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# The Politics of Public Ownership: Preservation Advocacy for Modern Municipal Resources

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# The Politics of Public Ownership: Preservation Advocacy for Modern Municipal Resources

## **Abstract**

Advocacy is central to the work of preservationists, yet the particular set of issues that must be addressed when advocating for the preservation of Modern municipal buildings is a topic that has not been previously explored. In addition to the challenges commonly confronted when advocating for the preservation of postwar resources, monumental Modern municipal buildings face substantive obstacles that emanate exclusively from their municipal ownership. Challenges encountered firsthand in advocating for the preservation of the Philadelphia Police Administration Building (the Roundhouse) serve as the primary motivation for this study which investigates the determining factors that lead to the successful preservation of Modern municipally owned buildings. Through case studies on the advocacy efforts for Boston City Hall, the Los Angeles Police Facilities Building (Parker Center), and the Philadelphia Police Administration Building, this thesis presents a series of best practices for both grassroots and organizational preservation advocates. The established recommendations are the result of empirical evidence obtained through interviews with individuals presently advocating for the preservation of Modern municipal buildings, those involved with local and national preservation organizations, municipal staff, and scholars in the field of Modern architectural preservation. While theoretical in nature, the presented strategies serve as sound maneuvers for shaping strategic plans for future efforts.

## **Keywords**

modernism, urban renewal, redevelopment, government, mid-century

## **Disciplines**

Historic Preservation and Conservation | Urban, Community and Regional Planning

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THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC OWNERSHIP: PRESERVATION ADVOCACY FOR MODERN  
MUNICIPAL RESOURCES

Kimber Lea VanSant

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

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2014

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Advisor and Program Chair  
Randall F. Mason  
Associate Professor

To Dustin,

For your encouragement and support despite my persistent absence

To my parents, Levin and Nancy VanSant,

For granting me respite at their farm and providing me with all the crabs I could eat

To my dear friends of the HSPV class of 2013,

Without whom this experience would have been considerably less amazing

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## Chapter 1 | Introduction

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Advocacy efforts for the preservation of Modern municipal buildings are beset by many challenges. In addition to the issues commonly confronted when advocating for postwar Modern buildings, such as aesthetic bias, functional obsolescence, and deferred maintenance, monumental Modern municipal buildings face substantive obstacles that emanate exclusively from their municipal ownership. The author leads an advocacy effort for the preservation of the Philadelphia Police Administration Building, which faces opposition from not only the public, but municipal agencies as well. The challenges encountered during this effort thus far serve as the motivation for this study, examining the determining factors for the success of advocacy efforts for Modern municipal resources.

Through case studies of current preservation advocacy efforts for similar Modern municipal buildings, a series of best practices was formulated. As with any preservation effort, there exists no prescribed strategy that encompasses all variables and is applicable to all cases. The recommendations presented result from empirical evidence obtained through interviews with preservation advocates and experts engaged in preservation efforts for Modern municipal resources. While abstract in nature, the presented strategies serve as sound maneuvers for shaping strategic plans in advocacy efforts for these buildings.

## ***1.1 Preservation Advocacy for Modern Resources***

Whether constructed of raw concrete or sleek glass and steel, monumental or avant-garde, since the time of their construction Modern buildings have historically been unappreciated and viewed with distaste.<sup>1</sup> The lack of admiration and the enduring argument for demolition and new construction over restoration and reuse leaves these buildings in a persistent state of extreme vulnerability. The preservation of Modern buildings is an idea that first gained traction in the 1980s and remains hotly debated.

In recent years, the “Save Prentice” advocacy campaign for the preservation of the Prentice Women’s Hospital in Chicago has garnered an abundance of media attention and brought the significance and plight of Modern buildings to the attention of a wide audience. The public nature of this campaign, as well as campaigns like those supporting the preservation of New York City’s 2 Columbus Circle, the Miami Marine Stadium, and the Gettysburg Cyclorama, which resulted in very mixed outcomes (some saved, others demolished), has exposed the threats to these resources and helped foster a greater collective appreciation for Modern architecture. As additional preservation advocacy efforts for Modern resources are publicized and gain political support, these buildings’ significance and the concept of their preservation will become more widely accepted.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “Modern” or “Modernism” are used in architecture as a design language emphasizing form rather than ornament, structure and materials over picturesque constructions, and the rational and efficient use of space. The Modern Movement in the United States began in the 1930s and was comprised of individual design movements including, but not limited to, International, Expressionist, Brutalist, New Formalist, and Googie. The hallmarks of Modern architecture were experimentation, technical innovation, and a rethinking of the way humans interacted with and utilized the designed environment. The “Recent Past” is a moving window encompassing resources designed or constructed within the past 50 years. This synopsis is based on the definitions utilized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. From “Modernism and the Recent Past Defined,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/saving-a-place/modernism-recent-past/defined.html>.

## **1.2 Challenges**

Advocacy efforts for Modern buildings face a number of challenges beyond simple lack of appreciation. An aesthetic bias against these buildings is inherent with much of the general public, particularly if the building was constructed within one's lifetime. In a similar vein, Modern architecture is typically constructed with little regard for earlier historic fabric, which presents additional aesthetic criticism. There are an abundance of resources from this period—eighty percent of the built environment—and so it can be challenging to focus preservation efforts when Modern buildings are seen as recent and ubiquitous.<sup>2</sup> A number of problems typically arise from proposals to preserve Modern buildings, making it difficult for owners and stakeholders to envision new uses for these buildings. Additionally, the building could have an irregular layout with seemingly inflexible interior spaces originally designed to fit a prescribed use. These challenges present a difficulty for building owners and potential occupants in visualizing reuse opportunities. When restoration and reuse are considered, the utilization of short-lived materials during construction can be perceived as a technical obstacle. Modern buildings are often labeled “non-contributing” within local historic districts, commonly because the districts were created prior to the widespread acknowledgement of their significance. Local historic districts often provide a level of protection against demolition, but this is only granted to those resources designated “contributing.” Another challenge is that most HVAC and mechanical systems reach the end of their life

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<sup>2</sup> “Not Another Top 10 List: Top 13 Challenges for Saving Modernism and the Recent Past,” Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed March 6, 2014, <https://www.laconservancy.org/node/914>.

cycles at or around the fifty-year mark. This can prompt an economic argument for demolition despite the fact that the building's architectural style has yet to reach an era of public appreciation.

Preservation efforts for Modern municipal buildings encounter additional challenges entwined with the politics of public ownership. There is a stigma associated with these buildings because they were often the result of controversial Urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s. The widespread clearance of neighborhoods coupled with the subsequent urban decline and population loss in many American cities is frequently a barrier to developing an appreciation for the resultant Modern architecture. Often overlooked are the original intentions of civic leadership to project a positive and progressive image through innovative architecture.

Many Modern municipal buildings were constructed during an era of civil unrest and as a result many have high walls around them, or are situated with the primary entrance facing away from the street. These buildings, particularly monumental municipal buildings, are often referred to as "anti-urban" and "non-engaging," which adds to negative public perception. Buildings with a "dark history," such as prisons, courthouses, and police buildings, are further challenged when seeking public support for their preservation.

Once a municipality determines that a building is obsolete and can no longer meet the needs of the current occupants, there is a tendency to cease responsible stewardship. Leaky roofs, rust stains, and mold are frequently considered adequate

justification to vacate a building and begin proposing demolition and new uses for the site. When Modern municipally owned buildings are located in desirable redevelopment areas, city development agencies often place lucrative real estate value over the historical or architectural significance of the building on the site.

### ***1.3 Research Question***

Advocacy is central to the work of preservationists, yet the particular set of issues that must be addressed when advocating for the preservation of Modern municipal buildings is a subject that has not yet been explored. A number of prominent cases have made headlines in recent years, and there are undoubtedly more debates to come. Through an examination of advocacy efforts for threatened Modern municipal buildings, this thesis investigates the determining factors that lead to the successful preservation of these resources. The most decisive factor in the successful preservation of Modern municipally owned buildings is the ability for preservation advocates to successfully maneuver the local political landscape. This includes establishing allies in municipal government and building a supportive constituency. Additional factors determining the outcome of preservation advocacy efforts for Modern municipally owned buildings include the strength of local preservation organizations and advocacy groups, and the level of development pressures in proximity to the site.

#### ***1.4 Case Studies and Site Selection Criteria***

This thesis will present case studies on the advocacy efforts for the Los Angeles Police Facilities Building (Parker Center), Boston City Hall, and the Philadelphia Police Administration Building (The Roundhouse). The design and construction of these buildings spans from 1952 to 1968 and encompasses a range of Modern architectural styles. The Parker Center was designed and constructed from 1952 to 1955 as an addition to the Los Angeles Civic Center area. The architecture firm Welton Becket and Associates designed the eight-story building, dubbed the “Glass House,” in the International Style. Designed and constructed from 1963 to 1968, Boston City Hall is a Brutalist style building designed by the architecture firm Kallmann, McKinnell and Knowles. The Philadelphia Police Administration Building (The Roundhouse) was designed and constructed from 1959 to 1962 in the Expressionist style by the architecture firm Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham (GBQC). Through a critical investigation of the preservation efforts for each case study site and the identification and evaluation of key determining factors in each case, this thesis will conclude with an analysis of the findings and their application to preservation efforts for Modern municipally owned buildings.

The primary determination for the selection of the case study sites is that the selected sites all serve to shed light on the preservation advocacy challenges facing the Roundhouse, for which the author is leading a preservation advocacy campaign. The particular issues specific to advocating for the preservation of the Roundhouse led to

the selection of case study sites encompassing similar traits, namely the use of concrete at Boston City Hall and the function of the Parker Center as a Police headquarters building. The selection criteria for the case study sites ultimately required that the buildings be: (1) municipally owned, (2) publically disparaged by representatives of the municipality in the news media, (3) designed and constructed between 1950 and 1970, (4) in repairable condition and an optimal candidate for adaptive reuse, (5) historically, culturally, and/or architecturally significant, (6) valued by a preservation organization and/or advocacy group that is publically advocating for its preservation and reuse, (7) one that has experienced deferred maintenance and neglectful stewardship, (8) located in an area undergoing rampant development, and (9) on a site for which the municipality has publically stated alternate profitable uses.<sup>3</sup>

### ***1.5 Methodology***

This thesis adopts a case study approach as a tool for evaluating current advocacy efforts for Modern municipal resources and formulating recommendations for comparable campaigns. This study incorporates traditional source materials, namely books, journal articles, newspaper articles, reports, conference proceedings, and published data. Regarding the examination of recent advocacy campaigns for Modern municipal buildings, data was collected through personal interviews, online media sources, and websites covering current advocacy campaigns. Interviews were conducted with those leading preservation efforts for the case study sites, those involved with local

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<sup>3</sup> These factors are not listed hierarchically, as each factor is weighed equally.



and national Modern preservation organizations, municipal staff, and scholars in the field of Modern architecture preservation.

### ***1.6 Limitations***

The limitations of this study are twofold, hinging on time factors and the accessibility of data. Due to the fixed amount of time for this study, not all potential interview subjects were available for interviews. Additionally, it was difficult to engage certain interview subjects, particularly those involved in municipal politics and those representing the development arms of the municipal government. In researching future development plans for sites, municipal government development organizations restricted access to such data.

## Chapter 2 | Literature Review

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In the realm of historic preservation, there currently exists a global debate on the significance of Modern architectural resources and the feasibility of their preservation. These debates inevitably devolve into issues of politics and capital, with government entities backing plans that will be most beneficial to the city financially. In the history of such fights, rarely does the supportive voice of the citizenry overcome the municipal governmental machine. Perhaps this is why the discussion of the preservation of Modern municipally owned buildings is currently absent from literature on the preservation of post-war architecture. When city government administrations habitually ally against the preservation of privately owned Modern buildings, the challenges faced by advocates for Modern municipally owned buildings seem insurmountable.

The Modern architectural movement in America encompasses a plethora of distinct movements designed by a cadre of noted architects, each singular work critiqued thoroughly and each designer covered extensively in the literature. When it comes to an examination of the uses or functionality of these buildings, a standard group is characteristically written about and includes private residences, public housing, luxury high-rises, institutional buildings such as schools and airport terminals, corporate office buildings and skyscrapers, banks, commercial buildings, hotels, museums, theaters, university buildings, and churches. The study of the history of Modern municipal architecture is an elusive topic. Not as elusive, however, as the study of the preservation of these particular types of Modern buildings.

This thesis builds off the widespread usage of Modernist styles of architecture in midcentury municipal planning and the current struggles in advocating for their preservation. It presents an historical overview of Modern municipal architecture and an examination of the establishment of preservation efforts for these buildings. The first section of this review presents a summary of works on post-war municipal planning and design. The second section gives an overview of the history and current status of the historic preservation movement's shift towards embracing Modern architecture. The final section provides an overview of recent advocacy efforts for Modern buildings. Serving as the foundation for this thesis, this review of the literature ultimately reveals a dearth of scholarship on Modern municipal architecture and its preservation.

### ***2.1 Postwar Municipal Planning and Design***

In the 1930s, merchants, banks, large corporations, developers, and virtually any institution with considerable business and property interests in the downtown areas of large US cities came together to influence lawmakers to transform the “slums” causing concern just outside of the central core.<sup>4</sup> These areas, comprised of acres of “uninhabitable” housing, vacant warehouses, rundown hotels, and crumbling factories, were viewed as eyesores, steadily creeping towards downtown and carrying with them

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<sup>4</sup> Marc A Weiss, “The Origins and Legacy of urban renewal,” in *Federal Public Housing Policy & Programs: Past and Present*, ed. Paul J Mitchell (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research, 1985), 254.

crime and delinquency, while undermining property values and deterring patrons.<sup>5</sup>

Initiatives began at the state level to deter further deterioration and rebuild these areas, with states empowering cities to introduce slum redevelopment programs. Public officials, together with planners and civic leaders, held the shared goal of eradicating slums and eliminating blight. In the 1940s, many municipalities were using eminent domain power to acquire slum property and sell it to private developers.

In 1949, Congress approved the Housing and Urban Redevelopment Act, bringing together local and federal governments to boost property values by legally employing eminent domain powers to clear blighted areas, creating sizeable parcels to attract investors.<sup>6</sup> Under Title I of the measure, the federal government agreed to pay two-thirds of the cost paid by local authorities in their purchase and clearance of blighted sites.<sup>7</sup> The Federal Housing Act of 1954 introduced the now-ubiquitous term “Urban Renewal,” and included rehabilitation and neighborhood conservation into the plan, allowing for the government-funded building of public housing, office buildings, luxury apartments, and government buildings. By 1965, there were nearly 1,600 federal urban renewal projects established across the country.

How were cities able to persuade the public into believing that the demolition of teeming neighborhoods inhabited by families and children was beneficial? A short propaganda film released in 1947 entitled *A Place to Live* served to bolster the case for

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<sup>5</sup> Jon Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *USA: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 153.

<sup>7</sup> In order for a designated area to be demolished, only twenty percent of the area had to be considered “blighted.”

federal urban renewal and convince the public that allowing the current living conditions in slums to continue was tantamount to child abuse.<sup>8</sup> The Richard Allen Homes, a federal renewal housing project in North Philadelphia, are shown and touted as the exemplar for those currently living in slum conditions. The narrator assures the viewers, "It is cheaper to keep them [housing projects] in shape than to pay the penalties of their [the slum dwellers] collapse in terms of life, health, and money. We are able to see the city the way it was meant to be: safe, happy, and beautiful." With promises of a primarily federally funded downtown transformation, coupled with the eradication of unsavory areas of the city and the safeguarding of poor citizens in federally funded housing projects, urban renewal was presented as advantageous across the board.

In a 1954 address entitled "Urban Renewal—It's Just This Simple" presented before the American Municipal Association, the Director of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment for the Housing and Home Finance Agency, explained the preventive and mitigating measures that could be used to contain blight. He spells out the rationale for renewal programs, stating, "In some areas, however, the extent of blight may be so great that it cannot be eliminated by any of these processes. Here preventive medicine offers no cure. Surgery is the only answer; clearance and redevelopment are in order."<sup>9</sup> Despite the propaganda presented to the public, the reality was that the wellbeing of

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<sup>8</sup> "A Place to Live, 1941," YouTube video, 16:32, From Brandon Films, Posted October 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZ94WTFYPB0>.

<sup>9</sup> J.W. Follin, "Urban Renewal -- It's Just This Simple (Ten Basic Questions and Answers about Urban Renewal)" (Philadelphia, 1954), 5.

the urban poor and ill-housed was a low priority for municipal officials. Urban renewal programs were largely advantageous schemes meant to revive downtown shopping and business centers, build centrally-located luxury housing to attract middle- and upper-class families, and enhance political and financial standing for those involved.<sup>10</sup>

As downtowns transformed in stages, with modern towers replacing rows of brick buildings, parking garages opening, movie theaters shutting down, hat shops being replaced by pawnshops, each occurrence chipped away at downtowns and destroyed the unity of the city.<sup>11</sup> In her seminal 1961 critique of midcentury urban planning policies, Jane Jacobs wrote of her strong opposition to the mass clearance of areas mislabeled slums that were, in fact, vibrant neighborhoods. She argued:

Without a strong and *inclusive* central heart, a city tends to become a collection of interests isolated from one another. It falters at producing something greater, socially, culturally and economically, than the sum of its parts.<sup>12</sup>

One of the strongest criticisms of this period of urban planning was the assumption that a city could transform one superblock at a time, with citizens mathematically divided and portioned to individual projects.<sup>13</sup>

The eradication of “blight” and the resultant development projects originally intended to revitalize downtowns only served to drive middle-class families to the suburbs and contribute to increased crime and civil unrest. In response to widespread urban disorder, President Johnson created The National Commission on Urban Problems

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 208.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Johns, *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s* (Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 137.

to document the impact of urban renewal on low-income neighborhoods. The commission reported on June 20, 1967 that 400,000 families had been displaced between 1949 and 1967 in urban renewal areas, and on these sites only 10,676 subsidized public housing units had been built.<sup>14</sup> The primary message of the report was that urban renewal's original goals had not been met, and that quite the opposite was occurring. Instead of luring families back to the city, the report found that "most families have come to believe that the city is not a decent place to bring up children."<sup>15</sup> Federal urban renewal programs were progressively amended up until 1973, when President Richard Nixon declared a moratorium on all new housing and renewal projects after they were deemed too costly and opposition too powerful.<sup>16</sup>

This overview of midcentury redevelopment programs provides historical background for the study of municipal buildings constructed during this era. Above and beyond an aesthetic bias for Modern municipal buildings exists a stigmatization stemming from the rampant redevelopment climate in which they were created. Mass clearance of sites, promises for a better future through thoughtful planning and design, and the resultant civil unrest of the late 1960s left lasting repercussions still felt by some who experienced this era firsthand. Certain municipal buildings suffer from a negative public perception stemming from the function of the agencies housed within.

Occasionally, contentious figures and unspeakable events are associated with Modern

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<sup>14</sup> Marc A. Weiss, "The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal," in *Federal Public Housing Policy & Programs: Past and Present*, ed. Paul J. Mitchell (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research ), 253-254.

<sup>15</sup> *Building the American City: Report of the National Commission on Urban Problems to the Congress and the President of the United States* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 496.

<sup>16</sup> Garvin, *The American City*, 136.

municipal sites and buildings, for which their dark history must be considered in addition to their historical and architectural significance.

## **2.2 Municipalities' Embrace of Modern Architectural Styles**

Not simply a campaign to clear away the blighted areas of cities, urban renewal also incorporated a social agenda. Supportive infrastructure improvements like new streets, schools, parks, utility lines, playgrounds, and public buildings were planned to accompany private rebuilding. In “before and after” drawings for renewal schemes, the resultant schemes were clearly inspired by early twentieth century European urbanism, incorporating Modern architecture, superblock city planning, and an overriding belief in the restorative effects of open spaces and sunlight.<sup>17</sup> The design innovations that emerged during this period “were seen as the realization in concrete, brick, glass, and steel of a new way of living in cities.”<sup>18</sup> Innovative Modernist design was championed because the problems in American cities in the 1950s and 1960s were seen as so hopeless that only dramatic programs, created by leading professionals, would suffice.<sup>19</sup>

Post-war architects were preoccupied with the problem of monuments and pondered the representation of unity in contemporary democratic societies.<sup>20</sup>

Neoclassical architectural designs all but disappeared from new civic buildings as private

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel Zipp, “The Roots and Routes of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 3 (December 6, 2012), 373.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Brent Ryan, *Design After Decline: How America Rebuilds Shrinking Cities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 195.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *USA: Modern Architectures in History*, 180.



architects replaced bureaucratic designers.<sup>21</sup> Modern civic buildings transcended the duty-bound forms of previous styles, signaling an audacity that embraced the present and incorporated the potential to instill greater confidence in the government.<sup>22</sup> The utilization of groundbreaking Modern architectural designs for municipal buildings during this period of widespread urban redevelopment symbolized a renaissance of sorts in many older American cities.

Modernist architectural styles were the clear choice for rebuilding efforts on cleared sites, as “the spirit of the time—the faith in technology, the neglect of nature, the intense desire for rational control, the belief that the present had no need for the past—had to be inscribed in the new buildings.”<sup>23</sup> Initially utilized for large-scale public housing schemes, Modernist architecture conveyed the sense that the city and its people were moving toward a positive future, one that would be an improvement on the present.<sup>24</sup> Modern architecture in its diverse manifestations continued to hold out the promise of social change, or at least to supply formal inspiration.<sup>25</sup> In an effort to reflect progress and the general optimism that comes with substantial physical transformation, cities wholeheartedly embraced innovative Modern designs for municipal projects.

Cities were now increasingly composed of detached districts, purposefully cut off from each other and from historic areas, and comprised of single-purpose, single-class

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Curtis W. Fentress et al., *Civic Builders* (West Sussex, England: Wiley-Academy Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Johns, *Moment of Grace*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> William Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (Upper Saddle River N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996), 210.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 548.

buildings, mostly of a uniform Modern style.<sup>26</sup> People desired more traditional features in major public buildings, and more traditional layouts of cities and towns:

As the older parts of cities were swept away in a wave of urban renewal, as nineteenth-century courthouses and city halls were demolished for modern replacements, more and more people wondered whether what they had lost was matched by the new world being created by modernism.<sup>27</sup>

Typically monumental in size, turned away from the street, and designed with little consideration of the existing built fabric, the new municipal buildings were the pride of local administrations but failed to connect with average citizens.

