

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.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Downtowner Motor Inn Hotel and Bathhouse

Other names/site number: The Springs Hotel and Spa

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 135 Central Avenue

City or town: Hot Springs State: AR County: Garland

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X 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 X 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

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b><br/> <u>Arkansas Historic Preservation Program</u><br/> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p> | <p>_____<br/> <b>Date</b></p> |
|---|-------------------------------|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> |  |
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>                                     | <p>_____<br/> <b>Date</b></p>  |
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Title :</b></p>   | <p>_____<br/> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p> |

\_\_\_\_\_  
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**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

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| _____        | _____           | buildings  |
| _____        | _____           | sites      |
| _____        | _____           | structures |
| _____        | _____           | objects    |
| _____        | _____           | Total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Hotel

Commerce/Restaurant

Recreation & Culture/Bathhouse

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Hotel

Commerce/Restaurant

Recreation & Culture/Bathhouse

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

foundation: reinforced concrete;

walls: brick, glass, aluminum, concrete, stucco;

roof: flat asphalt build-up

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has

### Summary Paragraph

The ten story "Downtown Motor Inn Hotel and Bathhouse" is located in the Historic District on Central Avenue in Hot Springs, Arkansas (Hot Springs National Park). The Modern Style structure, unique in Hot Springs, uses the national hot springs for its spa.

The building's exterior is primarily of brick, glass, concrete and aluminum following the precepts of Modern Architecture in its composition. The façade, although needing some maintenance, is unaltered since its opening in 1965. The "city scape" along Central Avenue is a typical mix of early to mid-20th century architecture including Classical Revival bath houses to various commercial brick structures. This Modern structure contrasts this back drop of more traditional architecture, but it respects the streetscape, in keeping with the Modern principals of urban design, by setting the hotel tower back from the street.

The two-story space housing the lobby and baths adjoins Central Avenue with a covered pedestrian area, adjacent to the sidewalk, which provides shading in summer and protection in winter. Modern architecture, such as this, is common in major cities but is unique and special in this relatively remote Arkansas setting.

"Modernism at Risk" (launched by the "World Monuments Watch" in 2006) is an advocacy and conservation program for Modern buildings around the world. The Modernistic style building in this location and from the post war, mid-twentieth century should be restored and preserved.

\_\_\_\_\_  
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### **Narrative Description**

The hotel was designed by noted architect Noland Blass, Jr. FAIA and Gold Medal winner of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The Modernist design reflects the progressive cultural and societal attitude of the client and architect to create a hotel and spa (bath house) in a design sensitive to mid-twentieth century post war Arkansas and America. Located in Hot Springs National Park, the design makes use of the natural hot springs for its bath house. The ten story structure, in accordance with Modernist design principles, is set back from Central Avenue to preserve open space and allow maximum sunlight into the streetscape. The Modernist design communicated that "bath houses" (spas) have a place in contemporary society. The promenade down Central Avenue (Bath House Row) is further enhanced by a covered open area along the front of the hotel with landscape planters and shaded areas for the respite of patrons from the sun or weather.

The Modernistic architecture also addressed environmental concerns that remain contemporary issues. Tinted glass was used for shading; balcony overhangs on each floor provided further shading from the solar gain of the sun, the brick masonry and exposed reinforced concrete structure allowed for "solar averaging." Redwood solar screens provided additional shading and ornamental visual relief from the more typically austere "International Style" of Modern architecture.

Continuity of the exterior design was brought into the interior. The redwood screens on the exterior were reflected in the use of redwood interior trim and accent ceilings. The openness of the glass exterior is complimented by aluminum and glass divisions in the lobby and gift shop. The form of the rooftop swimming pool is reflected in the perimeter form of the gift shop in the main lobby below it. The unornamented detailing of the interior spaces, except for the redwood, is consistent with the Modernist design.

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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.
- 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.)

- 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
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

**Period of Significance**

1963-1965

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1963-1965: Constructed

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Wheatley, Hill A. (Local)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Howard Eichenbaum

Noland Blass

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Downtowner Motor Inn Hotel and Bathhouse is being nominated under the Criteria A-C.

Under **Criterion A** with local significance as a remnant of the bathing culture that was significant in the development of Hot Springs. It is one of two remaining hotels in the Hot Springs Downtown Historic District that still have operating bathhouses.

