United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

Historic name Executive Plaza Office Building

Other names/site number N/A

Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number 720 Main Street | N/A | not for publication

City or town Kansas City | N/A | vicinity

State Missouri Code MO County Jackson Code 095 Zip code 64105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title Toni M. Prawl, Ph.D., Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

_____ entered in the National Register _____ determined eligible for the National Register

_____ determined not eligible for the National Register _____ removed from the National Register

_____ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

X	private
	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

X	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
		sites
1	0	structures
		objects
3	0	**Total**

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE / TRADE / Business

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete / Brick
walls: Glass
roof: Synthetics
other:

X **NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [ ] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [x] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

[x] **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Areas of Significance

Architecture

Period of Significance

1972-1974

Significant Dates

1972-1974

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hellmuth, Obata, and Kaussabaum (HOK)

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

__x__State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
____Local government
____University
____Other
Name of repository: **Missouri Valley Special Collections**
Kansas City Public Library

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

_____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.95

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

	Latitude:	Longitude:		Latitude:	Longitude:
1	39.104697	-94.583758	3		
2			4		

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)
_____ NAD 1927 or _____ NAD 1983

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1				3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description (On continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (On continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rachel Nugent, National Register Coordinator, and Sophie Roark, Historic Preservation Specialist
organization Rosin Preservation date September 23, 2016
street & number 1712 Holmes Street telephone 816-472-4950
city or town Kansas City State MO zip code
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:**
  - A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
  - A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs**
- **Owner Name and Contact Information**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log:

Name of Property: **Executive Plaza Office Building**

City or Vicinity: **Kansas City**

County: **Jackson** State: **Missouri**

Photographer: **Brad Finch, F-Stop Photography**

Date Photographed: **August 10, 2016**

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 19: Front (east) elevation. View west.
2 of 19: east and south elevations. View northwest.
3 of 19: South and west elevations. View northeast.
4 of 19: West elevation. View east.
5 of 19: North and west elevations. View southeast.
6 of 19: North elevation. View south.
7 of 19: North and east elevations. View southwest.
8 of 19: Corner detail south and east elevations. View northwest.
9 of 19: Connection to the storage building via a street-level plaza on the east elevation. View north.
10 of 19: Entry vestibule and lobby. View east.
11 of 19: Elevator lobby first floor. View east.
12 of 19: Second floor. View northwest.
13 of 19: Fourth floor. View southwest.
14 of 19: Fourth floor. View west.
15 of 19: Vault room basement level. View east.
16 of 19: Storage building interior, Contributing Building: View northeast.

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17 of 19: Concrete pedestrian walkway, Contributing Structure. View west.
18 of 19: Storage building rooftop plaza, Contributing Building. View northwest.
19 of 19: Storage building rooftop plaza, Contributing Building. View southwest.

Figure Log:

Figure 01. Location Map. Source: Google Maps 2016.
Figure 02. Location Map. Source: Google Maps 2016.
Figure 03. Location map. Property boundary outlined in white. Source: Google Maps 2016.
Figure 04. Resources map. Contributing resources are Office Building, Storage Building and Plaza, and Pedestrian Walkway. Source: Google Maps 2016.
Figure 05. Bridge connecting the storage building rooftop plaza to the main entrance of Executive Plaza Office Building. Source: Google Earth 2016.
Figure 06. Historic site plan. Source: Architectural drawings. Building Permit. Executive Plaza Office Building, 720 Main Street. Kansas City City Hall. 1972
Figure 07. Section of south elevation. Source: Building and Plaza Section. Clockwork.
Figure 08. BMA Tower 700 W. 31st Street Kansas City. View south. Photo by Brad Finch.
Figure 09. Philip Johnson's 19779-1984 AT&T building represents post-modern concepts in a skyscraper. Source: http://www.archdaily.com/611169/ad-classics-at-and-t-building-philip-johnson-and-john-burgee. Accessed 5/11/2016.
Figure 10. The Equitable Building 10 South Broadway, Saint Louis. Source: Architecture and Urbanism January 1982, p. 102.
Figure 11. The Equitable Building 10 South Broadway, Saint Louis. Source: Architecture and Urbanism January 1982, p. 103.
Figure 12. Traders Bank Building 1125 Grand Blvd., Commerce Tower 911 Main, and Ten Main Center 920 Main Street all in Kansas City. Source: Google maps, 2016.
Figure 13. Mercantile Bank and Trust Building 1101 Walnut St. Kansas City. Photo by Brad Finch.
Figure 14. Penntower 3100 Broadway Blvd. Kansas City. Source: Google Maps 2016.
Figure 15. Penntower 3100 Broadway Blvd. Kansas City. Detail of glass curtain wall showing spandrels and profile of vertical mullions. Photo Sophie Roark.
Figure 16. Section of north elevation showing three-story base and tower on Penntower. Source: Original drawings on file at State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri Kansas City.
Figure 17. Farm and Home Savings Building (1974) at 8500 Ward Parkway Kansas City. Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 18. American Bank and Trust Building (1973) at 1 West Armour Kansas City. Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 19. One Kansas City Place at 1200 Main Street and the Kansas City City Hall at 414 E. 12th Street. Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 20. Town Pavilion Tower at 1111 Main Street elevation and plan view Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 21. Executive Hills Office 1300 E. 104th Street Kansas City, Missouri. Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 22. Glenwood Place Towers 9300 Metcalf Avenue Overland Park, Kansas. Executive Hills Office 1300 E. 104th Street Kansas City, Missouri. Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 23. Northside redevelopment area bounded by Baltimore Avenue, an alley east of Main Street, W. 6th Street and W. 9th Street. Source: Google Map, 2016.
Figure 24. Historic Interior of the Executive Plaza Office Building. Source: *Architectural Record* May 1975.
Figure 25. Historic entry to the Executive Plaza Office Building. Source: *Architectural Record* May 1975.
Figure 26. Main entry Executive Plaza Office Building. Photo by Brad Finch, F-Stop Photography.
Figure 27. Historic Plaza Level Plan, 1972. Source: HOK
Figure 28. Historic Typical Floor Plan, 1972. Source: HOK
Figure 29. Photo map exterior and first floor. Not to scale. Current existing floorplan. Source: Clockwork Architecture + Design.
Figure 30. Photo map typical floor plan. Not to scale. Current existing floorplan. Source: Clockwork Architecture + Design.

Figure 31. Photo map storage building. Not to scale. Current existing floorplan. Source: Clockwork Architecture + Design.
Figure 32. Photo map, plaza and pedestrian walkway. Source: Google Maps, 2016.

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SUMMARY

The Executive Plaza Office Building at 720 Main Street in Kansas City, Jackson County Missouri sits at the northwest corner of Main and 8th streets in the northern portion of Kansas City's central business district. Hellmuth, Obata, and Kaussabaum (HOK), in collaboration with local associate architects Keene, Simpson, & Murphy, designed the nine-story office building in 1972 with construction completed in 1974. The building is clad in a reflective glass curtainwall comprised of a thin-mullion, continuous grid enclosing a rectangular structure. The reflective glass skin is the singular exterior surface and feature. The building has no added ornamentation. The curtain wall's smooth, unadorned surface emphasizes the rectangular volume it encloses. The Executive Plaza Office Building's exaggeration of the reflective glass curtain wall element as its primary element characterizes its Late-Modern architectural style. The property contains three resources: two adjacent contributing buildings and a contributing structure constructed concurrently. The main office building, an associated but detached below-grade storage building, and an exterior concrete walkway structure on the north elevation of the main office building make up the site. The landscaped roof of the below-grade storage building creates a street-level plaza in front of the office building's primary east elevation *(Figure 7)*. The flat plaza provides a formal setting for the building and conceals storage space from the public street view.

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Setting

The Executive Plaza Office Building occupies nearly one acre in the northern portion of Kansas City's downtown business district, two blocks south of Interstate Highway 35/70 that serves as the northern border of the district *(Figures 1 and 2)*. Surrounded primarily by unaffiliated surface parking lots on the west, north, and east, the building is the northernmost building on the Main Street/Delaware Street thoroughfare as it approaches the denser central business district one block to the south. The buildings on blocks to the east and west are slightly earlier, mid-scale commercial and residential buildings. High-rise office buildings and financial institutions fill the blocks immediately south in a dense mix of buildings with construction dates spanning the twentieth century.

The buildings in the central business district immediately south of the Executive Plaza Office Building are multi-story and typically feature glass or masonry exteriors. Small plazas or concrete sidewalks provide minimal setbacks from the street. Above- and below-ground parking serves the dense business district so that buildings or pedestrian space, rather than surface parking lots, occupy most blocks. Surface parking lots characterize the outer ring of the dense

business district, especially the northern portion surrounding the Executive Plaza Office Building.

The property occupies the south half of the block at the northwest corner of the intersection of 8th and Main streets. The site is sloped down toward the west, or rear of the building. An asphalt surface parking lot on a separate parcel fills the remainder of the block north of the building.

The roof of the below-grade associated storage building to the east of the main office building is at grade with Main Street and contains a landscaped plaza that serves as a designed setting for the building's deep setback from the primary street to the east. A narrow planted area separates the building from a pedestrian sidewalk on the south elevation. The west elevation abuts the sidewalk at street grade. A sunken area, level with the basement, occupies the space between the office building and the concrete retaining wall of the adjacent surface parking lot to the north. The concrete walkway, described below, is elevated above this sunken space.

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Office Building **Contributing Building**
Hellmuth, Obata, and Kaussabaum (HOK) 1972-1974

Exterior
The roughly 210,000 square-foot, nine-story Executive Plaza Office Building is a rectangular-plan, steel-frame building with a concrete foundation. The exterior is clad in facing brick at the basement level topped by a glass curtain wall that extends to the flat roof *(Photos 1 and 2)*. The flat roof is covered with a membrane. A metal-clad rooftop penthouse houses mechanical equipment. The glass curtain wall is the singular exterior material visible from primary public rights-of-way on the east, south, and north sides *(Photo 7)*. The brick base is visible on the rear, west elevation *(Photo 3)*. The reflective glass curtain wall has thin anodized aluminum mullions that appear nearly flush with the exterior wall surface *(Photo 8)*. The rectangular frames are all uniform size so that the mullions form a grid pattern. The pattern on the east and west façades is twenty panels wide by eighteen panels tall while the pattern on the north and south façades is forty panels wide and eighteen panels tall. Columns that are one-quarter of the width of a full panel run the full height of the curtain wall at the corners of each elevation. Horizontal bands of one-inch insulated glass alternate vertically with bands of quarter-inch spandrel glass. Both types of glass have a silver, reflective coating on the exterior. The quarter-inch spandrel glass matches the shape, size, color, and reflectivity of the insulated glass, making the bands of different glazing indistinguishable from one another on the exterior.

A centered front entry on the east elevation and a centered rear entry on the west elevation are the only disruptions in the otherwise continuous glass curtain wall exterior. The reflective glass

curtain wall with a low brick knee-wall angles inward at the recessed front entry on the east elevation. Three aluminum-frame, fully-glazed doors access the entry vestibule. The east elevation's glass curtain wall meets the brick-clad basement level just above the plaza grade. Brick pavers cover a partial-length bridge connecting the entry to the plaza.

The long south elevation has brown brick cladding at the basement level and the reflective glass curtain wall grid above. There are no openings and no other architectural features on this elevation. The west elevation also brick cladding at the base and the reflective glass curtainwall above *(Photo 4)*. A centered recessed entry has a metal slab pedestrian door and an overhead metal door accessing an interior loading dock.

Similar to the south elevation, the long north elevation has brown brick cladding at the basement and reflective glass curtain wall above *(Photos 5 and 6)*. A basement-level one, story brick-clad vault projects from the north elevation below the elevated walkway and the grade of the adjacent property to the north.

Interior

The interior of the Executive Plaza Office Building is primarily open office space with minimal vertical columns at 30- and 35-foot centers to provide flexibility in interior layout. A central core contains five elevators, stairs, and lavatories on every floor *(Photo 11) (Figures 27 and 28)*. A central lobby on first floor, at grade with the plaza and Main Street, has a glass-enclosed vestibule, historic brick paver flooring, and a dropped acoustical tile ceiling with can lighting *(Photo 10)*. The historic sealed brick pavers and integrated brick base continue into the lobby of the first floor. The acoustical tile ceiling is not historic, but is similar to the square tiles and recessed can lights that historically covered the ceiling in this space. The circulation cores on upper floors have vinyl wall coverings and vinyl base.

Historic finishes in the office spaces in floors one through nine include drywall knee walls along perimeter walls, drywall walls in limited locations, and dropped ceilings with lay-in acoustical tiles and integrated fluorescent light fixtures *(Photos 12, 13, and 14)*. Most floors are carpet, although some areas have VCT flooring. Portions of the third, fourth, and sixth floors have non-historic flooring systems designed to raise the floor height to conceal extensive electrical and data lines related to large-scale computer systems. Historically, each floor had its own color scheme with matching carpet and accent walls. Very little of those materials are extant. The interior was designed as flexible office space and is characterized by an open plan, extensive glazing on the perimeter, and a uniform central utility core on each floor. Some movable partitions and drywall interior office walls remain, but the interior is dominated by open, vacant space.

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The basement level is partitioned into corridors and rooms housing mechanical equipment and utility space. An interior vault in the basement contains red carpet and vinyl wall partitions *(Photo 15)*.

Storage Building **Contributing Building**
Hellmuth, Obata, and Kaussabaum (HOK) 1972-1974

Exterior
The trapezoidal storage building occupies the area east of the office building. The west elevation faces the at-grade basement level of the office building. The north and east sides of the storage building are below the grade of the adjacent parking lot to the north and Main Street to the east. Most of the south side of the storage building is exposed, although it is below the elevated ramp of 8th Street as it rises to meet Main Street *(Figure 7)*. The storage building has a concrete foundation and concrete walls. A pair of metal slab doors at the center of the west elevation, across the concrete alley from the basement entrance of the office building provides access to the interior. A second pair of metal slab doors provides access from the south elevation. Two metal louvered panels and three groupings of four glass block windows punctuate the otherwise plain concrete wall of the west elevation. Vertical metal siding clads a small portion of the southwest corner. The roof of the storage building is level with Main Street and the first-story entrance on the office building's front elevation *(Photo 9)*. Because the roof is the public entry to the main building, it is designed and landscaped as a plaza. The plaza and the storage building form a single contributing resource.

Interior
The interior is strictly utilitarian and does not have any formal finishes *(Photo 16)*. Rigid insulation panels taped together cover much of the concrete ceiling. A metal grate floor divides the space into two levels and supports vertical shelving for storage space. The space has exposed ductwork, plumbing, and electrical conduit. The storage building was designed and used as ancillary service space.

