



# National Preservation Institute

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## The Recent Past: Strategies for Evaluation

### Seminar Overview

Examine nationwide trends in mid-20th-century houses and neighborhoods, with an emphasis on the evaluation of large suburban developments, construction methods, and house types and plans. Review era-specific factors that help to identify and categorize these buildings. Evaluate survey methodologies and consider the impact of neighborhood zoning, subdivision design review, urban renewal, and owner associations. Discuss how to determine the significance and integrity of resources when evaluating eligibility for federal and state programs, such as the National Register and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

### Agenda

#### Identification:

- Review major trends in mid-20th-century architecture to understand how new concepts were adapted for popular use, with an emphasis on large subdivisions and merchant-builder homes. Emphasize popular designs and their sources.
- Review building styles and types from the late 1940's into the early 1970's. Identify character-defining period features, with an emphasis on minimum traditionals, ranch houses, townhouses, and split-levels. Discuss evolving terminology and the emergence of post-modern and neo-traditional buildings.
- Briefly look at new developments in later periods that have become significant.
- Discuss post-war materials, house plans, and modular, in-factory manufactured, post-and-beam, steel-panel, concrete, and aluminum construction methods. Review changes from traditional stick building to Levitt-style mass building and the wide use of planbooks and prefabricated houses.
- Examine building types developed to support the new communities: highway commercial strips, shopping centers, gas stations, fast-food restaurants, motor hotels, and suburban office parks.
- Examine regional expressionism through differences in building patterns and designs, reflecting area traditions and weather.
- Review the significance of large-scale, multi-thousand-house, post-war developments, their site plans, and the particular social, design-review, and preservation problems they raise. Examine the work by mass builders, such as the Levitt Brothers and David Bohannon.
- Review the effect of the era through the changed use and appearance of the house by discussing HVAC systems, finish materials, bathrooms, kitchens, family rooms, and patios.
- Case study examples: the Eichler developments and San Lorenzo in California; Hollin Hills and related developments around Washington, DC; and the several Levittowns, especially Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

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## **Evaluation:**

- Discuss how to determine the significance and integrity of contributing resources when evaluating eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, federal rehabilitation tax credits, and other federal and state programs. Examine problems surrounding the “50-year rule” and qualifying resources that are less than 50 years old.
- Discuss the contribution or diminution by modern buildings in older areas and historic districts. Examine how to evaluate the significance of large developments or individual ranch houses.
- Consider the varied survey methodologies possible for large-scale housing developments, including traditional building-by-building survey, selected typical buildings or neighborhoods, or using percentage surveys such as one in 10 or 20. Discuss the impact of GIS and Google mapping on surveys.
- Consider preservation issues, protection by local historic district ordinances, neighborhood conservation ordinances, design review, and homeowners’ associations, as well as implied protection by National Register listing.
- Case study: The comprehensive Los Angeles survey sponsored by the Getty Foundation and the foundation’s international impact.
- Examine the legacy of residential Urban Renewal projects. Assess their historical significance as they have matured and issues they may now raise.
- Case study: Philadelphia’s Society Hill Urban Renewal Project and the closely related Old-City, Independence National Historical Park, and expressway issues. Examine the deteriorated area, intervention, new construction, and results today, including the role of historic preservation vs. urban design.

## **Regulation:**

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