



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 styles and types. Examine era-specific factors that help to identify these buildings. Discuss how to determine the significance and integrity of resources when evaluating eligibility for listing on the National Register and for tax credits. Review these considerations in meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Section 106, 110, and 4(f) requirements.

Agenda

Identification:

- Review major trends in mid-20th-century architecture to understand how new concepts were adapted for popular use, with an emphasis on large subdivisions and small-development merchant-builder homes. Consider popular designs and their sources vs. high-style architect-designed buildings.
- Review building styles and 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, house plans, and construction methods, including modular, post-and-beam, steel, concrete, and aluminum construction. Review changes from traditional stick building to Levitt-style mass building and the wide use of planbooks. Examine the increasing use of prefabricated houses, including National Homes, the largest manufacturer, and Lustron porcelain-steel-panel houses.
- 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, finish materials, bathrooms, kitchens, and family rooms.

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- Case study examples: the Eichler developments and San Lorenzo in California; Hollin Hills and related developments around Washington, DC; and the several Levittowns

Evaluation:

- Discuss how to determine the significance and integrity of contributing resources when evaluating eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and for local, state, and federal tax credits. Examine problems surrounding the “50-year rule” and qualifying resources for federal programs when they are less than 50 years old.
- 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 as they have matured.

- Case study: Philadelphia’s Society Hill Urban Renewal Project and related Old-City and Independence National Historical Park issues: consideration of the deteriorated area, intervention, and results

Regulation:

- Discuss architectural treatments for repurposed buildings, additions, alterations, infill, and façadism under the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards.
- Consider the requirements of federal laws and regulations under Sections 106, 110, and 4(f). Discuss the use of documentation as a formal recordation method for mitigation purposes or in the study and evaluation of a building for the National Register through HABS or another process. Explore the importance of any single McDonalds or a 15,000-house Levittown development.
- Discuss local regulations and their impact, and recognition of the recent past within older historic districts.