Storage Building Roof Plaza
The roof of the storage building forms a brick-paved plaza at street-level in front of the office building's front east elevation *(Photos 18 and 19)*. Public concrete sidewalks abut the north, south, and east sides of the trapezoidal plaza. A paved bridge connects it to the Executive Office Building at the building's main entrance. Paving bricks match the brown bricks used to clad the basement level and tie the building to the plaza. Nine cylindrical concrete planters are arranged in three symmetrical rows on the north side of the plaza. The south side narrows and includes a raised brick planter with hedges along the east section abutting the sidewalk. Concrete stairs access the plaza at the southwest corner from the 8th Street pedestrian

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sidewalk, which is above the plaza grade. Three concrete cylindrical planters are arranged in a row on the south side. Wood benches are cantilevered from the brick knee wall on the west and south sides of the plaza. A rectangular metal sculpture pedestal is centered in front of the building entry. Two metal flagpoles flank the building entry. Metal light fixtures with double lamps and cylindrical acrylic shades line the west and south side of the plaza *(Figure 6)*.

Concrete Pedestrian Walkway **Contributing Structure**
Hellmuth, Obata, and Kaussabaum (HOK) 1972-1974

The elevated concrete walkway parallels the building above the sunken area at the north edge of the property. This ramp is separated from the office building by about twenty feet. The sloped walkway connects the higher elevation of the plaza and Main Street with the lower elevation of Baltimore Avenue. The slope is continuous and does not include landings or flat areas along the length of the walkway. Large concrete columns support a reinforced concrete deck. A continuous metal-frame canopy with a series of pyramidal caps made of clear acrylic covers the walkway *(Photo 17)*. The concrete columns and deck are in poor condition with extensive areas of deterioration and corrosion of the rebar.

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Integrity

The Executive Plaza Office Building has experienced few alterations since the date of construction and retains all aspects of integrity. Still in its original location and setting, the building occupies a prominent location at the northern edge of Kansas City's central business district. The design, materials and workmanship, as envisioned by the architectural firm of HOK, are intact. No major alterations have been made to the exterior, leaving the character-defining features from the period of construction unchanged. These include the continuous-grid curtainwall, the reflective glass set in thin mullions, and the cubic form. A one-story brick vault was added to the basement level of the north elevation in 1983.[1] This addition is below grade of the parking lot to the north and is not visible from public right-of-way.

The contributing storage building and its rooftop plaza are intact and have not suffered any alterations. Some paving material on the plaza is in poor condition. The concrete walkway, which is a contributing structure, is recognizable for its original design and materials and retains its relationship to the building and the plaza. The concrete is in poor condition making it structurally unsound; the sidewalk is closed to pedestrian traffic.

On the interior, the original plan of open offices surrounding the central circulation/service core remains substantially intact. As the Executive Plaza Office Building was originally conceived as

a speculative office building, changes to partitions and finishes to meet changing tenant needs over time did not harm the integrity of design. The recessed main entry retains its reflective, returned ceiling that defines the primary public space. Glazed brick pavers in the main lobby and vestibule are intact. A few original office partitions retain color-coded vinyl elements. A private office in the basement containing a 1983 bank vault retains original color-coded vinyl and carpet finishes, but most office spaces have replacement carpet. Changes to the interior also include the addition of non-historic drywall partitions in some office suites and new finishes in some bathrooms. These alterations have secured the continued viability of the building and do not compromise the exterior characteristics for which the building is significant. The Executive Plaza Office Building retains its feeling as a Late-Modern architectural expression emphasizing its progressive curtain wall design.

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[1] Application for Building Permit, 720 Main Street, City of Kansas City, 1983.

SUMMARY

The Executive Plaza Office Building at 720 Main Street in Kansas City, Missouri, designed by Hellmuth, Obata, and Kassabaum (HOK), is locally significant under National Register Criterion C for the area of Architecture as a property possessing high artistic value. It also complies with Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years. Its period of significance, 1972 to 1974, corresponds to its period of construction. The building is exceptionally significant in the area of architecture as an expression of the ultimate evolution of the Modern Movement curtain wall. The building's glass curtain wall is set in a continuous and repetitive grid pattern with no relation to structural proportions identifying individual floors. Mullions with a minimal profile and reflective glass panels create a fluid glass curtain wall that emphasizes the rectangular volume it encloses. The lack of scaling devices distinguishes this design from earlier examples of Modern Movement architecture and evolves the curtain wall beyond the previous "skin and bones" relationship of curtain wall to structure. The Executive Plaza Office Building's uninterrupted, smooth, reflective surface notably lacks any ornamentation. The exaggeration of a single element, in this case the curtain wall, for the purpose of dramatic visual effect characterizes this building as Late-Modern. The Late-Modern architectural expression appeared contemporaneously with other architectural styles that were diverging from the previously-dominant Modern Movement. The Late-Modern glass container building, achieved with a continuous glass curtain wall wrapped around a frame, was a high-style precursor for a building form that later became ubiquitous as corporate office buildings in the 1980s and 1990s. The Executive Plaza Office Building's dramatic design was the first continuous grid, Late-Modern glass container building in Kansas City's metropolitan area. It is an exceptionally significant example of the glass curtain wall evolved to its purest form as an enveloping glass skin. The influential design was unparalleled at the time in the local built environment and became a template for later ubiquitous urban and suburban office buildings that mimicked the progressive aesthetic.

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ELABORATION

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Late-modern: The Executive Plaza Office Building as a Late-Modern Expression

Late-Modern describes a style of architectural expression that evolved out of, and in reaction to, the previously-dominant Modern Movement architectural style shortly after the mid twentieth century. Evaluating the late 1960s and 1970s to gain perspective on diverging and concurrent architectural trends, scholars Charles Jencks and Marcus Whiffen published independent essays designed to assist in identifying and classifying contemporary architecture. Jencks

coined the term "Late-Modern" in 1977.[2] Typically executed in modern materials like metal, glass, and concrete, Late-Modern buildings can share traits with Modern Movement examples. However, some characteristics delineate the style as a distinct and recognizable expression. The glass container building, as exemplified by the Executive Plaza Office Building, is one such recognizable form.

Jencks identified extreme logic, extreme repetition of modular elements, an exaggerated emphasis on constructional metaphors, and a sensuous imagery as defining aspects of the Late-Modern style.[3] Jencks emphasized the "single code", or the goal of taking Modern Movement devices to an extreme for the express and singular purpose of creating an amusing or dramatic aesthetic, as a hallmark of Late-Modern buildings.[4] While Late-Modern does not denote a specific aesthetic, glass container buildings are a recognizable group sharing some of Late-Modern's characteristics, formally identified as "notions" in Jencks' work. Jencks' notion of *extreme repetition* is expressed in glass container buildings by a single size pane on a glass curtain wall set in a repeating grid. Glass container buildings display Jencks' notion of *structure and construction as ornament* by dispensing with other applied decoration. In place of added ornament, glass container buildings rely on exposed construction materials, in this case the external glass, for their aesthetic. Reflective glass often defines the outward appearance as a mirror. Glass container buildings exemplify structure as ornament by using a fluid curtain wall to enwrap the structure, highlighting the form and elevating it to a decorative element. An *anti-historical* notion is best expressed by resistance to using past styles in a revival interpretation. Glass container buildings lack references to previous architectural styles. The Executive Plaza Office Building's articulation of its exterior curtain wall embodies Late-Modern extreme repetition of the uniform window pane. The unadorned glass curtain wall as the only exterior material accentuates the volume it encloses. The design uses a construction method---the glass curtain wall—solely to create a dramatic visual experience, making it a particularly identifiable example of Late-Modern characteristics.

Architectural Historian Marcus Whiffen characterized Late-Modern as a rhetorical style, as opposed to the rational International Style. In examining Late-Modern architecture, particularly in comparison with the International Style, Whiffen identified three rhetorical devices commonly used to make an architectural statement.[5] The Executive Plaza Office Building embodies all three of these: *exaggeration, repetition, and paradox.* The building's design *exaggerated* its exterior curtain wall by minimizing window mullions and dispensing with scaling devices such as spandrels or proportions that would correspond to individual stories. The result is an inability to read its size in human terms.[6] There are no forms to relate the building to a pedestrian level or

[2] Charles Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, (Great Britain: Rizzoli, 1980) 8.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 285.
[6] Heinrich Klotz, *The History of post-Modern Architecture*, (Cambridge, MIT Press 1988) 63.

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to distinguish a base and tower. In this fluid form, the curtain wall becomes a flowing membrane. The uniform, single-sized square window form repeats until the square loses its individuality in the mullion grid. This extreme *repetition* creates visual impact as the structure appears to be a single unit. The viewer reads the Executive Plaza Office Building as a singular form before distinguishing individual repeating squares. Architectural critic Heinrich Klotz described in *The History of post-Modern Architecture* the visual effect of the repetitive grid as viewing "a foil-wrapped package."[7] The exaggerated curtain wall serves the rhetorical device of the *paradox* by creating a glass building with no windows. By exploiting the materiality of the glass in the way that we typically experience it in a window -- that is uninterrupted -- the curtain wall becomes a single giant window. The paradox lies in the unobstructed "window" view that lacks the functionality of operable panes.

Jencks and Whiffen define the Late-Modern aesthetic in terms of conceptual ideas rather than specific physical features. Glass container buildings exemplify the physical manifestation of those concepts and represent a distinct sub-set of the Late-Modern style. The Executive Plaza Office Building fully embodies the characteristics of Late-Modern design, specifically the glass container building. The nominated resource is exceptionally significant as a local example of the purest articulation of these concepts, reflecting its high artistic expression, and as the precursor to the glass contain buildings that became ubiquitous with later corporate modern buildings.

Late-Modern in the context of Modern Movement and Post-Modern

Late-Modern occurred simultaneously with other styles and was not part of a linear progression away from Modern Movement or toward a subsequent expression. Rather, it represented a unique set of ideals that informed design. A comparison and contrast of contemporaneous architectural styles helps to understand how Late-Modern is distinguishable as a distinct style.

Modern architecture is a broad term that includes trends and styles spanning the mid- to late-twentieth century and describes a design theory that relies on function to inform design. Modern Movement as a style produces a machine character by embracing contemporary means of construction without ornamentation or historical reference. The style proliferated in the mid-twentieth century as Mies van der Rohe's rhythmic geometry influenced Modern Movement commercial tower construction in the post-World War II era. The resulting expressed exterior grid structure paired with curtain walls composed of glass and contrasting spandrel panels served as a common template for commercial buildings into the 1960s *(Figure 12)*.

Late-Modern adapted and exaggerated some Modern Movement concepts such as repetition. In Modern Movement examples, rhythmic, repeating proportions are informed by the building program and are therefore "rational." In a Late-Modern treatment, extreme repetition is

[7] Ibid. Klotz is describing HOK's Equitable Building in Saint Louis and its use of the same repeating grid system the Executive Office Tower design employs.

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exploited. The Executive Plaza Office Building's extreme repetition of identically sized windows set in a continuous grid contrasts with traditional curtain walls that may repeat window sizes, but typically delineate floors with spandrels, differentiated by size and/or material, as a way of expressing the interior building program. The extreme repetition used in the Executive Plaza Office Building serves only as a visual device for the exterior and has no other rational function. Where Modern Movement eschewed ornament in favor of undisguised structure and materials, Late-Modern utilized structure and construction *as* ornament.[8] The Executive Plaza Office Building exemplifies this concept by using a fluid curtain wall to wrap the structure, highlighting the form and elevating it to a decorative element. Using a reality of construction—the exterior wall—as a decorative device exemplifies Late-Modern emphasis on construction metaphor.

The evolution of Modern Movement architecture in the latter part of the twentieth century did not merge into a cohesive, single subsequent style.[9] Post-Modernism's response to Modern Movement differed from the roughly contemporaneous Late-Modern style.[10] Post-Modernism notably embraced historicism as a contrast to Modern Movement. Historicist elements with distorted scale or a reimagined function characterized Post-Modern designs. Post-Modern still used modern construction materials and methods but incorporated coded or implied symbolism as an antidote to Modern Movement's rationality. *(Figure 9)*. By way of contrast, Late-Modern buildings have a direct and obvious visual impact whereas Post-Modern examples contain large-scale or small-scale historical references.

Glass Curtain Wall Development

The Executive Plaza Office Building is exceptionally significant in the context of Kansas City in the early 1970s for its elaboration of the glass curtain wall that characterizes its Late-Modern architectural style. The technology to achieve this design developed in the years immediately preceding its execution. Several innovations were necessary to evolve the mid-twentieth century "skin and bones" glass curtain walls to this new fluid membrane application. Reflective glass was necessary for air conditioning purposes in a building covered in glazing. Minimizing metal mullions maximized glass surface for visual effect, but required improved attachments to connect the thinner curtain wall frame to the structure. A discussion of the progression of glass curtain wall design, along with notable applications demonstrating those trends, places the Executive Plaza Office Building's design in context as an early example of a continuous-grid, reflective glass curtain wall or glass container building.

In the 1950s, early buildings with glass curtain walls such as Lever House and the UN Secretariat, both in New York City, marked the beginning of a transition away from window

[8] Jenks, 46.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Robert Venturi's 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* was a notable milestone in celebrating eclecticism in architecture that had previously been dominated by Modern Movement reason.

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assemblies inserted into walls to the curtain wall as an exterior system. A curtain wall system is an assembly of structure, metal and glass working dependently and interdependently to serve a wall's function of keeping exterior conditions out of the interior.[11] Technological advances in glass production and the ability to design and install stronger glass walls allowed the evolution of the thin-mullioned curtain wall. Newer curtain walls moved visually away from the skeleton-and-skin relationship of frames holding glass toward a fluid membrane appearance. This enhanced visual relied on thinner glass and reduced framing.

Beginning in the 1960s, the new float method of glass manufacturing used a liquid metal substrate to roll out glass for a consistent thickness. A fire-polishing process replaced hand grinding and polishing to make the final product clear. The float method could produce notably thinner glass.[12] The cost savings gained from replacing labor-intensive steps with efficient machine polishing were passed onto the consumer. Thinner, more affordable glass helped make the product appealing as a primary exterior material for large-scale buildings.

Reflective glass was necessary to make it feasible to condition indoor air in a building entirely covered in glazing and lacking operable windows. Solar performance, mirrored glass appeared on the Bell Labs building (Holmdel, New Jersey designed by Eero Saarinen) in 1957 as the first notable application.[13] Improved gaskets and new means of assembly, such as clips and glass structural fins, accommodated frames with smaller exterior profiles. Architects Cesar Pelli and Anthony Lumsden's reverse mullions on the 1966-1973 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Headquarters (Hawthorne, California) was a significant achievement in the fast-paced development of the curtain wall in the late 1960s.[14] By reversing the metal mullions to the interior, the frames appeared nearly flush with the exterior glass. A few years later in 1969, construction of Pelli and Lumsden's Century City Medical Plaza (Century City, California) marked the earliest completed project to feature a structure entirely enclosed in a skin of glass.[15]

The Equitable Building: A Precursor to the Executive Plaza Office Building

Directly on the heels of the first entirely enclosed curtain wall structure, HOK designed the Equitable Building in St. Louis, Missouri (10 South Broadway) in 1971. The building features a thin-mullioned, continuous-grid reflective glass curtain wall and garnered national recognition

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[11] "Architectural Engineering. Solving Today's Curtain Wall Problems: Comprehending them, and then Providing Expert Attention," *Architectural Record* (May 1972): 129-132.
[12] Charles K. Edge, "Flat Glass Manufacturing Process (update)," PPG Industries, Section 11, *The Handbook of Glass Manufacturers*, Volume. II.; Daniel Paul. *Westward Transitions: The Early Development of the Late-Modern Glass Skin in the Collaborative Works of Cesar Pelli and Anthony Lumsden* (LA Forum Late Moderns, 7:2016).
[13] Paul.
[14] Ibid. The Federal Aviation Administration Headquarters at 15000 Aviation Blvd. Hawthorne, California is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
[15] Ibid.

for that design feature.[16] The Equitable Building represents HOK's first notable exploration of this curtain wall application. It serves as a relevant comparison to the 1972-1974 Executive Plaza Office Building by demonstrating an early use of a similar curtain wall and illustrating how the Executive Plaza Office Building used that same feature, but simplified and refined the overall design to a create a Late-Modern aesthetic.

