MID-CENTURY MODERNS:
A QUESTION OF HISTORY NOT TASTE

BACKGROUND [A]
LOCATION 1
HISTORY 2
SITE 3
ARCHITECTURE 4

ADVOCACY [B]
STRATEGY/EXECUTION 5

PLANNING [C]
FUTURE PRESERVATION 6

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MAX BUTEN, LHHS
BACKGROUND [A]

WYNNEWOOD, [EST. 1691]
LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP, PA

PHILLY’S MAIN LINE •
Western Philly Suburb 1
Proximity to Lancaster Ave. 2
Adjacent to Train Station 3
Adjacent to Commercial 4
Development [c1950]

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION…
BACKGROUND

WYNNEWOOD, [EST. 1691]
LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP, PA

WYNNEWOOD STATION •
- Built c1870 [Wilson Bros.] 1
- Pennsy Railroad [Main Line] 2
- Gateway [Wynnewood] 3
- Site Orientation [Tracks/Rd.] 4

PUBLIC FEDERAL SAVINGS •
- Built c1951 [Unknown] 5
- Gateway ["Book End"] 6
- Orientation to Community 7
- [Intersection/Commercial]
BACKGROUND [A]
PUBLIC FEDERAL SAVINGS BANK - “PFSB”, [c1951]
WYNNEWOOD, PA

SITING OF THE BUILDING
• Form Fits Context [Road] 1
• Pedestrian Pathway [Train] 2
• “Looks” Outward [Glazing] 3
• Iconic Waypoint [Tower] 4

CONNECTION TO THE COMMUNITY…
BACKGROUND [A]

PUBLIC FEDERAL SAVINGS
BANK - “PFSB”, [c1951]
WYNNEWOOD, PA

FEATURES •
Form/Massing [Curve] 1
Tower [Clock/Signage] 2
Planar Elements [Roofs] 3
Window Wall [Glazing] 4
“Ornament” [Masonry] 5
Artificial Illumin. [Lighting] 6

MATERIALS •
Brick [Bond/Color/Joints] 1
Limestone [Profile/Color] 2
Concrete [Finish/Color] 3
Glass [Opacity/Color] 4
Metal [Type/Color/Finish] 5

WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT ISN’T…
**Public Federal Savings Bank**

39 Lancaster Avenue, Lower Merion Township

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY**

**SIGNIFICANCE**

Built in 1951 for the Public Federal Savings Bank; this unique mid-century modern building is a largely undiscovered example of suburban commercial development that occurred in Wynnewood during the 1950s. The one-story brick building is an icon in the community. It is characterized by a rounded front that reflects its corner location, formed by a nearly full-height band of large windows in aluminum frames. The building’s prominent brick and concrete tower is intersected by a bold horizontal cantilevered flat roof that wraps the corner of the building and announces the main entrance.

Although it is over 50 years in age and has a unique architecture that reflects the period in which it was constructed, the National Register eligibility of the Public Federal Savings Bank has not been documented and evaluated. The Township is now making plans to add mid-century buildings like this one to its inventory of protected historic properties, but the building is not currently protected.

“The one-story brick building is an icon in the community.”

**THREAT**

Mid-century modern architecture is often under-appreciated. Because it is often not considered to be “historic” and thus worthy of preservation, buildings of this era are often altered in a manner that compromises their design and character, or lost all together.

The property containing the 1950s Public Federal Savings Bank, as well as several adjacent properties, were purchased by a local developer. The developer called for the demolition of the Public Federal Savings Bank and construction of a new bank with a larger floor plan and a drive-through. Plans for the bank property have not yet been finalized, so a demolition permit has not yet been issued.

In an attempt to protect this property, members of the Township’s Historical Commission and Planning Department have prepared sketch plans that explore alternatives that allow the developer to achieve its goals, while preserving the existing building. When community members presented the alternative concepts to the developer, they highlighted advantages of utilizing the existing building, including the fact that it is iconic in the community and has a prominent tower that can be seen from quite a distance. The developer listened to this proposal and took the ideas back to the development team for consideration.

Because new bank branches are licensed by the FDIC, the project will likely be reviewed under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act. This will require that the significance of the property be documented and evaluated. If the building is found to be “historic,” the developer will be required to engage in a public process to consider project alternatives that avoid or minimize adverse impact to the property, or take measures to mitigate the impact. This process, as well as preservation incentives such as the Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits, may help to convince the developer to preserve the building rather than demolish it. However, a demolition proposal has been submitted and is scheduled to be reviewed in February.

The Public Federal Savings Bank is not alone. Mid-century modern buildings are disappearing because they don’t fit in with our traditional concepts of what is historic. Hopefully, the Public Federal Savings Bank will help to bring attention to the significance of architecture of this era, and begin to help the public recognize its value.
# Mid-Century Moderns, 1950

## Lower Merion, PA

## Preventing Future Loss

- Raise Public Awareness 1
  - [Educational Programs]
- Identify Historic Resources 2
  - [Survey/Documentation]
- Regulate Historic Resources 3
  - [Listing/Protection]
- Update Twrshp. Comp. Plan 4
  - [Zoning Regulation]
- Revise Preserv. Ordinance 5
  - [Increase Regulation]
- Waive Bldg. Permit Fees 6
  - [Economic Impact]
- Increase Demo Permit Fees 7
  - [Economic Impact]
THANK YOU

PRESERVATION PA •
LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP • HISTORICAL COMMISSION
LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP • HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD
LOWER MERION • CONSERVANCY
 PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION
PRESERVATION ALLIANCE • OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA
AIA PHILADELPHIA • [HP COMMITTEE]
DOCOMOMO PHL •
RECENT PAST • PRESERVATION NETWORK
AND ANY MORE •

MANY THANKS TO ALL:
QUESTIONS?