Under **Criterion B**, the Downtowner is associated with two people that important to the area. Hill Wheatley played a critical role in the development of the Hot Springs Historic District by developing and owning/operating 36 out of the 60 properties in downtown Hot Springs, and was committed to the preservation of its history. Howard Eichenbaum was a nationally recognized architect who was instrumental in establishing the Arkansas division of the American Institute of Architects and was the first architect in Arkansas to be elevated to the honorary fellowship status. Noland Blass Jr. was elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, one of the highest honors in the profession; served two terms as president of the Arkansas Chapter and received the chapter's Gold Medal

Under **Criterion C** was the first Moderne/ International Style high-rise built in the Hot Springs Historic District. This is the first modern hotel built to serve the tourism demands and is one of only a few multi-story Moderne style buildings remaining in the Hot Springs area.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Hot Springs sits at the base of the Ouachita Mountains southwest of the Arkansas state capitol of Little Rock. The water from the hot springs began to be known for having medicinal qualities and attracted visitors from all over the region. It developed into a well-known resort nicknamed "The American Spa". In 1830, the first bathhouses were constructed in Hot Springs. The area thrived on containing and distributing the heated waters in therapeutic bathhouses. By the 1870s Hot Springs was nationally advertised as "The Nation's Health Sanitarium".



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Bathhouse Row (NR 11-13-1974) along Central Avenue became the centerpiece of bathing culture in Hot Springs. The baths faded as medical treatment with the advent of modern medical science, but people still came by the thousands for relaxation.

The Central Avenue Historic District (NR 6/25/85) possesses one of Arkansas' richest collections of historic commercial buildings. Ranging in date from 1886 to 1970, the structures found along Central Avenue in downtown Hot Springs reflect the growth of this town as it became Arkansas' most significant resort community. Historically, Central Avenue offered a wide variety of hotels, stores, restaurants and office buildings, all constructed to serve the needs of the visitors to Bathhouse Row. As the area became more popular, the bathhouses and hotels became more lavish to cater to their wealthy clientele.

As visitors increased, new hotels and boarding houses replaced the smaller and less sophisticated of the previous decades. Several important hotels were constructed during the latter part of the nineteenth century that attempted to surpass the quality of earlier establishments thus perpetuating continued competition among the hotels.

From its earliest days, the strength of the downtown business area in Hot Springs was deeply rooted in its accommodations for the tourists who visited. Local entrepreneur, Hill Wheatley, knew the value of the real estate along Central Avenue in the downtown area, and he spent his life investing in and developing this area.

Wheatley, a grade-school dropout, worked various jobs and saved his hard-earned wages in hopes of eventually realizing his dream to be a real estate tycoon. It was a big dream for a young man with little education. He was ambitious and frugal, and often bragged that he could squeeze a nickel until the buffalo sat down.

A favorite Wheatley adage was, "There only one thing that they will never make any more of, and that is land." He had a habit of putting his name on every building that he owned, and had a practice of rarely selling any property he bought. He particularly loved buying real estate in downtown Hot Springs, and was dedicated to preserving the history of the city he called home. Many downtown merchants credit Hill Wheatley with saving at least 10 historic buildings from demolition. Wheatley and downtown Hot Springs became one of the same, with Hill Wheatley Enterprises, Inc. owning 36 of the 60 properties in the Hot Springs Historic District.

In 1963, Mr. Wheatley began construction on the 10-story **Downtowner Motor Inn & Bath House**, formerly the Virginia Apartments and Boarding House as well as a Greek Confectioner. When the Downtowner opened its doors in 1965, it delighted its visitors with luxurious furnishings, fine dining, a bathhouse where they could enjoy bathing in the thermal water from

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the hot springs. Mr. Wheatley paid attention to every detail of the new hotel but especially those of the 9,000 square foot penthouse that spanned the entire 10<sup>th</sup> floor which was originally used for card rooms until 1967 then it would be his family's home.

The Downtowner is a good example of Moderne/ International Style, one of only a few remaining multi-storied buildings with this style in Hot Springs. A full service bathhouse is located on the second floor with thermal water being pumped from the hot springs of the National Park. Floors 3-9 serve as hotel rooms while the 10<sup>th</sup> floor is the penthouse.

