

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **IT'S NOT UGLY, IT'S THE RECENT PAST:
FACING AESTHETIC CHALLENGES OF
MODERN ARCHITECTURE WITHIN
HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Joy Tober, Master's Historic Preservation, 2008

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Preservationists constantly face new challenges in their pursuit to preserve America's built heritage. Among those challenges is the recent past, which has been gaining a great deal of interest over the years. The "recent past" is a term used to refer to historic resources younger than 50 years old. Although hard for many to think of as historic, these resources do give us insight into our past and are an important part of our tangible history. Unfortunately, preservation of the recent past has proven very difficult. Underage resources face many of the same obstacles as "traditional" properties, but also must contend with unique challenges. Aesthetic challenges are by far the most important. Negative perceptions of mid-century modern architecture as well as current assessment methods, which rely heavily on architectural values to narrate our past, hinder opportunities to better understand the importance of these valuable yet vulnerable resources. By recognizing these hindrances we can begin exploring new ways of determining a significance that better reflects the principles of the modern movement.

IT'S NOT UGLY, IT'S THE RECENT PAST:
FACING AESTHETIC CHALLENGES OF
MODERN ARCHITECTURE WITHIN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

By

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Dedication

To my mother Judy and my sister Jennifer for supporting me along the way. To my husband Richard for giving me the push I needed to finish. Thank you all, for without you, I would not be me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“In our hast to move on to anther century,
we often fail to understand our own”

Ada Louis Huxtable

What is the “recent past”? In the world of historic preservation, the “recent past” generally refers to historic resources younger than 50 years old. By definition, this includes the built environment constructed between 1958 and the present. By association, it refers to the modern movement as a whole, in particularly mid twentieth-century modern architecture. The National Register of Historic Places, a national listing of resources considered historically significant, does not allow for properties under 50 years of age to be listed unless they can show “exceptional importance” under Criteria Consideration G. Because state and local designations often look to the National Register as a guide, the same rules usually apply. Although formal recognition on a county, state or national level does not necessarily mean that the resource is protected against demolition or alteration, some protection is provided by way of recognition and consideration. Ironically, the recent past resources that are denied this protection can be argued to be the ones that need it the most.

The built environment that came out of the early and mid-twentieth century represents a time that experienced great social, cultural, economical and political change. Advancements in technology and science allowed architects to experiment with new materials and design. Depleted downtowns were “renewed” with public housing projects and economic prosperity as well as social change altered the face of the American landscape. Corporate modernism in the form of glass curtain walls

crowded the urban landscape and all while suburbs grew exponentially on the outskirts of cities. These changes culminated in a wealth of new architectural building types such as shopping centers, fast food restaurants and drive-in movie theaters. As with traditional historic resources, properties from the recent past tell us a story and provide us with insight into “who we are today, who we were, and the many ways that we have lived”¹ throughout the twentieth-century.

Unfortunately, preserving these important resources has proven to be very challenging. It should be of no surprise that one of the top concerns plaguing preservationists today is in regards to managing the volume of recent past resources. Due to the shifting social, technological and economical changes that happened after World War II, the building stock of America grew at an exponential rate. Amazingly enough, 75% of the buildings that exist today were built after World War II.² The pure volume and variety of resources can be daunting, leaving many preservationists wondering where to start, how to assess significance as well as determine which resources are worth preserving. Although surveys are usually the first step in tackling such an issue, a great deal of staff time and a good amount of money is needed and convincing others to spend money on roadside icons, shopping malls and public housing complexes can be extremely difficult.³

Conservation is another important issue concerning recent past preservation. Building expansion, mass production, consumer consumption and technological experimentation eventually led to new building materials and designs. Regrettably,

¹ Jeanne Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, Preservation Books (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2006-2007), 1.

² Theodore H. M. Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 158.

³ Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, 8.

because many of these new materials were experimental their lifespan was either unknown or only intended to last a few years. Some materials, such as aluminum, have begun to take on a different appearance essentially erasing their intended message, while others are no longer manufactured making it that much more difficult to replace.

Resources from the recent past are currently facing real threats. Traditional historic resources are not the only ones affected by the “McMansion” trend sweeping across America. Mid-century houses also face demolition in favor of bigger and more fashionable homes, even more so due to the perception that these homes are not historic and therefore dispensable. Our country is now developing at a rate equal to the growth that followed World War II. With such high development pressures, our current tangible past is at great risk of being lost. Inappropriate alterations also affect recent past resources as people seek ways to combine current styles to existing structures. However, demolition and alterations are not the only threat these buildings face; a lack of knowledge and appreciation on the part of the public and preservationists also contributes to their decline.⁴ Without understanding the meaning behind the choice of materials and designs how can one objectively judge the worth of these buildings?

The most controversial topic regarding preservation of mid-century buildings is the fifty-year threshold, as mentioned earlier. Established “in order to assure historical perspective and avoid judgments based on current or recent popular

⁴ Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, 4.

trends,”⁵ many preservationists question the validity of the rule. Some professionals feel this threshold is still necessary today not only because it allows for a clear perspective of the site within its historical context but also because of the volume of mid-century resources. There are still so many “historic” resources yet to be surveyed and evaluated and many professionals fear that without a fifty-year threshold, their already stretched budgets will not be able to accommodate everything.⁶ Some of the concerns among other professionals wishing to eliminate the rule include; the perception that buildings under 50 years are not “historic” and therefore are not worthy of preservation and the fact that due to quickly deteriorating experimental and short-lived materials many of these buildings will be irreparable before they even achieve 50 years.

Aesthetics is also a concern among proponents of the recent past. Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. Unfortunately, when it comes to architecture this statement falls a little short. It is not uncommon to hear sentiments such as “eyesore,” “ugly” or “boring” when talking about modern architecture and the general public are the only ones that feel this way, there are many preservationists that will agree. In fact, one preservationist has expressed that “the vast majority of what has been built in American in the last 50 years is crap.”⁷ For many, modern architecture is the complete antithesis to beauty as portrayed in earlier architectural designs

⁵ Marcella Sherfy and W. Ray Luce, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years, Preface,” *National Register Bulletins*, #13 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998) http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/nrb22_preface.HTM (accessed May 1, 2008).

⁶ John H. Sprinkle, Jr., ““Of Exceptional Importance:” The Origins of the “Fifty-Year Rule” in Historic Preservation,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 2 (May 2007):102.

⁷ Donovan D. Rypkema, “Saving the Recent Past-A Philosophical and Practical Dissent,” *Forum Journal* 20, no.1 (Fall 2005).

because there are no details or decorative ornamentation and nothing to stimulate our “visual hunger.”⁸ For others, modern is “indifferent to human scale, comfort, or well-being.”⁹ So how do you convince someone that a structure they find visually unattractive, which is located in the community where they live is worth preserving?

Perhaps one of the most important concerns when it comes to preservation of the recent past is evaluation. One of the biggest obstacles that stand in the way of objective evaluation is how people perceive these sites. As a direct result of urban renewal, many professionals, as well as the public, find little redeeming qualities in the recent past and therefore find it difficult to be impartial. For others it is a matter of memory and in order for something to be historic it must have taken place outside the scope of their memory. Another dilemma facing professionals is the vast amounts of new categories of resources not usually considered historic such as shopping centers and fast food restaurants.¹⁰ How do you place significance on a Big Mac and McFlurry? Some feel that due to the volume of these resources they should be held to a higher standard and possess a greater degree of integrity than their more historic counterparts.¹¹

Current evaluation methods as applied to resources of the recent past focus more on architectural significance (Criteria C) than on any other values and this approach hinders the preservation of these valuable properties. (A more in depth explanation of National Register Criteria for Evaluation is in Chapter 4) The

⁸ Henry Hope Reed, Jr., *The Golden City* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), quoted in a review by H. Allen Brooks, Jr., *College Art Journal*, 19, no. 3 (Spring, 1960): 292.

⁹ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 25.

