

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: Placer County Administrative Center **DRAFT**

Other names/site number: The Domes

Name of related multiple property listing:

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: 175 Fulweiler Ave

City or town: Auburn State: CA County: Placer

Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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 \_\_\_ 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:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

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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

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#### 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

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Geodesic Dome

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

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Concrete

Roof: Aluminum, Steel

Walls: Concrete, Steel, Glass

### 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 historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Placer County Administrative Center is located at 175 Fulweiler Avenue in Auburn, California. It is set in a mid-century mixed residential, office and commercial area. The 25,000 square foot administrative center was constructed in 1966 as a single story building comprised of five hexagonal Temcor gold anodized geodesic domes arranged in a “honey comb” plan consisting of a central dome flanked by two domes to the west and two domes to the east. A sixth open framework dome structure adjoins the central dome to the south to delineate an entry plaza containing a central concrete planter and water fountain feature. With exception of the front entry, the general appearance of each facade is that the upper half is glazed with Profilite vertical channel glass following the arched dome roof contour and the lower half is concrete wall. The front entry facade is primarily glazed floor to ceiling with two steel framed glass single doors with sidelights being the only public entry points. The building has retained its historic integrity as a unique example of geodesic dome architecture in northern California and continues to function as Placer County’s official administrative center.

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### Narrative Description

The Placer County Administrative Center, colloquially referred to as “The Domes” was constructed in 1966 to serve as Placer County’s new administrative office building complex. The building, located at 175 Fulweiler Avenue, occupies the southeast portion of the County

owned fifteen acre parcel located at the intersection of Fulweiler Avenue and Nevada Street in Auburn, California. The parcel is located in a mixed residential and commercial area and is bounded by the Old Auburn Cemetery to the south, the Auburn Nevada Street train station to the west, Placer County Office of Education offices to the north and a small office building and residential homes to the east.

Located immediately to the west of the administrative center, at 145 Fulweiler Avenue, is the Placer County Human Resources Office building that was constructed on the county owned parcel in 1963. The Auburn Branch Library at 350 Nevada Street was constructed in 1973, and is located to the north of the administrative center. The shared entrance driveway to the administrative center and human resources building is located on Fulweiler Avenue. A war memorial sculpture designed and cast by Dr. Kenneth Fox was installed at this entrance in 1967. The administrative building is surrounded on all sides by various mature trees, bushes and lawn landscaping and by a hexagonal one-way drive with a double row of angled parking spaces around the building.

The 25,000 square foot administrative center consists of five 5,000 square foot hexagonal Temcor geodesic domes arranged in a "honey comb" plan of a central dome flanked by two domes to the west and two domes to the east. Each of the five domes is joined on three sides. A sixth open framework dome structure adjoins the central dome to the south to delineate an entry plaza with a central fountain water feature. The project architect was Robert B. Liles Architect and Engineer of San Francisco, with Hood Catham acting as a lead project architect. John N. Vogley also of San Francisco was the project's landscape architect. The project general contractor was Nimbus Construction of Fair Oaks, California.

The administrative center's five geodesic domes are made of .08 inch thick anodized aluminum panels. The panels were constructed at the Temcor facility in Torrance, California and shipped to Auburn by rail. When the panels arrived on site, they were riveted together like an airplane. The first dome took three weeks to assemble, but as construction crews became familiar with the geodesic construction, they could assemble one dome in about three days. A gold anodized finish for the domes was selected as a tribute to Placer County's gold rush history.

Along all facades, steel frame arches rest on reinforced Y-shaped concrete columns, with reinforced concrete footings. The Y-shaped columns are located at each exterior corner point of the hexagons to support the steel framework for the aluminum geodesic roof panels. Exterior roof drains are located atop each column.