The Equitable Building is a 21-story tower with a thin-mullion, continuous grid, reflective glass curtain wall connected to a low-rise, street-level building via a 4,000 square-foot glass-enclosed garden walkway.[17] The continuous-grid reflective glass curtain wall was visually distinctive from earlier Modern Movement curtain wall examples that typically contained differentiated spandrels and visible frames. The Equitable Building was recognized in a national context as a new aesthetic when architecture critic Heinrich Klotz noted "with the Equitable Building, Modern architecture was reconfirmed in a striking new way."[18]

The Equitable Building's ground level has exterior granite-clad vertical supports and a horizontal band demarcating the first floor *(Figure 11)*. This traditional element at the lower level delineates the base from the tower and invites the viewer to read a distinct ground floor and primary and secondary entrances. By defining the first story, the masonry cladding becomes a scaling device that gives reference to the ground floor proportion. In contrast, the Executive Plaza Office Building's design expanded the sculptural possibilities of the new encasing skin by omitting all scaling devices and connection to the street level on the primary elevation. The reflective curtain wall stretches to street-grade level and is uninterrupted at eye level. Rather than employing an articulated main entry, Executive Plaza Office Building's entrance is folded inward with reflective glass that continues the building's visual distortion. While the Equitable Building debuted the repetitive-grid reflective curtain wall feature, the Executive Building's design the following year utilized that same features and evolved the overall design beyond the base and tower to create a single volume.

The 1971 Equitable Building's continuous-grid reflective glass curtain wall was closely followed by the 1972-74 Executive Plaza Office Building's elaboration of that element to create a glass container building; or a building with a glass curtain wall serving as the primary exterior material to enclose the structure.[19] While the glass container building is not the only expression of the Late-Modern style, it is a building type that clearly communicates Late-Modern concepts. Extreme repetition of modular elements and an exaggerated emphasis on constructional metaphors---in this case the continuous-grid reflective curtain wall--create Late-Modern

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[16] "The Equitable Building, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1971," *Architecture and Urbanism* 136 (January 1982):102-108.
[17] "Profile of a Highrise Boss," *Fruin-Colnan Magazine*, Fall, 1969.
[18] Klotz, 63.
[19] Ibid. Klotz identifies unproportioned container buildings and assigns aesthetic characteristics to this group when they are clad in reflective glass.

sensuous imagery in the Executive Plaza Office Building.[20] The building is an excellent example of a Late-Modern glass container building. The absence of traditional building elements negates the perception of primary and secondary facades. The building is a mirrored form and seems to disappear into its reflected sky as a floating cube. Its setting in a deep, flat plaza further highlights the form as an aesthetic ideal by isolating it from other buildings, infrastructure, and landscape features. Rather than connect with surroundings, the building is perceived as an individual and distinct object; a reflective glass box.

The Executive Plaza Office Building's design was an early and successful execution of the newly emerging concept of encasing an entire building in a reflective glass skin. The design is one expression of Late-Modern style that influenced more-vernacular and ubiquitous commercial architecture in the decades that followed. The design formula of a metal structure wrapped in a reflective glass skin proliferated in the guise of urban and suburban corporate office buildings in the decades that followed.

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Kansas City Commercial Architecture in the 1970s: A Comparison

When the Executive Office Tower was completed in 1974, the only contemporary local Kansas City building of the same scale was Penntower, located three miles south of the central business district. A comparison of Penntower to the Executive Plaza Office Building's design, along with analysis of other architectural expressions in Kansas City in the early 1970s highlights the distinctive and exceptionally significant design of the Executive Plaza Office Building in its local context.

Penntower

Saint Louis and Kansas City-based architects Peckham-Guyton designed the 13-story Penntower (3100 Broadway Boulevard) office building for developer Linclay Corporation in 1972 *(Figure 14)*.[21] Like the Executive Plaza Office Building, Penntower is clad in thin-mullion reflective glass panels. Although the cladding material (green reflective glass) is uniform across each façade, the spandrels are differentiated in height, giving visual reference to individual stories. Thicker vertical mullions protrude from the plane of the wall to separate each pane of glass, further differentiating it from the Executive Plaza Office Building's smooth, uniform reflective skin. Penntower's visible grid is especially noticeable in oblique view and prevents the curtain wall from appearing as a single reflective plane *(Figure 15)*.[22] Penntower's other notable design feature is a three-story concrete and reflective glass pyramidal base that steps back progressively from sidewalk level and serves as a pedestal for the glass curtain wall tower

[20] Jenks, 8.
[21] *Penntower Dedication*. KC Times, May 22, 1975.
[22] Architectural drawings of Penntower, 3100 Braodway, Kansas City. State Historical Society of Missouri.

(Figure 16). By emphasizing the base, the design grounds the building in its site on top of the hill.

Penntower's exaggerated concrete base expresses its interior ground-level atrium as an exterior volume. In comparison, the Executive Plaza Office Building's curtain wall is the single plane forming the building's envelope and defining its rectangular form. Penntower appears as a glass tower perched on a substantial and geometric base. By contrast, the Executive Plaza Office Building's thin curtain wall envelops the entire structure to a ground-level brick base that is not visible on the primary elevation. The roof of the Executive Plaza Office Building's adjacent storage building forms a perpendicular flat plaza in front of the main building's façade and conceals the minimal brick base that is only exposed on secondary elevations. The appearance of the curtain wall extending to ground-level emphasizes its reflective rectangular shape.

While Penntower is contemporaneous with the Executive Plaza Office Building and shares a similar scale and use, its dominant mass at the base links it more closely with common local themes in architectural design at the time. Its glass curtain wall also did not achieve the same fluid character that the Executive Plaza Office Building's glass curtain wall displayed. The comparison serves to highlight the distinctive aesthetic of the Executive Plaza Office Building in a built environment dominated by emphasis on weight and structural mass.

Other Contemporary Buildings

Other Late-Modern glass container buildings were constructed contemporaneously with the Executive Plaza Office Building nationwide, but the aesthetic was not common in Kansas City at the time.[23] Many 1970s-era buildings in Kansas City shared a similar style, characterized by a definite reduction in glass and a greater emphasis on massive walls.[24] In contrast to the geometric curtain walls on 1960s-era Kansas City towers, 1970s buildings emphasized solid exteriors with textured material, light and shadow, and exposed concrete and brick. De-emphasizing glass as a wall system, many of Kansas City's 1970s-era buildings appear as massive walls with windows as clean-cut openings or secondary planes.[25]

The Executive Plaza Office Building stands out as a distinct design in the local built environment of the time. In the downtown urban setting, its glass curtain wall extending to street-grade level contrasted with the exposed articulated steel frame and pedestal of the 1974 Merchantile Bank and Trust Building (1101 Walnut Street).[26] The Merchantile Bank and Trust Building has a tall base supporting a vertical tower that lends it a sculptural quality that diverged

[23] A review of building permits issued in Kansas City between 1972 and 1974 referenced with current addresses yielded a set of contemporaneous local buildings for comparison.
[24] George Ehrlich, *Kansas City Missouri, An Architectural History 1826-1990,* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1992) 165.
[25] Ibid.

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from previous Modern Movement rectangular slab buildings *(Figures 12 and 13)*.[27] The building's expressed structure as a dominant visual feature contrasts with the Executive Plaza Office Building's uniform reflective glass exterior.

Brutalism and New-Formalism were two alternate stylistic treatments popular in Kansas City around the same time as the Executive Plaza Office Building. A comparison of physical characteristics associated with those two styles highlights the distinctive features that make the Executive Plaza Office Building an exceptionally significant example of Late-Modern in its context. Displaying the slanted façade with massive walls characteristic of Brutalism, the 1974 Farm and Home Savings Building (8500 Ward Parkway) was a departure from previous rectilinear forms *(Figure 17)*.[28] The appearance of weight and massiveness of Brutalist expression contrasts with the contemporaneous reflective exterior of the Late-Modern Executive Plaza Office Building.

Like Late-Modern glass container buildings, New Formalist buildings typically employed glass curtain walls and free-standing, self-contained forms, but often incorporated exaggerated or projecting roof slabs and prominent vertical columns.[29] The New Formalist 1973 American Bank and Trust Company Building (1 West Armour Boulevard) used large-scale glazing, but in a staggered curtain wall to reduce the impact of a single plane. Its enhanced structure forms a large cap with thick vertical supports *(Figure 18)*. New Formalism embraced the Classical precedents of symmetry and proportion and repurposed or abstracted classical forms such as arches, colonnades, columns, and entablatures. This historicism was antithetical to Late-Modern's "anti-historical" notion and produced a decidedly different aesthetic. New Formalism restyled old forms offering a conservative contrast to Late-Modern's visual effect devoid of historical reference.

The transition from the previously-dominant Modern Movement style produced varied responses in roughly the same time period within the same geographical location. The Executive Plaza Office Building was a singular and distinctive local expression of the Late-Modern glass container building that exploited the Modern Movement's curtain wall.

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[26] Elizabeth Rosin, "Mercantile Bank & Trust Building," *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, 2009, Section 8-10.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid. The Farm and Home Savings Building is located roughly ten miles south of the nominated building in a distinctly suburban setting.
[29] Whiffen, 261.

Post-Modern and Corporate Modern in Kansas City

Post-Modern architecture represented another divergence from Modern Movement design, primarily beginning in the 1970s and gaining prominence in Kansas City's downtown commercial architecture during the 1980s. Comparing Post-Modern examples in Kansas City serves to differentiate that style from the Late-Modern Executive Plaza Office Building. Some elements of the two styles, such as glass curtain walls, overlapped. However, the unique elements that characterized the Late-Modern glass container building specifically influenced an on-going trend that occurred simultaneously and endured beyond Post-Modern's high-style popularity. The glass container building influenced the vernacular and wide-spread corporate office buildings that proliferated into the 1990s and beyond.

Post-Modern in Kansas City

Several 1980s-era, large-scale commercial buildings in Kansas City's downtown incorporated reflective glass cladding and displayed a lack of detail to attract the eye from the overall form, as the design of the Executive Plaza Office Building also did. However, these general characteristics resulted from the economics of construction that dictated restraint, rather than adherence to a set of design principles.[30] While the reflective glass curtain wall was a common exterior treatment, notable glass container buildings in Kansas City also incorporated Post-Modern stylistic elements. These buildings are distinct from the Executive Plaza Office Building's reductive aesthetic and include Post-Modern's hallmark veiled references achieved through re-imagining familiar architectural features.

Several notable downtown buildings display some aspect linked to the Post-Modern trend. Completed in 1988, One Kansas City Place at 1200 Main Street is a glass-skinned sky scraper stepped back toward the top in a design reference to the nearby 1935-37 Kansas City City Hall *(Figure 19)*. The allusion to the historical building in mimicking the familiar, historic form yet wrapping the building in technologically-progressive reflective glass is a hallmark of Post-Modern double-coding devices. Town Pavillion at 1111 Main Street, completed in 1986, is another example of Post Modern stylistic elements on a large-scale downtown office tower. The glass and granite building has a conical cap and four porticos that form a Latin cross in plan view *(Figure 20)*. Incorporating a familiar historical reference that will never be viewed by the public is a nod to architectural peers common in Post-Modern designs. These buildings occupy large lots three and four blocks south of the nominated property.

Corporate Modern: a lasting influence

While the features of the Executive Plaza Office Building's that make it an exceptionally significant Late-Modern glass container building were conceived and executed as a stylistic endeavor, the same aesthetic inspired serial designs that proliferated in the years that followed

[30] Ehrlich, 187.

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as corporate offices. Corporations commissioned glass container buildings because they were relatively inexpensive to construct, easy to imitate and conveyed modernity.[31] Corporate Modern is a term linking continuous-grid, reflective glass curtain wall buildings from 1960 to circa 1990.[32] It describes Late-Modern glass container buildings and groups them with later versions influenced by that original concept. Corporate Modern buildings utilize glass curtain wall membranes that typically drop to the ground, although examples with articulated entries and first floor levels do exist.[33] Early versions are rectangular in form and later examples incorporated rounded elements in which the skin flows over corners and rooftops. The overall look of the buildings is a free-standing sculpture, which revolves around the idea of total mechanical control inside the building. The aesthetic trend peaked in the 1990s and was often applied to office buildings sited in suburban corporate campuses.[34]

In Kansas City, this trend is evident in the built environment as urban and suburban corporate office buildings adopted the formula of continuous-grid, reflective curtain walls wrapped around a geometric structure. Beginning in the 1980s, suburban Corporate Modern buildings borrowed and proliferated the most salient design feature that the Executive Office Tower first demonstrated in downtown Kansas City. The adoption of the glass container building as a corporate symbol proves its aesthetic appeal to convey modernity, even years after its introduction. While reflective glass buildings appeared in Kansas City's downtown, the suburban Corporate Modern buildings more closely mimicked the sculptural floating aesthetic of the Executive Plaza Office Building's early glass container building design. Corporate Modern examples show a direct influence of the Executive Plaza Office Building's exceptionally significant design on the local built environment.

Suburban office buildings in park-like settings proliferated in and around Kansas City's suburbs in the 1980s.[35] New ultra-modern office buildings near increasingly sprawling residential suburbs took advantage of unlimited parking that was not available in the central business district. The Executive Hills office park, completed in 1983, contains two low-slung, rhombus-shaped and one rectangular glass container building fourteen miles south of downtown Kansas City at 1300 E. 104th Street. The two-acre wooded site reflects in the glass buildings as seen

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[31] Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 166.
[32] Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement (DOCOMOMO)'s Western Washington chapter identifies Corporate Modern by this definition. DOCOMOMO of Western Washington. http://www.docomomo-wewa.org/styles detail.php?id+34 (accessed on August 4, 2016). The term is not widely used to describe a standard stylistic expression and is sometimes associated with mid-twentieth century Modern Movement commercial buildings that are distinctive designs associated with specific corporations. The Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture defines Corporate Modern in that way.
http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606789.001.0001/acref-9780198606789-e-5471?rskey=1MyEDk&result=1413 (accessed September 13, 2016).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ehrlich, 187, 203.

from the adjacent freeway. Their stand-alone siting makes them a complex of distinct enclosed spaces rather than a cluster of abutting buildings as would be found in a dense urban setting. In their isolated placements, the individual buildings embody the glass container building aesthetic in an anonymous corporate milieu *(Figure 21)*.

