

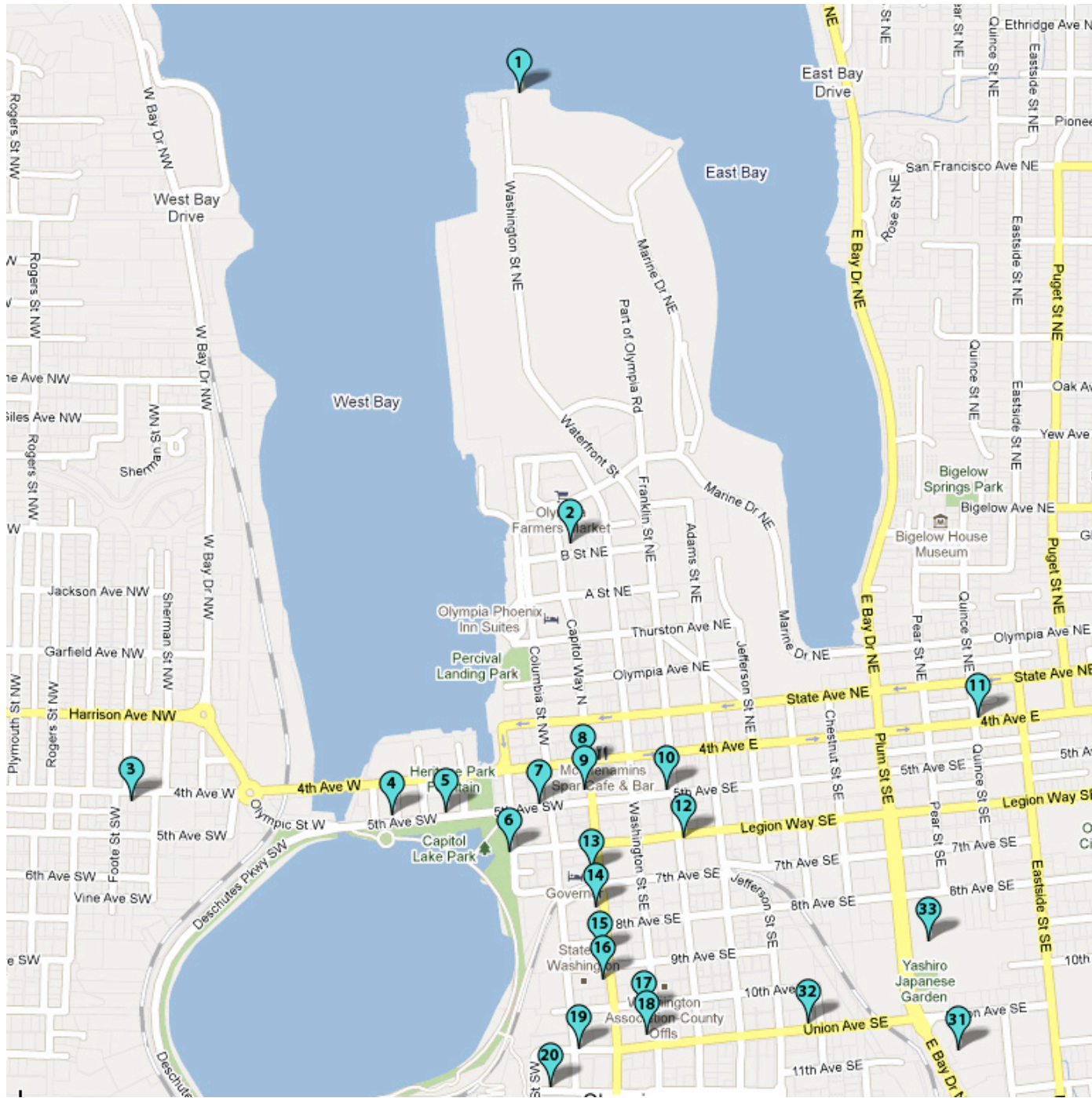
OLYMPIA MODERNISM

A self-guided tour of mid-century buildings

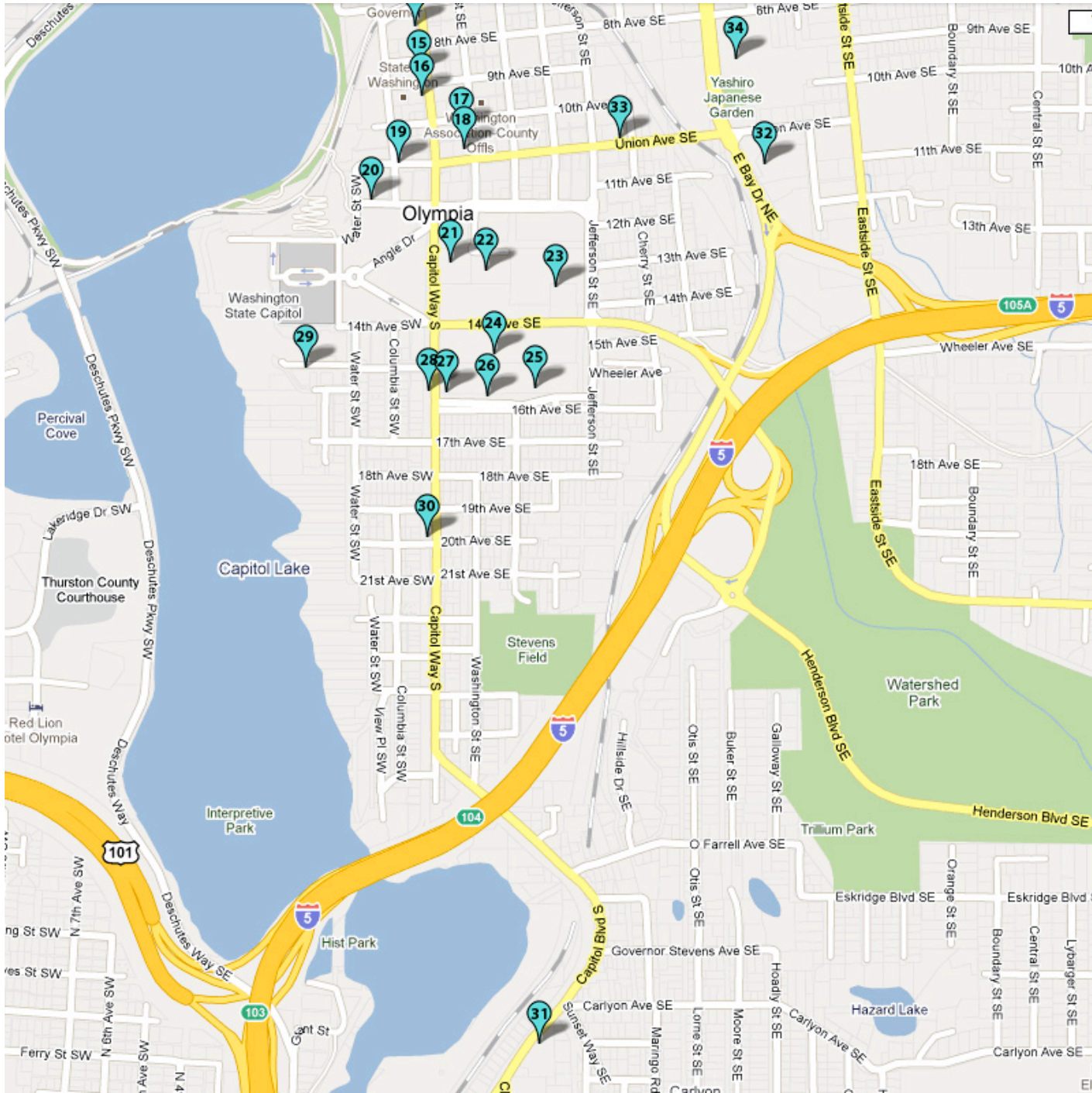


Mid-Twentieth Century
Modern Olympia





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1 – KGY Radio Station
 1240 Washington St NE
 Architect: Robert Wohleb, 1960

KGY Radio, one of the oldest radio stations in the United States, began life at St. Martin's College in 1914. The station, originally heard in 23 states, officially procured a license from the Federal Communications Commission to operate in 1922. After outgrowing its space in the Rockway-Leland Building, KGY hired architect Robert Wohleb to design a studio at the tip of the port peninsula. Built on pilings directly above the water, it is one of the most uniquely situated stations in the country.