By the end of the 1960s, the urban planning and design ideals of the previous two decades were facing intense scrutiny. Reactions against the excesses of Modernist bravado began to take shape almost immediately after the cessation of widespread municipal redevelopment programs.<sup>28</sup> In his classic text on Modern architecture, William Curtis blamed the negative reaction to the use of Modernist styles in renewal projects on the issues arising from the conflict between “a faceless modern technology and the need for belonging and identity.”<sup>29</sup> The claim is often made that Modern architects tasked with building public or municipal buildings refused to relate to what had been built before, and as a result, Modern buildings had a similar tendency not to relate to the surrounding built environment. Another argument is that while these

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<sup>26</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, “Inventions and Interventions: American Urban Design in the Twentieth Century,” in *Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public Realm*, ed. Elizabeth A. T. Smith (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), 37.

<sup>27</sup> Nathan Glazer, *From a Cause to a Style: Modernist Architecture's Encounter with the American City* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, “Inventions and Interventions: American Urban Design in the Twentieth Century,” 37.

<sup>29</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, 556.

buildings were architecturally innovative, they were also alien in form and scale and created at the expense of beloved older neighborhoods.<sup>30</sup>

In both *The Public Face of Architecture* and *From a Cause to a Style*, Nathan Glazer argues that the utilization of Modernist architecture in municipal buildings and the subsequent “denial of tradition” failed cities and, more importantly, the public. Despite meeting all practical needs, he feels that the public has a right to question if a public building is suitably beautiful for the place and function for which it was designed.<sup>31</sup> He condemns Modernist municipal complexes as being designed to ward off the casual public, and places the failures in design on the lack of involvement by the public and public officials.<sup>32</sup> He asserts that the message these buildings carry is more about aesthetics than about what institution is housed inside, its function, or how it relates to other institutions within the context of the city.<sup>33</sup> Unlike private buildings, public buildings should make a more substantial effort “to shape public spaces, to declare their public function, to strengthen in those who view them a civic consciousness, a pride in city, public life, and major institutions.”<sup>34</sup> He suggests that the public must look inward for a remedy to this problem, and that the only answer lies in the raising of public taste. His recommendations are farcical, revealing his inability to look beyond the aesthetic

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<sup>30</sup> Ryan, *Design After Decline: How America Rebuilds Shrinking Cities*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Glazer, *From a Cause to a Style: Modernist Architecture's Encounter with the American City*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Nathan Glazer, *The Public Face of Architecture: Civic Culture and Public Spaces* (New York: Free Press, 1987), xi.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

issues inherent in Modern public buildings to other factors contributing to their significance.<sup>35</sup>

In his unwavering critique of American settlement patterns, James Howard Kunstler argues that the landscape we've created is the primary source of modern troubles. He targets Modernism, which he deems "bad architecture," suggesting that the architects "set out on a great purifying mission that damaged the whole physical setting for civilization in our time."<sup>36</sup> He blames Modern architecture for the ruination of cities through "abstract renewal schemes, public buildings and public spaces unworthy of human affection."<sup>37</sup> In their desires to create an idealized society through innovative architectural design, he feels the Modernists and their successors instead stamped out history, tradition, and significance, while inflicting tremendous damage on the physical settings of American cities.<sup>38</sup>

These critiques of the recent past are in no way novel and, historically speaking, periods of transformative building and the resultant uses have been negatively regarded. In a presentation given at the National Park Service's 1995 "Preserving the Recent Past" conference, Richard Longstreth addressed skeptical preservationists, pointing out some of the factors leading to a lack of support for the preservation of Modern architectural resources. He explains the evolution of repugnance for works from one's own era:

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>36</sup> James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 59.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 84.

Both buildings and cities created since the rise of industrialization in the early nineteenth century were charged with having nearly ruined the planet. The legacy of one`s parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents was not only visually meaningless and degenerate, but socially and spiritually repressive as well. The more of this alleged blight that was removed from the scene, the better.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly destructive viewpoints are what initially fueled the historic preservation movement, and much like the buildings fought for then, Modern buildings also deserve to be examined from a fresh perspective.

Gwendolyn Wright`s comprehensive overview of Modern architecture is an account of its history and influence in the United States, from after the Civil War through the current day. She approaches the topic through a broader cultural context, constructing a narrative that traces the transformation of the nation. By the close of the 1960s, claims that this style of building could remedy social problems had proven to be unfounded. The style had fallen from grace and “the public at large had also become bored with this kind of modernist architecture, which was criticized as monotonous and lacking any distinction.”<sup>40</sup> She identifies significant changes in Americans` home, work, and public lives, three major realms of modern life where people come together, and examines how architecture helped define these transformations.<sup>41</sup> Her approach is unique, and her inclusion of lesser known architects and locales presents a compelling history.

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Longstreth, “I Can’t See It; I Don’t Understand It; And It Doesn’t Look Old to Me,” *Forum Journal* 27, no. 1 (2012): 36.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *USA: Modern Architectures in History*, 74..

<sup>41</sup> “Architecture as Response: An Interview with Gwendolyn Wright,” *Arcade* 31.1 (Winter 2012), accessed April 3, 2014, <http://arcadenw.org/article/architecture-as-response>.

As representations of the authority and associated ideas of local government, post-war municipal buildings embraced Modern architectural styles for their transformative power. Their dramatic forms and innovative design echoed cities' desire to be viewed as an improved version of what they had been previously. The municipal buildings born out of sweeping redevelopment efforts and revitalization programs engaged the city in a progressive manner and, thus, were constructed in a similarly representative style. Post-war buildings were at one time ubiquitous, and as a result, suffered a period of widespread loss. Today, the number of well-maintained Modern municipal resources is dwindling. As municipalities continue to maintain poor stewardship over these resources, it becomes the charge of local preservation organizations and grassroots advocacy groups to quell the losses and cultivate appreciation for these often-unseen, yet significant buildings.

### ***2.3 Preservation Advocacy for Modern Architectural Resources***

A step in the natural evolution of the discipline, the preservation of post-war Modern architecture in the United States is a concept that has steadily gained acceptance since it first materialized nearly thirty-five years ago.<sup>42</sup> As resources from this period gain a wider audience, the most documented and recognized midcentury architectural sites include iconic buildings, those designed by noted architects, and high profile residences. Celebrated examples are well maintained, often locally landmarked

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<sup>42</sup> One of the earliest published pleas for the preservation of Modern architecture came from Chester Liebs, "Remember Our Not-So-Distant Past?" *Historic Preservation*, (January-March 1978), 30-35.

or designated national landmarks, and included on protective local registers. The protection and care afforded to these iconic monuments of Modernism contributes to a false sense of security for the broader oeuvre of post-war architecture. Modern vernacular, commercial, educational, and municipal buildings, particularly those built by lesser-recognized architects, play an important role in our communities and are at the greatest risk of demolition and insensitive alteration. Advocacy efforts for these often-invisible structures face a unique set of challenges as they promote their significance and work towards their preservation. While preservation advocates utilize extant preservation tools, those working towards the preservation of Modern buildings are developing new approaches and seizing opportunities to identify, publicize, and garner public support for undervalued, yet significant architectural resources.

The lack of admiration and attention afforded post-war architectural resources leads proponents to assess significance based on broad factors, with age no longer of central importance.<sup>43</sup> Diane Wray, cofounder of Denver's Modern Architecture Preservation League, made clear the reality of advocacy efforts for buildings from this era, stating, "the need to preserve [a building] is dictated not by its age, but by the threat of its destruction."<sup>44</sup> A significant factor working against the advocacy of Modern municipally owned buildings lies in their genesis: the planning philosophy responsible for considerable urban renewal teardowns. The post-war period of large-scale urban redevelopment was antithetical to the birth of the national historic preservation

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<sup>43</sup> Kelli Shapiro, "From Modernism to McDonald's: Ideology, Controversy, and the Movement to Preserve the Recent Past," *Journal of Architectural Education* 61, no. 2 (2007): 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

movement in 1966, which was bolstered by the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act. Aside from being perceived as contributing to the mass demolition and endangerment of older buildings and neighborhoods, monumental Modern municipal buildings also represent larger problems such as the mass exodus from historic urban cores, the subsequent decline and decay of these areas, and issues stemming from social justice and civil unrest.<sup>45</sup> Detractors view the demolition of these sites as justification for past planning crimes, and their redevelopment as a way for cities to mend themselves.

Preservation Economist Donovan Rypkema contends that advocates for the preservation of Modern architecture feel that these buildings deserve special attention and increased emphasis, as opposed to being part of the ongoing chronological evolution that has occurred in the historic preservation movement since its beginning.<sup>46</sup> Referring to these advocates as “recent past separatists,” he believes that preserving commercial or vernacular architecture from this era amounts to “lowering standards” and that the vast majority of what has been built in America over the last 50 years is “crap.” Much the same as many public officials and policymakers, these buildings are a part of his living memory, and he, like them, is unable to find significance in lesser-known, understated Modern sites. In spite of dissenting voices, the preservation advocacy for Modern architecture has grown over time, continually influencing public perception on the significance of these resources and the need for their preservation.

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<sup>45</sup> Kelli Shapiro, “From Modernism to McDonald’s,” 11.

<sup>46</sup> Donovan D Rypkema, “Saving the Recent Past: A Philosophical and Practical Dissent,” *Forum Journal* 20, no. 1 (2005).



The current state of preservation advocacy for Modern buildings in the United States is the result of three decades of efforts undertaken by individuals and organizations. In 1988, the International Working Party for the Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites, and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement, widely known as Docomomo, was established in Europe and today is made up 2,300 members from more than 59 chapters. The non-profit organization's mission is to act as a watchdog when important Modern movement buildings are under threat, exchange ideas related to conservation technology, and foster interest in the ideas and heritage of the Modern movement. Docomomo US was founded in 1995 as the United States chapter of the international organization. Through its union of regional chapters, it promotes public interest in Modern architecture and its preservation through lectures, walking tours, organized advocacy efforts, and annual symposiums.

The first conference held in the US on the topic of Modern architectural preservation, "Preserving the Recent Past," was hosted by the National Park Service in Chicago in 1995. Attended by over eight hundred preservation practitioners and policymakers, the meeting featured new research on the challenges of evaluation, conservation of materials, and preservation and re-use strategies.<sup>47</sup> A volume containing all presented papers was later published, and featured an insightful contribution by Diane Wray, Director of Denver's Modern Architecture Preservation League (MAPL), in which she addresses the challenges of advocating for the preservation of Modern city

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<sup>47</sup> Susan D Bronson and Thomas C Jester, "Conserving the Built Heritage of the Modern Era : Recent Developments and Ongoing Challenges," *APT Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (1997): 5.

owned architectural resources, providing strategies for navigating and overcoming the political labyrinth inherent in such efforts.<sup>48</sup> The strategies that stemmed from MAPL's project *Protecting Modern Architecture in the Public Sector* are invaluable to any group or individual leading campaigns for publically owned buildings. In 2000, the "Preserving the Recent Past 2" conference was held in Philadelphia, and also spawned a valuable publication featuring all presented papers, on topics ranging from advocacy to conservation and rehabilitation.<sup>49</sup> The literature resulting from these conferences is particularly beneficial, not only for the expert contributions to the issues facing the preservation of Modern resources, but also because they document the evolution of the Modern preservation movement as it's developed over the last two decades.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is an international conservation organization comprised of conservation professionals that advises the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on cultural heritage and the World Heritage Convention. The International Scientific Committee on Twentieth-Century Heritage (ISC20C) aims to promote the identification, conservation, and preservation of mid-to-late twentieth-century places that are most at risk as a result of lack of recognition and inadequate conservation. Through projects, conferences, publications, and their "Heritage Alert" program, they work to raise international public awareness about Modern threatened sites.

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<sup>48</sup> Diane Wray, "Organizing to Preserve Modern Architecture: The Modern Architecture Preservation League," in *Preserving the Recent Past*, ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer, vol. 10 (Washington D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Deborah Slaton and William G Foulks, eds., *Preserving the Recent Past 2* (Washington DC: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2000).

The World Monuments Fund (WMF) is an independent organization that has worked since its inception in 1965 to preserve important architectural and cultural heritage sites in more than ninety countries. Their special initiative, “Modernism at Risk” began in 2006 and stemmed from a growing concern for Modern sites that began in the 1980s. A major component of this initiative is their yearly watch list, which features a number of midcentury Modern sites in the United States and abroad. In addition, through funding provided by sponsors, they support the development of design solutions for adaptive reuse of buildings, conservation projects at internationally significant and endangered Modern sites, and a travelling exhibition and lecture program, which aims to increase public awareness about preserving Modern architecture. Starting in 2008, they began awarding the WMF/Knoll Modernism Prize biennially to the designer, architect, or firm responsible for an innovative architectural or design solution that has preserved or enhanced a Modern landmark.

The Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN) is a grassroots national non-profit founded in 2000 in response to the proposed demolition of Richard Neutra’s Cyclorama Building at Gettysburg National Military Park. Comprised of a coalition of preservationists, historians, and architects, the RPPN helps local preservation advocates promote and protect Modern sites of value to their communities. In particular, RPPN focuses on little known, often overlooked Modern vernacular sites. Their quarterly magazine promotes local grassroots advocacy campaigns and helps publicize threatened Modern sites around the country.

The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) is a private, non-profit institution that works to advance conservation practice in the visual arts and architecture through scientific research, education and training, model field projects, and the broad dissemination of findings. Their “Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative” (CMAI) was launched in 2012 as a research-based initiative centered on the unique preservation concerns inherent in Modernist buildings. Driven by the challenges of Modern buildings built using innovative construction methods and experimental materials, the initiative aims to develop and disseminate literature for use by practitioners working with Modern architecture. The GCI’s research and development of best practices for the maintenance and renovation of these resources will serve to not only benefit current owners and stewards of Modern structures, but will also assist in the creation of realistic pro forma analyses to determine the financial feasibility of potential rehabilitation projects for prospective developers.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Modernism and the Recent Past” initiative stems from their commitment to preserving Modern heritage and the understanding that architectural styles gain acceptance at different points in history. Their “National Treasures” program lists endangered places of national significance as well as sites where they believe successful preservation will have positive implications for preservation nationwide. In recent years they have listed both Bertrand Goldberg’s Prentice Women’s Hospital (1975) and Hilario Candela’s Miami Marine Stadium (1963) as “National Treasures.” They utilize their website to solicit donations for the

aforementioned advocacy efforts, share updates on the campaigns, and allow followers to share personal stories about each site. The Trust acquired Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House (1945-51) in 2003 and Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949) and forty-seven-acre campus in 2007, operating both as house museums. Both are National Historic Landmarks, and in 2008 Trust President Richard Moe stated, "We've always had the goal of including examples of the best of each style in our collection of historic sites."<sup>50</sup> For lesser-known, more vernacular Modernism, they have resources for owners of Modern homes, information on surveying and designation of Modern resources, and their *Forum Journal* often features articles on challenges faced when working to preserve sites from this era.

The General Services Administration (GSA) is an independent agency that supports the operational needs of federal agencies, namely the regulation, acquisition, use, and disposal of real estate and land. The portfolio of Modern-era buildings built between 1950 and 1979 under the charge of the GSA numbers nearly six hundred and equates to fifty percent of its inventory. In 1999, the GSA began a comprehensive plan for conceiving and implementing policy issues for its buildings of national importance. The "Modern-Era Buildings Initiative" spawned a symposium and panel, which established recommendations addressing the performance and aesthetic challenges of Modern GSA buildings. The recommendations, along with a framework for investment decisions and design alterations were featured in a 2003 publication entitled *Growth, Efficiency and*

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<sup>50</sup> Kim O'Connell, "Now Presenting the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The National Trust for Historic Preservation protects modernism and the recent past," *Preservation* (May/June 2008), accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2008/may-june/yt-modernism.html>.

*Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s.* This publication was created in anticipation of increased public interest in Modern buildings and the agency's realization that they needed to develop a better understanding of their Modern-era resources. The overview presented encompasses the GSA Modern building inventory, case studies, style guides, and evaluation guidelines. It is apparent that these buildings were celebrated for their innovative design when first constructed, and that the GSA intends to continue observing their significance through proper stewardship.

Aside from the GSA, these preservation advocacy organizations and conservation initiatives are ones that can potentially work together with local preservation organizations and assist with preservation efforts for Modern municipal buildings. Collaborations and coalition building with these organizations allow for exposure to a wider audience while also lending credibility to influence public perception of not only one specific campaign, but the preservation of Modern architecture in general. The GSA's framework is comprehensive and should serve as a model for state and local governments' stewardship of their Modern buildings. Their consultation with seventy-five leading private-sector architects and preservation experts on how to address the performance and aesthetic challenges of their stock of Modern buildings is a precedent-setting move that reflects an admirably responsible level of stewardship.

Preservation advocacy efforts for Modern buildings receive increased media attention with each passing year. The debate about the historical and architectural significance of resources from this period is now a conversation taking place in

mainstream publications and thus rendered legitimate by a growing group of supporters. The eighteen-year preservation battle for Araldo Cossutta's Brutalist Third Church of Christ, Scientist (1971) in Washington, D.C. lasted from 1991 through 2009 when a demolition permit was issued for the building. This fight played out in the media, with those against the building's preservation labeling the bulldozing of the church "a huge victory for common sense and for the rights of property owners against a small band of preservation extremists."<sup>51</sup> The 2003 through 2005 public debate over the proposed radical alteration to the exterior of Edward Durrell Stone's Modernist 2 Columbus Circle (1964) in New York City brought the issue of the significance and preservation of Modern architecture again into the spotlight. The 2007 through 2012 campaign to save Bertrand Goldberg's Brutalist Prentice Women's Hospital (1975) in Chicago utilized the power of social media and commanded an enormous level of support for the building's preservation. Sadly, each of these cases resulted in loss of the building or its architectural integrity through insensitive rehabilitation. Preservation groups went head to head with municipal agencies over the landmarking and protection of each of these privately owned sites, ultimately ending in a vote against designation or a revocation of previously granted designation.

When privately owned Modern buildings struggle for local landmark status despite an outpouring of support, the fate of publically or municipally owned resources seems like an impossible act. Despite a growing awareness and appreciation for Modern

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<sup>51</sup> Marc Fisher, "D.C. Lets Church Tear Down Brutalist Atrocity," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 2009, accessed April 5, 2014, [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/rawfisher/2009/05/dc\\_lets\\_church\\_tear\\_down\\_bruta.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/rawfisher/2009/05/dc_lets_church_tear_down_bruta.html).

resources, there are still challenges for broader recognition of commercial, educational, and municipal building types. Susan Macdonald assesses the plight of these buildings clearly, explaining:

Large government agencies have yet to appreciate the legacy of their own buildings from this period, often seeing them purely from a utilitarian perspective or merely as real estate. Once modern structures are obsolete, few recognize potential for their adaptation to contemporary needs.<sup>52</sup>

It is the responsibility of local preservation organizations and grassroots advocates to influence municipal government administrations to recognize that their buildings are significant and not simply real estate.

When the power to protect a building from demolition lies in the hands of the building's owners, what can local preservation organizations and individuals do to ensure their protection? This is a question that has not been previously explored and one that is becoming more critical as major cities increase in population each year. The resultant growth of residential areas and development pressure places these post-war sites, generally situated on large lots, at an increased risk of demolition. This thesis explores the dilemmas presented in advocating for the preservation of municipally owned Modern buildings. These issues are explored through an examination of preservation advocacy efforts to protect three municipally owned Modern buildings that once faced or currently face the threat of demolition. A critical investigation of the advocacy efforts for Boston City Hall, the Los Angeles Police Facilities Building, and the

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Macdonald, "Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940-1990," in *Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940-1990*, ed. Wim de Wit and Christopher James Alexander (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2013), 120.



Philadelphia Police Administration Building leads to a determination of best practices for similar preservation advocacy efforts for Modern municipal buildings.

### 3 | Case Study: Boston City Hall

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Boston City Hall is a monumental icon of Modernism that serves as an artifact of the social and economic rebirth of the city of Boston. Today, the building stands as one of the most contentiously viewed municipal buildings in the nation. When architecture firm Kallmann, McKinnell and Knowles won the design competition for the building in 1962, their design immediately garnered international acclaim as well as debate. Once referred to as the “Paradigmatic structure of the 1960s,” in a city where “the realities of political power can use a bit of dignified dressing up,” the building was an essential component in the creation of “The New Boston” and symbolic of the dynamic era of transformation the city underwent in the 1960s.<sup>53</sup> Today, Boston is experiencing an era of tremendous economic success amidst continued growth and development. Boston City Hall’s expansive multi-acre site is located in a desirable development area of downtown Boston, and the new mayor has publically suggested its sale. Despite its precarious position, supporters are actively advocating for the building’s preservation and rehabilitation while calling on the City of Boston to be better stewards and realize the value in maintaining the building for its original use as a City Hall.

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<sup>53</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “Focus on the Museum Tower,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1980.

### **3.1 Historical Background**

Boston is a city steeped in history and recognized primarily for its surviving stock of seventeenth and eighteenth century brick buildings. The site upon which Boston City Hall is constructed evolved over time, from seventeenth century estates to a small village to thriving urban center. The area known today as Government Center was erected on a site historically known as Scollay Square. The neighborhood was named for William Scollay, a Scottish apothecary, who in 1795 purchased a number of buildings at the intersection of Court and Cambridge Streets in downtown Boston. In 1838, the area was officially designated by the city of Boston as Scollay Square. Located close to downtown Boston, Scollay Square was a center of business activity in addition to serving as a vital transportation hub.