The Glenwood Place Towers are a set of two individual glass container buildings fourteen miles southwest of Kansas City's central business district at 9300 Metcalf Avenue in Overland Park, Kansas. Constructed in 1984 and 1986, the Corporate Modern buildings are reflective glass towers in a park-like setting centered in a city block with radial parking lots, a pond, planted lawn, and curving roads surrounding them. The V-plan glass container buildings have folded accordion planes of continuous-grid blue reflective curtain walls. Their elaborate and broad setting serves to minimize their scale and their reflective skin make them a stage from which to experience the surrounding landscape rather than the primary site feature *(Figure 22)*.

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PROPERTY HISTORY

The Executive Plaza Office Building housed Commerce Bank offices along with some rental office space from its opening in 1974 until its owner, locally-headquartered Commerce Bank vacated the building in 2006.[36] The building's construction was part of a redevelopment effort sponsored by the Downtown Redevelopment Corporation, which washeaded by Commerce Bank president James Kemper. The Downtown Redevelopment Corporation developed six buildings in the immediate vicinity of, and including, the Executive Plaza Office Building between the late 1950s and the early 1970s *(Figure 23)*.[37] The buildings offered a mix of commercial, hotel, and office functions and did not share any unifying design elements.[38] What they did share was a location in the north section of the downtown business district. The redevelopment efforts sought to attract and retain businesses in downtown during a time of suburban development that drew commercial entities away from the city center.[39]

[36] *Commerce Bank: The story of a bank that helped a city grow*. Vertical File Commerce Bank. Missouri Valley Special Collections. Kansas City Public Library.
[37] Cydney Milstein. "Ten Main Center," *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, 2015, Section 8-14. *It Happened in Kansas City*, Kansas City Star, April 20, 1962.
[38] City Plan Commission Kansas City, Missouri. *Central Business District Kansas City Missouri Study, 1956.* Special Collections. Missouri Valley Room. Kansas City Public Library Kansas City, Missouri. *Downtown Renewal Accelerates*, KC Times, April 1, 1972. *Downtown Still is Busy Building*, Kansas City Star, July 16, 1972.
[39] Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority. *Urban Renewal Kansas City, Missouri 16-year Progress Report 1953-1969*. Special Collections Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Public Library.

The Downtown Redevelopment Corporation hired HOK, a St. Louis-based and nationally-recognized architecture firm, to design the Executive Plaza Office Building as speculative rental office space.[40] The design team also included the local Kansas City firm Keene, Simpson, & Murphy, designers of the 1965 Commerce Tower, as Associate Architects.[41] Construction began in June 1972 with Winn-Senter Construction Company serving as General Contractor.[42]

The design called for a 200,000-square foot, nine-story office building with a "glass shell covering a steel frame" designed to reflect the surrounding skyline and associated landscaped plaza.[43] The reflective silver coating on the exterior of the insulated glass touted thermal benefits that would allow tenants "maximum temperature and humidity control" and "enhance beauty."[44] In addition to its bold exterior design, the Executive Plaza Office Building included progressive technology. Special electronic and air conditioning equipment would accommodate electronic data processing equipment on any floor.[45] Structural column spacing at 30 and 35 foot centers offered open layouts customizable to individual tenants. A centralized control and information center regulated lights, fire control, elevators, and security. A rooftop heliport was intended to transport visitors from the new Kansas City International Airport then under development. Building permit plans show column projections on the roof for "future heliport" although this feature was never constructed.[46] Upon completion, the *Kansas City Star* observed the "weirdly wiggly world of downtown buildings appears at 8th and Main Streets where the reflective exterior of the new Executive Plaza office building mirrors its neighboring structures."[47] The Executive Plaza Office Building cost 8.5 million dollars to construct.[48]

Architectural Recordshowcased the Executive Plaza Office Building in its *Record Interiors of 1975* issue. The article highlighted the successful integration of private office space and partitions of common space to create an "office landscape" without the formality of conventional layout or the chaos of open space.[49] Although the space was originally programmed for rental tenants, Bancshare, a banking holding company for Commerce Bank branches, occupied the entire building by 1975.[50] InterArc, a subsidiary of HOK designed the interior with bold colors coordinated on separate floors, offices along the perimeter walls, and transparent and partial

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[40] Joe Robert, "Buildings," *Kansas City Star,* June 18, 1972.
[41] Ibid. Commerce Tower was listed in the National Register on April 11, 2014.
[42] Architectural Drawings, Building Permit, 720 Main Street, City of Kansas City, 1972.
[43] "Office Building-Plaza Planned for 8th at Main," *Kansas City Star,* February 24, 1972.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid. Architectural Drawings, Building Permit 720 Main Kansas City, Missouri (City of Kansas City, 1972).
[47] "Reflections," *Kansas City Star,* September 1973.
[48] Roy Inman, "From Gaping Holes to Gleaming Buildings" *Kansas City Star Magazine,* June 10, 1973, 16.
[49] "Record Interiors of 1975," *Architectural Record* 157.1, January 1975, 93. "Executive Plaza Office building," *Interior Design* 46.5 (May 1975):140-145.
[50] Commerce Bank organized Commerce Bancshares in 1966. The next year it started acquiring banks in Missouri. Chris Rousch, *Building Commerce. Commerce Bank, Strength, Community, Innovation for 150 Years* (St. Louis: Essex Publishing, 2015) 135.

height partitions to allow light into interior offices*(Figure 24)*. The building's dramatic exterior extended inside at the folded entry, where the mirrored glass exterior "turns under and into the building" to create a reflective glass ceiling over the reception area in the vestibule *(Figures 25 and 26)*.[51]

The Executive Plaza Office Building remained under the same ownership for over thirty years. BancShares remained the primary tenant, along with a handful of other tenants in leased suites, until 2006 when the building was vacated. Aside from periodically reconfiguring the interior offices and updating finishes to meet tenant needs, as was common in office buildings, the only alteration was the addition of an exterior bank vault on the north elevation in 1983. The building has remained vacant since 2006. The only visible changes to the original design are the addition of the bank vault. The bank vault is at basement level on the north elevation. It is below the parking lot grade and is not visible from any public right-of-way.

Gyo Obata and HOK

HOK incorporated in 1955 in St. Louis. George Hellmuth fulfilled a business development role, George Kausabaum oversaw production, and Gyo Obata was the principal designer. The firm did not focus on a specific building type, but rather pursued commercial, institutional, educational, and large-scale planning projects. During the 1960s, the firm designed their first nationally-recognized corporate building, the 1964 lab for IBM in Los Gatos, California, and opened their first branch office in San Francisco in 1966.[52] By the 1970s, the firm had designed notable projects including the Dallas / Fort Worth Airport in Dallas Texas and the Galleria in Houston, Texas, the nation's first enclosed mall. HOK opened offices in New York City and Washington D.C., and had nine offices in the early 1980s when they received an international commission to build the King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh Saudi Arabia. Hellmuth retired in 1978, and Kausabaum died in 1982. Obata stepped down as chairman in 1993. In 1998, World Architecture declared HOK the largest architectural firm in the world.[53]

Gyo Obata earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from Washington University in 1945. He studied under internationally-renowned architect Eero Saarinen, and worked in the Chicago offices of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill before returning to St. Louis to work under Minoru Yamasaki, who later designed the World Trade Center. After forming HOK, Obata soon gained recognition for his innovative designs.[54] Obata's 1967 American Zinc, Lead & Smelting Company Building (20 South First St.) in St. Louis was a dramatic Modern Movement office

[51] "Record Interiors of 1975."
[52] Walter McQuade, *Architecture in the Real World: The Work of HOK*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams. 1984) 16.
[53] Esley Hamilton, Doris A. Danna, and Steven E. Mitchell, "American Zinc, Lead & Smelting Company Building," *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, 2015, Section 8-11.
[54] "Three New Office Structures by HOK," *Architectural Record* 146.2 (August 1969):121-126.

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building that earned local designation as an architectural landmark within a year of its completion.[55]

Obata's projects are remarkably diverse and are characterized by custom solutions rather than a unifying signature. He was a skilled urban planner who carefully incorporated site considerations and circulation in large-scale and individual designs.[56]

CONCLUSION

The Executive Plaza Office Building is an exceptionally significant example of a Late-Modern glass container building embodying stylistic elements that represented and influenced new directions during a progression away from Modern Movement architecture in the early 1970s. Affectionately nicknamed the "Flashcube" for its similarity to the anachronistic attachment to period cameras, the building exemplifies a uniquely Late-Modern unintended humor.[57] The striking form and Late-Modern curtain wall of the Executive Plaza Office Building serve to amuse by visually responding to its surroundings as a distorted and reflective volume. It represents a departure from the rational Modern Movement commercial buildings that preceded it and is distinctive from concurrent styles. The influences of the Late-Modern glass container building are perceptible in the later Corporate Modern buildings that imitated its form. The Executive Plaza Office Building is an exceptionally significant embodiment of Late-Modern architecture in Kansas City. It retains integrity and is recognizable as an early glass container building thoroughly articulated to express an aesthetic ideal.

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[55] Ibid. Section 8-4
[56] Muriel Emanuel, *Contemporary Architects*. (New York: St. James Press, 1994).
[57] Jencks, 78.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Legal Description: 720 MAIN T H SWOPES 2ND ADD LOTS 13 THRU 15 & S 16.3 FT LOT 16 BLK3 & ALL VAC ALLEY LY W & ADJ EXC PRT IN BALTIMORE ALSO ROSS& SCARRITTS ADD LOTS 14 THRU 18 & PRT LOT 19 LY S OF ELY PROLG OF A LI 16.3 FT N OF & PARL TO S LI SD LOT 16 BLK 3 EXC PRT SD LOTS IN MAIN ST ALSO ALL VAC DELAWARE ST LY BETWEEN SD SUBS ALSO 11.11 FT VAC 8TH ST LY S & ADJ SD LOT 14 ROSS & SCARRITTS ADD

Boundary Justification

The proposed boundaries include the city parcel historically associated with the resource. The boundary includes the three contributing resources: the office building, the storage building, and the concrete walkway. The designed plaza is the roof of the below-grade storage building. The surface parking lot to the north occupies a separate legal parcel.

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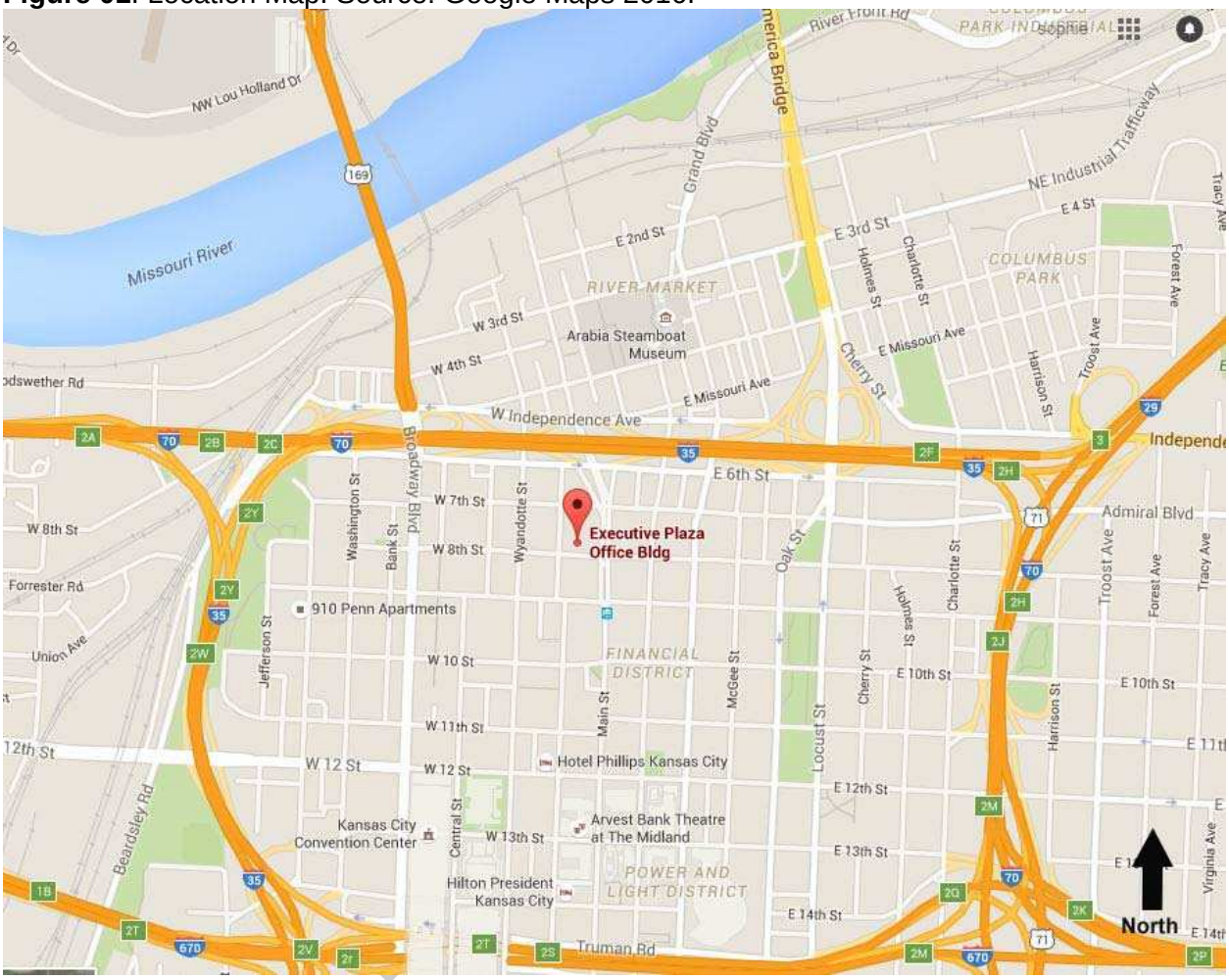
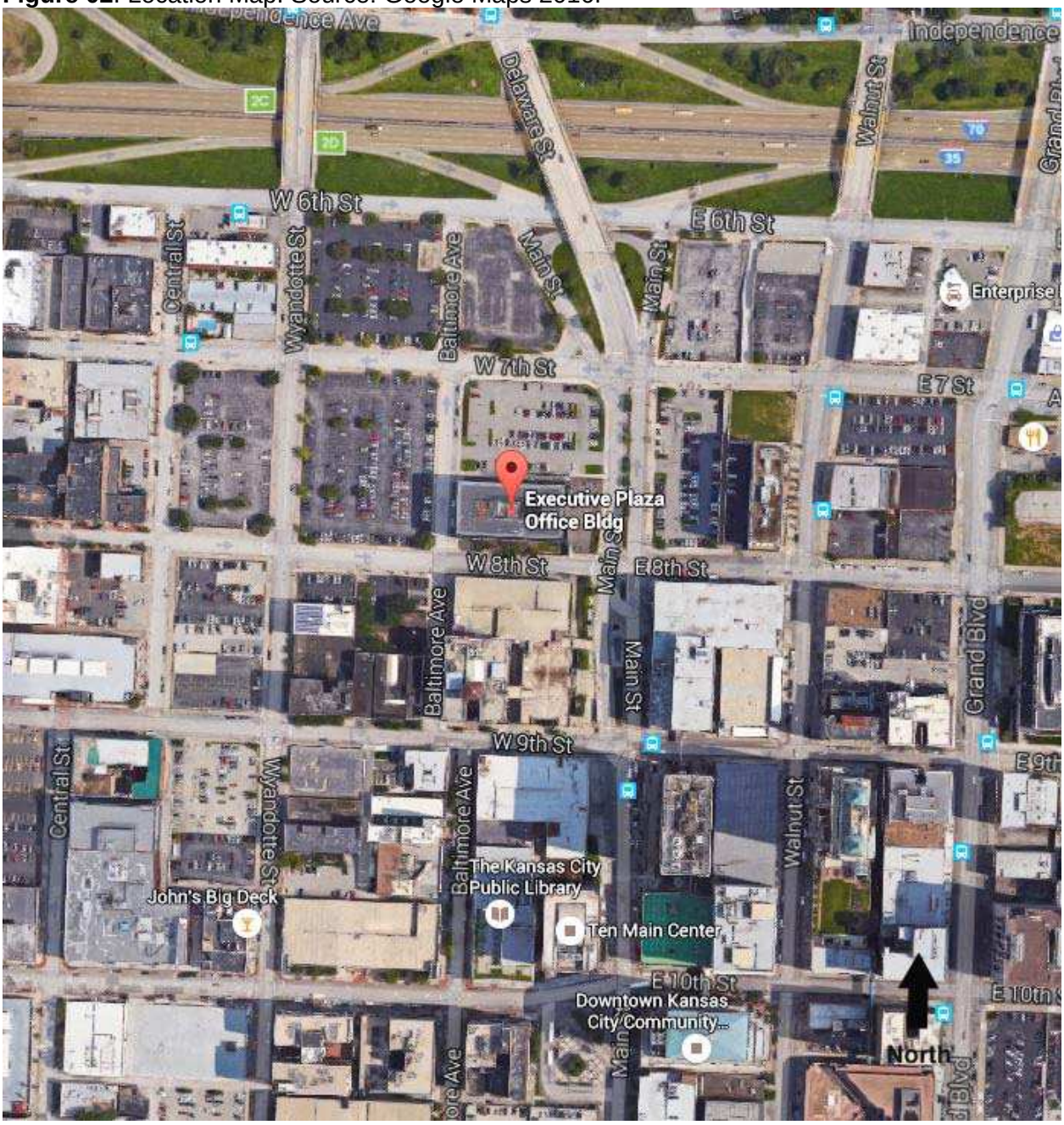
Figure 01. Location Map. Source: Google Maps 2016.