Each hexagon side measures 42'-10" with the center radius also measuring 42'-10". Exterior walls have reinforced concrete footings and are composed of eight inch thick reinforced pre-cast concrete panels. Lower panel sections are smooth finished and upper panel sections are exposed aggregate. Along some walls, landscaped earthen berms and concrete planters obscure some or all of the smooth concrete wall panels around the domes. Large arched Profilite vertical channel glass windows occupy the top portion of each facade above the exposed aggregate wall panels. Fixed plate glass windows fill in some areas of the facade, usually at the building's corners where the Profilite windows end. The north facade has a centrally located narrow floor to ceiling fixed glass window. The fixed plate glass windows on the entry dome facade are wide, extend floor to ceiling, and flank the central Profilite windows. All entry and exit points are made of steel frame glass single doors. The main entry has a centrally located arched Profolite vertical channel glass window wall flanked on either side by glass single doors with sidelights. All other doors are single doors that are not open to the public.

Concrete steps lead up from the parking driveway off of Fulweiler Avenue to the concrete hexagonal entry plaza finished in a pattern of hexagon shapes. The plaza slab and all other exterior concrete slab is composed of four inch reinforced concrete on top of two inches of sand with a base of six inches of crushed rock. The entry plaza has a steel triangle dome framework which was originally covered with canvas shade cloth panels. Currently, shade cloth panels cover a portion of the framework by the entry doors. A hexagonal water fountain and planters constructed of exposed aggregate concrete occupy the center of the entry plaza. The entry plaza also has two concrete benches with hexagonal concrete side planters.

The interior of each dome has a span of seven feet of unobstructed floor space. There are no load bearing interior walls. With the exception of the board of Supervisors hearing room, all interior walls were constructed of two by four sixteen inch on center studs covered with 5/8 inch gypsum board finished with semi-gloss paint. The Supervisors hearing room has a narrow ceiling soffit around the perimeter of the room to which fluorescent lighting is mounted. The central area of the room is open to the domed ceiling above. The room has retained its original 1/4" brown stained plywood wall paneling that extends up to the ceiling soffit. The walls above the ceiling soffit are painted gypsum board extending up to the dome. The hearing room has also retained its original wood back and upholstered seat cushion theater style seats. Besides the hearing room, the entry reception area and two sets of restrooms, all other areas of the building are not open to the public.

Four inch thick insulation was glued to the under side of all dome panels. In a similar fashion to the Supervisors hearing room, each of the five domes have some areas with conventionally joisted dropped 5/8" gypsum board ceilings and soffits that are finished with paint. In these areas, the finished ceiling height is eight feet six inches. In other areas of each dome, ceilings are open to the dome above which were originally coated with a sprayed on asbestos insulation that also served as the ceiling finish. The asbestos insulation was removed in 1979-1980 and replaced with a sprayed on polyurethane foam covered with a layer of zonolite fireproofing agent.

The interior floor is constructed of reinforced four inch concrete slab on top of two inches of sand with a water proof membrane underlayment. Original floor finishes consisted primarily of asphalt tile, with carpeting in executive offices and ceramic tile in the restrooms. Currently, the floor is primarily carpeted throughout with new tile in the restrooms as they have been updated over time with modern fixtures and finishes.

Since its construction in 1966, very few changes have been made to the administrative center exterior. In 2001 the aluminum roof panels were resealed and a new coat of gold paint was applied. According to Dave Poston, Placer County Maintenance Supervisor at the time, original paint chip samples were used to match the original gold color as closely as possible. The exterior steel arch framework was also repainted to match the original burnt umber color scheme as well (Thomson, 2001, p. B2). On a few facades, it appears that small sections of the large Profilite vertical channel windows have been replaced with aluminum framed single hung or fixed windows. Changes to interior office partition walls have periodically occurred to accommodate different departments needs over the years. The flexibility of changing interior partition walls was a selling point of geodesic domes as they do not need any interior load bearing walls. Carpeting now covers most of the floor throughout and the bathrooms have been updated with new tile, fixtures and finishes.