¹⁰ W. Ray Luce, “Kent State, White Castles and Subdivision: Evaluating the Recent Past,” *Forum Journal* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1995).

¹¹ Jennifer Emerson and Martin L.J. Newman, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Preservationists Debate the Recent Past,” *Forum Journal* 20, no. 1 (Fall 2005).

preservation profession has often focused on preserving “the “rare,” the “last,” the “special,” the “best,” [and] it has been a resource’s uniqueness that traditionally has been considered the most important signpost of its significance.”¹² Many would argue that we have moved past this “quest for the best” approach over the past decade or two and although preservation has begun to acknowledge the multiplicity that is inherent in historic structures, resources from the recent past are often denied this consideration. Carol D. Shull, Keeper of the National Register, points out in two separate articles, one dated 1995 and the other dated 2001, of the current criteria, architectural significance is by far the most used when applied to the recent past, next in line are social history, politics/government, commerce, transportation and finally engineering.¹³ Because of the ubiquitous nature of the recent past and the fact that the majority of these structures are a hybrid of design ideas built largely in collaboration or by unknown architects, there is concern that they will not last long enough to reach their 50 year mark if judged primarily on architectural values.

There are numerous challenges that stand in the way of truly understanding the significance that recent past resources have to offer beyond aesthetics. Among these challenges is the visual standard set for “historic” and “non-historic” due in part to the 50-year rule, a heavy reliance on standard styles to determine significance, the difficulties finding significance that best represents modern architecture and finally

¹² Deborah Edge Abele and Grady Gammage, Jr., “The Shifting Signposts of Significance,” in *Preserving the Recent Past* 2 eds. Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks (Washington, DC: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2000), 2-7.

¹³ Carol D. Shull and Beth L. Savage, “Trends in Recognizing Places for Significance in the Recent Past,” *Forum Journal* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1995); Carol D. Shull and Beth L. Savage, “From the Glass House to Stonewall: National Register Recognition of the Recent Past,” *National Register of Historic Places Workshop* (Washington, D.C. March 25, 2001), <http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/01workshop/glasshouses.htm> (accessed April 1, 2008).

the negative perception of modern architecture in relation to urban renewal. By recognizing the hindrances that prevent us from fully comprehending the importance of these valuable yet vulnerable resources, we can begin exploring new ways of determining a significance that better reflects the principles of the modern movement.

Chapter 2: A Concise History of Modern Architecture

The modern movement was a very complex moment in time that brought about myriad changes, which helped to characterize the twentieth-century. Modern architecture ushered in novel approaches to design that incorporated social concerns with technological advancements. Because of the complexities involved with the modern movement this is by no means an in depth or extensive account of that period but rather a concise history to place modern architecture within its own context.

The destruction of World War I, new developments in technology and progressive attitudes about the future all played a part in the formation of a new architecture in early twentieth-century Europe. Pioneers of the Modern movement such as Le Corbusier in France, Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius along with Mies van der Rohe in Germany, encouraged experimentation, innovative designs and a desire to improve social conditions. Modernist maxim's such as "ornament is crime" and "less is more" demanded clean lines and functionality over elaborate expressions that typified the past.¹⁴ Focusing more on internal spaces, architects chose simple geometric forms. These visual elements not only expressed the wish to enter a new design phase but also coincided with the new technologies and scientific progress of the day making the architectural statement that society was progressing forward towards a better future.

In the United States, setting the standards for change were Louis Sullivan, creating new designs in skyscrapers and Frank Lloyd Wright, who's "less ornamental and open-plan house from the 1900's and 1910's introduced America to a simplified

¹⁴ Nathan Glazer, *From a Cause to a Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 12.

idiom that focused on design elements.”¹⁵ By the 1920’s, European modern influences began ushering their way into America. Modernisms simplistic approach to design fell in line with the needs for housing during the Depression. Cheaper materials and mass manufacturing made it easier to build homes as well as public works projects throughout the country.

The decades immediately following World War II were a “forward-looking period during which modernity, as defined more by the speed, simplicity, and functionality that helped win the war...was accepted as the way of life.”¹⁶ The post war economic boom and technological advances allowed for widespread development. The middle class grew at a rapid rate raising consumer consumption to an all time high and putting demands on builders to create even more suburban communities. Wartime demands for new materials and scientific study resulted in mass-produced prefabricated parts taking home building to a new level. Between 1950 and 1960 approximately 13 million new houses were built, 11 million of those were located in suburban areas. These affordable prefabricated houses coincided with modern design allowing for large windows and more open spaces, which gave owners a more enjoyable living environment. Along with new housing developments came shopping centers offering all the conveniences found in the city.¹⁷ In the urban centers, public housing began to appear. Intended to provide “decent, clean, affordable shelter for the general population,”¹⁸ public housing represented hope for the future. Constructed with inexpensive materials and designed within a park-like

¹⁵ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 14.

¹⁶ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 4.

¹⁷ Gwendolyn Wright, *Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 151-193.

¹⁸ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 5.

setting, these high-rise super-blocks were supposed to alleviate crowded and unhealthy conditions.¹⁹ Unfortunately, a majority of these public housing projects failed and “dispossessed more than 400,000 families between 1949 and 1967,” a majority of them African Americans who did not have the financial means to move to better living conditions and were discriminated against in the mostly all white suburbs.²⁰

Automobile obsessed Americans in the 1950’s created the need for more roads, which eventually led to a new interstate system stretching across the country. This new expansion allowed people to explore America resulting in the creation of new building types such as road-side motels and franchise fast-food restaurants which took on a more flashy modern look by “mixing synthetic materials, bright colours and startling shapes, often derived from engineering advances.”²¹

America’s rising capitalism, as can be seen in city centers, often acquired a more strict form of modern design. Considered the International Style, corporate modernism is often what comes to most people’s minds when they think of modern architecture. Tall glass curtain office buildings dominated urban centers visibly representing the order and flexibility of the spaces within as well as the stability and reliability of the company. Other corporations chose to create business parks in suburban areas where extensive land allowed them to explore new designs and construct multiple buildings.²²

Events happening both within America as well as throughout the world had

¹⁹ Wright, *Modern Architectures in History*, 177-178.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 153-154

²¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

²² *Ibid.*, 156-166.

direct influences on many modern designs and the formation of new resources. The Cold War led to the creation of bomb shelters, underground launch sites, and military industrial complexes. Curvilinear forms, which the government claimed “deflected radioactive fallout”²³ found their way onto various building types. Advances in science, air travel and the space race gave way to architecture that emulated progress, speed and “transformed the look of cities and highways with upswept winglike roofs, domes, satellite shapes and starbursts that became the dominant visual language of motels, diners and gasoline stations.”²⁴ The positive outlook of the modern movement continued throughout much of the 1960’s, but unfortunately, “most of the nation came to realize the limits of post-war promises as people confronted the entrenched problems of racism and poverty throughout the country.”²⁵ The ubiquitous nature of modern architecture began to wane and lose popularity. Protests against the war and in favor of civil rights highlighted the fact that modern architecture and design was not the answer to change. By the 1970’s, Modernism had fell by the wayside and postmodernism, which referenced earlier styles, began to flourish.

Spanning decades and taking on numerous forms, modern architecture and design changed the face of cities and towns across the United States. The desire to improve social conditions through architecture led to innovative designs for mass housing. Technological advancements made it possible for architects and designers to push architecture in a different direction by experimenting with new materials and

²³ Ibid., 151.

²⁴ Randy Kennedy, “When the Space Age Blasted Off, Pop Culture Followed,” *The New York Times*, September 25, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/25/science/space/25pop.html?ex=1348372800&en=6cef385f5118c993&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss> (accessed May 12, 2008).

²⁵ Wright, *Modern Architectures in History*, 192

new concepts of space. So how does preservation currently evaluate such a diverse period of architectural, social, technological and economical history? In order to comprehend the relationship between the complexities of the modern movement and evaluation guidelines we must first familiarize ourselves with current assessment methods by taking a closer look at the criteria for evaluation.

