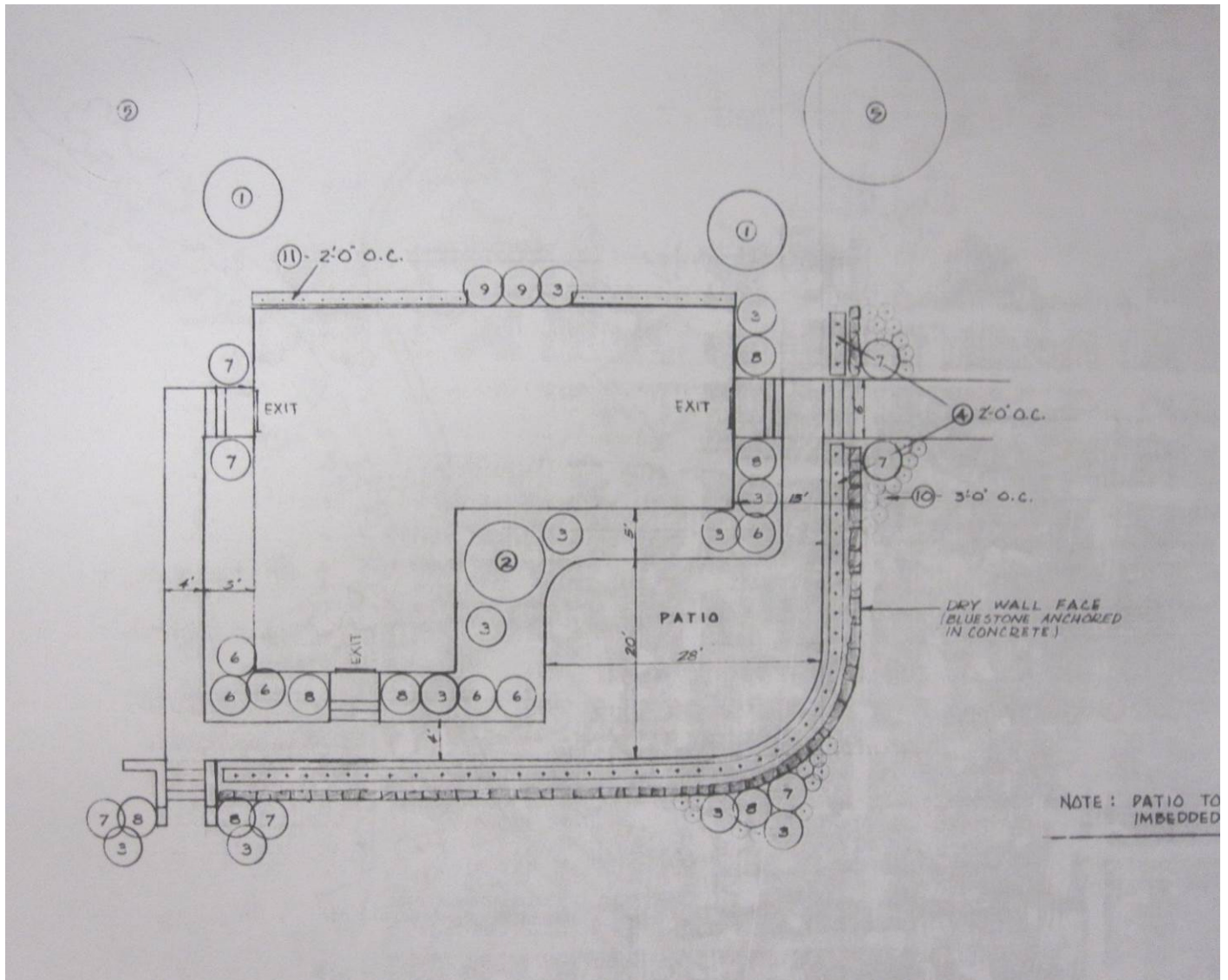


Figure 6. "Planting Plan for Ken-Gar Recreation Center," (1957). Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

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**KEN-GAR –
PALISADES
RECREATION
CENTER**
West End of
Wexford Drive

Area Number 19

Map Number 1

Recreation Room – 20 x 48

Kitchen – Yes

Tables – 4

Folding Chairs – 50

Figure 7. Ken-Gar – Palisades Recreation Center in the M-NCPPC *Guide to M-NCPPC Recreation Centers* (1962).
Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