The Downtowner was designed by nationally known architects Howard Eichenbaum and Frank Erhart from Little Rock. Mr. Eichenbaum was played a pivotal role in establishing the Arkansas division of the American Institute of Architects, and was the first architect in Arkansas to be elevated to the honorary fellowship status. Young architects in the state aspire to achieve such feats as Erhart and Eichenbaum, and compete each year to win a memorial scholarship award through the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The Downtowner project was completed in 1965 during the final years of their partnership. Mr. Eichenbaum died suddenly in 1973, and Mr. Erhart retired soon after. Noland Blass was known for his passion for art and how he loved to inject art into architecture. Blass was elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, one of the highest honors in the profession; served two terms as president of the Arkansas Chapter and received the chapter's Gold Medal; was a founding member and past president of the chapter's Educational Endowment Fund; served on the University of Arkansas School of Architecture Advisory Board, and on the Cornell University College of Architecture Art Planning and Advisory Council.

George Wildgen, former executive director of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, described him as "probably the most versatilely gifted" architect in the market. "Blass was one of the first, if not the first, to incorporate sculpture into the design of the building."

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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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:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** \_\_\_\_\_

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: \_\_\_\_\_  
organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number: \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip code: \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

**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.

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**Photo Log**

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:            State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

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

1 of :