Following the Great Fire of 1872, area churches, businesses, and residents began relocating to the Back Bay as an increasingly transient population replaced the majority of Scollay Square's permanent residents.<sup>54</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, the Square's theaters became immensely popular, prompting the addition of burlesque and vaudeville theaters. Humming with activity day and night, by the 1920s the area had become a celebrated entertainment district (Fig. 1). Following the end of the Second World War, the Scollay Square area had become perceived as a problem area suffering from the scourge of blight.

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<sup>54</sup> David Kruh, *Always Something Doing: Boston's Infamous Scollay Square* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), x.

The 1940 census figures reflected a decline in population for Boston and many of the nation's major cities. In 1941, Mayor James Michael Curley responded to the visible effects of Boston's decline, warning, "unless prompt measures are taken, the contagion will spread until virtual decay and destruction of the whole city has taken place." During the two decades following World War II, Boston was a city on the decline. The city was described as a "sick city" in *Fortune* magazine, as "dying on the vine" in *U.S. News and World Report*, and the *Boston Globe* deemed it "a hopeless back water, a tumbled-down has-been among cities."<sup>55</sup>

The Boston Government Center Renewal Project was conceived in 1954 when city, state, and federal authorities began contemplating major new construction projects in Boston. By early 1960, a definitive program was in place and surveying and planning commenced. The stated goals of the plan were to "clear a decadent area in the heart of the city and to convert it to a major center of governmental and private activity, marked by buildings of architectural excellence, with allocations of space to intensive business uses."<sup>56</sup> The primary considerations for the project were to increase the local tax base while revitalizing the downtown core. New York City firm I.M. Pei and Associates designed the Government Center master plan in 1961 which comprised new city, state, and federal office buildings, privately-financed office and retail space, and the eight-acre City Hall Plaza.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>56</sup> Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Government Center Progress Report* (Boston: 1964), 3.

Under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949, the Scollay Square area was named as an Urban Renewal Area eligible for federal assistance for redevelopment. In a 1964 progress report on the redevelopment project, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) described the former Scollay Square area as:

One of the most blighted in the central city marked by dilapidated dwellings and vacant stores, open parking lots, broken neon lights and faded marquees, taverns and tattoo parlors, marginal business establishments of one sort or another, an area marked by a high incidence of social disorders, fires and crimes. Its location at the confluence of the financial, governmental, retail and transportation centers of Boston, well served by mass transit and public highways, only served to underscore its misuse.<sup>57</sup>

The Scollay Square area had been considered as a possible redevelopment site since the 1950s and its selection as the site for the Boston Government Center Renewal Project was driven by advantageous motives. The area's central location in downtown Boston, situated between two major railway stations, was beneficial, as it facilitated easy accessibility to the new Government Center for all citizens. City planner Edward Logue oversaw the Government Center project and made it clear that no other approach outside of total demolition of the Scollay Square area would be feasible. He saw the wholesale clearance of the site as an opportunity to eliminate what he deemed to be an inadequate system of narrow winding streets, replacing them with major boulevards that better matched the scale of the new Government Center and that could accommodate the anticipated increased traffic volume.

Similar to the majority of sites selected for urban renewal projects, it was determined by the city that Scollay Square had become a "seedy" area made up of

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<sup>57</sup> Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Government Center Progress Report*, 2.

buildings that had undergone decades of neglect. Major publications contributed to the negative image of the area, with *U.S. News and World Report* referring to Scollay Square as “Boston’s skid row,” and *Time* magazine describing it as an area filled with “flop houses, bordellos and tattoo parlors.”<sup>58</sup> By labeling this area as blighted, the BRA could posit that its continued existence threatened the wellbeing of the remainder of the city. When city officials, urban planners, and business leaders spoke of blight, they were directly addressing the process of physical deterioration that undermined the quality of urban life and destroyed property values.<sup>59</sup> Branded a slum, sweeping demolition and redevelopment was thought to be the only solution for the area. Amongst the large number of businesses within the proposed site, the vacancy rate was twenty-seven percent, totaling nearly a million square feet of empty floor space, thus further compelling municipal leadership that the Scollay Square area was an optimal candidate for redevelopment.<sup>60</sup>

Longtime residents who considered Scollay Square one of Boston’s historical areas contested the determination that the area was a “slum.” Members of city council made feeble attempts to thwart the project, but overall the taking of Scollay Square was accomplished with minimal protest. In view of the fact that the social perception of the area by influential citizens and municipal leadership was poor, the BRA was able to easily seize the land with little organized opposition.

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<sup>58</sup> Kruh, *Always Something Doing: Boston’s Infamous Scollay Square*, 129.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

In October 1961, the BRA acquired nearly sixty acres in the Scollay Square neighborhood through the power of eminent domain. The area obtained during the early land acquisition period was comprised of 371 structures purchased through direct payments, settlements, and jury awards. Despite the fact that the area was occupied primarily by businesses, by June 1963, 584 dwelling units housing 438 families and individuals were vacated. There were a total of 869 businesses in the urban renewal area that were forced to relocate as a result of this project.

It took three years to raze the majority of the buildings that made up Scollay Square (Fig. 2). The project area was originally spread across twenty-two streets, and by the end of the project there remained only four major and two minor streets. The 1816 Sears Crescent Building, the site of the longest continuously operating bookstore in the country, was the only building in the redevelopment area that was considered for preservation. In a 1968 report to the BRA, Edward Logue contended that the height and mass of the Sears Crescent Building would complement the new Government Center buildings and deemed it “a ready-made link between the past and the present.”<sup>61</sup> The retention of the building was met with opposition from local politicians, namely City Councilor William J. Foley, who voiced his opposition to saving any of the original buildings, proclaiming:

I’d rather have visitors to Boston look at things they see in Miami and New York—bright shiny tax producing buildings, rather than some ugly building where William Lloyd Garrison published the *Liberator*...It just doesn’t make economic sense.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>62</sup> Uncle Dudley, “Ghosts and Signposts,” *The Boston Globe*, July 25, 1961, 14.

In the end, the building was saved largely through the efforts of George Gloss, who operated his bookshop from the building.

### **3.2 Design & Construction**

The decision to build a new city hall was determined by legislation enacted in 1958 by the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts which created the Government Center Commission, a board tasked with determining and acquiring a site suitable for the construction of a new city hall. In 1961, the Commission, along with Mayor John F. Collins announced the “Competition to Select an Architect for the New City Hall in the Government Center of the City of Boston.” The Mayor declared the competition a “once-in-a-century event” and hoped that all the top talents in the architectural field would compete. National competitions for public buildings were rare, and the Mayor explained that the primary motivating force behind the competition was the city’s desire “to obtain the best possible design in terms of beauty, planning and harmony with the other buildings in Boston’s new Government Center.”<sup>63</sup>

The competition was looking for architects to not only develop the site and undertake the planning and construction of the new city hall building, but also design the immense plaza included in I.M. Pei’s plans for Government Center. The competition’s instructions outlined a number of guidelines for all submitted designs to which applicants had to adhere. These included a height restriction of 130 feet,

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence B. Anderson, *A Competition To Select an Architect for the New City Hall in the Government Center of the City of Boston* (City of Boston, 1961), np.



enclosure of all systems within the building structure, a “sightly” roof that would be in view of taller neighboring buildings, and the formation an effective visual closure to neighboring Dock Square on the east façade.<sup>64</sup> Competition guidelines also stated that the building be of proportionate monumentality and scale to the vast plaza.

After attracting the participation of 256 architects and firms, in May 1962, a jury of four prominent architects and three Boston laymen announced the winner of the two-stage competition. The design by Columbia University architecture professors Gerhard M. Kallmann, Noel McKinnell, and Edward F. Knowles, which the jury described as impressive, functional, economical, and harmonious with its surroundings, was selected for the project (Fig. 3). They joined together with two Boston firms, architects Campbell, Aldrich and Nulty and consulting engineers LeMessurier Associates to execute the design and supervise construction. When the winning design was unveiled, “It sent a signal that the city was taking itself seriously...and wanted to be something better than it had been.”<sup>65</sup> The architects’ goals for their entry were to challenge people’s concept of what a monumental civic building should look like and to arouse a sense of optimism about democratic government.<sup>66</sup>

Completed in 1968 and opened in 1969, Boston City Hall is located at One City Hall Plaza in Boston, Massachusetts, within Government Center. A significant example of Brutalism, the building exhibits a monumentality befitting the home of municipal government in one of the nation’s largest cities (Fig. 4). Architects Kallmann, McKinnell

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Leon Neyfakh, “How Boston City Hall Was Born,” *The Boston Globe*, February 12, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

and Knowles established the three principal themes of openness, accessibility, and harmony between the old and new Boston, which are represented throughout the building (Fig. 5).<sup>67</sup> The building's functional organizational layout, structured according to frequency of use, is linked together with immaculate care (Fig. 6).

Boston City Hall is comprised of nine floors with a total enclosed area of 513,000 square feet. Composed in a tripartite arrangement, the building incorporates a base housing a grand entry hall (Fig. 7) and the city offices accessed most frequently by the public, an elevated level containing the Mayor's office, Council chambers, and councilor's offices, and the three-story tiered crown of the building housing administrative offices for municipal planning agencies. The building is constructed of cast-in-place and precast Portland cement concrete and masonry and stands as a clear rejection of the ubiquitous glass and steel structures of the era.<sup>68</sup>

Designed by Kallmann, McKinnell, and Knowles, the seven-acre City Hall Plaza adjoins Boston City Hall and the buildings that make up Government Center, including the John F. Kennedy Federal Building and the Government Service Center building, designed by noted architect Paul Rudolph. The State of Massachusetts, the City of Boston, and the United States Federal Government share ownership of the plaza. Constructed of red brick and concrete, the architects envisioned the plaza as an extension of the main floor of City Hall. Where the brick of the plaza meets with the quarry tile of the lobby, the link between the public sector and the municipal affairs

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<sup>67</sup> Boston City Council Central Staff, Pamphlet, "A Walking Tour of City Hall."

<sup>68</sup> Architectural historians classify Boston City Hall as an example of Brutalism. The name is derived from the French term *beton brut*, which translates to "raw concrete."

occurring within the building is delineated. The plaza is predominantly used for municipal and sports ceremonies, concerts, plays, farmers markets, food trucks, protests, and rallies.

Since its construction, City Hall Plaza has failed to realize its potential as a public outdoor civic space. Many complain of the inefficiency of the space, which suffers from inadequate nighttime illumination, an inability for the city to effectively plow snow, and extreme heat and sun exposure in the un-shaded expanse. Sunlit and windswept with very few trees and little vegetation, the plaza is a space ripe for greening and revitalization. Suggestions for improvement include the inclusion of pollarded trees, enclosed loggias, and arcaded sidewalks that could allow more comfortable spaces for the users of City Hall Plaza, while organically uniting the functional and the formal.<sup>69</sup>

### **3.3 Critical Reaction**

Boston City Hall was almost immediately hailed as an icon of Modern architecture and a landmark for the City of Boston. Serving as a symbol of Boston's reemergence following a fifty-year period of social and economic decline, the building won a number of awards soon after its completion. It won the 1969 American Institute of Architects (AIA) Honor Award, the 1969 Harleston Parker Medal, awarded by the City of Boston and the Boston Society of Architects for excellence in design and construction, and the 1969 Bartlett Award for Handicapped-Accessible Design from the AIA.

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<sup>69</sup> James Marston Fitch, "Boston's City Hall: End or Eve of an Era?," in *James Marston Fitch: Selected Writings 1933-1997* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 53.

Historian Lawrence W. Kennedy summed up the significance of Boston City Hall's design, stating:

This new City Hall shocked people into a new vision of Boston: the Hub was no longer a provincial backwater, home of historical relics and corrupt politicians; to many, City Hall symbolized the spirit of a new and more confident Boston ready to face the future.<sup>70</sup>

Architectural historian James Marston Fitch asserted that the new City Hall "stands at the center of a process of urban regeneration without parallel in American cities today."<sup>71</sup> Referencing the role the building plays as the seat of political power, he maintains that Boston City Hall uses sheer heroic scale as a method of promoting its municipal grandeur.<sup>72</sup>

The bold design of Boston City Hall was intended to be a rejuvenating symbol of the New Boston, ushering in an era of economic and cultural rebirth for a city that at the time of the building's construction had been on the decline (Fig. 8). The building was designed with the citizens of Boston in mind and was meant to be welcoming and inclusive for all users of the building, encouraging their participation and inclusion in municipal government processes. The building's dramatic modern design was selected because it was unmatched in any other civic building in the nation, thus further representative of the City of Boston's prosperous strides forward. Despite these intentions, the building has continuously garnered adverse reactions.

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<sup>70</sup> Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 179.

<sup>71</sup> James Marston Fitch, "Boston's City Hall: End or Eve of an Era?," 54.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

“Whatever it is, it’s not beautiful,” proclaimed a Boston Cab driver of the new Boston City Hall in February 1969, summing up the “architectural gap, or abyss, as it exists between those who design and those who use the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s new buildings.”<sup>73</sup> Boston City Hall presents an unfamiliar paradigm, not just stylistically, but also due to its atypical siting on a plinth in the middle of a vast plaza (Fig. 9). The vitriol directed at Boston City Hall comes from a public doggedly unconverted to Modernism and particularly hostile to the Brutalist aesthetic.<sup>74</sup> Challenging interior wayfinding and diminished lighting quality further compound their estranged relationship with the building. Additionally, the majority of citizens visit City Hall to perform acts of drudgery, such as paying a parking ticket or an excise tax. The visceral adverse reaction from users of the building is, in part, due to decades of deferred maintenance and inadequate interior signage. In April 2014, Mayor Martin Walsh introduced a new greeter program that aims to “make City Hall a more welcoming & accessible place,” presumably in response to navigation challenges on the building’s interior.

The legacy of the urban renewal-era widespread clearance of Scollay Square for Government Center remains a contentious issue for some citizens, resulting in a general distaste for the resultant buildings. In her book *Lost Boston*, Jane Holtz Kay laments the loss of the Scollay Square neighborhood, not only for the loss of a human dimension, but also for what took its place. The Square served as a nexus for city life, but today very little of this once-vibrant neighborhood survives amidst the vast acreage of City Hall

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<sup>73</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “Boston’s New City Hall,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1969.

<sup>74</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “The Beauty in Brutalism, Restored and Updated,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 25, 2009.

Plaza and the office buildings of Government Center.<sup>75</sup> Gone are the hand-painted billboards, barber poles, and elegantly trimmed doors. These have, in Kay's eyes, been "vandalized by blank-faced modernization or totally wiped out in our zeal for the sanitized surface...these buildings no longer provide the detail that humanizes city life."<sup>76</sup> Additionally, class and race conflicts plagued American cities in the 1960s, turning a general cynicism about municipal government into savage disaffection from it. Many questioned to what extent a new city hall, or any new Modern municipal building, no matter how well designed or adeptly crafted, could act as a regenerative force in city life.<sup>77</sup>

In 1987, the city held a public renaming ceremony to recognize the original name of the Government Center area. The train station signs were changed to "Government Center at Scollay Square" and informational signs about the former Scollay Square neighborhood were placed around the site. The *Boston Globe* reacted to the renaming, writing, "Scollay Square continues to hold memories for older Bostonians—and for sailors and undergraduates who were entertained there. They are memories that are worth preserving, even if only in a street sign or an MBTA stop."<sup>78</sup> Although the renaming was largely a symbolic gesture by the city, it served to honor a former thriving Boston neighborhood lost during a pivotal period of transformation.

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<sup>75</sup> Jane Holtz Kay, *Lost Boston* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 110.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 286.

<sup>77</sup> Fitch, "Boston's City Hall: End or Eve of an Era?" 50.

<sup>78</sup> "Next Stop: Scollay Square," *The Boston Globe*, January, 29, 1987.

### **3.4 Threats**

Boston City Hall has unquestionably experienced deferred maintenance, which has contributed to its negative public perception as well as complaints from users of the building. In its current condition, soiling is apparent on both the exterior concrete as well as the brickwork. In contrast to buildings like Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale, which recently underwent a \$126 million renovation, Boston City Hall has been "systematically and willfully destroyed by abusive neglect, aggravated malfunction, and spreading bureaucratic blight."<sup>79</sup> Workers and visitors to the building bemoan the coldness of the concrete, the dark areas stemming from lighting systems in need of an upgrade, and inconsistent interior temperatures caused by outdated and overtaxed HVAC systems. User discomfort could be rectified with proper stewardship and regular maintenance.

Over the past two decades, Boston's municipal leadership has publically acknowledged their aversion to Boston City Hall and their desire to sell the sprawling site and relocate municipal offices elsewhere. In 1998, Mayor Thomas M. Menino stated plans to sell City Hall to developers who could then gut the interior and use the building for office space or demolish it. His primary complaints stemmed from the building's "confusing layout" and it being too small to fit all city agencies, some of which had to lease space in other areas of the city.<sup>80</sup> His objective was for the sale of the current city hall to fund the construction of a new city hall, the cost then estimated at \$15-\$20

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<sup>79</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Beauty in Brutalism, Restored and Updated," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 25, 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Anthony Flint, "Save or Raze? City Hall, Fenway Talk Strikes Nerve," *The Boston Globe*, April 10, 1998.

million. Skeptics argued that the plan was not realistic and that abandoning a building strategically planned as a key element of Government Center was unsound.

In 2006, Menino again proposed the sale of Boston City Hall and its plaza for \$300-\$400 million and the relocation of municipal offices to a new building to be built on the South Boston Waterfront. In a speech to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce he stated, "This sale will open up prime real estate for facilities and open space that will galvanize the vitality of our downtown and strengthen Boston's future. The market value of City Hall and City Hall Plaza will attract sufficient revenue to construct a new seat for city government."<sup>81</sup> This plan never materialized, in part due to the challenge of finding a new site large enough to accommodate the municipal offices housed in City Hall. In a review of Mayor Menino's urban design highs and lows, Boston Globe architecture critic Robert Campbell addressed Menino's desire to vacate and sell the building, suggesting "What City Hall needs is the love of a good mayor who will give it the renovation it badly needs. Ideally, a mayor would also flank it with modest new development."<sup>82</sup>

In September 2013, then-candidate and current Mayor Martin J. Walsh announced during his candidacy a proposal to sell City Hall Plaza and Boston City Hall to developers in an effort to revitalize the downtown Boston area. He suggested that municipal government offices move to another site, citing that:

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas C. Palmer Jr. and Chris Reidy, "Menino Proposes Selling City Hall," *The Boston Globe*, December 12, 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Campbell, "For Urban Design, Menino Era Scores Highs and Lows," *The Boston Globe*, January 2, 2014.



A 21<sup>st</sup> century economy has emerged, and the new mayor must refocus the development to the core economic engine of the city, the downtown. This area must evolve from a 9-to-5 weekday government-dependent culture to a culture economically driven to add value 24/7 to surrounding businesses and neighborhoods.<sup>83</sup>

His plan called for selling Boston City Hall, for which he estimated the city could reap \$150 million while drawing in an additional \$10 to \$12 million each year in property taxes on the 4.5-acre site. His vision was for City Hall to be replaced by mixed-use development including office, retail, residential, and hotel space. The threats to vacate Boston City Hall and build a new building elsewhere are little more than political posturing. Once hard analysis is conducted, any proposed relocation scenario would not prove viable for the City of Boston.

The economically driven development and increase in activity in the area of City Hall in Downtown Boston following work hours so desired by Mayor Menino is currently coming to fruition. In December 2013, a 625-foot, 450-unit residential tower broke ground in Downtown Crossing. Once completed, this will be the tallest residential building in Boston. The Government Center Parking Garage, an underutilized 2,300-space structure flanking City Hall Plaza, is slated to be replaced with a pedestrian-friendly streetscape, public plaza, and mixed-use buildings spread across two urban blocks totaling 4.8 acres in size. This development project will incorporate two high-rises housing apartments and condominiums, a nine-story office building, a boutique retail building, and a hotel, all situated around a public plaza. Altogether, the project will

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<sup>83</sup> Matt Rocheleau, "Foes Critique Martin Walsh's City Hall Sale Plan," *The Boston Globe*, September 16, 2013.

incorporate 812 housing units, 196 hotel rooms, 1.15 million gross square feet of office space, and 82,500 gross square feet of retail.<sup>84</sup>

### **3.5 Advocacy Effort**

In 2007, in response to Mayor Menino's stated desires to relocate City Hall, the Boston Landmarks Commission received a Landmark Petition Form advocating for landmark status for Boston City Hall. The form consisted of supporter signatures, a detailed narrative on the history and significance of the building, photos, and a bibliography. One of the most prominent portions of the petition was the clarification that the signers believe that strict restrictions inherent in most historic preservation and landmarking initiatives should not apply to Boston City Hall. Support was given to interventions that will contribute to the building enduring for future generations.

The concept that Boston City Hall should undergo alterations, as long as they contribute to the building's sustained use, is one that has received widespread support.

The architects Gerhard Kallmann and Michael McKinnell observed:

When we designed City Hall, we regarded the construction of the building to be the start of a process that would engage successive generations of the citizenry in the embellishment, decoration, and adornment of the robust armature that we had designed. This, to our great regret, has not happened.<sup>85</sup>

McKinnell also referenced the continued evolution of the building in 1969: "This isn't a building where the pattern is frozen, where, if you move one detail you ruin everything.

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<sup>84</sup> "The Project," Redevelopment of the Government Center Garage, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://www.governmentcentergarageredevlopment.com/>.

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Padjen, "City Hall Issue," *Architecture Boston*, May-June (2005), 35.

The process of democratic government is the meaning of City Hall. It should never be finished.”<sup>86</sup> *Boston Globe* architecture critic Robert Campbell recommended undertaking a campaign “to refashion City Hall...into the livelier place it could be.”<sup>87</sup>

#### *Advocacy Campaign: Friends of Boston City Hall*

David Fixler is an architect with the Boston firm EYP and a specialist in the preservation of Modern buildings.<sup>88</sup> He is also co-founder and president of Docomomo New England, a non-profit dedicated to documenting and conserving modern buildings. Fixler is a founding member of the advocacy group Friends of Boston City Hall , which was established in 2007 in response to increased threats to the building.<sup>89</sup> He stressed the importance of incorporating the word *Friends* in the group’s name. Instead of utilizing a negative term pointing out their opposition to the demolition of the building, this positive moniker emphasizes their support for the building and its sustained use.