Chapter 3: Criteria for Evaluation

The process of evaluation helps us determine which properties hold enough significance to warrant designation. Though acquiring a designation status does not necessarily guarantee protection against demolition or inappropriate changes, it does offer financial incentives and recognition as well as consideration when faced with new development. Designation also helps to validate preservation in the public eye. Although the public and preservationists are not always in agreement about what resources deserve designation, the process does assure that the resource has undergone analysis and proven itself worthy of preservation. In turn, this can help build public support and perhaps make the next designation process a little easier.²⁶ But in order for a resource to receive a designation status it must first be evaluated for its significance.

Established in 1966 under the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Register of Historic Places is a catalogue of various properties such as “districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture.”²⁷ In order for a property to be eligible for or listed on the National Register, it must first meet one of four criteria, which evaluates the significance of a resource. Those criteria are as listed:

Criterion A: Event

Properties can be eligible for the National Register if they are associated with events that have made a

²⁶ Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, 12.

²⁷ National Park Service, “National Register of Historic Places, About Us,” <http://www.nps.gov/nr/about.htm> (accessed May 1, 2008).

significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

Criterion B: Person

Properties may be eligible for the National Register if they are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

Criterion C: Design/Construction

Properties may be eligible for the National Register if they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

Criterion D: Information Potential

Properties may be eligible for the National Register if they have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.²⁸

The property must also retain a certain level of integrity, which is the “ability of a property to convey its significance.”²⁹ According to the National Park Service,

To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant.³⁰

A more in depth description of the seven aspects of integrity are listed below:

²⁸ Rebecca H. Shrimpton, ed., “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, VI. How to Identify the Type of Significance of a Property,” *National Register Bulletins*, #13 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002) http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_7.htm (accessed May 1, 2008).

²⁹ Shrimpton, ed., “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, VIII. How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property,” http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_8.htm (accessed May 1, 2008).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Location

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.

Design

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.

Setting

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property.

Materials

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.

Workmanship

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.

Feeling

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.

Association

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.³¹

For resources under fifty years of age, they must meet not only the above criteria but also Criteria Consideration G: Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years, which states that “a property achieving significance

³¹ Ibid.

within the past 50 years may be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, according to the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, only if they are of “exceptional importance.”³² Although that National Register does not define “exceptional importance,” it is assumed that the resource must be far beyond what is usual or normal in order to qualify.

Designation of historic resources is much the same on the local level as it is on the national level. It is estimated that more than 2,300 cities have created some variation of historic preservation ordinances in an effort to protect their historic resources. Many of these communities have used the National Register of Historic Places as a guide in creating their own criteria and requirements.³³ Similar to the National Register some local ordinances do have age restrictions and these can vary from fifty to thirty years. However, unlike the National Register, not all ordinances have special considerations or age restrictions.

The criteria by which a resource is judged for its significance, both at the national level and often at the state and local levels, are broad enough in their language to accommodate a variety of significant meanings. However, even with these wide-ranging sets of standards, resources from the recent past still face problems and preservationists continue to struggle to get these properties recognized. The following case study will show the difficulties historic commissions and boards have in designating modern resources using current criteria.

³² Marcella and Luce, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years, Introduction” http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/nrb22_I.htm(accessed April 2, 2008).

³³ Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*,15.

Chapter 4: Case Study: Perpetual Building Association

Following the designation process of a recent past property is helpful in understanding the current issues involved with evaluating modern structures using current criteria. I chose the Perpetual Building Association, Silver Spring branch office building because I feel it represents typical commercial modern structures, which are the ones most often overlooked. My findings will show the struggles local historic commissions and boards must deal with when trying to designate recent past resources.

History of Perpetual

Founded in 1881, Perpetual Building Association grew to become the largest savings and loan association in the United States during the post World War II years. A savings and loan association is a “member-owned financial institution organized to provide home mortgages.”³⁴ It was institutions such as these that helped people achieve the “American dream.” Perpetual was most likely responsible for a large majority of home financing in the Washington D.C. region. Expansion of the company was inevitable after World War II when surrounding suburbs, such as Silver Spring, began to grow.³⁵

Quickly rising in population, Silver Spring’s commercial and residential areas were growing at a rapid rate. Recognizing that these new citizens needed the same services that the district provided, Perpetual decided to begin building branch offices,

³⁴ EHT Traceries, *Silver Spring Branch Office of the Perpetual Building Association* (Washington, DC, December 31, 2007), 6. This report can be accessed on the Montgomery County Planning Board website under Staff Report Archives, January 10, 2008, Item 10, Additional Attachment to Staff Report.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 5-10.

not a widespread concept before the mid-20th century. The first branch office was built in 1955 and located in Bethesda. The Silver Spring location arrived in 1958 and is sited at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Cameron Street. Perpetual also built a location in Hyattsville, Maryland in 1965. Robert O. Scholz, a Washington, D.C. area architect, along with Bank Building and Equipment Corp. of America, a company specializing in brand design, created the new modern look for Perpetual. Understanding the importance of the relationship between the savings and loan and the community, Perpetual offered its members a lounge and constructed an auditorium in the building for community use.³⁶

The property is a five-story building constructed of reinforced concrete and steel with a limestone and granite façade. It portrays a modern design by use of a flat roof, geometric forms and a clear rejection of traditional ornamentation. Perpetual chose to base their Silver Spring design on their headquarters in Washington, D.C. Other Perpetual branches in Bethesda and Hyattsville are also based on the headquarters design therefore visually linking all banks. The headquarters and branch offices represent a specific building type for banks during that time that wished to reinvent their image to reflect the post World War II “forward thinking and innovative approaches to the financial industry.”³⁷ Because the Perpetual building does not exhibit any particular established style and is rather a hybrid of different designs it is considered vernacular architecture.

³⁶ Ibid., 10,12,17.

³⁷ Ibid., 11,15-16.

Proposed New Development/Historic Designation Journey

The new project proposes razing the Perpetual building and constructing a 14-story residential tower, containing 106 homes with office spaces and retail on the ground floor. The new project will also have 115 parking spaces and a pocket park.³⁸ Currently, the project is on hold pending the outcome of historic designation to the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation. Unfortunately, the large volume of mid-century vernacular properties makes it easy for projects such as this to be constructed. Many people feel losing a resource, such as the Perpetual building, is of no consequence.

A property within Montgomery County can be listed on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation if it is deemed historically significant. Anyone can nominate a property for designation by submitting a nomination form to the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), if approved the nomination then proceeds to the Montgomery County Planning Board. If the Planning Board also approves designation, the property will then be presented to the County Council for a final vote. Both the HPC and the Planning Board use the evaluation criteria established in the Montgomery County Code, Chapter 24A: Historic Resources Preservation under 24A-3(b):, as listed below:

1. Historical and cultural significance: The historic resource:
 - a. has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the County, State, or Nation;
 - b. is the site of a significant historic event;

³⁸ Montgomery County Planning Department, "Project Name: 8700 Georgia Avenue," http://www.mc-mncppc.org/silverspring/private_projects/8700_georgia_avenue.shtm (accessed May 1, 2008). This information can be found at the Montgomery County Planning Department website under Community Planning, Silver Spring & Takoma Park, Pending projects.

c. is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society;

d. exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the County and its communities; or

2. Architectural and design significance: The historic resource:

a. embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction;

b. represents the work of a master;

c. possesses high artistic values;

d. represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

e. represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or County due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.

Both the HPC and the Planning Board use the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Ordinance criteria to evaluate the significance of properties, they also utilize the National Register criteria, as well as its fifty-year threshold, as a general guideline for assessment.³⁹ It is important to note that the Perpetual building turned fifty during this designation process.

HPC held two work sessions, June 27, 2007 and August 15, 2007, to determine the eligibility of the Perpetual Building Association Silver Spring Branch Office. The Commission recommended 4 to 2 that the building be designated on the

³⁹ Clare Kelly (Historic Preservation Planner) in an interview with Joy Tober, May 2, 2008.