2 – Georgia Pacific Plywood Co. Office
 600 Capitol Way N
 Architect: Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johanson, 1952

Constructed as a unique marketing tool for the Georgia Pacific Plywood Company, this building demonstrated the many uses of plywood by the utilization of exotic veneers for interior and exterior finishes. It housed the corporate offices for the company for just two years and then became home to the Washington State Department of Game. Listed on the National Register of Historic

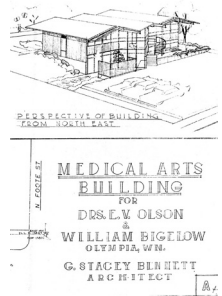
Places, the building was designed by the noted Seattle architectural firm of Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johanson, and today remains as the only standing structure associated with Olympia's once burgeoning plywood industry.



3 – Medical Arts Center
 1015 W 4th Ave
 Architect: G. Stacey Bennett, 1966

Designed to blend with the surrounding residential environment, the Medical Arts Center utilized a sawtooth style roof to break the mass of the building. Such design elements

reflect a softer approach to the strict form of modernism. Constructed for Dr. E.V. Olson and William Bigelow, the building housed a series of medical offices and a pharmacy and was designed by noted Olympia architect G. Stacey Bennett.



4 – Memorial Clinic
 529 4th Ave W
 Architect: Wohleb & Wohleb, 1948

The Memorial Clinic was built at this location because of its proximity to St. Peter's Hospital, which at the time was located just up the hill on 4th Avenue. The Memorial Clinic was an innovative concept in 1948. It joined together in one facility doctors from various specialties which was convenient for patients and reduced administrative costs. Not only did it include the clinic (shared by 20

doctors), but the building also housed a medical lab and a pharmacy. The clinic remained at the site until the early 1970s when it became home to the Thurston County Health Department. The Memorial Clinic was designed by the father and son team of Joseph and Robert Wohleb.



5 – Capitol Center Building
 410 W 5th Ave
 Architect: Bennett & Olson, 1966

The two-million dollar Capitol Center Building set the architectural tone in Olympia during the late 1960s. The imposing nine-story structure was the first mid-rise building to be constructed in the city and features an exterior curtain-wall building system. The main entry of the Meisian style building is highlighted by a large flat roof which appears to float between two steel columns.



6 – Capitol Lake Restrooms
 Intersection of Water Street & Legion Way
 Architect: George Ekvall, 1963

The efforts of Olympia's "Committee for the 60s" led to the construction of the Capitol Lake restrooms. The civic group was formed to study capital improvements for the city, which included several "special action projects" such as an auditorium, a new city hall, and a park and restrooms at Capitol Lake. Long-time Olympia City Manager, Eldon Marshall, convinced local architect, George Ekvall, to design the building free of charge for the city.



7 – Seattle First National Bank – Olympia Branch
 210 5th St W
 Architect: McClelland & Osterman, 1959

This bank building is one of several similar structures built across the state by Seattle First National Bank in the 1950s. The design was initially developed by Seattle architect John Maloney. The Seattle architectural firm of McClelland & Osterman then adapted Maloney's design

to conditions in Olympia. The New Formalist style building has an exterior of Roman brick, skinnier and longer than normal bricks. The building also features a curtain wall of multi-pane windows set in a slightly projecting rectangular concrete bay window and a curved cast stone entry portal. Inside the main entry is a mosaic tile mural depicting the legislative building on the Capitol Campus.



8 – Goldberg's Furniture Store
 403 Capitol Way S
 Architect: Wohleb & Wohleb, 1950

Proudly advertising, "Modern is the Word for our New Store," Goldberg's Furniture brought the latest design trends to downtown Olympia in 1950. The 3-story, 21,000 sq. ft. building was managed and owned by Alan and Arthur Goldberg. Their father, Joseph, had established the business in Olympia in the 1920s and eventually expanded operations into Aberdeen and Everett. The firm of Wohleb

& Wohleb designed the building with large expanses of glass at the street level protected by fixed awnings to entice year round window shopping. The upper two floors of the building, void of windows, served as an area to post a large sign.



