

Facts for Feds:

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BABY BOOM FOR NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY

One-Half Billion Square Feet of Public Buildings Reach 50 Year Threshold, 2005-2020.

Historic preservation professionals have long recognized that the generational post World War II Baby Boom was accompanied by a parallel increase in the construction of housing. At the same time as the Boomers become eligible for retirement, many of their homes will have a “mid-life crisis” of historical proportions. In 2008, for example, over 1.3 billion square feet of residential construction, representing over 1 million average sized houses, will reach 50 years of age.

This overall growth in new construction also occurred in the number of public buildings. In the next 15 years, over one half billion square feet of public buildings will pass the “longevity test” for consideration by the National Register of Historic Places. That’s the equivalent of nearly 13 percent of the total area of building assets reported in the FY 2006 Federal Real Property Report. From 1946 through 1970 the percentage of public buildings constructed each year has hovered around 1 percent (621 million square feet) of all new construction, while residential buildings averaged 62 percent of new construction. In 2008, 33 million square feet of public buildings reach 50 years of age, totaling 1.8 percent of all new construction in 1958.

As a result of the Preserve America and Federal Real Property Asset Management Executive Orders Federal agencies have begun to recognize the upcoming boom in potential National Register eligibility within their building inventories. In 2006, the Department of Defense reported to Congress that about 32 percent of its more than 340,000 buildings had met the 50 year threshold, by 2026, the percentage of older buildings will reach 65 percent of the inventory.

Recognizing these trends, Federal Preservation Officers (FPO) should ensure that their agencies are well prepared for the baby boom in National Register eligibility. FPOs with significant building inventories should consider developing the historical contexts necessary for the efficient and timely evaluation of properties approaching 50 years of age. This overall rapid increase in the number of properties eligible for historic property consideration also will impact program delivery for agencies that provide financial assistance, grants, licenses, or permits. With more and more buildings becoming “at risk” for consideration under Section 106, Federal agencies must ensure that their compliance review procedures have the capacity to provide timely review of projects. FPOs should also closely monitor calls for shortening the “50 year rule” because of its potential impact on historic property survey requirements.

Floor Space of Buildings Constructed 1946-1970
(millions of square feet)

Year	Total Buildings	Total Non- Residential Buildings	Public Buildings	Residential Buildings
1970	2938	1157	29	1781
1969	3249	1374	36	1874
1968	3129	1254	39	1876
1967	2820	1165	37	1654
1966	2643	1227	37	1416
1965	2843	1132	36	1711
1964	2738	1024	34	1714
1963	2711	958	43	1763
1962	414	894	34	1520
1961	2203	838	33	1364
1960	2154	854	33	1300
1959	2337	824	34	1512
1958	2101	768	37	1333
1957	2003	809	27	1195
1956	2017	823	27	1194
1955	1695	604	18	1089
1954	1486	532	16	953
1953	1306	490	13	814
1952	1288	441	15	845
1951	1279	470	11	805
1950	1475	483	10	989
1949	1038	344	8	694
1948	1060	385	6	673
1947	1060	349	6	707
1946	946	432	2	516

Source: Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Series 90-100, pg. 614 & 624 (<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/statab.html>). See also: Back to the Future: A Review of the National Historic Preservation Program, pg. 17 (<http://www.napawash.org/>) and the Preserve America Summit Report, pg. 19 (http://www.preserveamerica.gov/docs/Summit_Report_full_LR.pdf).

*For more information, send an email to NPS_fpi@nps.gov or call 202-354-6999.
Federal Preservation Institute, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW (2254), Washington, D.C. 20240*