Master Plan stating that it meets two criteria of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Ordinance.⁴⁰ Those criteria are:

1a: Has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county, state, or nation

2e: Represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape⁴¹

The Montgomery County Planning Board also held two work sessions, January 10, 2008 and March 20, 2008, in order to determine eligibility. After much debate, the board unanimously voted *against* designation stating that the building was not historically significant on any grounds. The designation process will now proceed to the County Council where they will have the final say on whether or not the Perpetual Building Association building will be placed on the Master Plan.

Findings

The issue of style was a big challenge in both the HPC meetings and the Planning Board meetings. Because the Perpetual building does not embody a recognized or high-style, it was difficult for the commissioners to acknowledge it as architecturally significant even though the proponents went to great lengths to describe the importance of the architectural elements. In the HPC meeting held on August 15th, 2007, Commissioner Rotenstein commented on architectural styles in relation to more vernacular buildings such as Perpetual by stating that:

They're very good for filling in checklists on National Register forms.
They're very good for completing computerized databases of building

⁴⁰ Patricia A. Harris letter to Dr. Royce Hanson, Chair and Members of the Planning Board, September 26, 2001, <http://www.montgomeryplanningboard.org/agenda/2008/agenda20080110e.html>. This letter can be found under Item 10, Related Correspondence.

⁴¹ Historic Resources Preservation, *Montgomery County Code*, sec. 24A-3(b).

inventories. But in the real world they don't mean a whole heck of a lot.⁴²

Other commissioners also found a hard time placing Perpetual within the established styles such as Commissioner Duffy who commented that the building does not represent a style that is defined in books and said that “most buildings live in that gray world between the vernacular and the high culture. This is one of those.” However, he did note that he believes there is some kind of architectural significance.⁴³

The Planning Board had an even harder time determining an architectural style mainly because so many “style” names were used to describe the building. Modern Classicism, International Style, Art Deco, Commercial Modernism, Suburban Baby Boom and Geometric Modern were among the “styles” that were mentioned in the first Planning Board meeting held on January 10th. Recognizing that if a property can easily fit within a category of style it has a better chance of receiving designation, the proponents of the Perpetual building used what they felt was the appropriate “style” category. Unfortunately, because there is no established nomenclature for the various forms of modern architecture, the numerous categories used to describe the building only seemed to confuse the board and gave ammunition to the owners who happily pointed out that because the building does not fit within an established style it does not have architectural significance.⁴⁴ The confusion of the board seemed to overshadow what the proponents were trying to show as architecturally significant

⁴² Patricia A. Harris letter to Dr. Royce Hanson, Chair and Members of the Planning Board, September 26, 2001, <http://www.montgomeryplanningboard.org/agenda/2008/agenda20080110e.html>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Montgomery County Planning Board Agenda, January 10, 2008*. Montgomery County Park and Planning. Planning Board Recordings, Part 9 – 14, <http://www.montgomeryplanningboard.org/agenda/2008/agenda20080110e.html> (accessed April 19, 2008).

and several members commented that they felt the building had no architectural redeeming qualities. These observations clearly show the difficulties HPC and the Planning Board had in figuring out where Perpetual fit within the parameters of architectural style. In addition, there are indications that although the criteria and standards act as a good supplement and checklist, they lack in helping to determine the significance of more vernacular styles.

Another problem that the meeting revealed was the absence of personal connections to the place itself. This was realized mostly in the Planning Board meetings when an HPC commissioner testified that he too was at first reluctant to grant designation but that after hearing testimony from community members he realized the importance of the property. Unfortunately, the Planning Board did not get the chance to hear from these individuals themselves, but the HPC member testifying did recall that many of them told stories about how the bank played into their daily lives and fit into their family traditions. One commissioner on the Planning Board acknowledged that there were probably many loans handed out to local citizens but that there was no human relation beyond that.⁴⁵

In a separate discussion about the building's significance as a bank branch, one Planning Board commissioner felt strongly against designation simply because it was a branch office. Clare Kelly, Historic Preservation Planner for Montgomery County, tried to counter that argument by mentioning that the Tastee Diner in Silver Spring was listed on the Master Plan. The commissioner's answer was simple, "its uniqueness in Silver Spring is because of the people." He then told a story

⁴⁵ *Montgomery County Planning Board Agenda, January 10, 2008.*

explaining how he went to the Tastee Diner one night after working late expecting no one to be there but instead the place was full of people. He noted that it was a place where *people* go and socialize.⁴⁶ This commissioner was looking for that same personal connection with the Perpetual building. If Perpetual had an outstanding architectural style or if some unforgettable event took place within its walls there is little doubt that the commissioners at both HPC and the Planning Board would grant designation but the property simply just does not have those qualifications. Instead, the commissioners were left with trying to find some other significance, some other values. HPC was able to make personal connections by listening to community members, which more than likely had an impact on the decision to grant designation. This just shows how vital the connection is between people and place.

Finally, the matter of function and design was brought up, although very briefly. In the first Planning Board meeting, James Jacobs, a local representative of the Recent Past Preservation Network, mentioned the significance of the function of the building and how the interior design reflected the new changes in banking. A curious commissioner asked if interior design meets any of the criteria and stated that a lot of testimony was referring to interior spaces. Once getting confirmation that the interior was irrelevant when considering designation, the matter was dropped.⁴⁷ As with most designations, interior design and use is not part of the evaluation or significance discussion. Design concepts were an important part of modern

⁴⁶ *Montgomery County Planning Board Agenda, March 20, 2008.* Montgomery County Park and Planning. Planning Board Recordings, Part 7, <http://www.montgomeryplanningboard.org/agenda/2008/agenda20080320e.html> (accessed April 19, 2008).

⁴⁷ *Montgomery County Planning Board Agenda, January 10, 2008.*

architecture and interior spaces often reflected in the exterior appearance.

Unfortunately, as witnessed here this essential element of modern architecture gets little or no attention.

These observations outline just a few of the struggles historic commissions and boards must go through when determining significance and potential designation. Confined by criteria standards, these members have no choice but to rely on local preservationists to provide them with information that proves the worth of a nominated property. That is why it is important for preservationists to be aware of the problems preventing designation of recent past resources. The next chapter will take a more in depth look into these challenges.

Chapter 5: Challenges

Although recent past resources face many challenges when it comes to evaluation and designation, aesthetic challenges are by far the most important. The first thing we see when evaluating a property is the facade. For many people, some preservationists included, the biggest hurdle is getting past that first impression. It is because of this reason that we must begin to examine the challenges that prevent us from looking beyond the façade of modern architecture. Age barriers, style barriers, significance barriers and perception barriers all contribute to this problem.

Fifty = Historic

The 50-year rule was created with the intention of gaining an historical perspective when evaluating our built environment. Unfortunately, this clear demarcation of time sets a visual standard for what “historic” and “non-historic” are supposed to look like. Because of this time stamp, visual cues become associated to architecture both over and under fifty years. A large majority of structures that are considered “historic” have a great deal of ornamentation and decoration. These structures also tend to have a widely recognized style, such as Tudor or Queen Ann. On the other hand, because Modern architecture intentionally divorced itself from previous designs, the structures appear “simple.” This “perceived “simplicity” of much post-war architecture conflicts with established notions of what “historic” architecture should look like”⁴⁸ and as a consequence modern architecture gets assigned the label of “non-historic,” therefore resulting in the loss of protection.

⁴⁸ Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, 3.

In many cases, the term “historic” has little relation to historical truth and instead has begun to take on a certain “look” that is aesthetically pleasing. Recent decades have seen a huge increase in commercial redevelopment in both major cities and small towns across America in an effort to breath new life into these struggling areas. But unlike the destructive urban renewal projects from the 1950’s and 1960’s that wiped out thousands of “traditional” historic resources, the revitalization developments today are taking on a more “historic” theme. This often includes the removal of all “non-historic” elements, usually alterations performed during the Modern movement, infill that takes on a more “historic” style and the inclusion of historically sensitive *new* features such as brick walkways. Even though some of these elements may not have ever existed in the past, they do conform to the general idea of “historic.”⁴⁹ The fifty-year rule only feeds into this misconception of “historic” while at the same time devaluing modern architecture.