The group is made up of citizens advocating for the preservation and appropriate stewardship of Boston City Hall as well as the improvement of City Hall Plaza. The group believes that the building should be preserved “for its powerful evocation of Boston’s aspirations.”<sup>90</sup> In a similar vein to the landmark petition, the group posits that the building does not demand extreme restrictions on future modifications, and that changes can and should occur.

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<sup>86</sup> Henry Wood, “Doing More With What We Have,” *The Boston Globe*, March 18, 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Campbell, “Towers Were the Height of Fashion,” *The Boston Globe*, December 31, 2006, N9.

<sup>88</sup> David Fixler provided all information in this section during a telephone interview on February 21, 2014.

<sup>89</sup> The Friends of Boston City Hall website is located at <http://friendsofbostoncityhall.org/>.

<sup>90</sup> “Who We Are,” Friends of Boston City Hall, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://friendsofbostoncityhall.org/>.

In the wake of Mayor Martin Walsh's statements in December 2013 regarding demolishing City Hall, Friends of Boston City Hall has recently reconstituted. Their stated goal is to work together with other organizations to influence the City of Boston to maintain and improve the building "to meet the needs of successive generations." The group asserts that along with the plaza, the building is not simply a symbol, sculpture, or piece of the city's history, but a place that must accommodate the needs of the citizens who visit or work within it on a daily basis. They aim to provide a forum for exploring ways in which Boston City Hall and the plaza should change, while also providing the tools, support, and advocacy to elicit that change.

The group plans to partner with local and national preservation groups, creating one entity with which to address Mayor Walsh. The alliance will most likely involve the Friends, The Boston Preservation Alliance, Docomomo, and possibly the National Trust, and will present a united front when approaching the City of Boston. The involvement of international organizations is important because Boston City Hall is, according to Fixler, a globally significant architectural resource. The building's international significance cannot, however, be the sole basis of the argument for preservation.

Because Boston City Hall is such a singular building, there is no "standard" or "one-size-fits-all" approach with regards to advocacy. It is imperative that maintenance staff have a complete understanding of the building in its current state so that proper maintenance can occur. The Friends of Boston City Hall plan to approach the new administration and raise consciousness about the building and its safeguarding. One of

their first goal is for the City of Boston to commission a proper study, and to have a thorough evaluation of the building performed, something that has not been done to date. Fixler feels that this is simply due diligence and acknowledges that it is a very tough building to work with, but also misunderstood, primarily because it is being maintained without any guidelines for best practices. Once guidelines and protocols are in place, maintenance and repairs can be properly executed, facilitating needed building upgrades.

The group also desires that the city invest in a high level comprehensive evaluation of what the possibilities are for the building. Fixler believes that a huge difference could be made in how the building is appreciated and experienced if “key bold moves are made to open up the interior, let some light in, and clean up some of the circulation patterns.” He is assured that none of the essential character of the building would be lost in the process of making these minor beneficial improvements. He also asserts that the plaza can be added to, as long as ample space remains around City Hall so that it can remain the civic monument that it is.

When considering adaptive reuse scenarios, Fixler discourages considering Boston City Hall as anything other than a civic building. The challenge in making the building work as a city hall is to remove some of the departments currently housed within. The City of Boston is currently somewhat decentralized and has very recently built the \$120 million Dudley Square Municipal Office Facility just outside of the city to house the Boston Public Schools administration, which had previously been housed in City Hall.

The Friends of Boston City Hall aim to accomplish their goals primarily through behind the scenes political maneuvering. The crux of preservation advocacy is political connections, and Fixler agrees, emphatically declaring “With these civic buildings, politics are everything.” The key, Fixler asserts, is to avoid being labeled “hysterical preservationists” and to make sure that the advocacy group is comprised of those outside the preservation and architecture fields. Municipal leadership will be more receptive if the building has a broad base of support incorporating members outside of the design community. The group is currently being reformed, but Fixler believes it should include representatives from the development, business, and legal communities, in addition to architects and preservationists. The development community is essential, he maintains, because municipal leadership tends to lend more credence to developers due to their interest in generating jobs and income. From a preservation standpoint, the primary goal should be to strategize on a way to maintain the building’s municipal use.

Addressing the difficult legacy of urban renewal and racial upheaval in the 1960s and its ties to Boston City Hall, Fixler believes that while these strong cultural memories must be acknowledged, they do not present valid arguments for not saving a building. While wholesale clearance of the Scollay Square site may have been a little heavy handed, it was not as devastating a loss as the development of Boston’s West End, and it is important to differentiate between the two.

*Advocating from Within: City of Boston Public Facilities Department*

For the last five and a half years, Joseph Mulligan has served as the Deputy Director of the City of Boston's Property and Construction Management Department, charged with the design, construction, and major repair of all municipal facilities, including Boston City Hall.<sup>91</sup> He oversees a staff of fifty employees from architecture, engineering, planning, project management, and construction backgrounds. The Capital Construction Division of the Property and Construction Management Department plays a critical role in designing, maintaining, and improving Boston's municipally owned buildings within their historic context. He agrees that Boston City Hall has been neglected over the past two decades, and is working to improve the way users of the building, including Mayor Walsh, appreciate their experience in the building.

Regarding the condition of the building, Mulligan is assured that it is in very good condition, devoid of leaks or any of the issues that often occur when Modern buildings experience deferred maintenance. The primary concern is the HVAC system, which is original to the building and fails to maintain consistent interior temperatures. He considers his stewardship as not only a labor of love, but also an obligation, given his responsibility maintaining all city owned buildings.

A primary problem that he seeks to resolve is a reversal of the current partitioning of interior offices back to the original open plan concept designed by Kallmann, McKinnell and Knowles. These partitions were constructed without addressing their effect on the HVAC system and interior building comfort. The City recently constructed a

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<sup>91</sup> Joseph Mulligan provided all information in this section during a telephone interview on March 3, 2014.

municipal office facility in a Boston suburb and Mulligan's office utilized a vacant suite at City Hall for a mock-up and interior fit-out of an agile workspace plan for the new building. The remodeled suite is an open interior floor plan with low-height partitions, glass partitions, and a focus on ambient air quality (Fig. 10). There are fewer private office and breakout rooms for meetings, incorporating strategies encouraging greater interaction between users while also opening up the previously walled-in space (Fig. 11). The lighting was also updated, highlighting the sculptural qualities of the ceiling grid. The Department of Energy and the Environment has moved into the redesigned suite and the space has become a showcase for the potential of interior upgrades to City Hall. Mayor Walsh visited the suite soon after his election and was encouraged by the transformation.

Over the next few years Mulligan wants to accomplish some relatively low impact stage setting involving decorative lighting on the exterior and in some major public spaces on the interior. He asserted, "the great antidote to Brutalism is color" and as a result, his office is working on some low-cost strategies to enhance the exterior lighting for both aesthetic and security purposes. He also wants to enliven the "beautiful sculptural spaces" on second and third floor mezzanine levels, which are utilized primarily by the general public conducting business in the building. The goal is to highlight the sculptural qualities of the concrete by enhancing the light and shadow interplay. Mulligan hopes that by bathing areas such as recessed entrances in LED colored spectrum lighting, it will not only serve to highlight the less-than-obvious main



entrance, but also soften the image of the building (Fig. 12). He is enthusiastic that the enhanced lighting will improve user's relationship to the building and potentially influence their perception of the building as one that is less cold and uninviting and more welcoming.

His long-term vision for making improvements to Boston City Hall involves interior lighting upgrades and HVAC modernizations. A recently vacated high rise building adjacent to City Hall will facilitate the relocation of staff out of City Hall, one or two floors at a time. Pending funding, the lighting project will begin within the next year, whereas the HVAC overhaul and repairs to the cast-in-place systems should commence in four to six years. None of these plans are concrete at this point, but the proposal was approved by the previous administration, and so Mulligan is optimistic. He believes that the administration sees the benefit in having a long-term view with regards to the management and improvement of its municipal properties.

Although he is working to make improvements to the building, Mulligan admits that improving the building in which the new Mayor works just a few months into a new administration could be considered dubious. He must to remain conscious of expenditures and resources utilized on City Hall so that improvements are not viewed as "feathering the nest." He laments that most upgrades and improvements are very expensive; in particular the cast-in-place systems that run through chases within cast concrete apertures. The steam heat system as well as many of the internal components

are corroded and need replacing. When a repair is needed, these systems are difficult to access and require invasive actions such as chipping away at the concrete plenum.

Mulligan's office is also working on improvements to City Hall Plaza. They've done minor work over the years, and there are perennial plans for additional improvements regularly being explored. One of the current projects is for the improvement of ADA accessibility on the plaza. In 2010, Boston was selected as one of five U.S. cities to receive the EPA Smart Growth grant, Greening America's Capitals. The city requested the assistance in order to create realistic greening options for the plaza that can be promptly realized. The project goals include the creation of well-defined edges and entrances, increased bike access and parking, the establishment of connections between the plaza and existing streets, increasing trees and vegetation for better storm water management, and supporting green building improvements and energy efficiency in Boston City Hall. According to Mulligan, storm water management is currently the most viable early action that the City will be undertaking. As the project progresses, the City will work to improve the character of City Hall Plaza through sustainable planning and design approaches so that the plaza can become a better utilized public space.

A municipal government initiative called New Urban Mechanics has teamed with the City of Boston to form the "Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics." The group describes itself as "an approach to civic innovation focused on delivering transformative City services to residents."<sup>92</sup> Serving as "innovation incubators" for the city, the group

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<sup>92</sup> "About: What is New Urban Mechanics?," New Urban Mechanics, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://www.newurbanmechanics.org/about-2/>.

works to collaborate and build partnerships with citizens, internal municipal agencies, and outside entrepreneurs. In March 2014, an arm of the group called “Streetscape Lab” sourced ideas from designers, artists, engineers, and everyday citizens on a project called a “Public Space Invitational” that encouraged reimagining public space in the city of Boston. As part of the project, they invited participants from the design community to reimagine Boston City Hall, rethinking the signage, indoor and outdoor space, ways to improve service delivery and the user experience. The City will review all submissions and may select up to six ideas for implementation. Mulligan believes such initiatives work to amass more constituents in support of Boston City Hall and is one way that citizens can become advocates for the building. Like Fixler, Mulligan believes preservationists should not be unwilling to accept any modifications to the building and should instead actively participate by proposing opportunities and generating ideas that benefit the user experience and use potential of the building.

Neither Mayor Menino nor Mayor Walsh’s threats to sell the building came to fruition, in part, because it would be financially impossible. Mulligan believes that people are beginning to realize that any alternatives to the current building would be very expensive and not politically palatable, adding, “Boston City Hall is home and it’s always going to be home.” Additionally, the building’s favorable context within Government Center, adjacent to the Federal building, across the street from the courthouses, and located within a transportation hub cannot be equaled in any other

location in the city. Locating Boston City Hall away from a transportation hub presents an inequity in that it would then become inaccessible to many citizens.

While Boston City Hall is one of Mulligan's favorite buildings, there are few others who share his affection. He has made it a personal mission to renovate the building one room at a time, which, he admits, may take decades. His approach to the building is the concept of "the bold strokes and the long march." He explained, "Give me a couple of bold strokes right out of the gate to be able to get people prepared to take the long march to renovate the building."

### **3.6 Conclusion**

When Boston City Hall was publically threatened by municipal leadership, the grassroots advocacy effort Friends of Boston City Hall sprang into action. Their primary aim is the formation of a diverse group of professionals working deliberately and pragmatically on a strategic plan for the preservation and restoration of the building. They support renovations and building upgrades, as long as they contribute to its long-term usage. Appropriate stewardship of the building by the City of Boston is lacking and an issue that both the advocacy group and municipal agency representative Joseph Mulligan fully support. Together with other local organizations, the group plans to approach municipal leadership and influence them to properly maintain the building. Their collective expertise will allow them to assist the city in this undertaking, providing the tools and support necessary to endure the sustained use of the building as Boston's

City Hall. The group is adamant that a proper study and thorough evaluation of the building must occur before maintenance plan formulation.

Joseph Mulligan plans to improve the way the building is experienced by users by starting out with low impact improvements. Once the administration is amenable to funding larger maintenance projects, Mulligan will implement major repairs and replacements of the HVAC and lighting systems. The advocacy for the repair and maintenance of the building from an outside group as well as municipal employees will undoubtedly convince the administration of Boston City Hall's prolonged use value. Once bold moves are implemented, and users experience the building in a more positive way, support for its renovation and continued usage will widen.



Figure 1. "Crowded Scollay Square." Leslie Jones. 1942. Boston Public Library, Print Department.  
<http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/8c97nd68b>.



Figure 2. Government Center Construction. 1964. Government Center Progress Report, May 1964, <https://archive.org/stream/governmentcenter64bost#page/n4/mode/1up>.

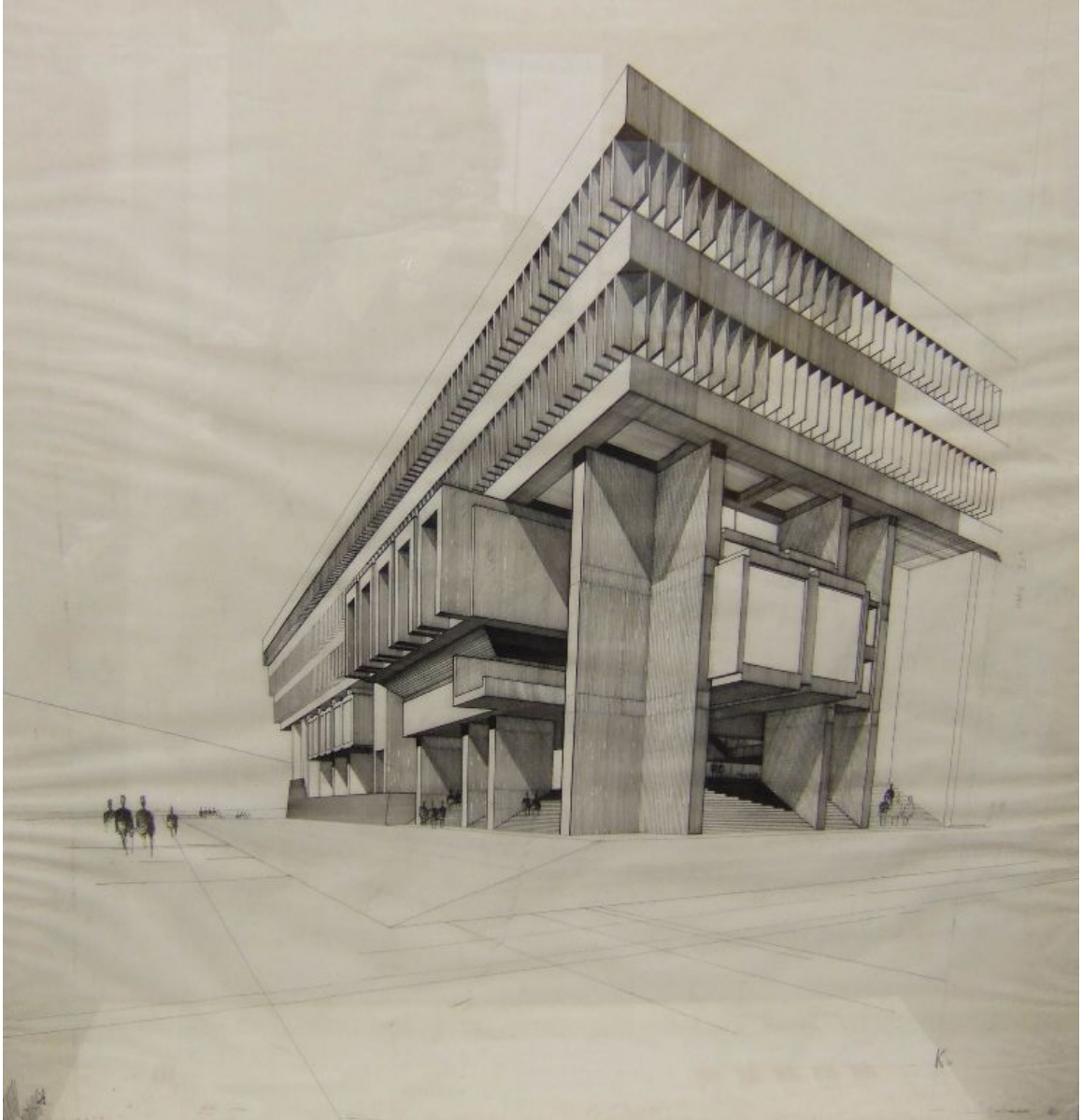


Figure 3. Boston City Hall Competition Drawing. Perspective from Southwest. Michael McKinnell. 1962. Historic New England. <http://friendsofbostoncityhall.org/architectural-drawings/>.





Figure 4. Boston City Hall, Main (west) and side (south) elevations. Bill Lebovich. 1981. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.ma1243/photos.076420p>.



Figure 5. Boston City Hall, Partial view of the south elevation bays. Bill Lebovich. 1981. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.ma1243/photos.076426p>.





Figure 7. : Boston City Hall, Main lobby, looking east. Bill Lebovich. 1981. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.ma1243/photos.076428p>.





Figure 8. Postcard depicting "The New Boston." Friends of Boston City Hall.  
<http://friendsofbostoncityhall.org/memorabilia/>.



Figure 9. Boston City Hall, present day. Kallmann, McKinnell and Wood Architecture Portfolio.  
<http://www.kmwarch.com/project.aspx?id=1>.

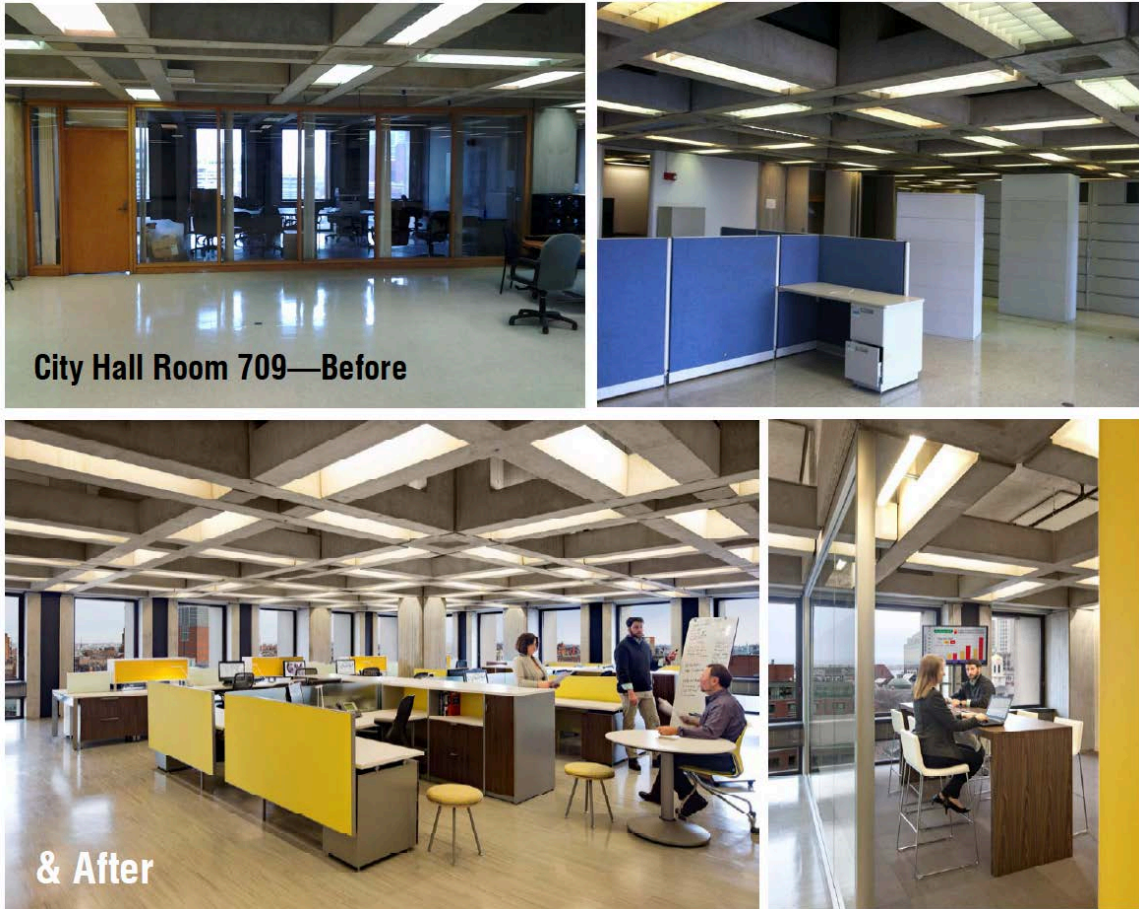


Figure 10. Boston City Hall Room 709 agile workspace renovation. Building Boston 2008-2014: Portfolio of Property and Construction Management of the Public Facilities Department. Provided by Joseph Mulligan.