9 – Olympia Federal Savings & Loan
 421 Capitol Way N
 Architect: Bennett & Johnson, 1967, 1978

Reflecting the postwar growth of the banking industry, Olympia Federal Savings & Loan set out in the late 1960s to make a bold architectural statement on a prominent lot in downtown Olympia. Designed as a floating glass box inside a metal and brick

frame, the local architectural firm of Bennett & Johnson rose to the occasion, and set a new architectural standard for the city. Today the building remains one of the most intact mid-

century modern buildings in the city. In 1978 Bennett & Johnson designed the rear and side additions which enclosed part of the open box.

The building is also noteworthy for its mahogany carved doors which feature a maze of skeleton key shapes inlaid with colored glass. It was designed and built by noted Wenatchee artist Walter Graham.



10 – Capital Savings & Loan
 222 5th Ave E
 Architect: Sibold & Nesland, 1963

Inspired by the futuristic pavilions at the Century 21 Exposition in Seattle, Capital Savings & Loan brought a unique architectural style to downtown Olympia in the early 1960s. The building was designed by the architectural firm of Sibold & Nesland, which had offices in Olympia and Seattle.

The poured concrete building is clad with stone veneer and boasts a "parabolic-like" roof. The rear of the building, which forms a half-circle, is delineated by a projecting second floor supported by graceful arches. Upon entry into the bank, patrons were originally welcomed by a small bridge which was flanked by pools of water.



11 – Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
 1006 4th Ave NE
 Architect: Kenneth Ripley, 1958

Obscured today by a metal parapet wall, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company building originally had a distinct low profile design which highlighted large full-width beams holding up the flat roof.

Ample windows at the eaves, which nearly surround all four sides of the building, allowed natural light to flood into the work area. The building served as home to Metropolitan Life Insurance Company until the late 1970s and was designed by Seattle architect Kenneth Ripley.



12 – Sears Department Store
 600 Franklin St
 Architect: George Ekvall, 1952

Echoing the design of Goldberg's Furniture Store, former Wohleb employee George Ekvall designed a modern Sears Department Store in 1952. Constructed for just over \$200,000, the investment by Sears was significant for the time. The store was attempting to compete with the locally owned and operated Miller's Store, which had been in business in Olympia since the turn of the century.



13 – Ramada Inn
 621 Capitol Way S
 Architect: Camp, Dresser & McKee Architects, 1971

Corporate-run accommodations first came to downtown Olympia with the opening of the Ramada Inn in 1971. The building was designed by the international architectural firm of Camp, Dresser & McKee Architects, which had offices in Seattle and Bellevue. It ascribes to the concept of “form follows function” instilled by architect Mies van der Rohe. You can clearly identify the function of each

part of the building just from looking at the exterior—the guest rooms are stacked on top of each other, and anchored by windowless stair and elevator towers. Grounding the hotel to the site is a distinct Pavilion-like coffee shop and a flat-roof lobby area.



14 – Evergreen Plaza
 711 Capitol Way S
 Architect: Chester Lindsey, 1972

The Evergreen Plaza was designed by notable Seattle architect, Chester Lindsay, who specialized in high-rise buildings. Evergreen Plaza has a traditional architectural form, while still presenting a very modern appearance. Known as a base, shaft and capital design, the building has three distinct components reflecting the parts of a column. At Evergreen Plaza the base and shaft sections are joined by vertical piers which

stretch to nearly the full height of the building. The capital, or top floors of the building, project slightly and feature a continuous band of windows. The building was constructed as part of a movement in the 1970s to create new office space downtown. Over the years, it has housed a variety of professional offices.



15 – Washington Mutual Savings Bank
 825 Capitol Way S
 Architect: Bennett & Johnson, 1968

By the late 1960s, the local architectural firm of Bennett & Johnson were well established and received many high profile commissions in the city. Among them was the Washington Mutual Savings Bank. The nearly symmetrical building has a glass first floor, topped by a heavy cornice. At first glance, the front of the building appears to float between the two windowless brick vaults on each

side. Anchoring the building to the sidewalk are two large brick piers, which shelter a short bridge to the main entry doors.