Executive Office Plaza
720 Main Street Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.
39.104697, -94.583758.

Figure 02. Location Map. Source: Google Maps 2016.



Executive Office Plaza
720 Main Street Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.
39.104697, -94.583758.

Figure 03. Location map. Property boundary outlined in white. Source: Google Maps 2016.

Figure 04. Resources map. Contributing resources are Office Building, Storage Building and Plaza, and Pedestrian Walkway. Source: Google Maps 2016.

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Figure 05. Bridge connecting the storage building rooftop plaza to the main entrance of Executive Office Plaza. Source: Google Earth 2016.

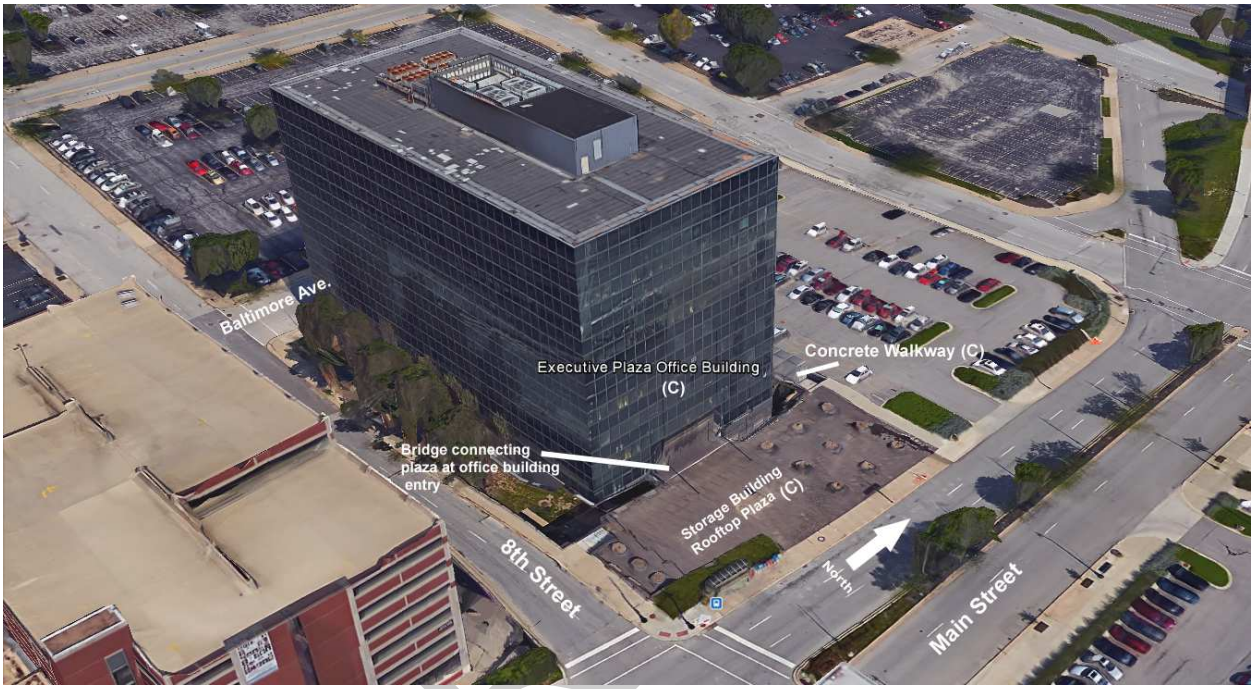

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Figure 06. Historic site plan. Source: Architectural drawings. Building Permit. Executive Office Plaza, 720 Main Street. Kansas City City Hall. 1972

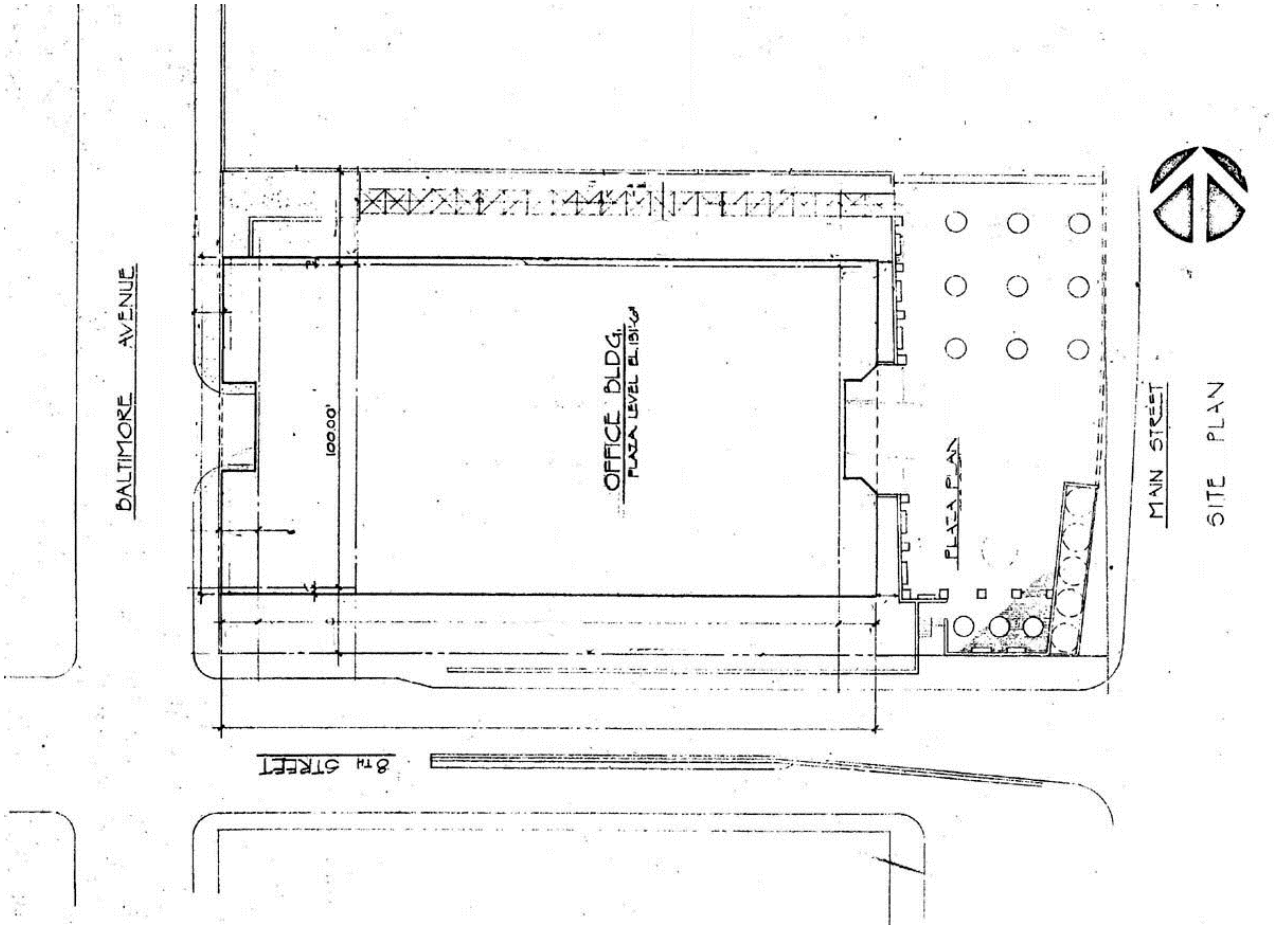


Figure 07. Section of south elevation showing the relationship of the main office building to the storage building, its rooftop plaza, and the bridge that connects the two buildings. Source: Building and Plaza Section. Clockwork.

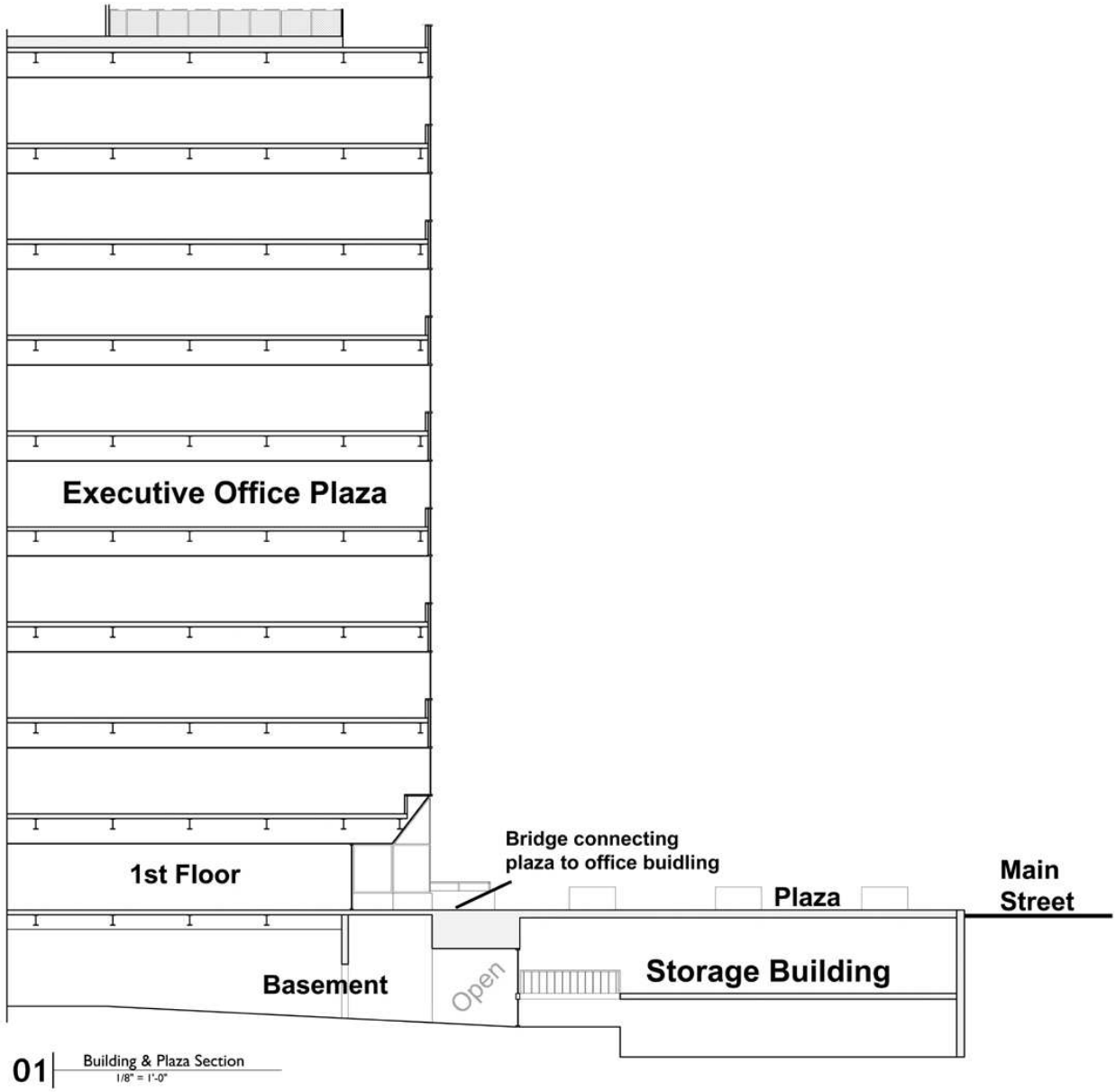


Figure 08. BMA Tower 700 W. 31st Street Kansas City. View south. Photo by Brad Finch.

Figure 09. Philip Johnson's 19779-1984 AT&T building represents post-modern concepts in a skyscraper. Source: http://www.archdaily.com/611169/ad-classics-at-and-t-building-philip-johnson-and-john-burgee. Accessed 5/11/2016.

Figure 10. The Equitable Building 10 South Broadway, Saint Louis. Source: Architecture and Urbanism January 1982, p. 102.