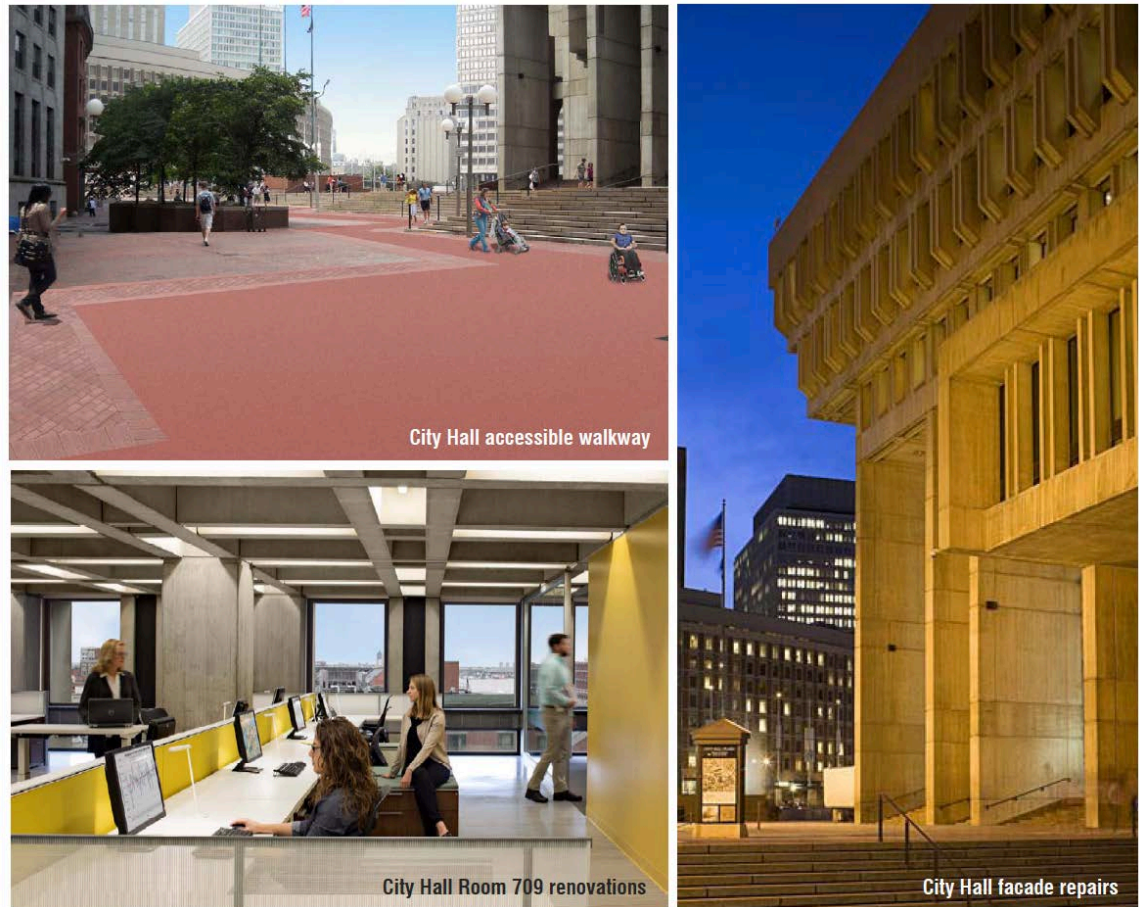


Figure 11. Boston City Hall Room 709 agile workspace renovation, accessible walkway plan, and façade repairs. Building Boston 2008-2014: Portfolio of Property and Construction Management of the Public Facilities Department. Provided by Joseph Mulligan.





Figure 12. Boston City Hall exterior LED lighting mock-up. Provided by Joseph Mulligan.

## 4 | Case Study: Los Angeles Police Facilities Building

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When first built, the Los Angeles Police Facilities Building was a model of operational efficiency in law enforcement buildings due to its integration of police operations and cutting edge technological advances. Designed and constructed from 1951 to 1955, the iconic building served as the headquarters of the Los Angeles Police Department for over half a century. Following Police Chief William Parker's death in 1966, the building was officially renamed and dedicated as the Parker Center in his honor. The building was vacated in 2013 when the force moved into a newly constructed state-of-the-art facility, leaving its future uncertain. The City of Los Angeles has announced three proposals for the redevelopment of the site that call for its renovation, addition, or demolition. While it remains unclear which proposal has the support of municipal leadership, the Los Angeles Conservancy is proactively advocating for the building's renovation and reuse.

### ***4.1 Historical Background***

The area just east of downtown Los Angeles and adjacent to the Civic Center is known as Little Tokyo. The site of the present-day Los Angeles Police Facilities Building, known today as The Parker Center, was once a thriving square block within the Little Tokyo neighborhood (Fig. 13). Home to Japanese Americans since the late nineteenth

century, Little Tokyo is the largest Japanese settlement in the mainland United States, a title it has held since 1915.<sup>93</sup>

In reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, in February 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 ordering the evacuation and relocation of all Japanese nationals as well as any US citizens of Japanese descent to “relocation centers.” From 1942 to 1945, the inhabitants of Little Tokyo were held in prison camps throughout the western United States. During this period, the vacated buildings of Little Tokyo became known as “Bronzeville” becoming home to African Americans from southern states that had migrated to Los Angeles in search of wartime employment in the defense industries.<sup>94</sup> These new residents, much like the Japanese Americans before them, were barred from living in restricted “white” neighborhoods.<sup>95</sup> Following World War II, Japanese Americans returned to Little Tokyo, with many elderly, first-generation former inhabitants taking up residence again, while the younger members of the community left in search of employment.

It was the diminished landscape of what was once a thriving district that attracted Civic Center expansion here in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>96</sup> In 1940, the City of Los Angeles purchased one square block bounded by North San Pedro Street to the East (today named Aiso Street), East First Street to the South, North Los Angeles Street to the

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<sup>93</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), 211.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

<sup>95</sup> Hillary Jenks, “The Politics of Preservation: Power, Memory, and Identity in Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo,” in *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 37.

<sup>96</sup> Jenks, *Cultural Landscapes*, 39.

West, and East Temple Street to the North. The land was purchased with the intention of expanding the Los Angeles Civic Center.

In 1953, the City of Los Angeles demolished the buildings on the lot for its new Police Facilities Building. As was common during midcentury urban redevelopment planning, municipalities would routinely locate police headquarters in areas in need of revitalization. A Little Tokyo community activist affirmed:

In 1950, there was a whole section of Little Tokyo on First Street where the Police Administration Building is, that was leveled because of the expansion of the Civic Center...the fact that it was considered a deteriorated area made it very easy for the Police Administration Building to be moved in.<sup>97</sup>

The redevelopment of the site resulted in the destruction of one-quarter of the district's commercial frontage and the relocation of one thousand Little Tokyo residents.<sup>98</sup>

Clearance of the site forced the closure of many longtime Little Tokyo establishments such as the 1925 Olympic Hotel, the 1905 Filipino Christian Church and Fellowship, and the 1923 Paris Hotel.

This project marked the beginning of a period of rampant redevelopment in the Little Tokyo area. In 1963, in response to plans to extend the Civic Center's large-scale municipal landscape deeper into Little Tokyo, the Little Tokyo Redevelopment Association (LTRA) was formed. The LTRA fundraised and worked towards the construction of the Merit Savings & Loan Building on First Street, a medical building on Second Street, and the fifteen-story Kajima Building at the intersection of First and San

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<sup>97</sup> Amy Tachiki, ed., *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 1971), 329.

<sup>98</sup> Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 216.

Pedro Streets. These building projects helped foster middle-class prosperity in Little Tokyo, as its citizens and leadership refused to allow a complete bureaucratic takeover in their community. In 1970, with support from the LTRA, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency managed the sixty-seven acre Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project, which introduced high-rise development projects and commercial investment from both the United States and Japan.

These development projects altered the appearance of Little Tokyo and left merely thirteen original structures in place along the north side of First Street. The area containing the last intact block in Little Tokyo was designated the Little Tokyo Historic District, placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, and declared a National Historic Landmark District in 1995. The statement of significance for the district states that despite population losses following the Second World War, the area remains a historical focal point for Japanese Americans and symbolizes the hardships and obstacles overcome by those living in the Greater Los Angeles area. Today, Little Tokyo spans roughly ten square blocks adjacent to the Civic Center area east of downtown Los Angeles. Despite its small size, it serves as an important cultural landscape that has faced many battles, most notably regarding citizenship, urban redevelopment, ethnic identity, housing, and corporate power.<sup>99</sup>

Planning for a new central Police Facilities Building began in 1947, with bonds presented to the electorate to fund new police facilities, unifying them in one Modern building. After funding challenges forced a redesign, the plans for the new facility were

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<sup>99</sup> Jenks, *Cultural Landscapes*, 35.

completed in 1951. Located one block east of the Los Angeles City Hall, the new facility's location in the Little Tokyo neighborhood was chosen for both its proximity to other municipal buildings, as well as the fact that following World War II, the area had fallen into decline and was considered by the city as an ideal site for redevelopment.

#### ***4.2 Design & Construction***

Welton Becket was a prolific Los Angeles-based architect who began designing buildings in the 1930s. In 1949, he formed Welton Becket Associates and by the time of his death in 1969, his firm had grown into one of the largest architectural offices in the world. The firm is known for notable Los Angeles-based projects, including the Beverly Center, Pan Pacific Auditorium, Capital Records Tower, Cinerama dome, and the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. Becket was also a partner in the 1960 "Jet Age" expansion of the Los Angeles International Airport. Becket's firm practiced "total design" in which they not only designed the buildings and surrounding landscape, but also all the "display cases, tie racks, counters, door handles, wallpaper, even the plates in the buffet."<sup>100</sup>

Becket's design intentions for the Los Angeles Police Facilities Building were for the building to epitomize the efficient and inviting home of the modern police department. Touted as a structure that would revolutionize the design of law enforcement buildings, the new building was celebrated for its functional, yet cutting edge form. Through the centralization of all police facilities within 398,000 square feet,

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<sup>100</sup> From an undated Los Angeles Conservancy Pamphlet about the Parker Center.

all under one roof, the LAPD posited that they could provide better service to all citizens.

Ground was broken for the new facility on December 30, 1952, and the building officially opened in 1955. The complex is arranged in a T-plan and composed of connected rectilinear volumes designed in the International Style. The primary structure is an eight-story rectangular tower housing administrative offices, set atop a one-story base that extends to the south and north which houses administrative offices and an auditorium. Extending north from the tower is a two-story jail structure.

Often referred to as “The Glass House,” the north and south elevations of the tower are comprised of horizontal bands of windows alternating with mosaic tiles (Fig. 14). In total, the Parker Center encompasses 25,000 square feet of glass set in aluminum sashes. The decorative facades contrast sharply with the windowless east and west elevations, which are clad in ceramic veneer panels. The mass of the tower extending over the main entrance plaza is supported by twelve delicate pilotis clad in blue mosaic tile.

The City intended for the new building to revolutionize the design of law enforcement buildings. The Parker Center was lauded for its dramatic modernization of police operations through the inclusion of what were once separated divisions, now together under one roof. The building contained all administrative offices and staff units, the Traffic Bureau, and the central detectives and patrol divisions. It also housed what was at the time of construction deemed the nations’ finest crime laboratory

known as the “Scientific Investigative Division.” An auditorium with seating for 453 would allow the police to perform line-ups on a stage protected by a wire screen, so that the audience was hidden, teach classes and show motion pictures. Another cutting edge innovation was the inclusion of the police radio and communications network, serving as the city’s nerve center for all civil emergencies.<sup>101</sup>

The building integrates art and landscaping components and is renowned for its sculptural pieces. There are two integrated art pieces that are site-specific and part of the original design of the building. Bernard J. Rosenthal’s fourteen-foot bronze sculpture “The Family Group” is located on the building’s exterior and is a semi-abstract representation of a father, young boy, and a mother holding a baby. The sculpture was meant to express the idea that the Police Department is dedicated to the protection of the family. Joseph Young’s thirty-six by six foot, six ton mosaic entitled “Theme Mural of Los Angeles” is located in the lobby of the building and depicts the architectural growth of Los Angeles through depictions of such iconic buildings as City Hall, Angels Flight, and Grauman’s Chinese Theater.

#### ***4.3 Critical Reaction***

The Parker Center was widely celebrated for both its integrative and innovative design when it was first opened. One visitor commented, “Within its polished, hygienic laboratories and offices are facilities and equipment calculated to hearten the honest

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<sup>101</sup> “History of the Parker Center,” The Los Angeles Police Department, accessed April 13, 2014, [http://www.lapdonline.org/history\\_of\\_the\\_lapd/content\\_basic\\_view/1123](http://www.lapdonline.org/history_of_the_lapd/content_basic_view/1123).



and stay the wayward.”<sup>102</sup> Individuals and civic groups displayed such a high level of interest in the building that the police were compelled to conduct hourly tours. These requests increased at such a rate that a full-time guide was required to lead group tours. In the last four months of 1955, over eight thousand people toured the building, which not only gave a glimpse of the modern facility, but also, according to the LAPD, worked to bring a closer relationship between the public and their police.

A July 1956 issue of *Popular Mechanics* published a feature story on the Parker Center titled “The Jail That Modern Science Built” (Fig. 15). The author deemed it “ultramodern in all respects” adding that it’s been “termed the best law-enforcement facility in the world by experts...the building is attracting attention from police officials in all parts of the United States and Canada.”<sup>103</sup> Because the building was stocked with the most modern equipment all under one roof, the assertion was that the LAPD could provide better law enforcement to the growing city (Fig. 16).

In 1956, the building won an Award of Merit from the AIA, recognized as an achievement in architectural design. In that same year, *Progressive Architecture* reported on the building and detailed its significance:

Few police buildings anywhere are known for their architectural merit; even less for the use of the related arts, or for the landscaping of their sites. In all these respects, the new Los Angeles building is an exception. In addition—and most important—this structure represents a brand-new building design category; one that will be seen increasingly in the years ahead. For under one roof (except for a very few patrol divisions) are all of the police facilities for the entire city (1956).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> From an undated Los Angeles Conservancy Pamphlet about the Parker Center.

<sup>103</sup> Jack B. Kemmerer, “The Jail That Modern Science Built,” *Popular Mechanics*, July 1956, 79.

<sup>104</sup> “Los Angeles Police Department,” *Progressive Architecture* 37 (1956): 108.

In recent years, the building has been landmarked at both the state and local levels. In 2004, the building was identified as an historic resource eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Places, and in 2010, it was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Parker Center is also a contributor to the National Register-eligible Civic Center Historic District.

#### **4.4 Threats**

In the mid-1990s, a comprehensive analysis was conducted and determined that the Parker Center had “reached the end of its service life.”<sup>105</sup> Space constraints and the need for seismic retrofitting led the LAPD to begin contemplating the building of a new facility. The Parker Center was initially threatened with demolition in the early 2000s, when the LAPD was considering demolishing the building and rebuilding on the site. This initial plan was deemed unfeasible and the LAPD soon designated an alternate site for the new headquarters building.

In 2003, the Los Angeles City Council approved the use of Municipal Improvement Bonds to fund the \$437 million project and a site was selected. In 2007, City Council voted to use eminent domain power to seize three downtown properties for the new building. The site of the new Police Headquarters Building is located two-tenths of a mile from the Parker Center, situated south of Los Angeles City Hall, whereas the Parker Center is located one block east of City Hall. Ground was broken for the new five

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<sup>105</sup> Los Angeles Police Department, “News Release, September 8, 2009,” accessed April 17, 2014 , [http://www.lapdonline.org/newsroom/news\\_view/42777](http://www.lapdonline.org/newsroom/news_view/42777).

hundred thousand square foot headquarters building in January 2007 and the grand opening was held in October 2009. The building was vacated in 2013 when the final few remaining departments moved into their new headquarters building.

The Parker Center has unquestionably experienced deferred maintenance over the last two decades. The building's slide into disrepair gave it "a real-world stigma that's left it tarnished and crumbling from the inside out."<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that Los Angeles architectural mainstay Welton Becket designed the building, its deteriorating appearance has made it challenging for the community to defend or protect.

The Parker Center building was ultimately vacated because it was no longer able to meet the functional needs of the LAPD as the number of staff had outgrown the occupancy of the building. In a special "Visual Storytelling" segment in the *Los Angeles Times*, Detective Gus Villanueva reminisced about his many years there:

Fifty-plus years in a building that was used twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, one can only imagine the toll that can take on a structure. The employees that have worked there, we are way overdue to move into a new structure, and now I'm about to embark in the twilight of my career in a new Police Administration Building."<sup>107</sup>

Users of the building frequently complained about interior comfort. The HVAC system is original to the building and long overdue for a replacement. The ventilation was so poor in the building that officers joked that the smell of seized marijuana would waft between floors.

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<sup>106</sup> Wendy Gilmartin, "Law & Order, Special Fugly Unit: Parker Center, 150 N. Los Angeles St., Downtown," *Los Angeles Weekly*, May 1, 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Jerome Adamstein, "Parker Center: Los Angeles' historic police headquarters shuttered after 57 years on the beat," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://framework.latimes.com/2013/01/15/parker-center-los-angeles-historic-police-headquarters-shuttered-after-57-years-on-the-beat/>.

Only since the Police Department's announcement to vacate the building has negative commentary on the building escalated. Despite its unassuming streamlined design, the Parker Center is considered by some as an eyesore and anti-urban. Additionally, many citizens remain outraged by the actions of the LAPD and cannot be convinced that the building is worth saving. In 2009, following a tour of the new LAPD Headquarters building, Police Chief William Bratton suggested that "a Hollywood film crew should buy the Parker Center and blow it up because it's useless."<sup>108</sup>

#### **4.5 Advocacy Effort**

The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization formed in 1978 as a result of a grassroots effort advocating for the preservation of the 1926 Los Angeles Central Library. Following years of intensive advocacy, the group succeeded in saving the library from demolition and is today the largest local preservation group in the United States. With thirteen staff, more than six thousand members, and hundreds of volunteers, the Conservancy stands as a model preservation advocacy organization.

Through advocacy and education, the Conservancy works to "recognize, protect, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County."<sup>109</sup> The information-rich Conservancy website is unmatched in its ability to convey current local preservation issues, providing for each threatened resource a

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<sup>108</sup> Gary Leonard, "Bratton: 'Blow Up Parker Center,'" *LA Downtown News*, September 9, 2009, accessed April 20, 2014, [http://www.ladowntownnews.com/news/bratton-blow-up-parker-center/article\\_6d9ee50d-a386-5302-bc62-1cae2665cb89.html](http://www.ladowntownnews.com/news/bratton-blow-up-parker-center/article_6d9ee50d-a386-5302-bc62-1cae2665cb89.html)

<sup>109</sup> "About," Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed April 17, 2014, <https://www.laconservancy.org/about>.

detailed history, thorough background documentation, the nature of each issue, the Conservancy's position, documentation, and calls to action. In 2014, the group won a Survey Award of Excellence for their website presentation "Curating the City: Modern Architecture in L.A." as part of the Modernism in America awards established by Docomomo US.<sup>110</sup>

The group has a particular interest in protecting midcentury Modern buildings and in 1984 created the "Fifties Task Force" which today is known as the Los Angeles Conservancy Modern Committee. The "ModCom" is a volunteer group that is an offshoot of the Conservancy that works to identify and protect significant Modern buildings. The group works to foster appreciation for Modern architecture through tours, exhibitions, lectures, field trips, and special events. Since the time the Parker Center was first threatened with demolition, the Conservancy has worked to decidedly establish the Parker Center's historic and architectural significance. In 2003, the L.A. Conservancy Modern Committee organized a "Built by Becket" tour, which showcased Becket's significant designs throughout Los Angeles County and included the Parker Center.

The Conservancy prides itself on its proactivity and is highly successful at proactively addressing and advocating for threatened resources and alerting supporters to those threats. The group puts out a "Preservation Report Card" that evaluates how effectively the eighty-nine cities in Los Angeles County are working to adequately protect historically important structures. The goal is for the report card to act as a tool

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<sup>110</sup> Kathryn Shattuck, "Plaza-Saving Efforts Earn Honors for Groups," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2014.

for communities to assess their level of preservation and ultimately make improvements.

Adrian Scott Fine is the Director of Advocacy at the Los Angeles Conservancy and provided insight into the advocacy effort for the Parker Center as well as the manner in which the Conservancy advocates for the preservation of municipally owned Modern buildings more generally.<sup>111</sup> In California, there are environmental guidelines and processes that must be enacted any time a building project is determined to have any impact on the environment. Adrian provided extensive detail on this process, and what it reveals about the City of Los Angeles' plans for the Parker Center.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a statute passed in 1970, following the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which established a statewide environmental protection policy. It requires state and local agencies to follow a protocol of analysis and public discourse anytime a project is proposed that could have environmental impacts. There are a number of steps in the CEQA process, but the one most significant for preservation advocacy is the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). This report is prepared when the lead agency determines that the project may have significant environmental impact, and makes public the municipality's plans for decommissioned buildings such as the Parker Center. Although lengthy and cumbersome, this process allows preservation organizations like the L.A. Conservancy to be included in the process from the beginning of any project involving an historic building.

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<sup>111</sup> Adrian Scott Fine provided all information in this section during a telephone interview on March 3, 2014.

In the case of the Parker Center, the lead agency in the CEQA process is the Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works. In May 2012, they posted a Notice of Preparation, informing the public that an EIR would be prepared for the building and that comments would be accepted at a public meeting on May 22, 2012. Due to the proximity of the property to City Hall, and the stated need for between 500,000 and 750,000 square feet for city workers currently housed in various locations, the City of Los Angeles identified the development of the Parker Center site as an opportunity to “improve city services by re-activating this underutilized property.”<sup>112</sup>

The agency issued a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) called the “Los Angeles Street Civic Building Project” in September 2013 listing three potential alternative plans for the building.<sup>113</sup> The first option is rehabilitation, including seismic retrofitting, energy efficiency upgrades, reconfiguration of space to accommodate 875 city employees, and the addition of rentable commercial space (Fig. 17). This option also includes an optional inter-building tunnel connecting City Hall to the Parker Center building. The second option incorporates the previously mentioned rehabilitation of the building as well as the demolition of the Parker Center jail (Fig. 18). An expansion building would be constructed on the jail site, creating space for 1,775 city employees, and increasing the total available square footage from 319,048 to 522,260. This plan also included 16,500 square feet of commercial space and a childcare facility. The third

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<sup>112</sup> “LA Street Civic Building Project (W.O. 1907212),” Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, accessed April 15, 2014, [http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park\\_center.htm](http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park_center.htm).

<sup>113</sup> “Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR): Los Angeles Street Civic Building Project, Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, accessed April 15, 2014, [http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park\\_center.htm](http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park_center.htm).

option is full demolition of the building and construction of one or two new office buildings totaling 753,730 square feet (Fig. 19). This plan includes outdoor open space and a pedestrian connection between City Hall to the west and the Little Tokyo neighborhood to the east. The DEIR maintains that demolition would “best satisfy the project objectives because the greatest number of City employees could be relocated under this alternative and a new building would provide better fire-life and seismic safety features and comply with the city Green Building Code.”<sup>114</sup> The DEIR outlining these options was circulated for public review from September through October 2013 during which time the L.A. Bureau of Engineering accepted written comments.