The Style Issue

Simply put, architectural styles help to identify a specific type of architecture based on visual and structural elements and clues. Although knowing what elements make up a style is beneficial in the study, classification and evaluation of America’s building stock, too much reliance on standard guidelines proves challenging when evaluating recent past resources. Style helps preservation professionals assess historic structures by ascertaining their placement in history and determining architectural significance. In many cases, it is the style itself that becomes the reason for a building’s preservation. But architecture is not only a simple arrangement of

⁴⁹ Richard Longstreth, “Taste Versus History,” *Forum Journal* 8, no. 3 (May/June 1994).

parts. The various architectural styles that have evolved over the years are not separate static events divorced from history. Each new concept and design is based upon previous developments, which is why it can be difficult to categorize and not unusual to find resources with a hybrid of “styles”, which is often the case in modern architecture. Although using style to assist in evaluating historic resources has been helpful in the past, is it still relevant with resources from the recent past?

Understanding and describing the visual aspects of a building are unavoidable when evaluating resources and essential to understanding the changes within the history of architecture. However, when it comes to modern architecture this seemingly simple task becomes a daunting chore. Past architectural styles have often acquired their name based on certain traits such as materials, for example a sod house. Some styles are named after their creators, such as Jeffersonian or Richardsonian Romanesque, while others reflect their place of origin like Italianate or Chicago School.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this technique of naming is not easy to apply to architecture throughout the 20th century. Many would argue that modern architecture is in fact *not* a style at all and that “the reason why no style names exist...is because architects were trying to break with the notion of style, to create an architecture without historical precedent that honestly reflected the impact that technological advances and new materials had made on building.”⁵¹ Although the term International Style has become the choice of many style guides to describe mid-century architecture, it does not reflect the period as a whole and was in fact at the time a source of contention between architects who did not believe in labels and those that felt their work

⁵⁰ Linda Donovan Harper, “Name That Style! Vocabulary for the Recent Past,” *forum Journal* 7, no. 4 (March/April 2001).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

identified with that particular style.⁵² Years later we are still trying to find the best way to label this very complex period of architectural history.

For many years, the field of historic preservation did not widely recognize the significance of architecture in and of itself but instead focused more on important events and people. William Sumner Appleton changed the direction of preservation in the early twentieth-century when he founded the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPENA) and shifted the focus of preservation from note-worthy individuals and events to architectural significance. Though this aspect helped broaden and enlighten the field of historic preservation, there now seems to be a preoccupation with style in which finding the “best,” the “exception,” and the “pure” are the intended goal.⁵³ Architecture is an intricate interplay involving a multitude of factors. Minimizing these efforts in favor of motif can result in biased evaluations. Regardless of objective intentions, if a resource does not pass the test of “purity” set up by the fixed parameters of style, it is often dismissed, as was seen in the Perpetual building case study examined earlier. Modern architects are known for experimenting with materials and design. Examining just one year throughout the modern movement shows a variety of designs going on all at the same time, “the laconic structuralism of Mies van der Rohe; the geometric organicism of Frank Lloyd Wright; the understated abstractionism of Richard Neutra; the "soft" naturalism of William Wurster; [and] the flamboyant expressionism of Bruce Goff.”⁵⁴ Not to

⁵² Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966) 16.

⁵³ Richard Striner, “Scholarship, Strategy, and Activism in Preserving the Recent Past,” *Journal Forum* 10, no.1 (Fall 1995).

⁵⁴ Richard Longstreth, “I Can’t See It; I Don’t Understand It; And It Doesn’t Look Old to Me,” *Forum Journal* 10, no.1 (Fall 1995).

mention the numerous less known and unknown architects across the nation influenced by these designs as well as regional aspects. With all these elements at play, it is not hard to understand the difficulties of placing modern architecture within a specific style and the tendency to look for pure examples.

Modern architecture, especially residential, was often a hybrid of sorts that seemed a “fitting expression of American culture, [it was an] unpredictable amalgam of tradition and innovation, local and universal, personal and collective.”⁵⁵

Collaboration between architects and builders resulted in various types of modern designs. These partnerships took into consideration not only popular concepts but regional factors as well, such as topography, restraints, local character, and the environment.⁵⁶ If assessed using the current set of standards a large majority of modern architecture will not apply. However, if we use style as a way to assess resources “based on the creative processes by which building designs are conceived and developed”⁵⁷ then we have a much better chance of including more modern architecture in local and the national register.

In our quest for the “best” are we really preserving what is most important and most valuable? Saving a building that represents the best Beaux-Arts style in a neighborhood where there are no community connections seems a waste of time, effort and money. What is most significant and holds the most value for a community may in fact come in a package easily overlooked when searching for that “pure” model. Buildings possess more than just facades and should be read as social and

⁵⁵ Wright, *Modern Architectures in History*, 125

⁵⁶ Wright, *Modern Architectures in History*, 173-175.

⁵⁷ Richard Longstreth, “Architectural History and the Practice of Historic Preservation in the United States,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58, no. 3 (Sept 1999) 328.

cultural documents.⁵⁸ The Perpetual building is an excellent example of this problem. The property does not exhibit a high-style, in fact the appearance of the building is not what makes it significant at all, the savings and loan that occupied the property is the key factor. Community members spoke about how important Perpetual Building Association was in their lives, not the structure.

With attention focused so much on style, other values can be easily overlooked. When the elements and features of a resource take priority, other, perhaps more principle values, become diminished. There are multiple values at play within any historic resource including, social, political, historical and economical, to name a few. Richard Longstreth wrote a great example illustrating the intricacies of historic resources:

a late nineteenth-century schoolhouse may be revered not for what it may tell us about the interplay between national tendencies in design and local patterns in building, not for what it may reveal about rising standards in the public education system, not for what it may have symbolized as a mark of progress for the neighborhood, not for its longstanding role as a community center, but instead as one of East Clambake's "best" surviving examples of this or that "style."⁵⁹

By superseding one value over you run the risk of loosing other important factors that make the resource more meaningful.

Finding Significance

An historic resource can embody multiple forms of significance. As stated before, Criteria C: Design/Construction is the most widely noted significance for resources of the recent past but also the most difficult to establish in the case of vernacular structures, the most common form of modern architecture. For these types

⁵⁸ Striner, "Scholarship, Strategy and Activism."

⁵⁹ Longstreth, "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; And It Doesn't Look Old to Me."

of resources, one must look beyond the façade in order to find meaning. However, using existing criteria does pose some problems. Taking the more traditional fine art approach, disconnecting history from architecture and the trying to incorporate the architect's intent are among the major problems of finding significance within modern architecture using current evaluation methods.

When evaluating resources, preservation has a tendency to take a more traditional fine art approach to evaluation, which focuses on “identifying the pure form [and] the original condition.”⁶⁰ The beginnings of the preservation movement, which focused on exemplary people, events and artistic forms, along with early preservation education, which ultimately grew from the study of architectural history, have no doubt set up this elitist type of attitude.⁶¹ Unfortunately, this outlook is expressed in the methods by which the profession judges the worthiness of a resource.

The National Register Criteria for Evaluation clearly caters towards a more fine art approach when evaluating historic sites by recognizing primarily those resources that embody true representations, high artistic values, “important” people, events and examples. Justified when first instituted, these techniques are no longer applicable in today's society and leave behind a whole host of resources that contribute to our overall understanding of America's tangible history. A preservation program that focuses on preserving the past primarily through architectural excellence by way of “highbrow” assessment as well as “commemorates a few exemplary national or civic leaders, made sense a hundred years ago, but no longer suffices to

⁶⁰ Dell Upton, “Architectural History or Landscape History,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 4 (Aug. 1991), 197.

