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New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

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23 August 2011

Edward A. Diana
Orange County Executive
255 Main Street
Goshen, New York 10924

RE: Orange County Government Center
Goshen, Orange County

Dear Mr. Diana:

On December 18, 2010, the Paul Rudolph Foundation submitted to the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) a request to evaluate the Orange County Government Center in order to determine whether or not the building was eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Based on the information provided, it is the opinion of the SHPO that that the building meets the criteria for listing on the registers. I have enclosed a copy of the evaluation for your records.

Properties that meet the criteria for registers listing receive a measure of protection from state and federal agency undertakings; however, they are not eligible for potential benefits. Not only is listing on the registers a prestigious honor, but it brings with it economic incentives. Owners of historic commercial properties listed in the National Register, for example, may qualify for a preservation tax credit. Non-profit owners and municipalities that own listed properties are eligible to apply for New York State historic preservation grants.

I have enclosed some literature on the State and National Registers of Historic Places that you may find helpful. If you have any questions about this determination, please contact me at 237.8643 x 3261 or Bill Krattinger, our National Register representative for Orange County, at x 3265.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office

cc: Sean Khorsandi and Dan Webre, Co-Directors, Paul Rudolph Foundation
Cornelia Wendall Bush, Orange County Historian
Erin Tobin, Preservation League of New York State

Orange County Government Center

Significance

The Orange County Government Center is exceptionally significant as an outstanding example of Modern architecture in the small village of Goshen. Commissioned and built between 1963 and 1971, the building was designed by nationally renowned architect Paul Rudolph and is a significant example of his mature, large-scale expressionistic work.

The Orange County Board of Supervisors began consideration of a new county office building as early as 1962, when the board authorized a building committee to begin interviewing architects. In May 1965, the committee recommended that the county employ the firm of Paul Rudolf and Peter Barbone, of New Haven, Connecticut, to design the new building, which was to be paid for by municipal bonds. Six months later, in January 1966, the architects presented preliminary sketches to the board, and the following month the board approved preliminary plans and authorized that bids be let.¹

The design was locally controversial even before it was approved, and at least one member of the board, although noting that he favored construction, requested that the design be "toned down a little."² Another member said he believed the design was "ultra," but also indicated his support, while a third said his first reaction was to "run for the hills" but now believed that it will be one of Goshen's nicest. Other board members questioned the proposed \$4.6 million cost. Nevertheless, the board was united and optimistic in its support for the building, voting 31 to 4 in favor of Rudolph's preliminary design. After design approval, Rudolf promised to work closely with the county to refine it.³ In December 1967, the county employed Middletown architect George Bagge as an assistant project inspector to monitor the day to day details of construction.⁴ The building was dedicated in October 1970.

It has been said that the new county building was intended to symbolize the county's transition from a centuries old system of system of government by individual town supervisors to an organized and unified county-wide government administered by a county executive; however, the government center was actually planned prior to the transition and had to be altered during construction to provide space for the new county executive and his staff.⁵ Nevertheless, the building, which incorporated space for all three branches of local government, was a fitting reflection of the county's progressive thinking and modernization efforts during this era.

Paul Rudolph (1918-1997) was a graduate of the Harvard Architecture School, where he studied under the pioneering German modern architect Walter Gropius. In 1957 Rudolph

¹ Orange County Board of Supervisors, Regular Session, 13 July 1962, 13 July 1962, 14 May 1965, 11 February 1966, 14 July 1966.

² Orange County Board of Supervisors, Regular Session, 11 February 1966.

³ "County Center: Rudolph's Interpretation of Government" (*Goshen Sunday Record*, 11 October 1970).

⁴ Orange County Board of Supervisors, Regular Session, 7 December 1967

⁵ Orange County adopted a new character in 1968, and the first county executive and legislature elected under the new plan took office in January 1970.

process. In later commissions, such as the Orange County Government Center, Rudolph developed a number of different precast concrete block types to achieve a similar look in a more economical way. For example, though pre-cast concrete blocks were used, they were cast in fluted forms with exposed aggregate to produce complexity and variety of surface.