In his role as Director of Advocacy for the Los Angeles Conservancy, Adrian Scott Fine submitted comments on the DEIR on behalf of the Conservancy in October 2013. He urged the City and the Bureau of Engineering to pursue a project that minimizes the greatest impacts to cultural and historical resources while still meeting project objectives. The project alternatives that retain the building have the greatest potential for complying with the *Secretary of the Interiors Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, meeting project objectives, and maintaining the eligibility of the Parker Center as an historic resource. He presents a thorough analysis of the City’s stated alternatives and questions why there is no baseline or space needs assessment for City employees. The Conservancy also questions why none of the alternatives meet their stated desired square footage needs, and why the tower structure that would replace the jail has its height capped, thus limiting the square footage and density it could

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<sup>114</sup> Draft Environmental Impact Report, Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering.



provide to the project. Under the CEQA act, the lead agency must “take all action necessary to provide the people of this state with...historic environmental qualities...and preserve for future generations...examples of major periods of California history.”<sup>115</sup> In Fine’s estimation, the demolition and replacement of the Parker Center is not a viable option as it would cause a substantial adverse impact to a significant historical resource.

The Conservancy is advocating for the reuse of the building by other city services, a move that will bring those offices closer to Los Angeles City Hall while also utilizing the Parker Center building. Fine contends that the building is an optimal candidate for reuse due to its largely open floor plan with partition walls, which lends itself to reuse as an office space. The Conservancy is of the opinion that the demolition of the rear jail section and the construction of a slightly larger tower on the site is the alternative that will most likely allow the building to remain extant. This option goes down the middle, appealing to both preservationists as well as those who want increased square footage on the site.

The CEQA process for the Parker Center is unusual in how it has developed thus far. Typically by the Draft EIR stage, the Conservancy knows what project the City is proposing, what they refer to as a “preferred project.” In the case of the Parker Center, Fine says that no one is clear which avenue the City wants to pursue, which is highly uncommon.

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<sup>115</sup> Adrian Scott Fine, “Conservancy Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), Parker Center,” October 21, 2013, accessed April 15, 2014, <https://www.laconservancy.org/sites/default/files/files/issues/LAC%20Comments%2C%20Parker%20Center%20DEIR%20LA%20Street%20Civic%20Building%20Project%2C%2010.21.pdf>.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process provides analyses such as pro-forma analyses, feasibility studies, and anything that would determine viability of projects that would impact historic resources. The Conservancy's role in the process is to make recommendations regarding how it should occur, what should be done to ensure a fair, independent analysis, and then submit feedback when studies are skewed or clearly biased. The Conservancy has strong relationships with the development community and will, in some cases, engage them to get second opinions or provide feasibility analyses to compare with what the City has provided.

One of the primary issues that must be overcome is the building's association with the controversial former Police Chief William H. Parker. Under Parker, the Los Angeles Police Department was notorious for police brutality and racial hostility towards Latinos and African Americans, in particular before and after the 1965 Watts Riots. Chief Parker's legacy still remains today, and so a major challenge in advocating for the preservation of the Parker Center is the stigma associated with the building's name. The building was originally named the Los Angeles Police Facilities Building, and was renamed for Parker shortly after his death in 1966 (Fig. 20). One of the strategies the Conservancy is considering is to return to using the original name and to try to separate the building from this divisive figure.

Aside from the negative associations with the Parker name, and the turbulent history of the LAPD, there exists an aversion to the building within the neighboring Little Tokyo community. The general belief is that the Civic Center area and development

surrounding the community has squeezed and pushed them, resulting in the loss of a great deal of their original community. In response, residents and community leaders are vigilant about encroachment.

At the 2012 public meeting on the Notice of Preparation for redevelopment of the Parker Center site, comments came primarily from Little Tokyo residents and business owners. One request was that the city consider including private businesses, storefronts, and offices in the new building. The commenter stated that civic buildings are acceptable during the daytime, but after 5:00 PM everyone goes home and the building sits there dark, desolate, and lonely. He suggested that the city work to “try and make it a little bit less like a public building” because then it would add liveliness to the neighborhood at the street level. Others questioned the historical value of the building and suggested that the Little Tokyo community would prefer a park on the site. The fact that the area was once part of Little Tokyo was mentioned with the request that, however the site is ultimately developed, there should be a linkage between the project and the Little Tokyo community. Representatives of the Conservancy were also in attendance and posed questions. The chair of the L.A. Conservancy’s Modern Committee spoke on the significance of the building and professed strong support for the adaptive reuse of the building.

An additional advocacy challenge is that there exists the perception that the Parker Center is not the best example of Welton Becket’s work, and is therefore expendable. In response, the Conservancy plans to bolster Becket’s celebrated career

and clearly illustrate how the building fits in to it. An additional plan to strengthen the significance argument is to promote the fact that when first built, the Parker Center served as one of the national models for modern police facilities in the mid-twentieth century.

Fine believes that one benefit of these buildings from the 1950s-1970s is that they often incorporate ample surface parking or open space that was part of a designed landscape, allowing for more flexibility and options for the site. Urban development is currently attentive to increasing density, and so, for a number of projects that the Conservancy is presently working on, they are able to accommodate that density through new construction and retain the building. There remain issues related to scale, massing, and compatibility, which the Conservancy works through with the project owner, but in the end these larger sites should be viewed as a benefit as opposed to a challenge.

The argument for the Parker Center's historical significance is one that must inevitably be addressed when advocating for the preservation of Modern buildings. Fine says that when the building was initially threatened in the early 2000s, there were many questions as to whether it was historic or worthy of preservation. Even within the preservation community there were mixed opinions as to whether or not the Parker Center was a building worth fighting for. Given its eligibility for the California Register of Historical Places and its eligibility as a contributor to the National Register of Historic Places Civic Center Historic District, Fine believes that the argument for its historic

significance is no longer in question. The sculptures and mural at the building are considered significant as well, and according to Fine, have perhaps more supporters than the building itself. There have been numerous failed attempts to remove these works and take them elsewhere, including to the new LAPD headquarters building. The Conservancy does not support the relocation of these pieces, as they are integral to the building.

Fine admits that the Conservancy isn't a purist preservation organization and is known for being fairly pragmatic and refraining from all-or-nothing thinking. They work to find the "win-win," the solution that accommodates the proposed project while still keeping the building and its eligibility as a historic resource intact. In the case of the Parker Center, while the first option of rehabilitation is the most ideal, the organization will most likely be advocating for the second option of removing the jail and densifying the site through the construction of a tower.

The City of Los Angeles owns a number of Modernist municipal buildings, and Fine contends that they have a mixed track record of being good stewards. As is common for municipally owned Modern buildings, many suffer from lack of care or attention as the municipality defers maintenance over time. These buildings are simply not a funding priority. While Fine is encouraged that the city hasn't yet demolished any Modern municipal buildings, many aren't highly valued, lack proper upkeep, and "just look tired." These circumstances produce a feeling of unpleasantness for users and a general distaste from the general public. The Conservancy plans to address the stewardship

issue affecting some Los Angeles municipal buildings by encouraging owners to install modern systems, update lighting, and make repairs, while retaining interior standards and maintaining eligibility. When it comes to older, early twentieth-century buildings, such as the Los Angeles City Hall, they are excellent stewards, as these buildings are clearly valued by the City.

Midcentury Modern municipal buildings were often met with fanfare and ribbon cutting ceremonies celebrating their innovation and Modern design. Fifty years later, many of them have not been properly maintained for decades. This is undoubtedly the case with the Parker Center, which the LAPD had been publically declaring its intentions to vacate for over a decade until a new headquarters building was constructed. The building was habitually overcrowded, which strained the already dysfunctional HVAC system, creating a less than optimal interior environment for the users. In addition, the building has seismic challenges that must be addressed before it can be reoccupied. Despite the popular perception, Fine feels that these issues are not insurmountable.

Political maneuvering is paramount in every single preservation advocacy issue the Conservancy undertakes. They work closely with all the city council offices on preservation issues. If a building is in their district, they reach out to the council office very early on, not only to make their position known, but also to develop a relationship and gain a clearer perspective of the councilperson's position on the issue. The previous councilperson for the Parker Center's district was very vocal in her opposition and dislike of the building. Fine asserted that if she were still in office, saving the building

would be exceptionally challenging. The difficulty in advocating for municipal buildings is rooted not only the city's ownership of the building, but also the city-initiated environmental review process. Despite a very solid relationship between the Conservancy and the current councilperson, developed through previous advocacy projects, he has not yet disclosed where he stands with regards to the Parker Center redevelopment alternatives.

Neither the City nor its municipal leadership has yet to reveal their preferred approach. Fine is unsure if anyone in municipal government has formulated a position on the Parker Center project. Despite the fact that the City is studying the three options for the site, it is the understanding of the Conservancy that there is no actual funding for implementation. The lack of available funding leads Fine to believe that the City may just be going through the motions of the environmental review process without any stake in the project. The advocacy campaign in support of the Parker Center could be moot, or, he believes, they may ultimately get approval for one of the plans and then the project will stagnate, possibly for years, until they establish funding. He dissuaded contacting the council office; as council people are loath to state their positions until they absolutely must.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The Los Angeles Conservancy works to proactively address and publicize threats to significant historic buildings in the Los Angeles County. The group believes that the

most effective protections for historic places often lie in the hands of local government. As a result, it works with municipal leadership and utilizes political might to guide and protect Los Angeles' historic built environment. The group also strives to improve preservation at the local level by recognizing communities with strong preservation policies and programs and suggesting improvements to those that do not. Fine asserts that, from his experience, "the political side of things is the make or break" for all preservation advocacy efforts.

The State of California's environmental guidelines and processes are advantageous to preservation efforts in that they increase transparency in local governmental processes while forcing decision makers to consider all options when decommissioning municipal buildings. Although the Conservancy does not know the city's desired plans for the building, they remain pragmatic in their approach as they advocate for solutions that introduce interventions and additions while keeping the building in place. The group is actively working to overcome negative associations towards the building, due both to past LAPD controversies as well as Little Tokyo's concerns about encroachment. The Parker Center's historic and architectural significance, high reuse potential, and the large connected lot allowing for increased density will assuredly encourage the city to view it as an asset and bolster the Conservancy's argument for reuse.



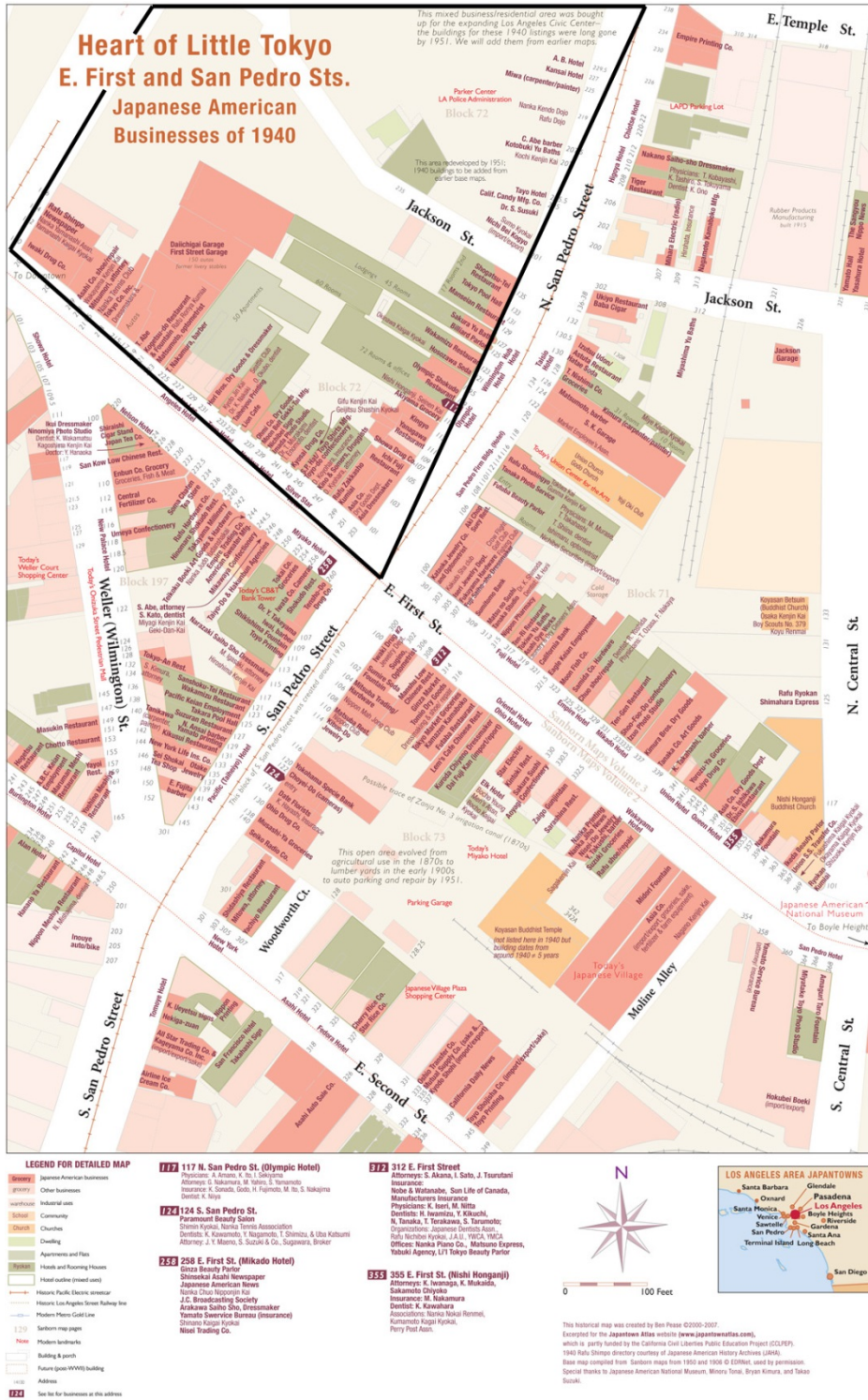


Figure 13. Map showing Japanese American Businesses in Little Tokyo in 1940. The area outlined in black shows the buildings demolished for the construction of the Los Angeles Police Administration Building. Japantown Atlas. <http://japantownatlas.com/map-littletokyo3.html>.



Figure 14. Parker Center, present day. Adrian Scott Fine. L.A. Conservancy.  
<https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/parker-centerpolice-facilities-building>.



# THE JAIL THAT MODERN SCIENCE BUILT

Figure 15. Image accompanying an article on the newly-built Los Angeles Police Facilities Building. Jack B. Kemmerer, "The Jail That Modern Science Built," *Popular Mechanics*, July 1956, 79.



Bullets for ballistics tests are acquired by firing suspected gun into a tank of water nine feet deep



Balloon-blowing test given drunken driver is rechecked in laboratory, gives alcohol content of blood



Figure 16 .Technological advancements at the new Police Facilities Building.  
Jack B. Kemmerer, "The Jail That Modern Science Built," *Popular Mechanics*, July 1956, 79.



Source: Gensler, 2012

**Figure 3-4**  
**Alternative B1 Site Plan**

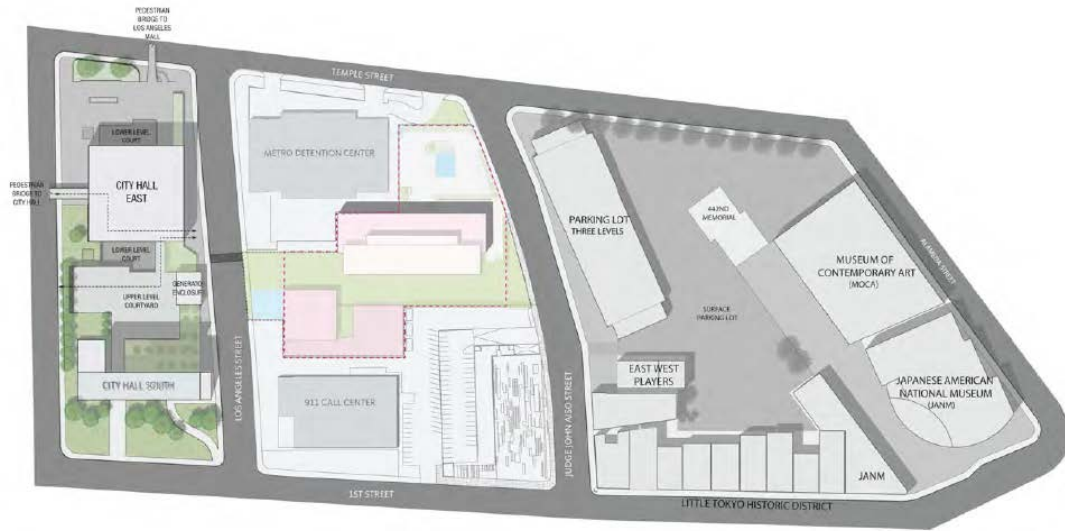
Figure 17. Parker Center Alternative B-1 Site Plan. “Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR): Los Angeles Street Civic Building Project, Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, accessed April 15, 2014, [http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park\\_center.htm](http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park_center.htm).



Source: Gensler, 2012

**Figure 3-5**  
**Alternative B2 Site Plan**

Figure 18. Parker Center Alternative B-2 Site Plan. “Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR): Los Angeles Street Civic Building Project, Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, accessed April 15, 2014, [http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park\\_center.htm](http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park_center.htm).



Source: Gensler, 2012

**Figure 3-6**  
**Alternative B3 Site Plan**

Figure 19. Parker Center Alternative B-3 Site Plan. "Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR): Los Angeles Street Civic Building Project, Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, accessed April 15, 2014, [http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park\\_center.htm](http://eng.lacity.org/techdocs/emg/park_center.htm).



Figure 20 Parker Center Dedication and unveiling of memorial stone. 1966.  
<http://www.badge714.org/dragraul.htm>.

## 5 | Case Study: Philadelphia Police Administration Building

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The City of Philadelphia's Police Administration Building, commonly known as the Roundhouse, was designed in 1959 by architecture firm Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham (GBQC) and constructed between 1959 and 1962. The building was born out of the vast urban renewal projects that took place during the mid-twentieth century. Designed as a symbol of civic pride and celebrated for its representation of the pioneering vision of the administration, the Philadelphia Police Department hoped that the building would promote a positive public image for their institution. The building's dramatic curvilinear skin employed the costly and groundbreaking Dutch Schokk beton system of precast concrete, reflecting the City's desire for the building to symbolize its progressive future. Like many Modernist structures in Philadelphia, the cultural and historic significance of the Roundhouse is overshadowed by the city's Colonial-era and nineteenth century historic fabric. In 2008, the building became endangered when the City announced plans to relocate the Police Headquarters to a derelict historic building in West Philadelphia, adding that the move will allow for the redevelopment of the Roundhouse site.

### ***5.1 Historical Background***

There remains little documentation on the neighborhood that once existed on the four square block site of the Roundhouse between Seventh and Ninth Streets and Arch



and Race Streets in the Center City area of Philadelphia. According to photographs, it was once a dynamic neighborhood lined with commercial storefronts and bustling with street activity (Fig. 21). In photographs taken in 1916, visible businesses include a shoe store, clothing store, theater, restaurant, drugstore, tailor, bar, hotel, and rooming house (Fig. 22). In her pioneering 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs details the neighborhood as well as the public square across the street from the current Roundhouse site:

The second of Penn's little parks is Franklin Square, the city's Skid Row park where the homeless, the unemployed and the people of indigent leisure gather amid the adjacent flophouses, cheap hotels, missions, second hand clothing stores, reading and writing lobbies, pawnshops, employment agencies, tattoo parlors, burlesque houses and eateries. This park and its users are both seedy, but it's not a dangerous or crime park. Nevertheless, it has hardly worked as an anchor to real estate values or to social stability.<sup>116</sup>

Beginning in the 1940s, several discreet groups of civic and business leaders joined together to form "The Greater Philadelphia Movement." Fearing that the city's physical decline and reputation for corruption would stymie new business development, the group worked to arouse civic interest in the city while "preserving the value of business interests."<sup>117</sup> The group's formation coincided with the 1947 Better Philadelphia Exhibition, designed by architects Edmund Bacon and Oskar Stonorov. A mix of World's Fair pavilion-style exhibits combined with modern retail displays, the exhibition attracted over 385,000 visitors. Focusing on improvements to all aspects of city life, it was the thirty by fourteen foot model of downtown Philadelphia showcasing new

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<sup>116</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 95.

<sup>117</sup> Madeline Cohen, "Postwar City Planning in Philadelphia: Edmund Bacon and the Design of Washington Square East," (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 367.

initiatives in civic space, transportation, arts, recreation, and business improvement projects that proved most popular with visitors. The transformation of downtown Philadelphia aimed to connect directly with citizens. This plan for a downtown transformation was a compelling alternative to suburbanization and aimed to garner public support for forthcoming transformational redevelopment projects.

Several of Philadelphia's major urban renewal projects were located in neighborhoods within close proximity to the Roundhouse. These included the redevelopment of Washington Square East into a strictly residential neighborhood, the selective clearance and preservation of Society Hill, the construction of I.M. Pei's Society Hill Towers, and the clearance of three square blocks of commercial and residential structures for the creation of Independence Mall. The Independence Mall project began in 1951 and in that same year Philadelphia Planning Commission Executive Director Edmund Bacon detailed the type of development he envisioned for the area beyond the mall. He believed that the area north of the mall, where the Roundhouse is now located, should be redeveloped for commercial and institutional purposes<sup>118</sup>

In 1958, Philadelphia Mayor Richardson Dilworth selected the site for the Police Administration Building.<sup>119</sup> Located at 750 Race Street, in an area that was then described as "skid row", the placement of the central police building was deliberate with the goal of revitalizing the area. The site was selected in hopes that the presence of the Police Administration Building would have a transformative effect on the blighted

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 422.