⁶¹ Michael Tomlan, “Historic Preservation Education: Alongside Architecture in Academia,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 47, no. 4 (May, 1994), 187-188.

preserve our history as we understand it.”⁶² Preserving only the best does not reflect the larger part of society who also deserves to take advantage of the benefits of historic preservation. In relation to modern architecture of the recent past, this antiquated elitist attitude towards preservation is particularly detrimental. As is the case with style, a majority of modern architecture, especially commercial property, will not fit within the current criteria for evaluation. The volume of modern architecture, as well as its ubiquitous nature and the fact that it was available to multiple social classes, begs for a different type of assessment to prove its worth, specifically one that takes into account other values beyond those that cater to the elite.

Placing people and history back into our resources is one way to look beyond the fine art approach. Unfortunately, this has proven to be a difficult task for preservationists. Rarely does an historic resource embody a single value. Physical structures never stand alone without some interaction of the environment or people. However, over the years this has become the normal way in which to evaluate resources. The evaluation criteria guide us towards examining these values independently of one another. Because of this division, examination and judgment tend to focus on one aspect *or* another. In the case of multiple values, examination and judgment look at one aspect *then* the other. National Register nominations show this tendency, in which the format of choice leans towards an architectural description and significance and then a separate telling of the history.

⁶² Ned Kaufman, “Saving the Sites Where History Happened: A View from New York,” *Historic Preservation Forum* (Spring 1996), 39.

Architecture and history are not two separate events that just happen to run parallel to one another, but rather interwoven happenings that both dictate and compliment one another. However, the field of historic preservation often separates them into two different categories, “as if architecture has no past and history has no physical dimension.”⁶³ In the case of the Perpetual building, it is clear how personal stories can contribute to the significance of a resource. Commissioners at the Planning Board meeting found it difficult to understand the historical significance, whereas HPC members who enjoyed the privilege of hearing personal narratives were able to make the connection.

The division between architecture and history can be traced through the history of preservation when importance was first placed on great men and events then shifted to architectural significance. The division concept is hard to understand since “physical characteristics [of a building] cannot be fully understood without careful examination of the related economic, political, social or technical factors [and in turn] the physical world adds a significant perspective to the understanding of people, events, and the historical pattern of which they are a part.” It is easy to miss the significance of a resource if assessing architecture and contemporary events as if they are two unrelated facets, especially in the case of modern architecture in which these two aspects were intimately connected. Fortunately, preservation has shown a trend over the past few decades towards a more holistic approach and has increasingly looked towards related disciplines such as, cultural anthropology, folklore and social history to gain a better understanding of the associations between

⁶³ Longsreth, “Taste Versus History.”

the tangible and intangible.⁶⁴ The next logical step now would be to merge the two together in order to obtain a more holistic understanding.

Social and historical aspects are not the only elements that should be integrated into a holistic approach to evaluation. Concepts behind designs also deserve consideration. It is during the modern movement that one begins to see architects and designers formulating theories for design and then applying those theories to buildings. As preservationists we see the structure but not always the concept behind it therefore we tend to only preserve what we can see. The idea of preserving concepts or design intent is a definite break away from conventional preservation, which focuses more on tangible objects rather than intangible ideas. However, the search for new concepts of design that drove many architects during the modern movement is an important part of its history.⁶⁵

One example that really highlights a prominent theory during the modern movement is the idea that form follows function. Architects believed that the purpose of a building should dictate what shape the building takes. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City is a good example of this idea. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Guggenheim is a six-story spiral structure with a domed glass ceiling and a gently sloping ramp circling around the interior. Wright felt that “a museum should be one extended expansive well-proportioned floor space from bottom to top,” he felt visitors should not have to retrace their steps through multiple rooms in order to see the art hidden in the far corners.⁶⁶ Because the Guggenheim is a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, 35.

⁶⁶ Susan Goldman Rubin, *There Goes the Neighborhood, Ten Buildings People Loved to Hate* (New York: Holiday House, 2001) 56-57.

well-known, and for the most part a well admired building, the possibility of losing such a resource is unlikely. But what about the hundreds of buildings designed by unknown architects for unknown reasons? How is that concept protected? Intangible aspects such as these are vital to the preservation of modern architecture because it gives us insight into not only how the building was created and constructed but also the thought process behind it.

Urban Renewal

Although not a challenge in terms of evaluation approaches or methods, the perception of modern architecture in the spotlight of urban renewal is a difficult obstacle to overcome. Urban renewal is often synonymous with mid-century architecture. Throughout most of the twentieth-century “traditional” historic resources were demolished by the thousands to make way for these modern projects. The widespread displacement and destruction of entire neighborhoods, construction of large-scale developments, and interstate highway systems are just a few of the reasons preservationists advocated for a national preservation program. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 changed the face of preservation and has helped to secure the protection of thousands of historic resources across America. Unfortunately, because of the negative associations with the urban renewal efforts 30 years ago, mid-century architecture still bears the brunt of that anger. Far too often these mid-century resources are dismissed based on prejudices against the destructive nature of urban renewal.⁶⁷ But these resources are a part of our built heritage. Based on the context of when and under what circumstances they were built, they should not

⁶⁷ Richard Longstreth, “The Difficult Legacy of Urban Renewal,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 20.

be rejected out of hand. Perhaps a new way of looking at these resources is needed in order to fully understand their importance.

In his article, “The Difficult Legacy of Urban Renewal,” Richard Longstreth suggests that we take a more detached and historical perspective that looks not only at the structures themselves but at the surrounding environment as well. Changes created during the years of urban renewal have altered the look and use of cities across the United States. Almost every city in America sought new and innovative ways to rejuvenate their urban centers, creating unprecedented changes that still affect us to this day. Clearly, displacement and destruction were a part of that history, but if we are going to judge urban renewal projects based on what we lost then we should apply this approach to all structures. For example, the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City, built between 1891-1893, was demolished in order to make way for The Empire State Building (1929 and 1931), now an American architectural icon listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The creation of Central Park and its surrounding high-end residences displaced hundreds of squatters.⁶⁸ What affect would there be if we were to apply the same principles we use for urban renewal projects with these two sites? We should make every effort to remember what was lost along the way but we should not let this interfere with the relevance of what was built in its place or the concept behind the program. We need to recognize the historic event that happened and assess the environment accordingly. What was happening during that time on a social, economic and technological level? What was successful and what has failed and why? How did the building design and fabric

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6-11.

change? How does landscape play a part in it? These are issues that should be addressed and considered when evaluating such resources. The negative associations attached to urban renewal must be set aside if we are going to protect the current built heritage for future generations.

The preservation movement is slowly beginning to recognize the value of urban renewal developments as historical documents. Capitol Park Apartments (now known as Potomac Park) in southwest Washington, D.C. is an excellent example of the preservation of urban renewal. Southwest Washington, D.C. underwent an extensive redevelopment during the 1950's and 1960's, which completely transformed the area. At the time, Southwest was considered an area of extreme blight. Thousands of mostly black and poor residents were displaced and countless historic structures were demolished to make way for new apartment buildings and townhouses.⁶⁹ The most notable of these projects is known as Capitol Park Apartments, designed by architect Chloethiel Woodard Smith and landscape architect Daniel Kiley. Distinctly modern in design, the 30-acre complex consists of 5 apartment buildings and 300 townhouses and boasted a large landscaped park with a wading pool and pavilion. Post World War II artist Leo Lionni designed a colorful tile mosaic mural within the pavilion.⁷⁰ However, in 1992 the District Government rezoned the area and opened the door for more development. Inevitably, a development company expressed interest in the area and put forth a proposal to

⁶⁹ Keith Melder, "Southwest Washington," in *Washington at Home*, ed. Kathryn Schneider Smith (Northridge: Windsor Publication, Inc., 1988), 70-75.