In form, the Orange County complex consists of a series of stacked “boxes” of varying sizes, each suggesting an interior room. On the north and south elevations, each box has a floor to ceiling single-pane fixed window. The north-south alignment of the complex, the courtyard, and the arrangement of boxes all gave Rudolph an ability to control light and shadow and to design memorable interior spaces, which was one of the architect’s primary goals. Rudolph thought of architecture as “consciously forming enclosed voids to accommodate human beings in the totality of their psychic and physical life and their various pursuits and intentions.”⁸

Rudolph’s later work exemplifies the late Modern period, as some architects turned away from the corporate International style that had dominated the 1950s. In reaction to what they perceived as abstract and formulaic glass boxes (or goldfish bowls, as Rudolph termed them), architects such as LeCorbusier, Marcel Breuer, and Rudolph designed sculptural, expressionistic structures that aimed for a richer expression of form and materials, a more direct engagement with site, and were designed to meet the specific purpose of the building. As Rudolph said, ‘Our commitment to individualism is partially a reaction to the growing conformity in the 20th century....There are too many problems crying for solutions for there to be a universal outlook.’⁹

The Orange County Government Center is an excellent example of Rudolph’s work of this period. In terms of context, the building was carefully sited away from the tightly built up streetscape of the central business district and surrounded by a large, open parcel. It was modestly scaled, at three stories, and divided into three components, which both met the functional requirement of the client and diminished the effect of its massive size. As seen from the road, the complex appears modest in scale and similar in size and scale to the surrounding buildings. The cast in place concrete form is both simple and complex, relying on a regular arrangement of columns and a variety of cantilevered beams. All mechanical systems have been carefully hidden so that nothing detracts from the sculptural qualities of the form. Interior spaces are complex and flowing from one level to another. The entire building shows the careful integration of form, structure and materials that marks Rudolph’s best and most well known work from this period.

⁸ in Monk.

⁹ Paul Rudolph, “Rudolph,” *Perspecta* 7(1961 ?) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566866> (5.24.11)

was chosen as dean of the School of Architecture at Yale. Following his tenure at Yale he returned to private practice, which he carried on until his death. His earliest works in private practice were single family houses in Florida, and it was not until the mid-1950s that he received his first large-scale commissions. In 1958, Rudolph, while serving as department chair, was asked to design Yale University's new architecture and art building. Completed in 1964, Yale Art and Architecture Building marked the transition to Rudolph's mature period and is considered to be one of his seminal works. Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, Rudolph was one of the most popular and influential architects in America and he designed a number of his most important works. This group, which includes the Endo Laboratories, the research facilities for IBM, the Boston Government Service Center, the Orange County Government Center, the Southeastern Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Burroughs Wellcome Headquarters, the high density apartments at Tracey Towers, and the Daiei offices in Nagoya, Japan, reflects Rudolph's fully formed Late Modernist aesthetic, in which he used precast concrete to create sculptural, "elegantly proportioned public spaces" that were carefully integrated into their environments.⁶

The Orange County Government Center was constructed on a twenty-four-acre parcel at the north end of Main Street, on the outskirts of the village's eighteenth and nineteenth century business district. The building is set back from the street, on a large, open lot, and the rolling front lawn is planted with trees. Large-scale parking lots are located south and east of the building, while a new court building abuts the government center on the north. The new building replaced the courthouse in the Rudolph complex functionally but not physically and did not compromise the integrity of the government center.

The government center is composed of three interconnected buildings, each three-stories tall, that enclose a central, landscaped courtyard. The buildings were intended to house all three branches of local government, with courts for adults and juveniles occupying the north and west wings and the executive and legislative offices in the south wing. The courtyard was an integral component of the design, almost a fourth room, and was the location of the entrances to each building. A large cantilevered porch defines the east side of the courtyard, but rows of terraced steps in front of the porch provide a clear approach for visitors.

The complex was constructed with a poured, reinforced concrete frame of regularly spaced columns and wide cantilevered beams. Its exterior features a rough textured concrete similar to the one Rudolph developed for the Art and Architecture Building at Yale. At Yale, this finish was achieved by pouring the concrete into corrugated forms and then breaking the ridged surface with a hammer to expose the aggregate. The result was a low-relief decorative surface that was intended to catch the light and soften the effect of the large concrete mass.⁷ Because of the prohibitive cost of the hand-crafted

⁶ Tony Monk, "Paul Rudolph: The Committed Late-Modernist," *The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (n.p.: John Wiley and Sons, 1999) reproduced at Paul Rudolph Foundation website <http://www.paulrudolph.org/biography.html> (5.25.11)

⁷ Timothy M. Rohan, "Rendering the Surface: Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale," *Grey Room* 1 (Autumn, 2000), 85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1262552> (5.24.11)