<sup>119</sup> "The Changing City," *Evening Bulletin*, February 27, 1958.

neighborhood. By 1963, the area surrounding the development site had become part of the Independence Mall Redevelopment Area (Fig. 23). All buildings on the four square-block parcel were demolished and those sites remained either vacant or were converted into surface parking. The Police Administration Building was this area's only redevelopment project (Fig. 24).

### ***5.2 Design & Construction***

In 1959, Mayor Dilworth commissioned the noted Philadelphia architecture firm Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham (GBQC) to design the Philadelphia Police Administration Building. Designed and built from 1959 to 1962, the Modernist building was viewed as a symbol of the innovative vision of the administration. The building was pioneering in its design and engineering and shortly after completion GBQC received the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal Award for its design. The Philadelphia Police wanted their new headquarters to promote a positive public image for both the police force and the City, which was also apparent in the City's concurrent social revitalization efforts and large number of new construction projects (Fig. 25).

The Roundhouse is located on an approximately 2.6-acre rectangular site on the south side of Race Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets in the Center City area of Philadelphia. In total, the Roundhouse comprises 125,000 square feet, accommodating five floors—a basement, ground floor, and three upper floors. Tall rectangular concrete panels delineate the majority of the building's perimeter as it meets the sidewalk. On

the north side of the building are the vast plaza and original main entrances. The plaza opens to Race Street and visually connects to Franklin Square—one of William Penn’s original five public squares in his 1682 plan for Philadelphia. On the south side are additional entrances—which now serve as the primary entrances—and an adjoining surface parking lot.

Often mistaken as Brutalist in style, the Roundhouse is designed in the Expressionist style, as exemplified by its dramatic curvilinear concrete skin (Figs. 26-28). The exterior is comprised of 144 five by thirty five feet precast concrete panels and was the second building in the United States to employ this groundbreaking Dutch Schokbeton system of precast concrete. Literally meaning “shocked concrete,” this method involved pouring zero-slump concrete into custom-designed molds attached to a steel-framed shock table. Although a more expensive process, the resulting panels have higher strength and a more uniform finish due to the mix and the vibration.

The interior of the Roundhouse features curved surfaces and round fixtures, most of which remain intact today (Fig. 29). The building’s interior continually plays off the “round” theme and features custom made round elevators and round “EXIT” signs protruding from above exit doors. Custom-designed light fixtures are situated within the voids of the coffered concrete ceiling panels. Wood paneling adorns many of the hallways on the first three floors as well as the auditorium. The Police Commissioner’s Office on the top floor contains custom-made cabinetry and wood paneling.

The Roundhouse is significant for its architectural and structural design commanded by GBQC and structural engineer August Komendant. Structurally, the architects' quest for a totally integrated building system led to the employment of Komendant; he designed both the panels and molds used in the Schokbeton system. Moreover, the building and its designers are emblematic of the architectural design movement known as the Philadelphia School. This group included Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi, Vincent Kling, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Geddes, and engineers Robert Le Recolais and August Komendant. These architects and engineers are loosely defined by their work and design beliefs that collectively advocated for post-war Philadelphia's return to a human-scaled city. At the behest of Mayor Dilworth and Edmund Bacon, this group reshaped the city and set the direction for development and growth in the Modern era.

GBQC's design for the Roundhouse embodies the firm's core design philosophies. These include the rectilinear perimeter wall, meant to relate to the city's grid plan and the plaza (Fig. 30), which was intended to facilitate a welcoming civic entrance. As a rare surviving example of Midcentury Expressionist architecture, the Roundhouse serves as a significant landmark of Philadelphia's Modern architectural legacy. Since its construction in 1962, the Roundhouse has become an established visual feature of both its neighborhood and the city, thus contributing to the building's strong cultural significance (Fig. 31).

### 5.3 Critical Reaction

At the April 1963 dedication ceremony, the Roundhouse was celebrated for being a state of the art law enforcement facility with a bold, Modern design. The ceremony program praised the building as the “new architectural focal point of the northern end of Independence Mall and an important contribution to the city’s downtown renewal.”<sup>120</sup> There were six hundred guests in attendance at the ceremony, notably Mayor James Tate, Police Commissioner Albert Brown, the partners of GBQC, Los Angeles Chief of Police William Parker, and G. Holmes Perkins, Chairman of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

When first constructed, the public building’s unique form and mass were met with criticism. Former Public Property Commissioner, Phillip Klein, disapproved of the design, and in 1963 stated, “Architects build this type of building for other architects to discuss and admire, certainly not for the utilitarian use needed in a police headquarters.”<sup>121</sup> Dazed employees bemoaned the dizzying curvilinear circulation pattern, and questioned the round elevators where “passengers feel like a can of people.”<sup>122</sup> In 1988, Police Commissioner Kevin M. Tucker’s frustration with the building was so great that he proposed selling it. John McNesby, president of the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police, called the headquarters inhumane, saying "It's a disgrace." He claimed that the

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<sup>120</sup> City of Philadelphia, “Dedication of Police Headquarters,” Monday, April 1, 1963, pamphlet from Temple University, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>121</sup> Maurice M. Lewis, “Klein Views New Police Building: ‘Ugly, Cost too High, Overcrowded,’” *The Evening Bulletin*, March 31, 1963.

<sup>122</sup> James Smart, “In Our Town,” *The Evening Bulletin*, January 13, 1963.

homicide unit was routinely infested with fleas and that the building was blistering hot in summer and freezing cold in winter.<sup>123</sup>

Police Chief Charles Ramsey has been very vocal about his dissatisfaction with the building, stating in March 2012: "It's no secret that our facilities are in pretty poor condition. This is a way in which we can improve that situation. [The proposed new building] is a good solid building, and once it's rehabbed, it'll make a good police headquarters."<sup>124</sup> In a *Philadelphia Inquirer* story from December 2008, Ramsey complained about the Roundhouse, stating, "I've never seen anything like that, and that's not a positive statement, it's a very negative statement. It's just not a good building," citing cluttered hallways filled with file cabinets and a homicide division where witnesses share space with suspects.<sup>125</sup> The building has been described as anti-urban, in that it turns its back to the street and neighboring Franklin Square. The rectilinear perimeter wall presents a stark delineation between the police and the public and acts as a barrier to pedestrians.

Present-day public perceptions of the Roundhouse are largely negative and stem principally from the building's law enforcement function, as well as the storied history and the once-brutish reputation of the Philadelphia Police Department. The building was designed to be inviting to the public, but because of its use, a grim association has

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Mike Dunn, "Plans For A New Police Headquarters Listed Under Mayor Nutter's Budget," *CBS Philadelphia*, March 10, 2012, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2012/03/10/plans-for-a-new-police-headquarters-listed-under-mayor-nutters-budget>.

<sup>125</sup> Jeff Shields and Carolyn Davis, "A Wish-List Plan for New Police Home," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 24, 2008, accessed March 12, 2014. [http://articles.philly.com/2008-12-24/news/25243320\\_1\\_police-headquarters-priority-list-building](http://articles.philly.com/2008-12-24/news/25243320_1_police-headquarters-priority-list-building).

been unavoidable. Once the announcement was made in 2008 of the Police Department's intentions to relocate their headquarters, the occupants' dissatisfaction with the building began receiving increased media attention.

The building suffers from severe overcrowding, with more than twice the original capacity of workers in the building. It is for this reason that the original, fifty-year old HVAC system cannot meet the needs of the building's occupants. Additionally, filing cabinets and data trays line the halls, and there are an abundance of temporary partitions subdividing nearly all office spaces. The public's perception of the building stems from statements from the building's users that stem from the City's failure to restrain occupancy rather than with the building's quality or functionality. The complaints from users are purely a reflection of the City's lack of proper stewardship and poor management of space.

#### ***5.4 Threats***

Although the City of Philadelphia has not yet specifically stated plans to demolish the Roundhouse, there are currently a number of known threats to the building. The first is the Philadelphia Police Department's 2008 announcement of their plans to relocate their headquarters to the Provident Mutual Life Insurance Building, a vacant early twentieth-century building located in West Philadelphia. While this move is a local preservation victory, it puts the Roundhouse at risk for demolition. In his 2012 Budget Address, Mayor Michael Nutter stated that this move would allow the City to sell



existing assets and develop the Roundhouse site. In 2013, The Philadelphia City Planning Commission unveiled its 2035 comprehensive plan for the Central District. The plan for the “Franklin Square Neighborhood” depicts a narrowed Race Street and the Roundhouse demolished and replaced by new residential construction (Fig. 32).

In April 2014, it was announced that the city is selling off \$55 million in municipal bonds to fund the Philadelphia Police Department’s move to West Philadelphia. The announcement confirmed that city officials would begin the sale of the Roundhouse building in 2017. City Treasurer Nancy Winkler added, “We think that [the sale of the buildings] will go well for us,” noting that the properties are in places where real-estate values are “very high.”<sup>126</sup>

The Roundhouse sits amid some of Center City’s most prominent neighborhoods: Independence National Historical Park, Old City, and Society Hill to the east; Chinatown and Penn Center to the west; and Market East to the south. The development pressures for the Police Administration Building and its site are directly related to the recent development of the area adjacent to the site. The \$6.5 million renovation of Franklin Square, coupled with the \$30 million renovation and conversion of the former Metropolitan Hospital into the MetroClub Condominiums, located across the street from the Roundhouse, have contributed to the area becoming more economically driven. Pressure to develop the site can also be traced to the City of Philadelphia’s

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<sup>126</sup> “Philadelphia Plans New Police Campus Boosting Growth: Muni Deals,” *Businessweek*, 2014, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2014-04-20/philadelphia-plans-new-police-campus-boosting-growth-muni-deals>.

budget problems and the financial gains that would come from the sale of the site to developers.

### ***5.5 Advocacy Effort***

The Save the Roundhouse advocacy campaign is a grassroots preservation advocacy effort born out of a Fall 2012 Historic Preservation Praxis Studio course in the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania. An individual project on the development of a strategic plan for an advocacy campaign supporting the building's reuse was the catalyst for the creation of the public campaign. The plan presents a deliberate and coherent course of action and was developed through the researching of past advocacy campaigns as well as extensive interviews with preservationists who have led or are currently leading advocacy campaigns for similar Modern buildings. The primary objective of the campaign is to gather public support for the building and its reuse. The desired result is to influence the administration to reuse the building for a municipal purpose. If not the administration, then ideally the campaign would engage with a developer interested in adaptively reusing the building.

The campaign is a grassroots effort being carried out by a two-person volunteer team, working together with Ben Leech, the Advocacy Director at the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.<sup>127</sup> In an effort to begin publicizing the threat to the building and its significance, the "Save the Roundhouse " Facebook page was created in December 2012. The page serves as the primary web presence for the campaign, with

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<sup>127</sup> The Save the Roundhouse advocacy campaign is led by the author and a colleague.

the goal of rallying supporters in support of not just the building, but Philadelphia's Modern architecture in general. This platform allows the organizers to effectively reach out to supporters by providing updates on the City's plans for the building, information and images detailing the building's history and significance, how to get involved, news regarding advocacy campaigns for other threatened Modern buildings, and information about upcoming events involving Modern architecture and/or preservation. There is also an educational component to the page which is executed through didactic photo essays covering other undervalued Modern Philadelphia buildings. Jack Pyburn's Spring 2013 Architectural Design Studio at Georgia Tech focused on reuse ideas for the Roundhouse, and the students' designs have been incorporated into the campaign (Fig. 33). In January 2013, local and national news outlets broadly publicized the campaign and the building's plight.

There are future plans for a design charrette showcasing interventions and proposals for the reuse of the Roundhouse, with the goal of engaging the public and getting Philadelphians to envision reuse possibilities at the site. There are additional plans to connect with the public through lectures on Modernism, an exhibit on Philadelphia Modern architecture, and panels with noted architects and leading figures in Modernism preservation and reuse. Community engagement would take the form of educating the general public on not just the significance of the Roundhouse, but architecture of the Modern Movement in general. This would be achieved, in part,

through a series of walking tours showcasing the Roundhouse, as well as other threatened Modern buildings in the city.

Ben Leech is the Director of Advocacy at the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia (PAGP) and is actively informing strategy decisions for the Save the Roundhouse campaign.<sup>128</sup> The PAGP is a relatively small preservation organization, with just three fulltime staff. Underfunded and understaffed, the organization struggles to go head to head with the City of Philadelphia and its many municipal development arms. A lack of transparency and a pro-development mission is inherent in the current administration, which makes it very difficult for the PAGP to make much headway.

The organization publishes an endangered properties list each year, and the Roundhouse was featured on the 2012 edition. In comparison to cities like Los Angeles, the climate for preservation in Philadelphia is anemic. Leech attributes the widespread support for preservation in L.A. to the larger constituency for preservation in general and the fact that municipal leadership is more inclined to support preservation efforts. Their large membership is in direct correlation to the culture of the City of Los Angeles that supports the idea that the Conservancy is a powerful faction.

When the Police relocate to their newly-renovated headquarters building in five to seven years, the Roundhouse site will be sold as a development parcel. In order for a municipally owned building to be sold in the City of Philadelphia, it takes an act of City Council to de-accession the building. It is at that point in the process that Leech says it

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<sup>128</sup> Ben Leech provided all information in this section during an in-person interview on April 11, 2014.

becomes unclear what happens next due to the involvement of the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC). The PIDC is Philadelphia's economic development corporation, established in 1958 as a joint venture between the City and the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. It manages real estate activity for the City of Philadelphia and its agencies as well as the redevelopment of key parcels and buildings owned by the City. Additionally, PIDC directs strategic development opportunities in areas where the City has important ownership or economic development interests. It is, in effect, a city agency that circumvents transparent public processes in the sale of municipal buildings and sites.

In Philadelphia, any building that is not locally designated is treated merely as real estate, with zero consideration given to the building. When selling municipal sites, the PIDC considers the sale a land transaction; the presence of a building on the site is not relevant to the agency's concerns unless it is deemed historic. The Philadelphia Historical Commission is the city agency tasked with designating buildings, sites, and districts to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Because each of the agencies involved in the process must decidedly act according to the desires of the administration, the level of review for the sale of municipal buildings is far from germane.

If a municipal building receives local historic designation, Leech explains, that activates a building-focused analysis when it is determined that it will be vacated and potentially sold. PAGP generally feels that this level of review is more appropriate,

despite being limited to only designated buildings. Even then, local preservation organizations rarely get a seat at the table when the City sets up a Request for Proposal (RFP) for redevelopment projects involving historic municipally owned properties.

One of the challenges in the preservation initiative for the Roundhouse is that Modern architecture is generally underappreciated. In an historic city like Philadelphia, with a vibrant historic fabric and a public that possesses negative associations toward the Roundhouse, it can be difficult building a constituency for its preservation. Leech attributes this to the fifty-year evolutionary cycles of architecture. In an examination of architectural styles from 1916 to 1966, there is a huge shift in the architectural vocabulary. The timespan from 1966 to the present, however, doesn't present as many variations of architectural styles. Today's contemporary buildings don't have enough critical distance from Midcentury Modern buildings for the latter to be truly appreciated.

A nomination for the building to be included on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places will be presented to the Philadelphia Historical Commission, but it is highly unlikely that it will be approved. The campaign is also working to obtain a Determination of Eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a move that will make Historic Preservation Tax Credits available as an incentive to developers.

The Roundhouse is in excellent physical condition and an ideal candidate for reuse. Although there are minor signs of exterior deterioration, they are scarce and can be easily remediated with little expense. Each floor has an open plan, which presents an

ideal opportunity for adaptive reuse. The campaign organizers have met with a developer who is interested in potentially adaptively reusing the building. They have converted a number of historic buildings in the city and have always had appreciation for the Roundhouse. Despite this interest, Leech believes that the best, most effective way to advocate for the preservation of Modern municipal buildings is to keep them under municipal ownership and sustain their municipal value. These buildings exist for distinct municipal uses, and weren't built to generate income. The lack of flexibility pertaining to their original function can create a challenge for developers wishing to adapt them for commercial uses.

## ***5.6 Conclusion***

The Save the Roundhouse campaign is actively working to increase awareness of the building's significance as well as any impending threats. The current proactive publicity and commentary taking place in the public arena is encouraging, but increased attention is needed to put pressure on the city to act cautiously with regards to how they handle the RFP process and the marketing and sale of this inimitable building. Support garnered from a wider audience could expose the building to a potential developer while also garnering increased universal support for threatened Modern architecture. Proactive preservation aims to raise awareness and generate support for the building while working to influence municipal leadership to keep the building in place, as opposed to demolishing it prior to marketing the property.

Advocating for the preservation of Modern civic buildings that have outlasted their original functional needs is a challenge, especially in a city like Philadelphia, where preservation is generally a low-priority issue. By galvanizing the public to support the preservation and reuse of the Roundhouse, this effort raises awareness regarding the City's rapidly-vanishing Modern architecture. It serves as an opportunity to combat the tremendous dearth of knowledge and understanding of Modernism and the significance of buildings like the Roundhouse in sustaining a dynamic and varied architectural landscape.





Figure 21. Race Street. 1916. Located in the Race Street file at the Philadelphia Historical Commission.



Figure 22. Race Street. 1916. Located in the Race Street file at the Philadelphia Historical Commission.



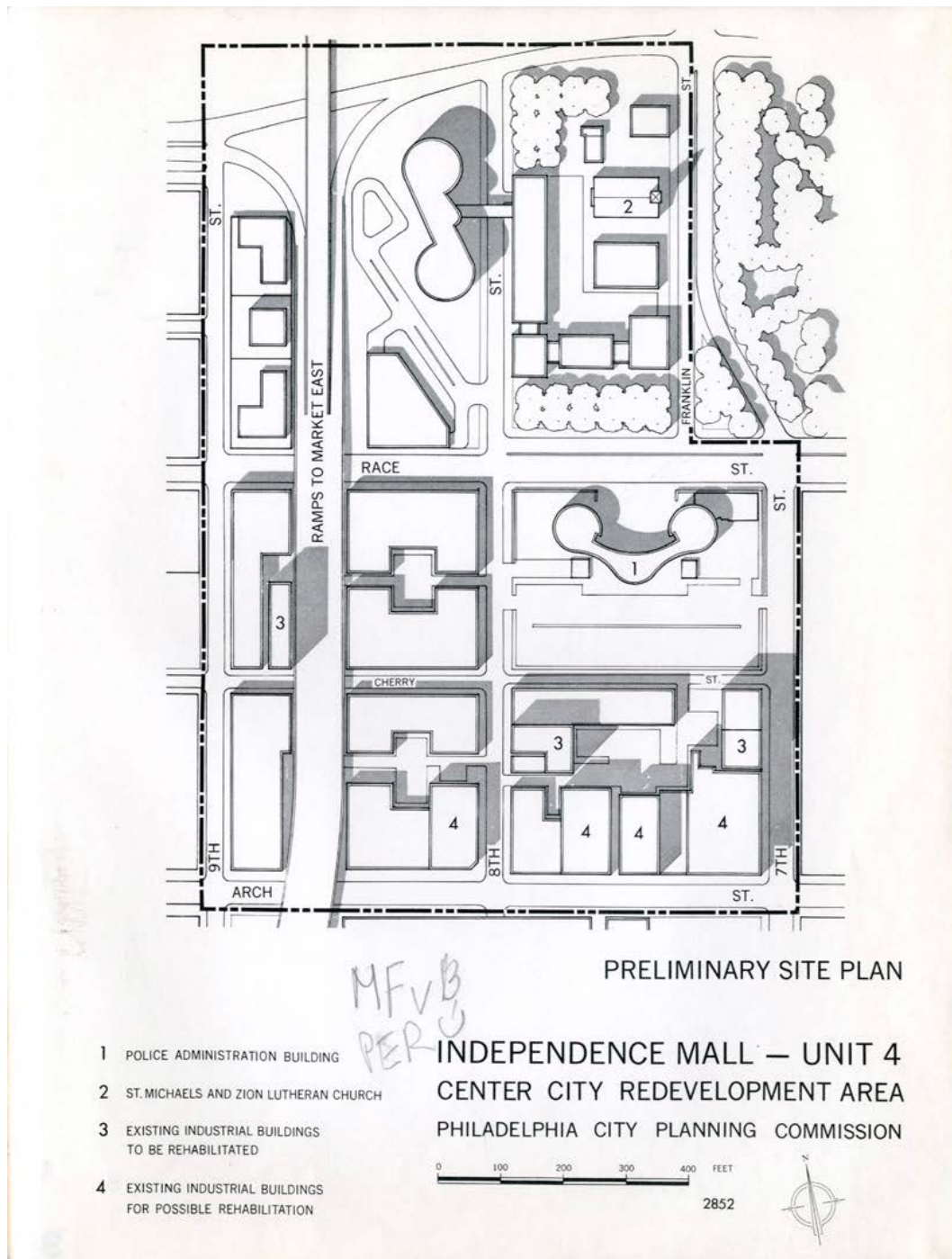


Figure 23. Independence Mall Redevelopment Area Plan. Philadelphia City Planning Commission. 1966.



Figure 24. Philadelphia Police Administration Building under construction. 1962. Temple Urban Archives.



Figure 25. From a booklet published shortly after the Roundhouse was dedicated, this image displays the positive public image the Philadelphia Police wanted to promote through their new building. Earle D. Oakes Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania.





