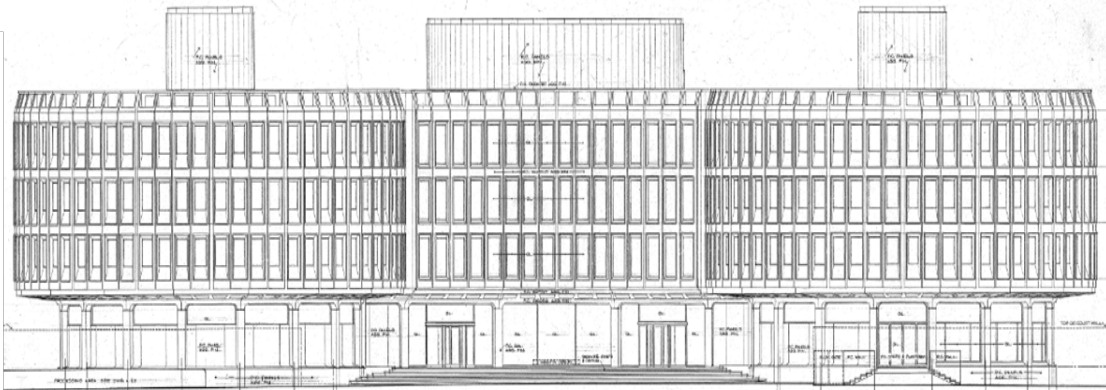


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ICOMOS Heritage Alert

Philadelphia Police Administration Building

(aka Roundhouse, Police Headquarters Building), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Press Release

26 January 2023

The Philadelphia Police Headquarters (PPHQ) is internationally significant as a mid-century Expressionist public building, a product of an exceptional collaboration between the architects, structural engineer, and the application of state-of-the-art architectural concrete precasting building technology. The PPHQ represents progressive social aspirations for community-based public safety services, and exceptional design based on international influences and state-of-the-art concrete precasting technology. Designed and constructed using virtually all architectural/structural precast concrete, the building pioneered the use of new and daring structural concrete reinforcing techniques of pre- and post-tensioning which were essential in achieving the building's architectural character.

The PPHQ was designed by a collaborative team, unusual for a period before the advent of computer aided design, that included the internationally, nationally, and regionally recognized firm of Geddes Brecher Qualls and Cunningham; renowned Estonian structural engineer, August Komendant who worked with Louis Kahn on most of his important buildings; and the engineers from Eastern Schokbeton deploying an innovative Dutch concrete precasting technology.

Philadelphia's Independence Mall Redevelopment Plan assigned a prominent site to the PPHQ, across the street from Franklin Square, one of the original five parks in William Penn's plan for the city. At the time, Philadelphia was trying to reform its government, modernize and professionalize municipal services, and root out corruption and political influence. The City leadership's goal for the new police headquarters building was that it should serve as a symbol of modern, professional, community based public safety services. The building's soft circular welcoming shape, fenestration, expansive front plaza, and generous interior public spaces provided transparency reflecting the progressive objective for policing in the City of Philadelphia.

Regrettably, because of political change soon after the building's completion, the vision of a compassionate, engaged, transparent community-based policing that inspired the building design was not realized in practice. Brutal, discriminatory, and biased law enforcement behaviors accelerated under notorious Police Commissioner and subsequently Mayor Frank Rizzo. In the minds of some Philadelphia citizens and leaders, the PPHQ has become a physical symbol of the inappropriate police actions and the community disruption caused by urban renewal programs at midcentury, neither of which are associated with the aspirations for the building's contribution to the City and the inspiration for its design.

The PPHQ is now vacant, and the City has announced its intent to sell the building and site to a developer. From cursory observation, the PPHQ building itself is in very good condition. There has been minimal alteration to the original building and its significant features. Currently, a community engagement program, funded by the City, is canvassing citizens for input regarding the future of the building and site.

The overriding goal for the future of the PPHQ is for it to be protected by deed or easement in perpetuity, appropriately rehabilitated to Secretary of Interior Standards, and sensitively adapted for compatible uses.

Ideally, standing alone or as part of a larger development project, the PPHQ will be used to realize the progressive civic objectives for which it was designed, community services. For example, the building can accommodate a ground floor restaurant/café, offices for non-profit organizations and an educational space that recognizes and interprets the trauma of an era of brutal policing and urban renewal displacement with the overriding objective to learn from the past to achieve a better future.

The rear half of the site, the original parking lot for the building, holds the potential for a new structure without the need to modify or otherwise hinder the preservation and adaptation of the PPHQ. This might include compatible uses such as affordable housing, landscaped public spaces, and a pedestrian-friendly corridor for easy access to nearby Franklin Square from adjacent neighborhoods, particularly the Chinatown neighborhood.

If the PPHQ is incorporated into a request for developer proposals (RFP), the RFP should

1. establish an easement and/or deed restriction on the sale of the property that requires the building's appropriate preservation treatment and maintenance over the long term and adapts the building for new uses that are compatible with its significant historic qualities over the long term; and
2. give substantial weight in developer selection for their creativity and ability to do so.

Until such provisions are incorporated by the City of Philadelphia into the approach to disposition this unique and exceptional internationally acclaimed mid-century icon to a developer, the potential for disfiguration or, worse, demolition by an insensitive developer remains a distinct and worrisome possibility.

ICOMOS, including its International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage and National Committees in the US and Estonia, and DOCOMOMO, including its US and Philadelphia branches, as well as the Estonian Museum of Architecture are issuing this Heritage Alert jointly to raise the awareness of the Mayor of Philadelphia, the City Council and the Philadelphia Department of Planning and Development to these dangers, provide recommendations and offer their assistance to ensure the preservation and sensitive adaptive reuse of this heritage both for Philadelphia's citizens but also the international community.

Download the [Letter](#) and [Background document](#)

Contact: Jack Pyburn, FAIA, President
ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage
pyburnj@gmail.com

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a non-governmental, not for profit international organisation, committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage. With over 11,000 members, 100+ National Committees (including in the USA and Estonia), 30 International Scientific Committees (including its International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage) and several Working Groups, ICOMOS has built a solid philosophical, doctrinal and managerial framework for the sustainable conservation of heritage around the world. As an official advisory body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS evaluates nominations and advises on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.
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DOCOMOMO International is a non-profit organisation dedicated to documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement.

It aims to:

- Bring the significance of the architecture of the Modern Movement to the attention of the public, the authorities, the professionals and the educational community.
- Identify and promote the surveying of the works of the Modern Movement.
- Promote the conservation and (re)use of buildings and sites of the Modern Movement.
- Oppose destruction and disfigurement of significant works.
- Foster and disseminate the development of appropriate techniques and methods of conservation and adaptive (re)use.
- Attract funding for documentation conservation and (re)use.
- Explore and develop new ideas for the future of a sustainable built environment based on the past experiences of the Modern Movement.

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