⁷⁰ "Capitol Park, Washington, DC," *The Cultural Landscape Foundation*, http://www.tclf.org/landslide/capitol_park.htm (accessed April 6, 2008); and Alexander M. Padro, "Capitol Park Apartments (Potomac Place)," *The Recent Past Preservation Network*, <http://www.recentpast.org/types/resident/potomacplace/index.html> (accessed April 6, 2008).

demolish the Capitol Park Apartments as well as the pavilion and pool area and build multiple high-rise condominiums. Despite the fact that Capitol Park was constructed under an urban renewal program, citizens and local preservation organizations banded together to protect their community. Residents filed to have the Capitol Park apartment building and the adjacent park area designated on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. According to the DC Preservation League, “residents [were] concerned about protecting the quality of life of Southwest Waterfront and Capitol Park by maintaining the character of living in an urban park-like setting.”⁷¹ Unfortunately, a high-rise residential apartment building was construction on the open space located outside Capitol Park Apartment resulting in the loss of the pavilion, the pool and the open green space.⁷² However, the residents did manage to have the apartment building designation on D.C. Inventory. This example highlights the fact that not all urban renewal was bad.

Age, style, significance and perception are all problems that hinder objective evaluations of modern architecture. Concepts behind modern designs went far beyond aesthetics and looking past the glass curtain wall would give us a better understanding of these resources. Evaluation of the recent past must reflect the changes of the modern movement. Exploring different approaches to preservation can help in discovering new ways to integrate traditional preservation practices with new techniques better fit for preserving the recent past.

⁷¹ “Most Endangered Places for 2003, SW Redevelopment – Capitol Park,” *D.C. Preservation League*, <http://www.dcpreservation.org/endangered/2003/capitolpark.html> (accessed April 6, 2008).

⁷² Eric Hein (DC Preservation League) in an interview with Joy Tober, April 14, 2008.

Chapter 6: Changes for the Future

Acknowledging and understanding obstacles is the first step towards finding the right solutions. It is clear that recent past resources require a broader perspective when evaluating for their significance. Because a majority of modern properties simply will not fit within the current criteria, we must begin examining new ways to assess and recognize them. Taking on a more holistic approach to evaluation, expanding our current registers to reflect multiple values and educating professionals as well as the public of the significance of modern architecture are just a few ways to make changes for the future.

Values-Centered Preservation

Values-centered preservation looks beyond conventional evaluation methods and assesses a wide range of values in order to determine the best preservation strategy. This approach considers not only traditional criteria such as artistic and historic importance but also political, social and economical values as well, to name a few. Values are not equal and the purpose of this method is not to find the “best” value but rather to synthesize all relevant values and prioritize them in order to ensure that the right decisions gets made. Values-centered preservation takes into account both the contemporary and heritage values of a place and “acknowledges their multiplicity...and the fact that values come from many different sources.”⁷³

Understanding the changeability of values is vital, especially in the field of preservation where the tendency is to freeze resources within a specific frame of time.

Taking this approach helps in strategizing and implementing the best preservation

⁷³ Randall Mason, “Theoretical and Practical Argument for Values-Centered Preservation,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, 3, no.2 (Summer 2006): 31.

strategy for a particular resource, whether that be designation, reuse or something else altogether. It caters less towards a particular significance and more towards an overall understanding.

Multiple Registers

Registers are a great way to document resources and encourage preservation. However, the National Register of Historic Places as well as local registers, adhere to specific criteria, which as mentioned before, does not always adequately recognize certain resources. Registers directed towards specific themes or values, such as cultural, technological or social, can set up criteria that focuses specifically on the those subjects. Rather than defined by age and restrictions, emphasis is placed on a resources other values. Because of the large volume of recent past resources, I feel separate registers would work best at the local level where specifics can be tailored to the needs of each community. DOCOMOMO (Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement) has already begun both an International and US register that uses criteria better fit for Modern architecture. (See Appendix A) DOCOMOMO focuses their evaluation on technological merit, social merit, artistic and aesthetic merit, canonic merit, referential value and integrity.

Education

Education is the best tool we have for preserving Modern architecture. Appreciation is the biggest challenge we face and trying to convince the public as well as other preservationists that these resources are worth saving is an uphill battle. However, but it can be done. Utilizing the recent interest in mid-20th century culture to engage the public and policy makers by reinventing old programs or creating new

ones such as walking and bus tours is great way to generate attention. Tours get people to recognize resources unnoticed before. Try including both the everyday and the quirky to give a full spectrum of architecture built during that time. Endangered lists are also helpful. Not only do they bring much needed attention to important endangered resources but they also offer education as to why the resource is significant. Workshops and training programs are also an excellent way to help educate others on the importance of preserving resources from the recent past. Encourage homeowners to restore rather than renovate by offering classes on how to repair their homes and offer training programs to professionals so that they too are aware of the benefits of restoration of modern architecture and can then offer assistance to others.⁷⁴ Finally, lectures and exhibits are a great way to engage others who are interested in the modern movement but not necessarily aware of preservation activities.

The recent past is a very vital part of our history and we cannot afford to let it simply disappear. Preoccupations with style, difficulties finding significance and negative perceptions are among the obstacles preventing us from understanding what these valuable resources have to offer us. By recognizing these hindrances we can begin exploring new ways of determining a significance that better reflects the principles of the modern movement.

⁷⁴ Lambin, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, 5-7.

Appendix A: DOCOMOMO Guidelines, Evaluation and Building Classification

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Guidelines documentation fiche 2003

composed by national/regional working party of:

The following guidelines are provided to assist working parties in completing the NIS fiche and to ensure uniformity in recording. Fiches should be completed as fully as possible but in the standard format every section might not be relevant to a particular subject. Relevant sections should always be completed even when the entry repeats data on other related fiches. The principal objective of the NIS is to provide a scientific record. Because chronology is particularly important, all data in the submitted documents should be as exact as possible. Entries in the section "history" (2) should be confirmed from all available sources.

0. Picture of building

Photographs and drawings illustrating the building or site are required in part 5 of the fiche. For a quick visual identification we ask here for a single image which characterises the subject. This image should be cleared for copyright and its source clearly stated. If possible one copy should be suitable for reproduction, e.g. an original black and white print. The "brief description" should form a caption to this picture.

1. Identity of building/site

1. 1 Identification

Here sufficient information must be given to locate and identify the subject.

Addresses are stated conventionally; the zip/post code is important; use province/region/county etc. as appropriate. Where postal address is not adequate give location by place-name and in relation to nearest classified road. Always provide national grid reference.

Typology should be standardised, see attached classification (e.g.: church: REL; fire station: PBS).

1. 2 The status of protection

should be indicated according to the present and local situation.

If a nomination is under preparation – for local protection or for the World Heritage List – this can be mentioned under the heading of remarks.

Eventual changes in the status should be mentioned in later updates.

1. 3 Visually or functionally related building(s)/site(s)

can be mentioned if they are essential for the composition of the main building/site. Eventual views can be indicated on a map by means of an arrow.

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International working party for
documentation and conservation
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2. History of the building or site

2. 1 - 2. 2 - 2. 3 Chronology-development-relevant person(s)/organisation(s)

should be completed as fully as possible to record the design and building process from commission - client and programme - to inauguration, noting especially changes of programme, concept or construction during that period. Note also any connections, through related persons or events, with wider aspects of the Modern Movement.

2. 4 - 2. 5 Other associated persons/events – important changes

can be used to record the history of the building in use.

Take especial care with dates, which should be precise and researched. They should be noted either "exactly known" (e) or "approximate" (a) or (c) for circa per item.

Dates can distinguish:

- the international competition year
- the preliminary concept of the design
- the official construction permission
- the beginning and completion of construction
- the inauguration of the building

If possible, specify the information sources.

3. Description of the building or site

3. 1 Character

Summarise here the main characteristics of the building or site, in no more than one page, please. The subject should be described, not only on the functional level, but also in its formal and technical aspects, and, in a few words, the architectural concept should be synthesised. Building complexes, neighbourhoods, urban and rural landscapes or gardens might require identification of separate buildings or elements, which eventually can be described more in detail in subsidiary fiches.