Figure 26. View from the south showing the parking lot and the convex south walls of the Roundhouse. Peter Olson, *Police Headquarters*. Olson Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

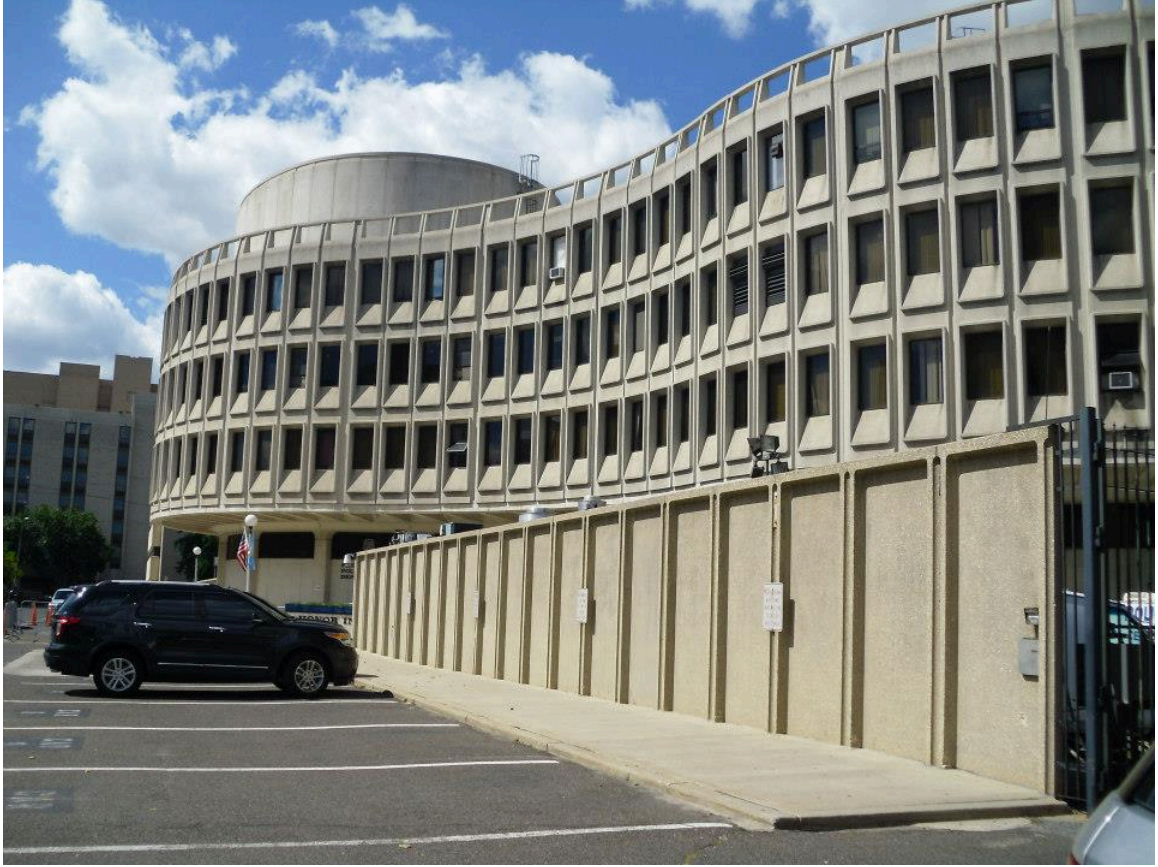


Figure 27. Roundhouse, present day. Allee Berger. 2012.



Figure 28. The current entrance on the south side of the building and provides users of the building with easy access to the parking lot. Christine Beckman. 2012.





Figure 29. This image of the lobby highlights its open floor plan and attention to curved forms. Earle D. Oakes Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania



Figure. 30. Shortly after the police began operations in their new building, the main entrance was closed and the entrance moved to the south side. As a result, the plaza sits vacant and unused. The plaza was praised by Architect Robert Geddes for serving as both the functional and symbolic center of a community. Allee Berger. 2012.

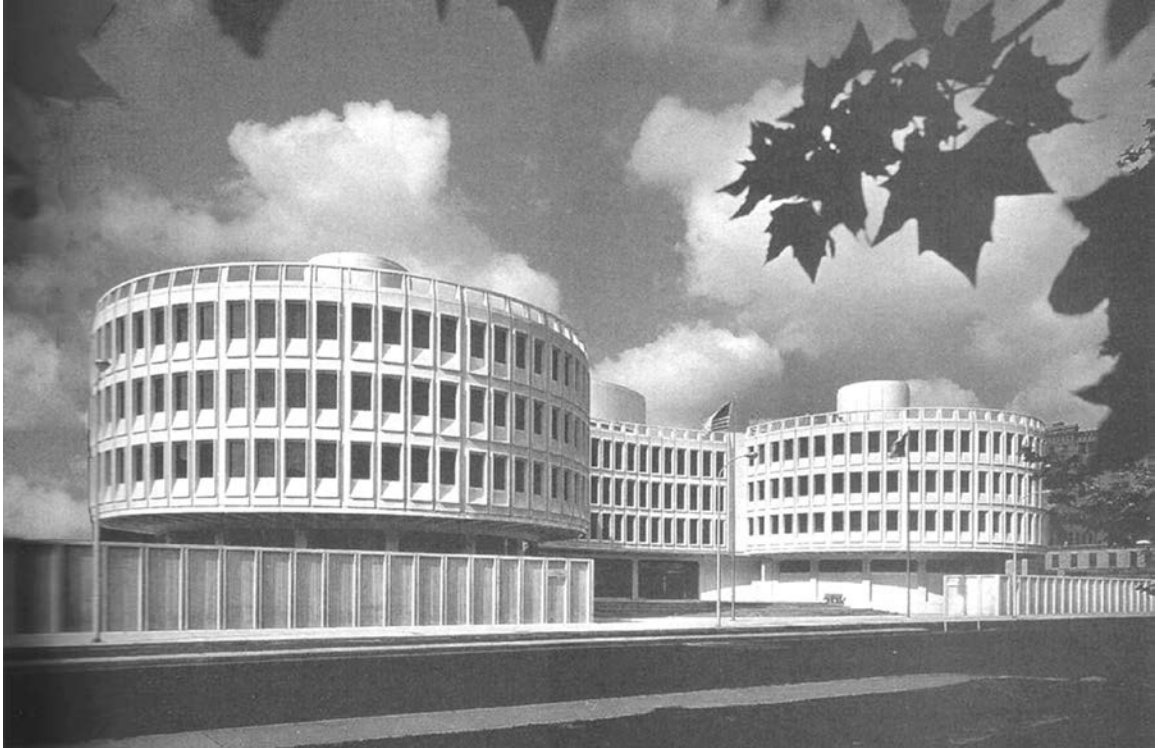


Figure 31. This view of the Roundhouse across Race Street shows the poured-in-place perimeter walls that define the majority of the building's perimeter while relating the building's rounded shape to the gridded layout of Philadelphia.

Peter Olson, *Police Headquarters*. Olson Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.





8th and Race Streets, looking east, 2012

Figure 32. Proposed redevelopment of the Roundhouse site from the final draft of Philadelphia City Planning Commission 2035 Plan [http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans/District%20Plans%20Library/Central\\_DP\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans/District%20Plans%20Library/Central_DP_FINAL.pdf).



Figure 33. Georgia Tech Architectural Design Studio design intervention showing an aerial view of the Roundhouse with new construction in the former parking lot area. Emily Lenke. 2013.

## 6 | Recommendations and Conclusion

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As the preceding chapters have shown, the preservation of public Modern buildings faces significant obstacles, arguably more and greater than buildings of other styles and uses. Perceived as dated and rarely considered historically significant, these buildings are far too often deemed expendable by their owners. Advocating for their preservation presents distinct challenges, which stem from their value solely as real estate and development parcels coupled with a general lack of transparency in municipal governmental processes. While these challenges can be discouraging, they, in fact, offer an opportunity for advocates to bring to light and publicize little-known threats to local Modern municipal buildings. Mounting a preservation advocacy effort for such buildings offers a chance to educate the public on the significance of Modern architecture while also garnering support for threatened municipal mainstays of a city's historic fabric.

Through extensive research of both past and current advocacy efforts for Modern buildings and interviews with preservationists who have led or are currently leading advocacy campaigns for Modern municipal buildings, an array of recommendations was formulated. The original drivers for this study are the challenges facing the successful preservation of the Philadelphia Roundhouse. While the preservation of the Roundhouse is an uphill battle, an examination of it and other similarly challenging advocacy efforts for Modern municipal buildings has outlined best practices to inform advocacy efforts for similar buildings.

No matter the era they represent, truly intriguing and timeless municipal buildings warrant the opportunity to remain standing long past the fifty-year mark, when so many of them are deemed functionally obsolete and demolished. A survey of the replacement plans for Prentice Women's Hospital, the Orange County Government Center, Baltimore's Morris Mechanic Theater, or the Philadelphia Roundhouse reveals the value inherent in these structures and why such monumentally iconic buildings should be granted reprieve.

The rampant indiscriminate neglect and disposal of Modern municipal buildings is startling. Local and national preservation organizations are typically understaffed, underfunded, and highly selective in the projects they undertake. If a building is imminently threatened, and has little support for its preservation, it falls to the individual or group of individuals to take on the challenge of advocating for its preservation. Grassroots preservation advocacy campaigns for buildings of all eras largely rely on volunteer energy and personal commitment.

Preservation advocacy efforts generally encompass a number of patently unpredictable factors, and thus lack any sort of strategic uniformity. For this reason, prescriptive strategies may possibly be regarded as too abstract for real life implementation. In all preservation challenges, however, the variables are so great and what cannot be predicted so pervasive, that it is crucial for advocates to have a clear strategy and a delineated process in place. Myriad circumstances contribute to the

outcome of advocacy efforts for Modern municipal buildings, and although difficult to predict, outlined herein are strategic propositions in order of descending magnitude.

### ***6.1 Generate Proactive Evaluation and Commentary***

One of the principal methods of triage for threatened Modern municipally owned buildings is securing exposure for the issue. If a municipality has not yet clearly stated their plans for a building, it is imperative for advocates to immediately begin getting proactive evaluation and commentary on the building out into the public arena. Today, this is accomplished primarily through social media outlets, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and various blog sites. Not only will publicizing the threat to the building alert citizens and Modern architecture enthusiasts alike, but it will also assist in articulating a building's significance to those who had not previously given it consideration. The social media soapbox provides advocates with a public forum from which to call out municipal leadership regarding their responsible public management of buildings.

The exposure granted through a social media campaign will often attract the attention of local media. The reach of local television and radio news stations will expose the plight of a threatened building to a much more diverse audience than social media alone. In addition, partnering with local and/or national preservation organizations will serve to increase the legitimacy of a grassroots advocacy campaign while also cultivating supporters on a national level. The goal is to direct the dialogue regarding the threats to the building and its significance in the hopes that a groundswell



of support will form and that, aside from the general public, municipal leadership and developers will take note.

## ***6.2 Master Political Savvy***

An essential component in any preservation advocacy effort is the determination of key supportive constituents in municipal government. Grassroots advocates may find it difficult to navigate political waters, and should partner with preservation organizations with political influence. Working together with local preservation organizations will enable advocates to meet with city officials and explore their plans for the building. If there are no stated plans for the building, these meetings give an opportunity to present reuse proposals, examine the tax incentives available for developers, and convey that the building is an ideal reuse opportunity. Additionally, it is beneficial to lead conversations with the city councilperson representing the site's district and suggest working together to evaluate reuse opportunities for the building. Resist viewing the administration as adversaries and instead consider partnering with them to find a solution.

Consider whom city officials listen to, and whom the city would be willing to include in discussions about future plans for the building. Form a coalition of respected and experienced voices, not just representing the preservation field, but a spectrum of disciplines and interests. Aside from the local preservation organization, solicit members of local neighborhood organizations, businesspersons, architects, and real estate

developers. An objective of meeting with members of municipal government is to influence the administration as to how to market the property, encouraging them to keep the building in place and let developers make the determination as to whether it's a candidate for rehabilitation. Even if the city sees no value in the building, a developer very well could.

Offer to bring experts in the field of Modernist building preservation and reuse into relevant municipal offices to present on the significance of Modern architecture and provide stewardship recommendations. Architect and preservation expert David Fixler has had occasion to go into Boston City Hall and present to municipal staff, on Modern buildings, their significance, and ways to sensitively treat them. Detached from architectural design and preservation matters, politicians and municipal staff especially require support to make sense of the significance of this era of architectural design and ways to improve their stewardship of municipally owned buildings.

Traditional preservation policy, at both the local and national levels, needs to be amended in order to better accommodate younger resources. It is all too common practice for cities to preemptively demolish buildings prior to marketing real estate parcels to developers. In an attempt to avoid this practice and the resultant plethora of empty lots remaining when development cycles inevitably change, some cities, including Boston, do not allow clearance of a site until the developer provides proof that financing has been secured for the new development. Work with municipal agencies tasked with the city's real estate transactions and encourage similar policies if not already in place.

Owing to inadequate transparency in municipal government processes, and a tendency for demolition permits to be issued with little public notice, it is imperative that preservation advocates monitor municipal development agency maneuvering. This can be facilitated through the state historic preservation organization as well as local preservation organizations and allows advocates to stay abreast of the issuance of requests for proposals, orders for demolition, and funding requests for development projects.

### ***6.3 Present the Building as an Asset to the Municipality***

Modern municipal buildings were designed for a very specific civic use, and as such, comparable usage is the optimal choice when examining reuse opportunities. Consider if there other municipal departments that would benefit from the location or perhaps would be a boon to the area. Advocates for Modern municipal buildings should work with the municipality to examine ways in which threatened, decommissioned, and vacated buildings can remain in municipal use. Public-private partnerships should also be considered, as dual-funding sources can increase the viability of a project.

The creation of compelling visual representations of reuse scenarios can help illustrate a building's reuse potential. The General Services Administration's (GSA) First Impressions program aims to change the way that Modern federal buildings are regarded, implementing everything from additions to small gestures at building entrances. Reach out to sympathetic local developers that have previously worked with

Modern buildings and inquire as to feasibility of reuse, procuring preliminary reuse schemes, if possible. Transformative ideas and reuse scenarios that make the building useful for the city's needs should be presented to the municipality accompanied by cogent illustrations and realistic metrics.

When advocating for the preservation and reuse of a Modern municipal building, the value inherent in the building must be made clear to the municipality. It is a near impossibility for municipal leadership to find value in a building based solely on its historic or architectural value. The building must have real social and economic value to a city in order for rehabilitation and reuse to be considered. If the city desires an income-generating replacement for the threatened building, advocates must be able to demonstrate that the building can serve that new function. It must be clearly illustrated from a purely dollars-and-cents real estate standpoint that the building is an asset. Additionally, it should be pointed out that a pleasing and historically varied architectural landscape could raise property values, make the city more desirable for citizens and tourists, and enhance civic pride.

#### ***6.4 Landmark the Building***

Work together with the state historic preservation office to nominate the building to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register process can be lengthy, but in the interim, advocates should obtain a determination of eligibility that the building meets National Register criteria for evaluation. Once this determination is

obtained, the city would be foolish to preemptively demolish the building and deny developers the option to rehabilitate and utilize the twenty percent Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit made available once the building is officially listed on the National Register. This tax credit is made available to properties that will be used for an income-producing purpose, and so if the building were to remain in municipal usage, would not apply. However, it is beneficial to work to have the building listed on the National Register regardless of how the building is reused, because certification of the building as an historic structure by the federal government could influence the city to become better stewards and list the building on the local historic register.

Local landmark processes are political in nature with decisions often made behind closed doors long before public meetings are held. Municipally owned buildings are at a significantly greater risk of being denied local landmarking. This is due to the conflict of interest presented when the entity that determines if a building should be protected is the same entity that would profit from its destruction. The best plan of action is to nominate the building prior to stated threats. If threats have already been made public, nominate the building regardless. At the very least, statements made by municipal officials at public meetings will be revealed and retained as part of the public record. Post the commission's reasoning for the denial of local register listing publically and use it to bolster the argument for more transparent municipal government processes.

Preservation advocacy groups should conduct regular methodological surveying and evaluation of Modern buildings, nominating any meeting the criteria for listing and

determined significant. If the building is located within a local or national historic district, ascertain if it is listed as a contributing resource. If not, it is simply because it has not been identified as such due to changing notions of significance and age of the resource at the time of the original nomination. With a minimal amount of research and writing, buildings meeting the age criteria (typically fifty years) may be reevaluated and with local historical commission approval, historic district registers can be revised with their inclusion. Protection stemming from proactive evaluation and designation of Modern resources serves to assist cities in making more thoughtful decisions regarding development that is inclusive of recent past architecture.

### ***6.5 Overcome Aesthetic Bias through Education***

Modern buildings must be evaluated based on their historical, architectural, and cultural value, regardless of age. Despite increased interest in Modern design in recent years, many possess limited knowledge about the significance of Modern architectural resources, oftentimes basing their judgments purely on aesthetics. Stylistic prejudices prompt many to disregard Modern municipal buildings because they lack familiarity with their context and history. Projects that stemmed from urban renewal programs are often sited on large lots, with the entrance facing away from the street. This leads to them being regarded as anti-urban and, thus, difficult for the public to embrace or advocate for their preservation.

In advocating for the preservation of Modern buildings, it is not only important to maximize the public's exposure to the building, but also the significance of Modern architectural styles more generally. This can be accomplished through social media channels, informal presentations, panel discussions, gallery exhibitions, and through any means that allow advocates to simply share photos and background information on Modern buildings and their significance. Currently, Modern architecture, and in particular Brutalism, has a large supportive presence online. As advocates reach larger audiences, those who reactively dislike these buildings on a purely aesthetic basis will at the very least be exposed to information regarding their architectural and historical significance.

### ***6.6 Tell a Good Story about the Building***

Advocating for the preservation of Modern municipal buildings will sometimes, sadly, elicit hostility from those in opposition to the building and the preservation effort. It is critical to avoid being aggressive or confrontational and to always come across as pragmatic and cooperative. When it comes to buildings with negative associations to urban renewal or dark history such as police brutality or civil unrest, advocating for their preservation can be challenging. It is important not to ignore the negative associations, for they are strong cultural memories and must be addressed. However, it is crucial that advocates convey a good story about the building, one that will articulate why the building is important and should be saved. It is imperative that advocates work to

dissociate the negative associations from the building and instead emphasize the building's significance. Negative associations must be acknowledged, but are not valid arguments for not saving a building.

Any initiative advocating for the preservation of a Modern-era building should start with a comprehensive study of its history, evaluation of its cultural significance, and a thorough assessment of present conditions. It is essential that advocates are well informed on the building's history and significance, generating talking points and remaining prepared to recite when required. If the threatened Modern municipal building or the campaign for its protection receives media coverage, opponents will invariably appear in the comments sections of news sites and social media sources. Whenever negative commentary or press is disseminated, it is imperative that valid, rational responses are generated. Otherwise a flood of negative commentary can perpetuate one-sided dialogue in opposition to the building's preservation. Similarly, it is vitally important to avoid releasing unflattering images of the building. Anything depicting it in a rundown, dilapidated state will accomplish nothing more than bolstering the city's argument against preservation and reuse.

### ***6.7 Remain Open to Adaptation***

The Historic Preservation movement is generally viewed as constricting, one that exists to place restrictions and limits on property owners that inhibit change and modification. But the reality is that preservation works best when there is a strong



creative contribution alongside the curatorial responsibilities. With challenging Modern buildings, preservation advocates must be open to dynamic adaptation and renovation as long as it does not compromise the essential integrity of the building. Historically, preservationists have refrained from bold design interventions, but if a building can be restored and made beneficial to the users, then such interventions should be considered. Preservation and reuse of Modern municipal buildings should balance user functionality and flexibility while respecting the existing character of the building. Though not a municipal building, the recent renovations to Paul Rudolph's Yale Art & Architecture building are an example of the transformative power of a sensitive rehabilitation taking the user's needs into consideration.

Sprawling sites that were once surface parking or designed landscapes present an opportunity not only to developers wishing to densify a site, but also to preservationists advocating for a building's preservation. If there is development pressure at the site, the construction of an addition facilitates added square footage and increases real estate value, potentially saving an historic Modern municipal building from demolition. Although the reuse opportunities are greatly increased with Modern municipal buildings on large lots, the compatibility between the new construction and the historic building must be addressed.

## **6.8 Encourage Sustainability**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation touts, “the greenest building is the one that already exists” and its Preservation Green Lab works to integrate sustainability and preservation by decreasing demolition and promoting building reuse. Findings show that building reuse yields fewer environmental impacts than new construction when comparing buildings of similar size and functionality.<sup>129</sup> Sustainable construction practices divert debris away from landfills, while recycling or salvaging the majority of construction waste resulting from renovations. Additional measures that promote sustainability and conserve the operating energy of buildings are the incorporation of high efficiency HVAC systems, improvements to the thermal performance of the building envelope, and integrating water and lighting conservation plans. Appropriate stewardship of Modern resources by municipalities is also a sustainable practice. Taxpayers funded the construction of these buildings, and so municipalities should maintain long-term maintenance and upkeep of these resources as both financial and environmental objectives. The sustainability angle in preservation projects resonates with both private developers as well as municipal leadership. Avoid clinging too strongly to this issue, but make the point that demolition, particularly of large Modern buildings, is not a sustainable option.

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<sup>129</sup> Preservation Green Lab, “The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011, vi.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

As time passes and the distance increases between present day and the epoch of Modernism, the historical significance of its architectural remnants will continue to gain increased appreciation and credibility. The preservation of Modern buildings was derided twenty years ago, even within the preservation community, whereas today the significance of these resources is much more widely recognized. As threats to Modern buildings continue to be publicized through highly visible advocacy campaigns, their significance and the need for their preservation will invariably continue to be acknowledged by the general public.

As budgets dwindle and funding sources disappear, many Modern municipal buildings are utilized on a daily basis without upgrades to failing mechanical systems and devoid of proper maintenance. The fundamental challenge for their preservation lies in convincing municipal leadership of the value inherent in these buildings and the financial benefits of their reuse over demolition and new construction. Ideally, the cultural and architectural value of city owned buildings would also be considered, but tragically, there is little regard for these resources beyond their financial value.

Preservation advocacy is generally an uphill battle, but when advocating for the preservation of city owned buildings, the challenges increase considerably. Cities are dynamic, ever-changing places where preservation is often viewed as a hindrance to progress. Municipal administration asserts that cities must always be changing and developing, lest they become stagnant. While this is true to an extent, it is imperative

that municipal leadership enlists experts, outside of municipal government, to take stock of current historically, culturally, and architecturally significant municipally owned resources representing all eras up to and including the present. Municipalities should then afford local historic designation to these resources, thus allowing the city to transform and develop around them. Unconstrained municipal control and regulatory power is a threat not only to historic preservation generally, but also to a city's ability to retain an historically and architecturally diverse urban fabric.

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