16 – Golden Gavel Motor Hotel
 909 Capitol Way S
 Architect: Dawley Bros. Construction Co., 1958

The Golden Gavel was designed, built and owned by the Dawley Bros. Construction Company. At the time of its construction, the hotel was touted as one of the most well-appointed accommodations in Olympia. It offered “free TV, colored

phones, extra length beds, and contemporary furniture.” Miss Jane Wray, an interior designer with the Bon Marche, was hired to bring the latest decorating trends to the hotel.

The L-shaped building is typical of many mid-century hotels with its flat roof, exterior hallways, and ample off-street parking. A slightly modified original sign, as well as an over-sized golden gavel still welcome visitors to the hotel.



17 – 1007 Washington Building
 1007 S Washington St
 Architect: Dawley Bros. Construction Co., 1959

This simple two story office building was built to house a variety of Federal agencies including offices for the FBI, Social Security and the Department of Transportation. The repetitive grid of vertical extruded aluminum mullions

and horizontal rails is highlighted by aqua-colored spandrel panels that are attached to the exterior of a steel frame. This low cost curtain wall system was an inexpensive way to erect a functional building in a short time frame and was constructed as a spec building by the Dawley Brothers Construction Company.



18 – 120 Union Ave Building
 120 Union Ave SE
 Architect: Dawley Bros. Construction Co., 1954

The 120 Union Avenue Building housed the offices of the Dawley Bros. Construction Co., which from the 1930s to 1950s dominated the construction business in the South Sound. Unusual for the time, the

company provided design-build services with a staff of in-house architects, engineers and contractors. This building is remarkably similar to the Golden Gavel Motor Hotel, also designed and built by Dawley Bros. Construction Company.



19 – State Parking Garages
 Union Ave & Columbia St
 Architect: Warren Brown, 1958 & c.1972

The State Parking Garages are comprised of two parts located across the street from each other. The 1958 structure is an unusually early example of Brutalism in Washington State. The Brutalist style is characterized by the use of rough, heavy

reinforced concrete and chunky angular solid shapes. The original structure was designed by in-house General Administration architect Warren Brown and built for \$245,000 by the H. Halverson Corporation of Seattle. Parking stalls were originally leased to state employees for \$3 to \$5 dollars per month. The northern segment was built to match the original structure circa 1972.



20 – General Administration Building
 210 11th Ave SW
 Architect: A. Gordon Lumm, 1956

As the first major building to be constructed on the capitol campus after the Great Depression, the General Administration Building brought a dramatic shift in architectural design to the campus. Built in the International style, the concrete structure has a distinct horizontal cubical form and seemingly spare ornamentation. However, ribbons of windows, decorative relief elements on the exterior

concrete walls and a vertical pylon of Wilkeson sandstone (which changes color when moist) adds visual interest to the exterior façade.

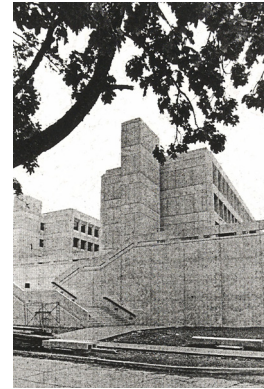
Inside, Bellevue artist Jean Cory Beall created a large mosaic mural with over 150,000 pieces of glass and stone. The 10' x 29' mural features iconic imagery representing Washington's industrial and natural resources. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was designed by Tacoma architect A. Gordon Lumm.



21 – State Archives Building
 1129 Washington Street SE
 Architect: Harmon, Pray & Dietrich, 1963

Formerly housed in the basement of the Public Lands and Social Security Building, the State Archives Building was the last structure built as part of the

initial expansion of the Capital Campus to the east side of Capitol Way. At the time, some legislators were concerned the new campus was too far for workers to walk thus wasting the time of state employees. The subterranean building was constructed for \$660,000 and served double duty as a bomb shelter in case of nuclear attack.