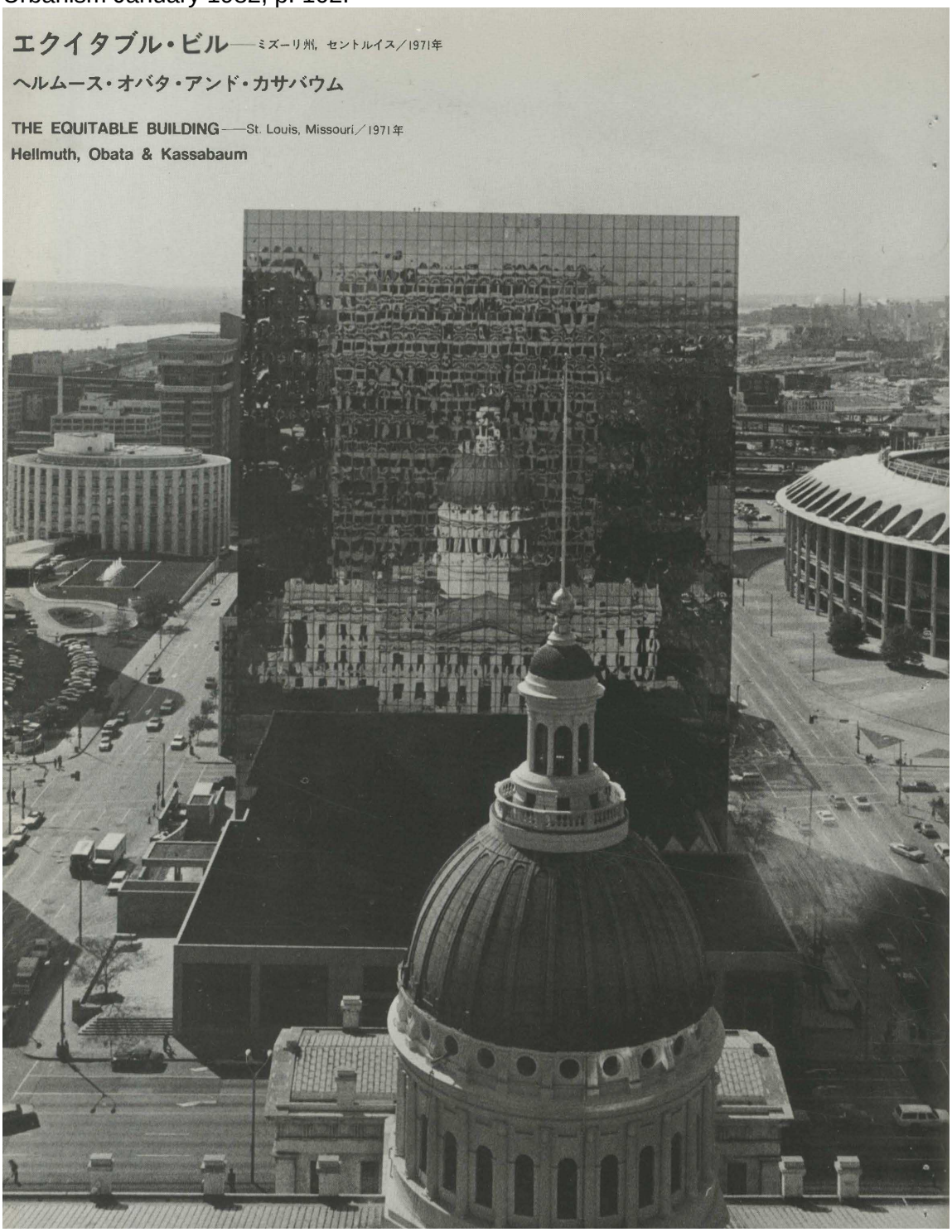
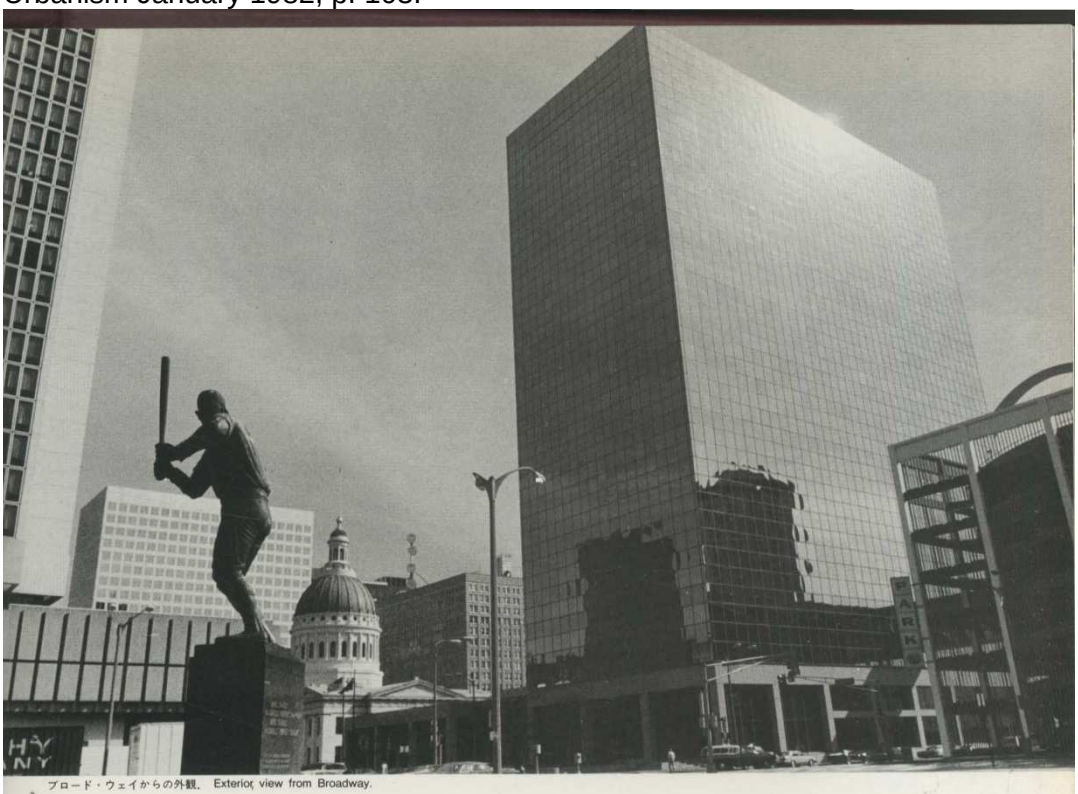


Figure 11. The Equitable Building 10 South Broadway, Saint Louis. Source: Architecture and Urbanism January 1982, p. 103.



ブロード・ウェイからの外観。 Exterior view from Broadway.

外観。 Exterior view.

a+u 8201 103

Figure 12. Traders Bank Building 1125 Grand Blvd., Commerce Tower 911 Main, and Ten Main Center 920 Main Street all in Kansas City. Source: Google maps, 2016.

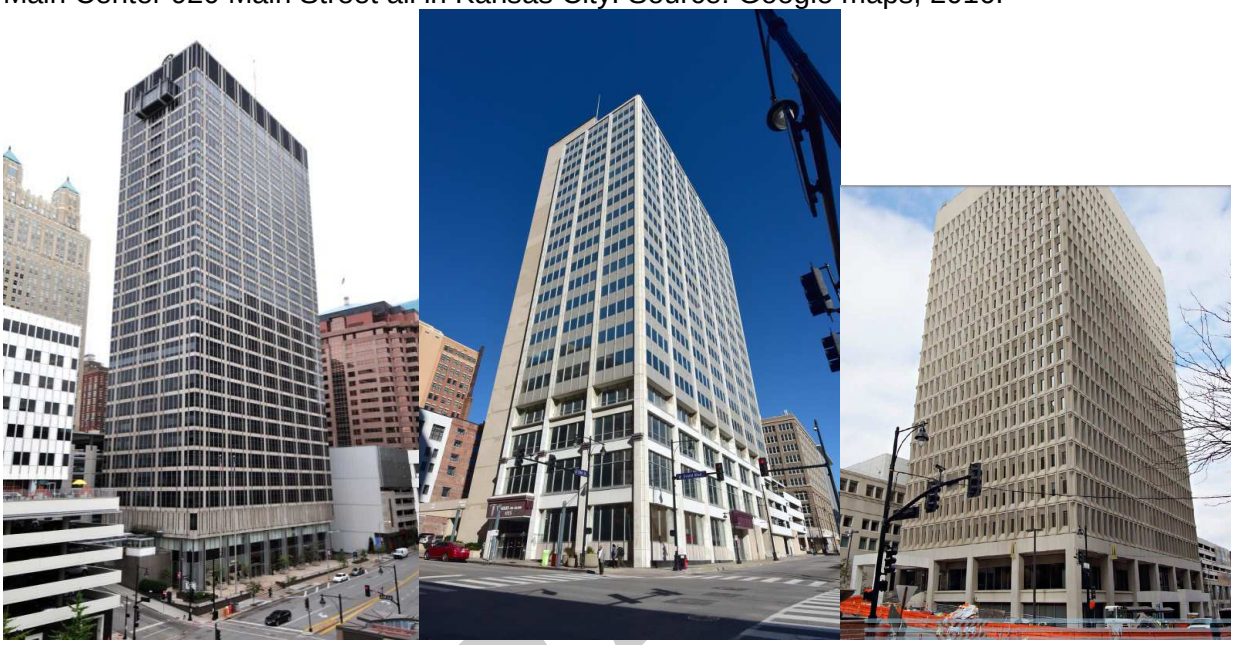


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Figure 13. Mercantile Bank and Trust Building 1101 Walnut St. Kansas City. Photo by Brad Finch.

Figure 14. Penntower 3100 Broadway Blvd. Kansas City. Source: Google Maps 2016.

Figure 15. Penntower 3100 Broadway Blvd. Kansas City. Detail of glass curtain wall showing spandrels and profile of vertical mullions. Photo Sophie Roark.

Figure 16. Section of north elevation showing three-story base and tower on Penntower. Source: Original drawings on file at State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri Kansas City.

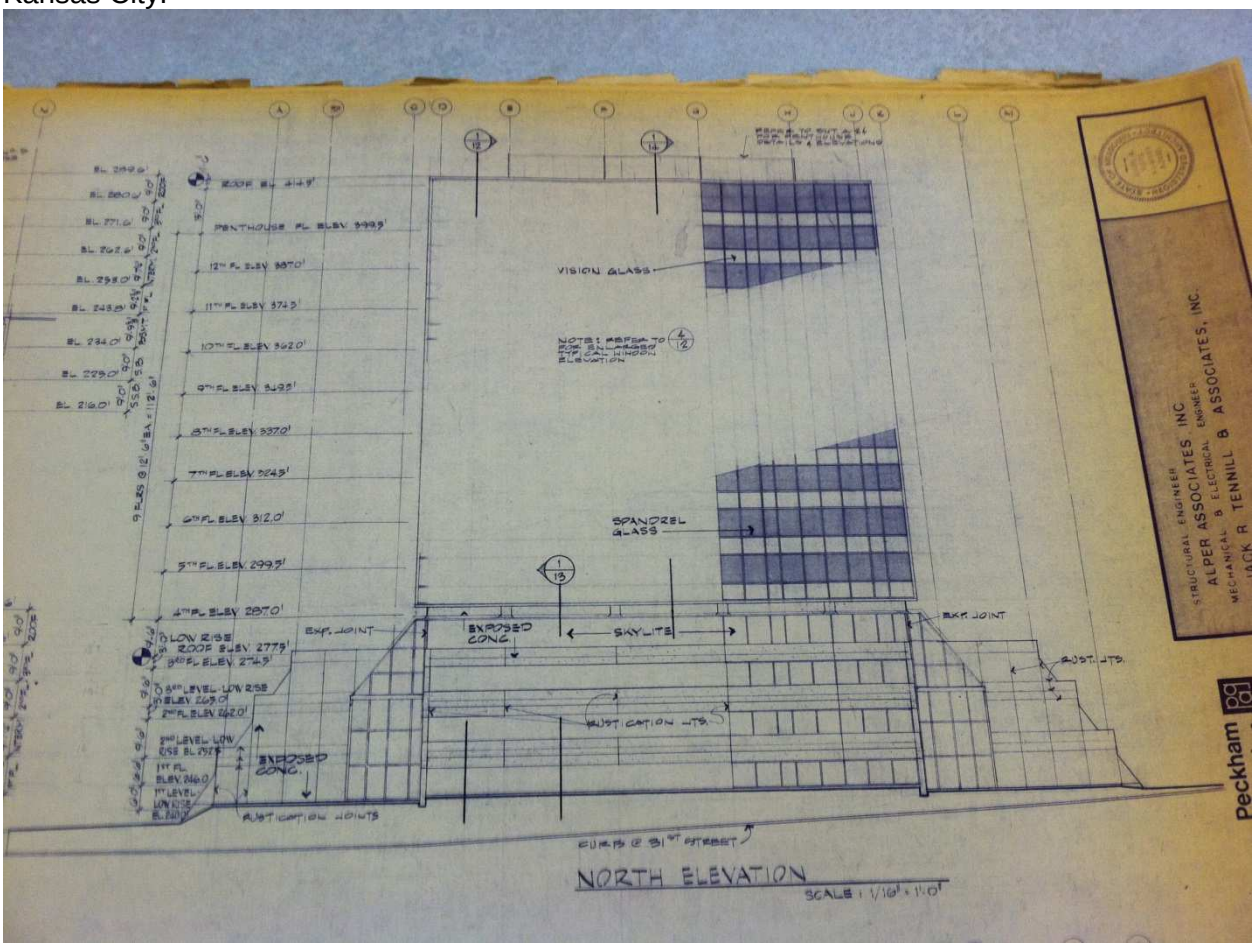

Figure 17. The 1974 Farm and Home Savings Building at 8500 Ward Parkway Kansas City. Source: Google Map, 2016.

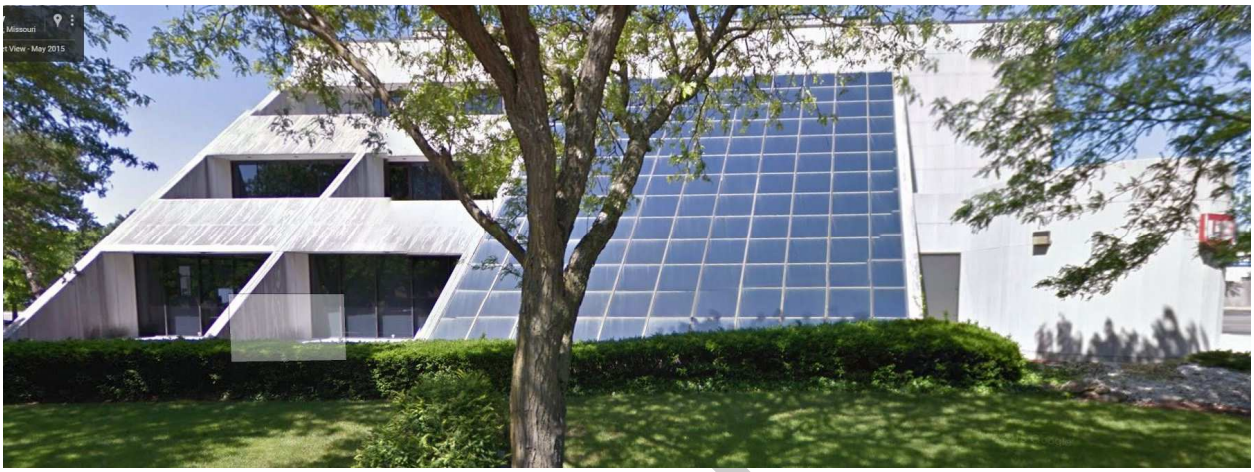

Figure 18. The 1973 American Bank and Trust Building at 1 West Armour Kansas City. Source: Google Map, 2016.