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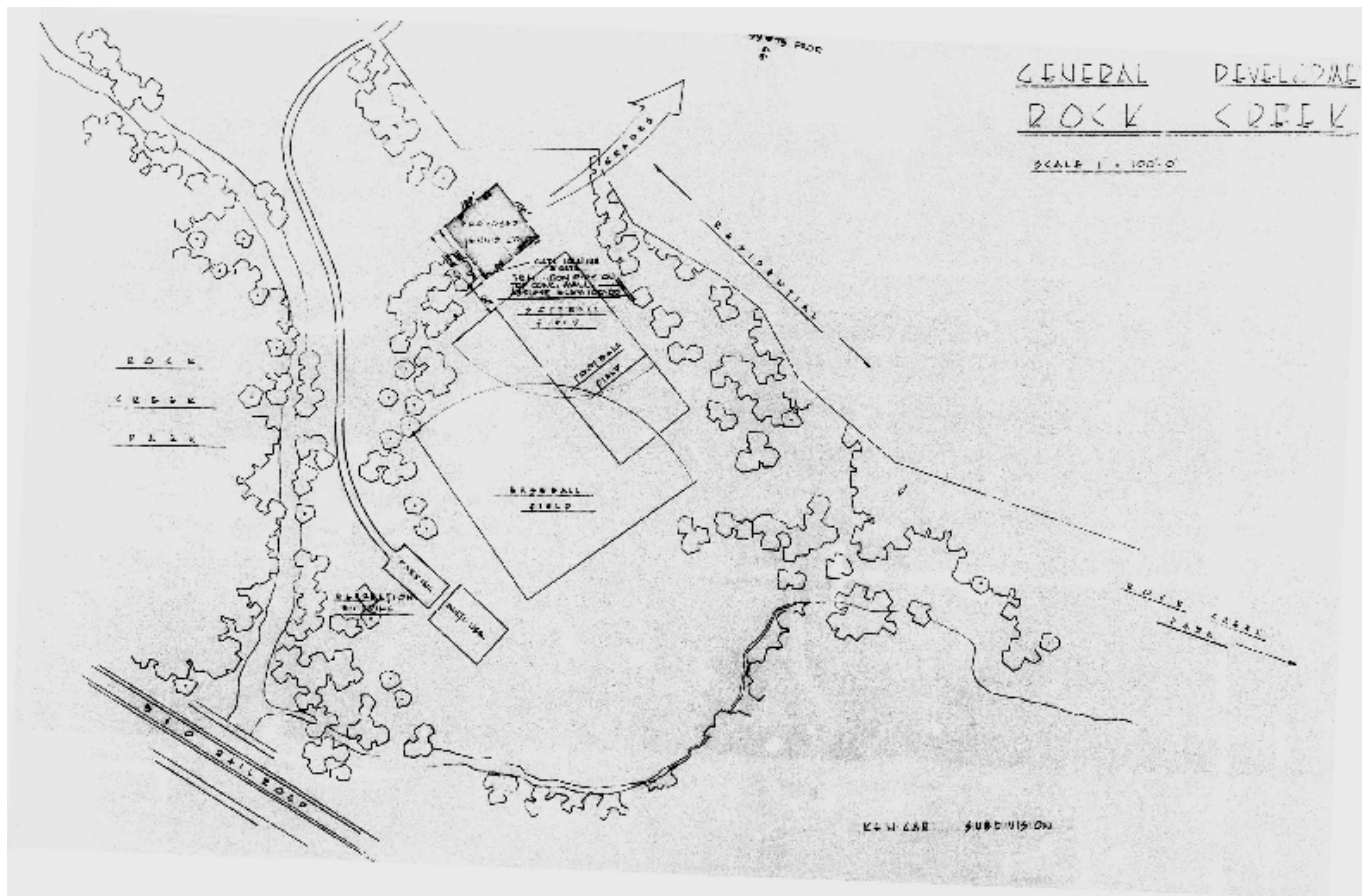


Figure 8. "General Development Plan for Rock Creek Park," 1960. Courtesy: M-NCPPC.

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Figure 9. View of Ken-Gar – Palisades Recreation Center, front (north) façade.

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Figure 10. View of Ken-Gar – Palisades Recreation Center, northeast corner.

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Figure 11. View of Ken-Gar – Palisades Recreation Center, south (rear) and east elevations.

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Figure 12. View of Ken-Gar – Palisades Recreation Center, west and south (rear) elevations.

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Figure 13. View of interior, in the main room looking towards the front door.

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Figure 14: View of interior, in the main room looking toward the back door.