23 – Dept. of Social & Health Services Building
 14th and Jefferson Street
 Architect: The Richardson Associates, 1975

The 407,000 sq ft. Department of Social & Health Services Building was designed to bring together agency employees formerly housed at 22 different locations. The building, a staged H-shaped structure, incorporated a 300 seat auditorium, a cafeteria and room for 1,500 state employees. Reportedly it was the first state governmental building in the U.S. to use the concept of "open landscaping" for office spaces - the 300 ft. long x 60 ft. wide spaces were designed without partitioning off individual office spaces. To offset noise, a system was installed to transmit "white noise" throughout the building.



24 – Water Garden Fountain
 North of Employment Security & Highways Bldg
 Architect: Lawrence Halprin, 1972

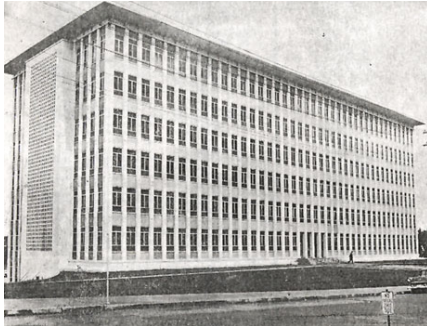
Completed in 1972, the Water Garden Fountain was installed to break up the expanse of a courtyard formed by the top of one of the state parking garages. Noted landscape architect Lawrence Halprin created the sculptural fountain with board-formed poured-in-place concrete towers of varying heights. Water flowed over the forms in a variety of ways, terminating in pools and basins of varying depths. The Water Garden Fountain was designed to allow the visitor to experience the foundation by walking into it. Plagued with continuous water loss problems, the State permanently shut off the fountain in 1992.



25 – Highway Administration Building
 310 Maple Park Ave SE
 Architect: The Richardson Associates, 1970

Built to accommodate 850 state employees, the H-shaped Highway Administration Building was the first state building to incorporate escalators. The architects touted "the Theory of Horizontal Flow" to support the use of escalators in the design. This theory

states that people can move more rapidly when they can stay on one floor, rather than moving between floors and when vertical motion is necessary it should be fast, and direct. The 8 million dollar building took two years to complete and was designed by the Seattle architectural firm of The Richardson Associates. The building was given a "special award for excellence in use of concrete" from the Washington Aggregates & Concrete Association upon completion.



26 – Employment Security Building
 212 Maple Park Dr, and
22 – Department of Highways & Licensing Building
 1125 Washington St SE
 Architect: Harmon, Pray & Dietrich, 1962

Constructed in 1962 as the first development projects on the East Capitol Campus, the Employment Security Building and Dept. of Highways & Licensing Building brought a very

different architectural style to the Capitol Campus. The two similar buildings, designed by Seattle architectural firm of Harmon, Pray & Detrich, were originally described as “classic contemporary.” Today we call the designs New Formalism due their use of cast concrete panels, symmetrical layout and stripped down classical design motifs. The 91,000 sq. ft., Employment Security Building was built at a cost of \$1.8 million. At the time of construction, officials at the Dept. of Highways & Licensing Building were not happy with their new building due to the lack of stairs and only two elevators. Reportedly employees often had to wait upwards of 15 to 20 minutes to ride the elevators.



27 – IBM Building
 106 Maple Park Dr
 Architect: Jared Morse, 1959

Denver architect, Jared B. Morse, used an exposed steel frame, infilled with brick and asbestos panels for the construction of the IBM building in 1959. The company expanded its operations across the United States in the mid 1950s, fueled by the popularity of its electric typewriters. The company’s sales reached the one billion dollar level in 1957. The building was used by IBM until

1975 when it was acquired by the state to serve as an annex for the Employment Security Department.



28 – Capitol Center Apartments
 1517 Capitol Way S
 Architect: Fred Rogers, 1949

Constructed in 1949, the Capitol Center Apartments brought a new modern form of architecture to the growing city of Olympia immediately after World War II. Designed in the International style by Seattle architect Fred Rogers, the poured concrete building used steel framing that allowed for a banding of uninterrupted windows that wrap around the front and sides of the U-shaped building.