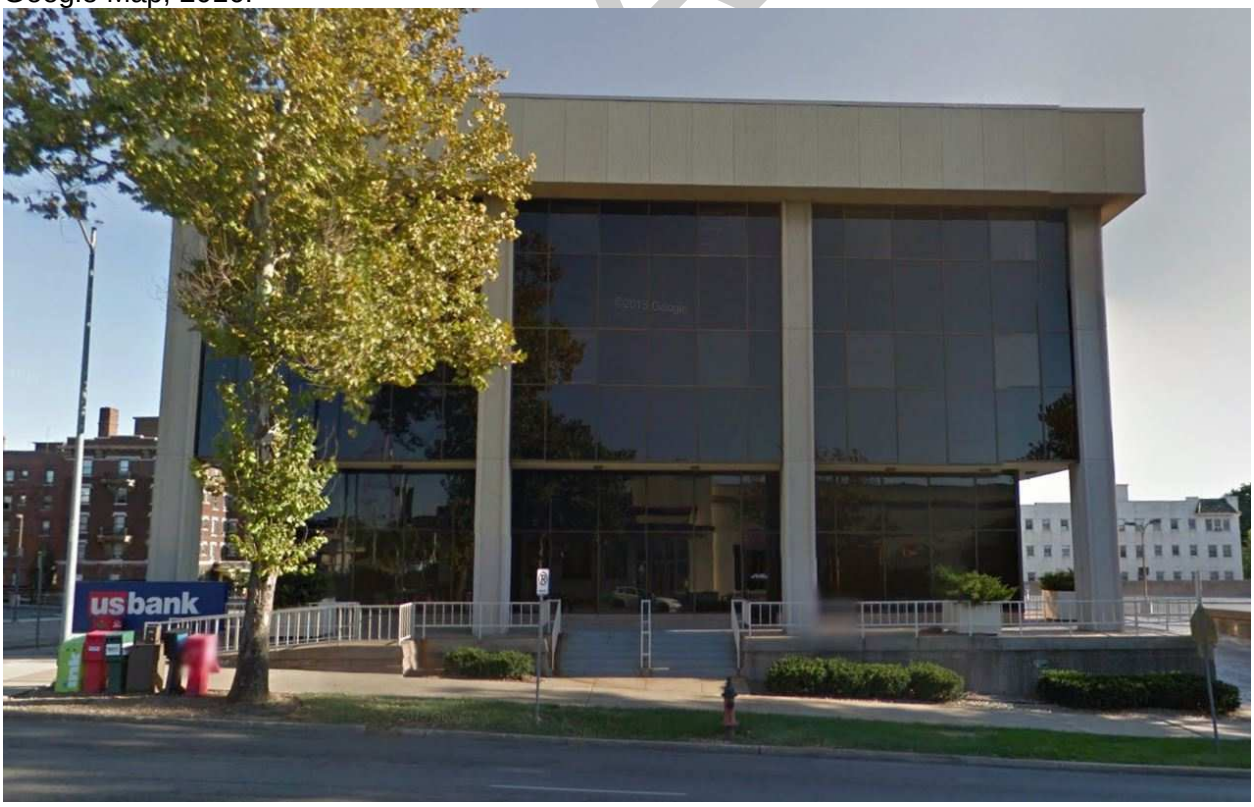

Figure 19. One Kansas City Place at 1200 Main Street and the Kansas City City Hall at 414 E. 12th Street. Source: Google Map, 2016.

Figure 20. Town Pavilion Tower at 1111 Main Street elevation and plan view Source: Google Map, 2016.

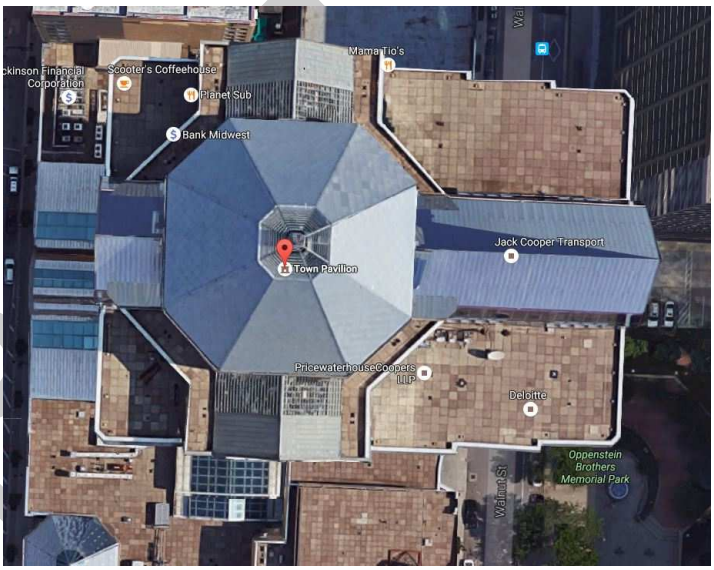

Figure 21. Executive Hills Office 1300 E. 104th Street Kansas City, Missouri. Source: Google Map, 2016.

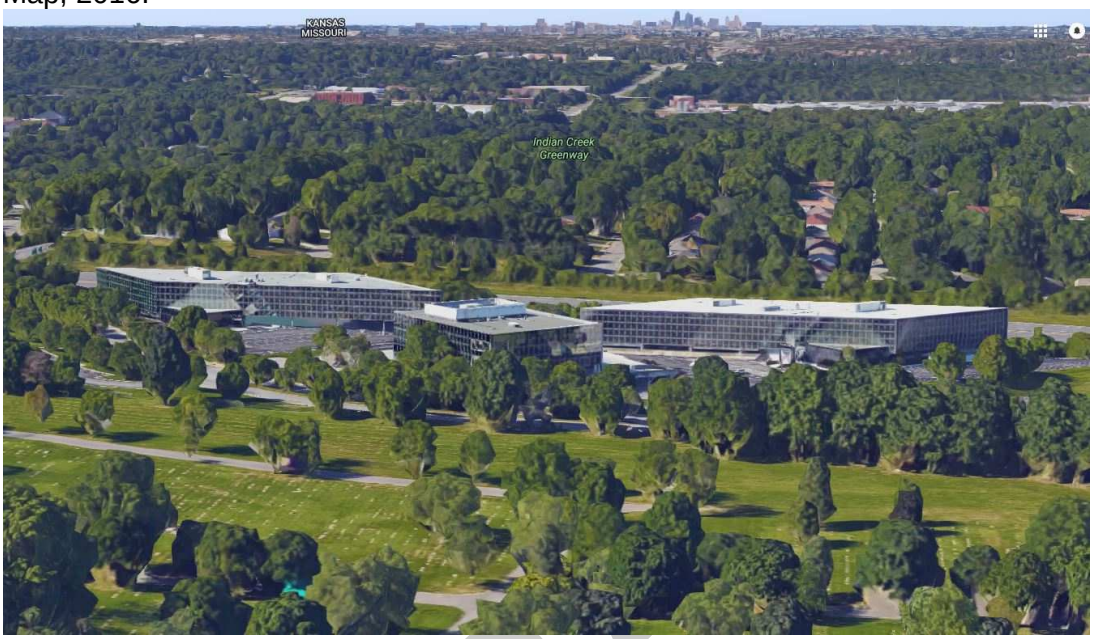

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Figure 22. Glenwood Place Towers 9300 Metcalf Avenue Overland Park, Kansas. Executive Hills Office 1300 E. 104th Street Kansas City, Missouri. Source: Google Map, 2016.

Figure 23. Northside redevelopment area bounded by Baltimore Avenue, an alley east of Main Street, W. 6th Street and W. 9th Street. Source: Google Map, 2016.

Figure 24. Historic Interior of the Executive Office Plaza. Source: *Architectural Record* May 1975.

Figure 25. Historic entry to the Executive Office Plaza. Source: *Architectural Record* May 1975.

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Figure 26. Main entry Executive Office Plaza. Photo by Brad Finch, F-Stop Photography.