3. 2 - 3. 3 Current use – condition

should be completed to record present use(s) and condition.

3. 4 Context

to note local developments or any known proposals affecting the concept or functions of the building or site.

4. Evaluation

docomomo's tests for modernity seek to establish innovation, technical, social and aesthetic.

4. 1 - 4. 2 - 4. 3 Intrinsic value

In this section, the principal reasons for the selection are explained. It is not enough to affirm the outstanding values of the building or site at technical, social, aesthetic levels; the reasons must be argued in a few words. The evaluations must stress the innovatory aspects eg in building materials, structure and details, in commission, use or typology, and in design.

4. 1 Technical evaluation

The use of new materials and new techniques was a credo for modern architects, so this aspect must be examined very carefully. Building materials and finishes, structure and services and, if relevant, building methods should be considered.

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4. 2 Social evaluation

Consider here social purposes and effects. Was the client a new actor compelling Modern intervention as were the public housing offices, or demanding new building types such as sanatoria or health centres? Did the project serve wider social or economic strategies, as did hydro-electric schemes and new towns?

4. 3 Aesthetic evaluation

Here are considered the formal strategies of the designer and the formal qualities of the building.

4. 4 - 4. 5 Comparative significance

The two next categories are complementary. Though modern architecture was often acclaimed for its innovatory character, not all buildings did introduce new models; moreover, many were derivative.

4. 4 Canonic Status (question of model)

This question concerns architectural appreciation, reception in the specialized press, as well as the project's impact on design practice, at international or local level. In other words, in the time of its construction, sometimes later, was the project recognized as a major contribution to modernity? Furthermore, did the building or site contribute to establish new architectural principles? Did it become a model?

4. 5 Reference Value (question of precedent)

Consider here the historical context: can we establish relationships (technical, functional or formal) between the building or site under consideration and others which were built or established before, in the same region or in foreign countries.

Bibliographical references:

- Book

AUTHOR NAME, First name or Initials, Title, Town of publication; Publisher's name; year; ISBN
eg WATTERS, Diane, Cardross Seminary, Edinburgh; RCAHMS; 1997; ISBN 0 7480 5829 X

- Article

AUTHOR NAME, First name or Initials, 'Title', Name of periodical, country, volume or issue number, year, pp. x-y.
eg BROOKS, Allen, 'PSFS: a source for its design', Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. 27, 1967, pp. 299-302

What is important is the sufficiency of data; not the writing order, nor the punctuation. Different styles can be used, but be consistent. Please ensure that all important references are given.

Address to send the NIS Fiches

Two papers copies of all documents, in English, and a CD-Rom should be sent to the Secretary ISC/R:

Marieke Kuipers
C/o Rijksdienst vd Monumentenzorg
p.o. box 3700 BA Zeist
The Netherlands

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Full Documentation Fiche 2003

composed by national/regional working party of:

0. Picture of building/ group of buildings/ urban scheme/ landscape/ garden
depicted item: source: date:

1. Identity of building/ group of buildings/ group of buildings/ landscape/ garden

1. 1 Data for identification

current name:
former/original/variant name:
number(s) and name(s) of street(s):
town:
province/state:
post code: block: lot:
country:
national topographical grid reference:
current typology:
former/original/variant typology:
comments on typology:

1. 2 Status of protection

protected by: state/province/town/record only
grade:
date:
valid for: whole area/parts of area/building
remarks:

1. 3 Visually or functionally related building(s)/site(s)

name(s) of surrounding area/building(s):
visual relations
functional relations:
other relations:

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2. History of building(s) etc.

2. 1 Chronology

Note if the dates are exactly known (e) or approximately estimated = circa (c) or (±)

commission or competition date:

design period(s):

start of site work:

completion/inauguration:

2. 2 Summary of development

commission brief:

design brief:

building/construction:

completed situation:

original situation or character of site:

2. 3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owner(s)/patron(s):

architect(s):

landscape/garden designer(s):

other designer(s):

consulting engineer(s):

building contractor(s):

2. 4 Other persons or events associated with the building(s)/site

name(s):

association:

event(s):

period:

2. 5 Summary of important changes after completion

type of change: alteration/renovation/restoration/extension/other:

date(s):

circumstances/reasons for change

effects of changes:

persons/organisations involved:

3. Description of building(s) etc.

3. 1 Site/building character

Summarize main character and give notes on surviving site/building(s)/part(s) of area.

If a site: principle features and zones of influence; main elements in spatial composition.

If a building: main features, construction and materials.

3. 2 Current use

of whole building/site:

of principal components *(if applicable)*:

comments:

3. 3 Present (physical) condition

of whole building/site:

of principal components *(if applicable)*:

of other elements *(if applicable)*:

of surrounding area *(if applicable)*:

comments:

3. 4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments

Indicate, if known, potential developments relevant for the conservation/threats of the building/site

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4. Evaluation

Give the scientific reasons for selection for docomomo documentation

Intrinsic value

4. 1 technical evaluation:

4. 2 social evaluation:

4. 3 cultural and aesthetic evaluation:

Comparative significance

4. 4 canonical status (local, national, international)

4. 5 historic and reference values:

5. Documentation

5. 1 archives/written records/correspondence etc. (state location/ address):

5. 2 principal publications (in chronological order):

5. 3 visual material (state location/ address)

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

recent photographs and survey drawings:

film/video/other sources:

5. 4 list documents included in supplementary dossier

6. Fiche report

name of reporter:

address:

telephone:

fax:

e-mail:

date of report:

examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section

approval by working party co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name):

sign and date:

examination by DOCOMOMO ISC/R

name of ISC member in charge of the evaluation:

comment(s):

sign and date:

ISC/R approval:

date:

working party/ref. n° :

NAi ref. n° :

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Building classification documentation Fiche 2003

composed by national/regional working party of:

The list below gives the abbreviated code to classify the buildings for documentation.

Administration Parliamentary, government, civic and public buildings, professional institutions	ADM
Commercial Banks, markets, offices, public houses, restaurants, cafés, retailing, service premises, storage buildings	COM
Defense Fortifications, military installations	DEF
Education Libraries, archives, record offices, research establishments, schools, universities and colleges	EDC
Farming, Fishing Farming, fishing, fish farming, forestry, horticulture	FAF
Funerary Cemeteries, graveyards, crematoria, funerary monuments, mausolea	FNR
Health Hospitals, surgeries, health centres	HLT
Industrial Building industries, ceramics, chemicals, engineering, extractive industries, food and drink processing, marine construction, metal industries, textiles, wood-working industries	IND
Law Law courts, penal institutions, police buildings	LAW
Landscape Agricultural settlement, botanic gardens, arboretums, forestry, land reclamation, national and regional parks	LND

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Monuments	MON
Public, commemorative monuments, sculpture (free-standing)	
Public services	PBS
Baths, swimming pools, cleansing services, district heating, electricity supply, fire, ambulance services, gas supply, hydraulic power supply, sanitary provision, water supply, drainage, sewage disposal	
Recreation	REC
Cinemas, concert halls, museums, art galleries, pavillions, club houses, private halls, clubs, public parks, gardens, sports centres, gymnasias, stadia, sports grounds, theatres	
Religion	REL
Cathedrals, chapels, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship, church halls, meeting houses, religious centres, seminaries, presbyteries, manses, monasteries, convents, religious houses, shrines, places of pilgrimage	
Residential	RES
Castles, palaces, fortified houses, communal housing, country houses, mansions, large villas, hotels, inns, multi-storey flats, small detached houses, cottages, tenements, low flats, terraced cottages	
Transport, Communications	TRC
Broadcasting, bus and coach services, canals, civil aviation, postal services, railways, roads, paths, shipping, telecommunications, tramways	
Urbanism	URB
New towns and villages, town extensions, urban development, reconstruction	
Unclassified	UNC

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