



# National Preservation Institute

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## The Recent Past: Identification and Evaluation of Mid-20th-Century Resources

### Seminar Overview

Review nationwide trends in mid-20th-century houses and commercial structures, with an emphasis on the evolution of suburban development patterns, construction methods, and building types. Examine era-specific factors that help to identify and evaluate these buildings in terms of their significance for eligibility for listing in the National Register and consideration of Section 106, Section 110, and Section 4(f) regulatory issues.

#### Identification:

- Review major trends in mid-20th-century architecture to understand how new concepts were adapted for popular use, with an emphasis on large-development and merchant-builder homes. Consider popular designs and their sources vs. high-style architect-designed buildings.
- Review styles and building types from 1945 into the 1970's. Identify character-defining period features and important designers and developers, with an emphasis on minimum traditionals, ranch houses, and new house types such as split-levels. Discuss evolving terminology and the emergence of Post Modern and Neo-traditional building.
- Discuss post-war materials and construction methods, including prefabrication, modular, post-and-beam, steel, concrete, and aluminum construction, and changes from traditional stick building to Levitt-style mass building. Examine the increasing use of prefabricated houses, especially the Lustron porcelain-steel-panel house.
- Examine practical building types that came to maturity during this era and supported the new and emerging communities: highway commercial strips and shopping centers, gas stations, fast-food restaurants, motor hotels, banks, suburban office parks, office towers, townhouses, and garden apartments.
- Examine regional expressionism through differences in building patterns and designs.
- Review the significance of large-scale, post-war housing developments and their site plans, work by mass builders such as the Levitt Brothers and David Bohannon, and the particular social and preservation problems raised by these developments.
- Review the effect of post-war developments within the house on the use and appearance of the building, such as HVAC, materials, bathrooms, kitchens, and family rooms.
- Case study examples: the Eichler developments and San Lorenzo in California; Hollin Hills and related developments around Washington, DC; and the several Levittowns

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## **Evaluation:**

- Discuss integrity, evaluation of significance, eligibility for the National Register, and the “50-year rule” to qualify for the NR at less than 50 years of age.
- Discuss the contribution or diminution by modern buildings in older areas and historic districts. Examine how to effectively evaluate the significance of large developments or individual ranch houses.
- Examine the legacy of Urban Renewal projects in historic areas and how to assess their historical significance.
- Case study: Philadelphia’s Society Hill Urban Renewal Project and related Old-City and Independence National Historical Park issues

## **Regulation:**

- Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. Discuss architectural treatments for repurposed buildings, additions, alterations, infill, and façadism.
- Section 106, 110, and 4(f). Discuss the importance of any single McDonalds or a 15,000-house Levittown development.
- Discuss local regulation and recognition of the recent past.