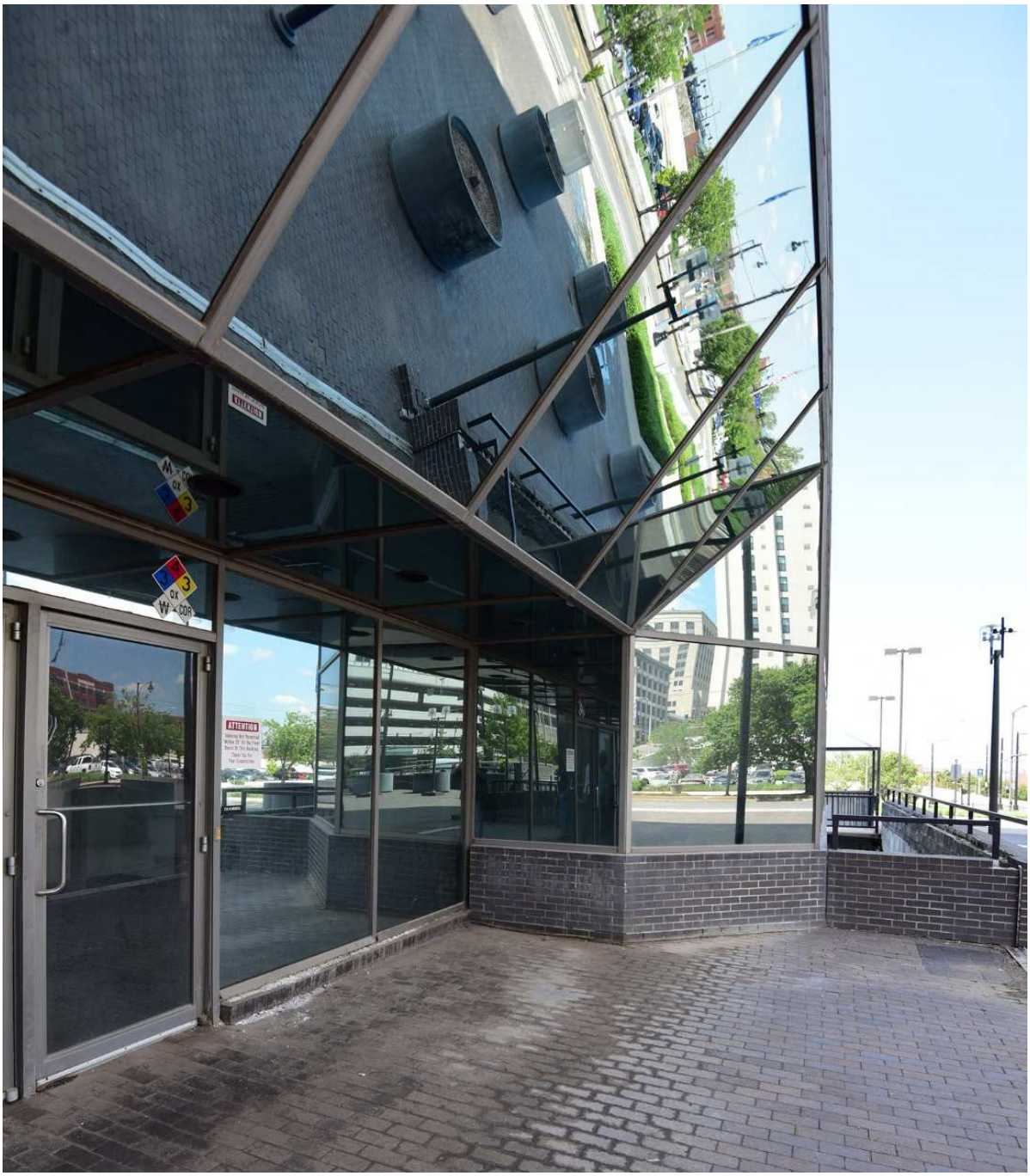

Figure 27. Historic Plaza Level Plan, 1972. Source: HOK

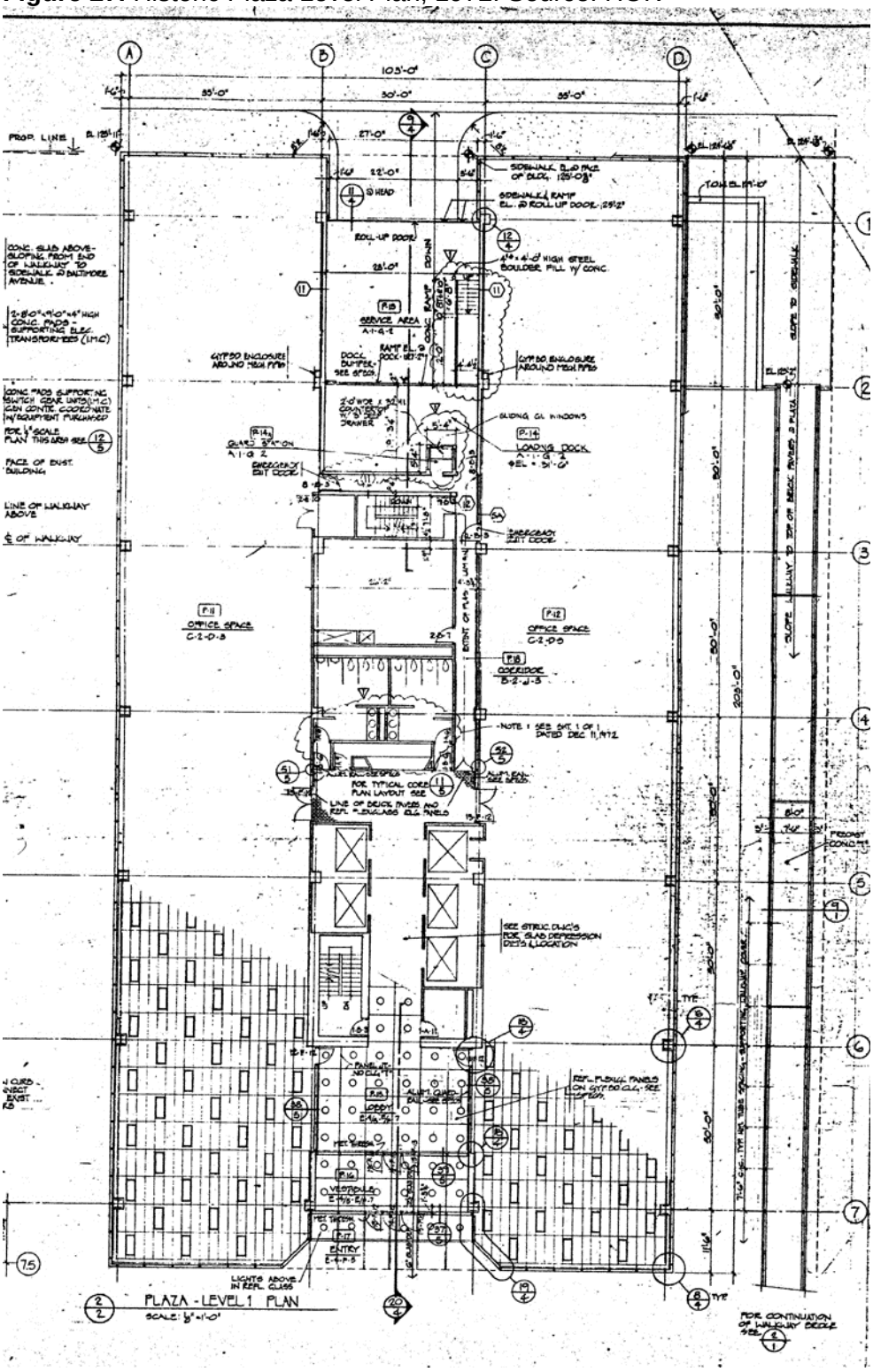

Figure 28. Historic Typical Floor Plan, 1972. Source: HOK

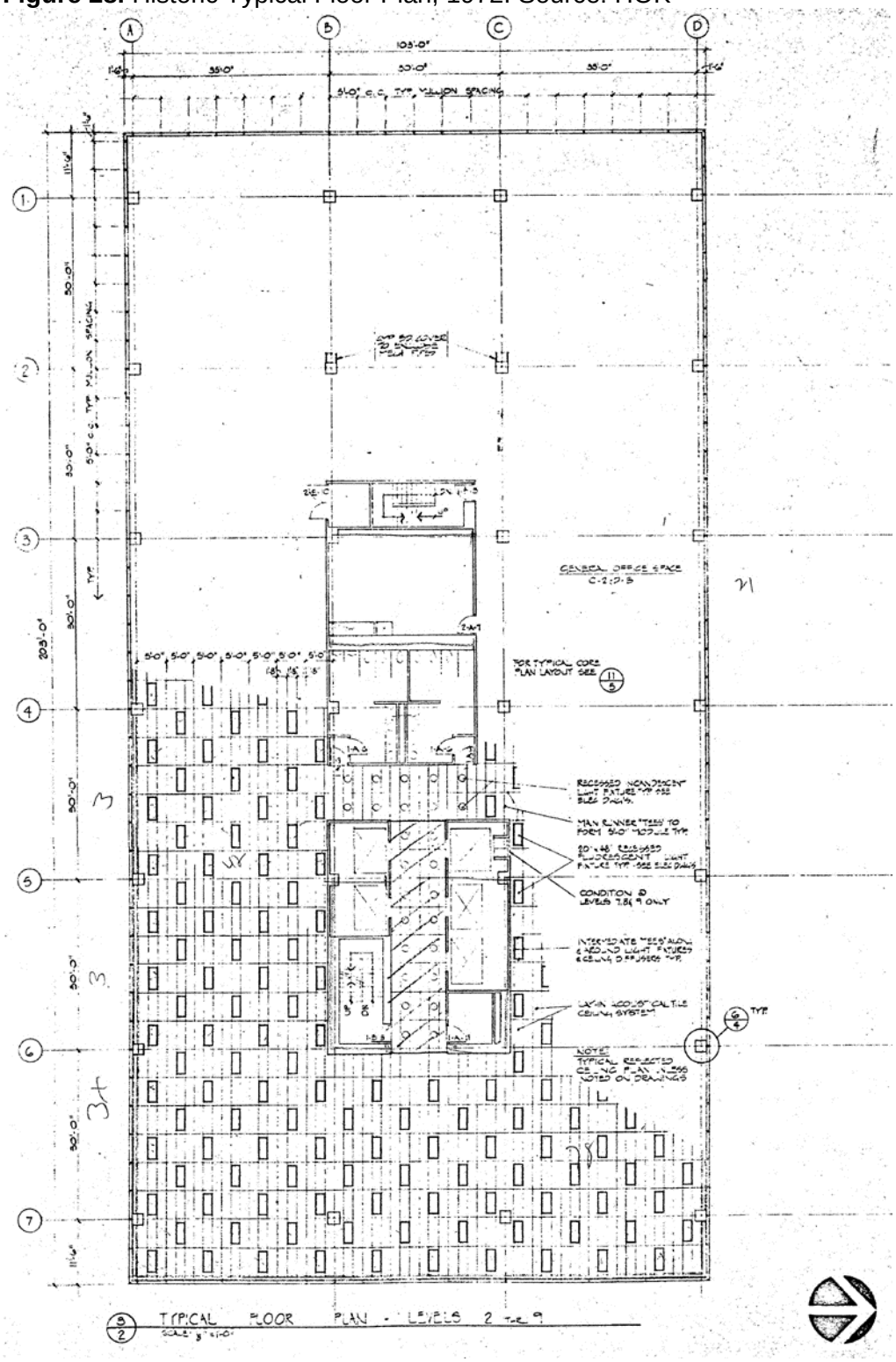

Figure 29. Photo map exterior and first floor. Not to scale. Current existing floorplan. Source: Clockwork Architecture + Design.

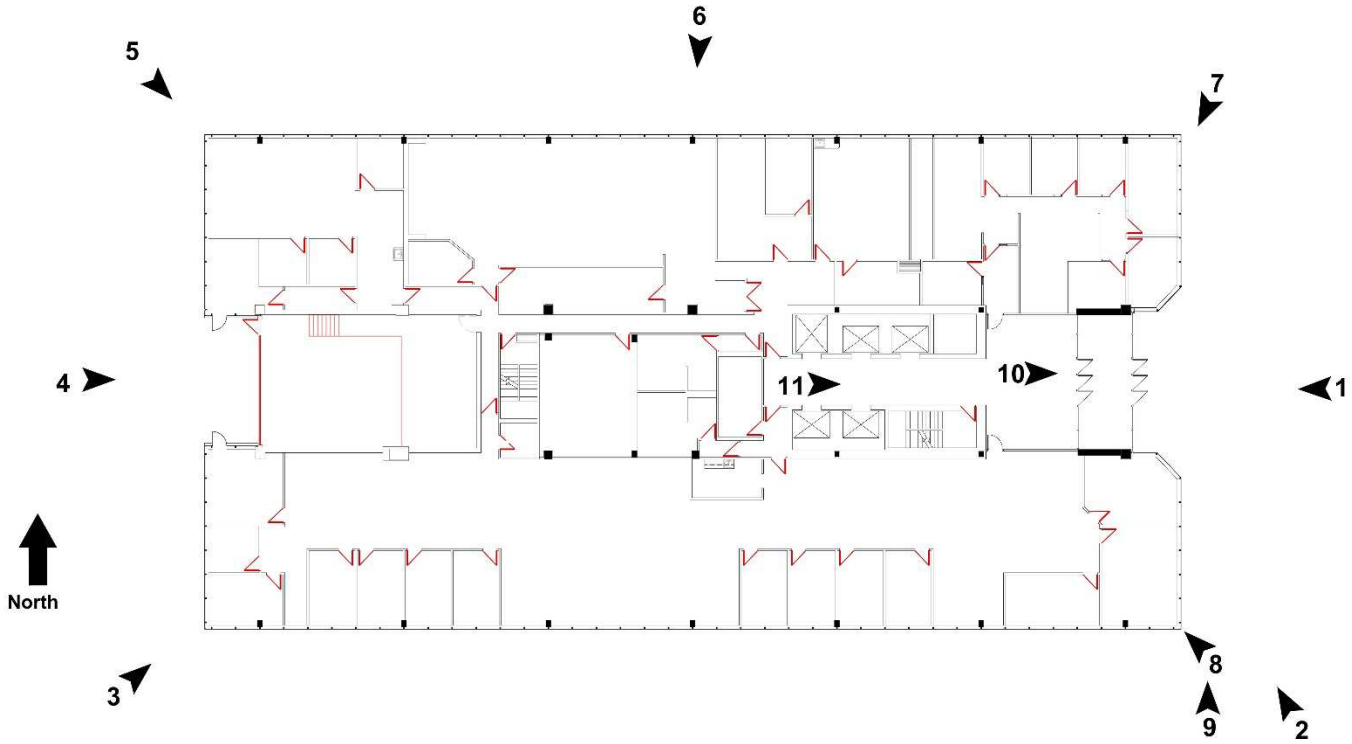

Figure 30. Photo map typical floor plan. Not to scale. Current existing floorplan. Source: Clockwork Architecture + Design.

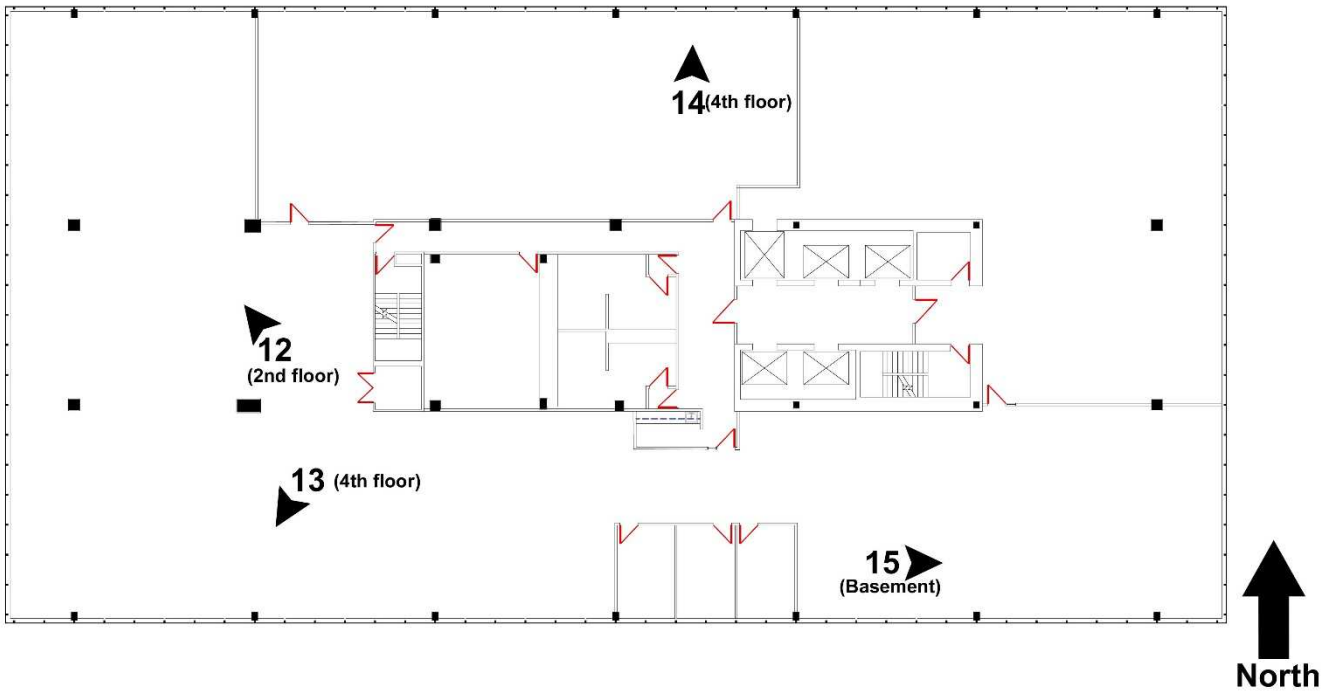

Figure 31. Photo map storage building. Not to scale. Current existing floorplan. Source: Clockwork Architecture + Design.

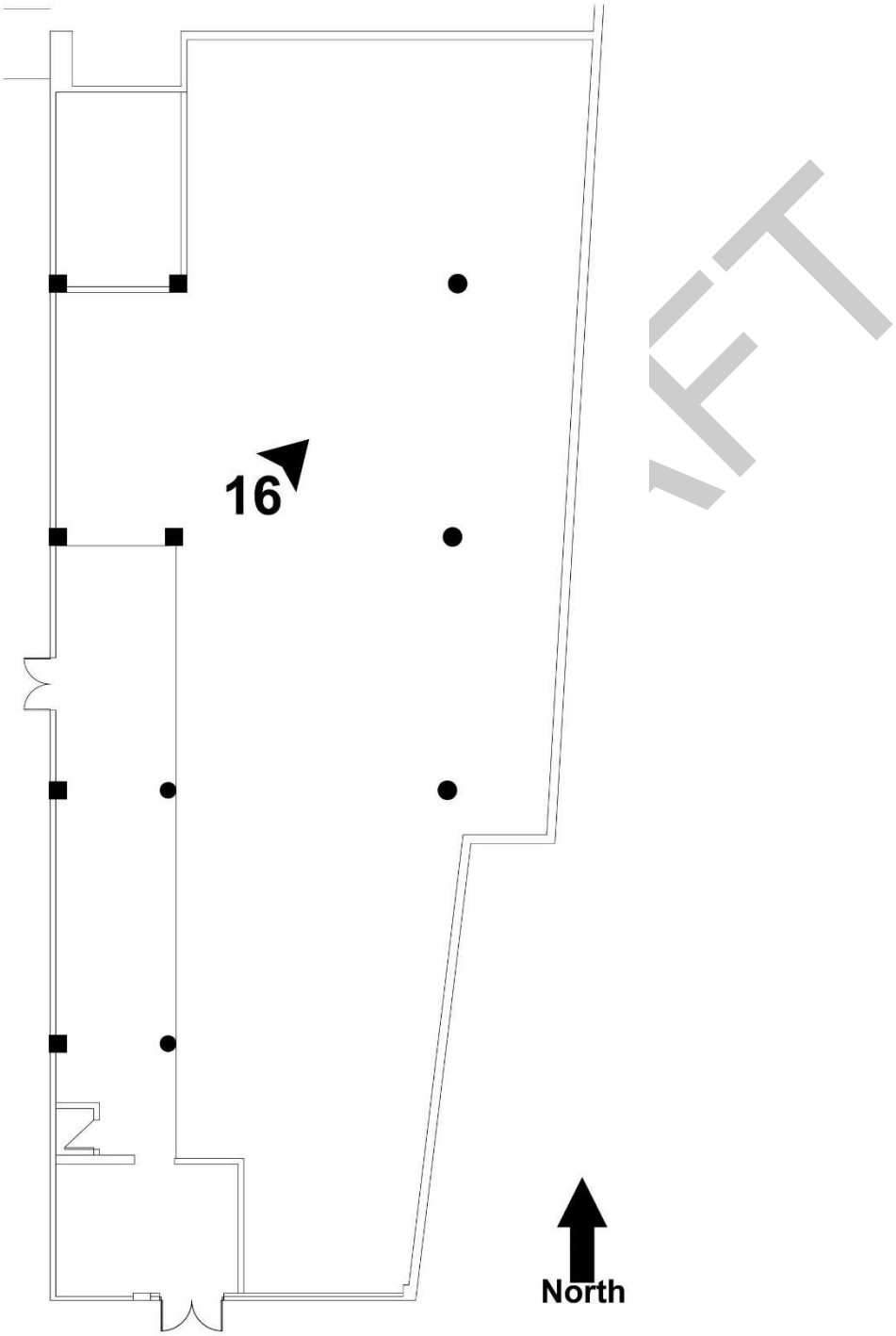

Figure 32. Photo map, plaza and pedestrian walkway. Source: Google Maps, 2016.

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Executive Plaza Building
720 Main Street

ONE WAY
Main

BALTIMORE AV

Jeep
WBZ•X6H
AC7•H58
PF7•M8N

North Loop

PL
PL
PL
PL

EXIT