**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 100 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.





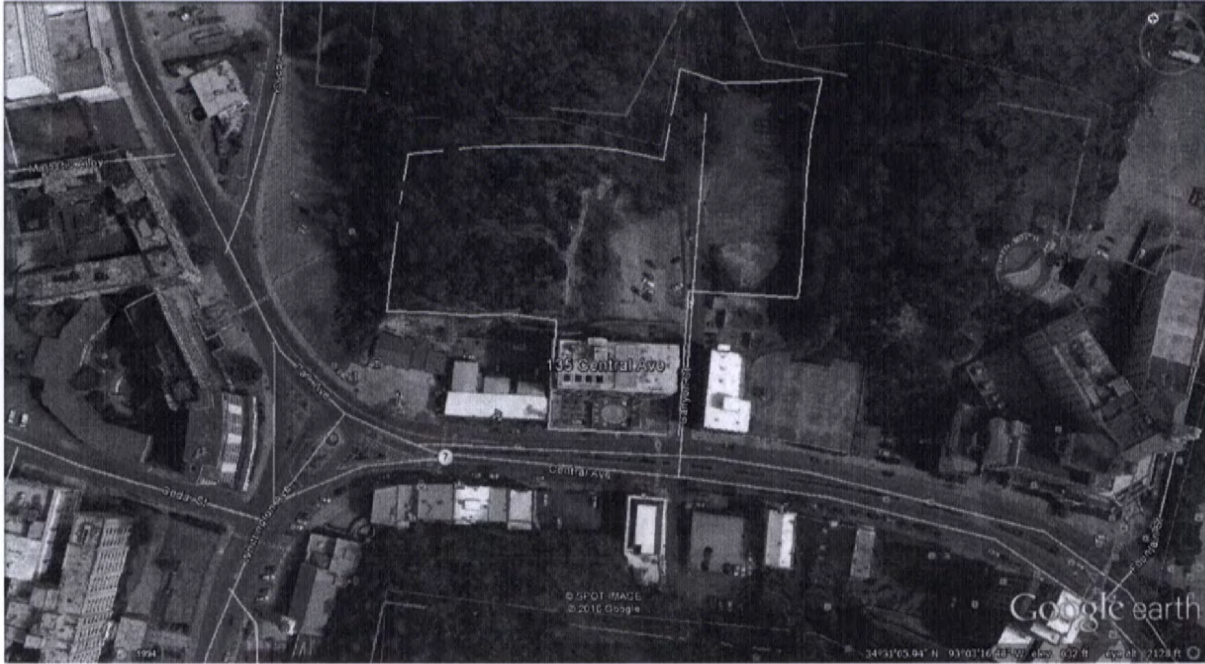




THE SPRINGS  
HOTEL & SPA

THE SPRINGS  
HOTEL & SPA

**Downtown Motor Inn Hotel and Bathhouse Determination of Eligibility**



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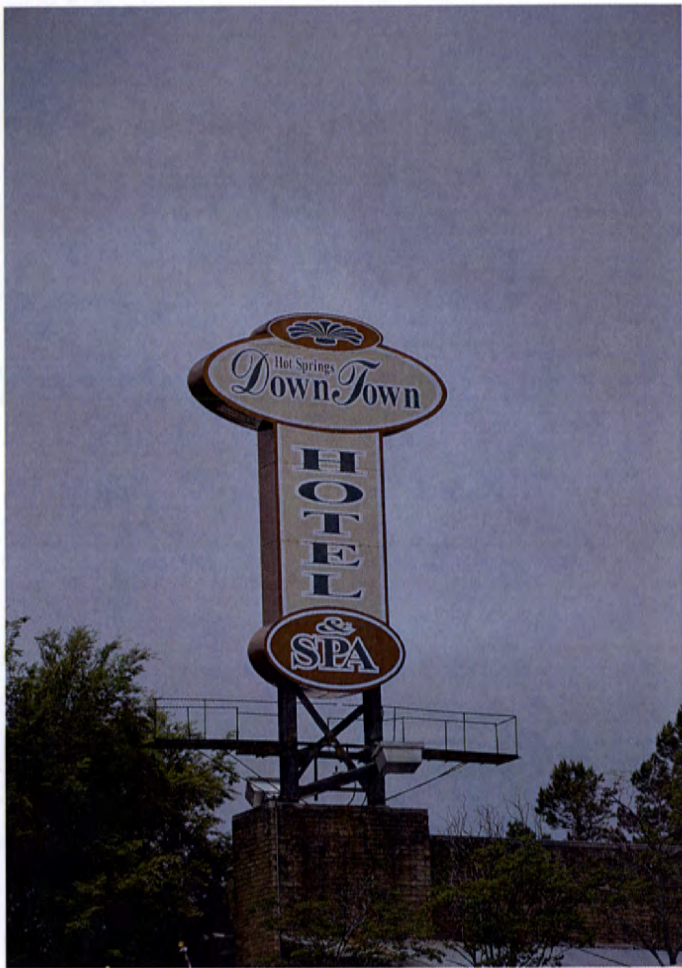


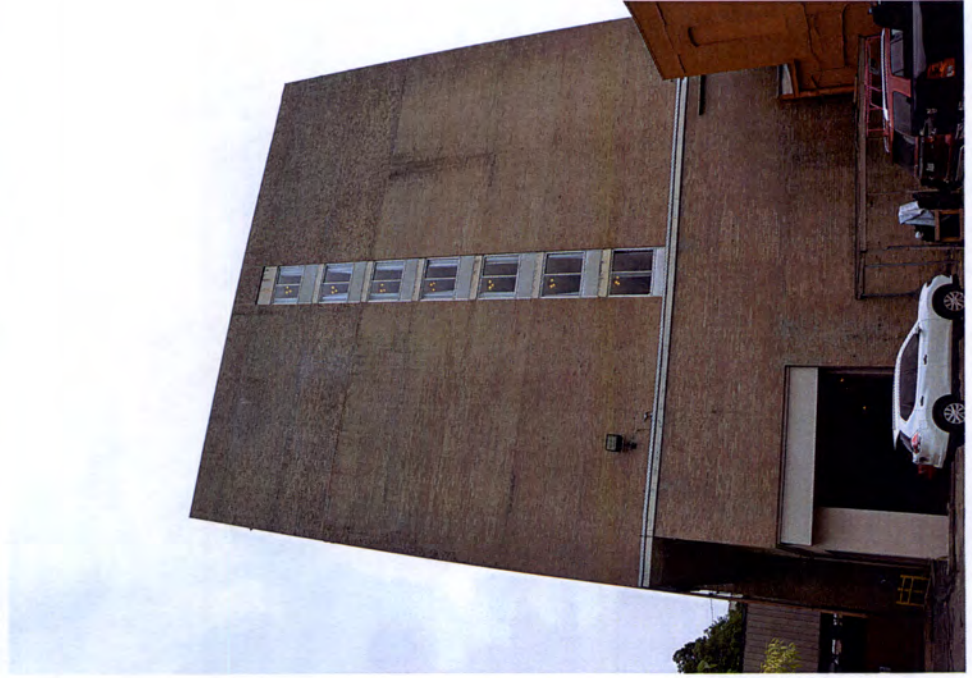


















  
NO PARKING  
VIOLATORS WILL BE  
TOWED AWAY  
AT OWNER'S RISK

**PARKING**  