29 – Washington State Library
 415 15th Ave SW
 Architect: Paul Thiry, 1959

Embracing many overall design elements of the Legislative building such as massing, proportion and scale, the State Library is a reflection of one form of Modernism called New Formalism. Designed by Paul Thiry (who is known as the “Father of Modernism” in Washington State), like many buildings of the era, the structure integrated art and architecture and features several paintings and sculptures by a variety of well known Pacific Northwest artists such as Kenneth Callahan, Mark Tobey, and James FitzGerald.



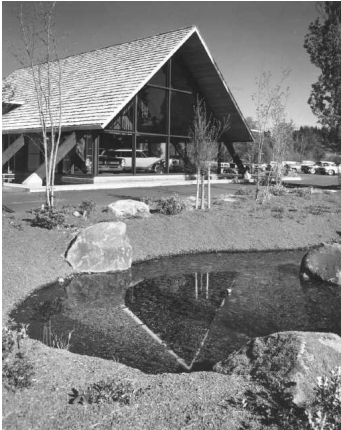
30 – Olympia Medical - Dental Building
 108 SW 22nd Ave
 Architect: Unknown, 1957

This unique building of ten professional medical offices is formed by two parallel rectangular boxes joined by bridges on the second story. The clerestory windows fronting the street and neighbors offer privacy, while floor-to-ceiling windows facing an interior courtyard open the interior space to light and nature, a typical design feature in the modern era.



31 – Sunset Life Insurance Co. Headquarters
 200 Capital Blvd
 Architect: Wohleb & Wohleb, 1959

Reflecting a desire by many companies to move to suburban areas during the 1950s and 60s, the Sunset Life Insurance Company took advantage of a prime building lot just on the outskirts of the city limits to build a small corporate campus in 1959. The building, a series of connected boxes, utilized a low cost building system of exterior curtain walls which are highlighted by pink and grey spandrel panels. The building served as home to Sunset Life until 1999 when it was sold to the state.



32 – Dick Lewis Pontiac-Cadillac Dealership
1100 Plum St
Architect: Bennett & Johnson, 1964

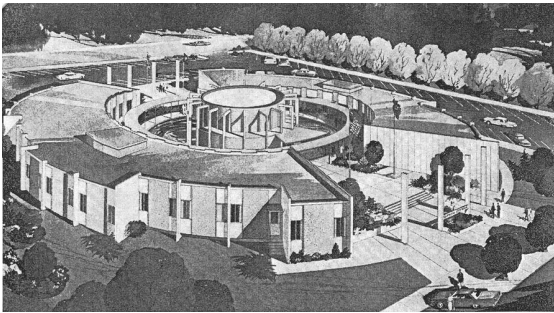
This unusual A-Frame style commercial building was constructed in 1964 to house the Dick Lewis Pontiac-Cadillac Dealership. Notable for its naturalistic landscaping complete with a water feature, the dealership was a far cry from the stark car lots normally seen in downtown core areas. It was one of the early dealerships that left downtown for the community's edge with the idea that a softer building, coupled with heavily landscaped surroundings, would present a more soothing atmosphere in which to view and sell cars.



33 – Washington State Employees Credit Union
502 Union Ave SE
Architect: Bennett & Johnson, 1968

Reminiscent of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses of the 1950s, the Washington State Employees Credit Union Building presented a different approach to bank architecture in Olympia

in 1968. Like many Wright structures, the building looked inward. Patrons originally approached the bank via a series of covered floating breezeways (now partially enclosed). Once inside, they were welcomed by a light filled atrium.



34 – Olympia City Hall
900 Plum St SE
Architect: Robert H. Wohleb, 1966

Touted nation-wide as a model of good design, architectural innovation and space planning, the "O" shaped city hall building utilized prefabricated open-web steel studs inserted with Styrofoam panels and then

covered with Marblecrete for the exterior walls. Designed for future expansion, the building was part of Olympia's "Committee of the 60s" effort to improve the infrastructure of the city. It originally featured a moat in the inner courtyard surrounding the council chambers. The building was one of the last projects by Olympia architect Robert Wohleb who died tragically in a boating accident a few months before the building was completed.

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