Integrity

The Placer County Administrative Center possess a high degree of all seven aspects of historic integrity. The building location retains full integrity as it occupies its original location. The building retains integrity of its original design, materials and workmanship. The exterior of the building retains nearly all of its original design and appearance. There are no exterior additions and original paint colors were color matched when the building's domes and exterior steel frame and concrete columns were repainted. Interior changes include carpeting as the primary flooring finish and removal of the spray-on asbestos insulation that was replaced with a spray-on polyurethane ceiling finish retaining the original domed ceiling contour. Some interior walls have been removed while others have been constructed to accommodate office areas as needed over the years. However, these interior changes do not significantly change the original character, design and appearance of the building. The Board of Supervisors meeting chamber retains its original design layout, wood paneling and seating. The building also retains high integrity of setting and feeling. The area around the administrative center has changed little since its construction in 1966 and retains its mid-century mixed office, commercial and residential feel. The Old Auburn Cemetery still occupies the parcel immediately across the street to the south, bounded by Fulweiler Avenue, Nevada Street and Carson Avenue. Placer County offices still occupy the 1963 two-story conventional office building on the site immediately to the west of the administrative center and the site retains its mature landscaping. The administrative center retains full integrity of association as it continues to function as the official administrative home for the Placer County government as well as the county Board of Supervisors offices and meeting chamber.



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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

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT  
ARCHITECTURE

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**Period of Significance**

1966

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**Significant Dates**

1966

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

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**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

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**Architect/Builder**

Robert B. Liles/Temcor

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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 Placer County Administrative Center, constructed in 1966, meets National Register Criterion C as a unique example of geodesic dome architecture in northern California. It is the only example of a Temcor geodesic dome office complex in California and possibly in the United States. The construction and design of the building is directly associated with the notable inventor, engineer and architect Richard Buckminster Fuller, who popularized and vigorously promoted the geodesic dome for residential and commercial uses. The administrative center is a distinctive building contributing to Placer County history and continues to function as the administrative home for the county CEO, Board of Supervisors offices and meeting chamber.

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

The Placer County Administrative Center, constructed in 1966, is a unique example of geodesic dome architecture in northern California and the only example of a Temcor geodesic dome office complex in California, and possibly the United States (Temcor, 2004). The construction and design of the building is directly associated with the notable inventor, engineer, architect and designer Richard Buckminster Fuller who popularized and vigorously promoted the geodesic dome for residential and commercial uses.

### **Criterion C - Geodesic Dome Architecture**

The development of the geodesic dome falls into modernist architecture chronologically and philosophically. Despite that some architectural historians place the geodesic dome under the category of Populuxe architecture, the geodesic dome is essentially in a class by itself. In contrast to Populuxe, the geodesic dome is a pure expression of form and function and its purpose was not to embody society's fascination with space. Rather, geodesic construction design developed by Richard Buckminster Fuller works on the principle that the triangle is an inherently stable shape and that a triangular framework held together in tension enables the creation of structures that are lightweight but profoundly strong. This principle, when applied to spherical forms, encloses the maximum interior volume with the least amount of surface area thus resulting in significant material and cost savings. Unlike the Populuxe movement that fell out of favor by the mid-1960s, the practical benefits of geodesic construction promoted by Fuller helped develop its popularity in the 1960s and remains a relevant building type for architects and developers seeking to 'do more with less' (Griffiths, 2011). Fuller's 'do more with less' principle of economy is also not to be equated with International Style architecture and Mies van Der Rohe's 'less is more' philosophy which is primarily an aesthetic position (Gorman, 2005, pp. 34-35).

The career of Richard Buckminster Fuller, or "Bucky" as he was known by friends and colleagues was atypical. While Fuller briefly attended Harvard University in 1913 and 1914, he was not formally trained as an engineer nor an architect. Rather, Fuller was largely self-educated through his natural aptitude for studying design, engineering and math, as well as his work experience in industrial design, engineering and construction. During the 1920s and 1930s, Fuller had an interest in designing a sustainable, autonomous living single-family dwelling that could be mass-produced, compactly packaged and shipped by airplane throughout the world. At this time, his design and engineering work was more inspired by trees where a central trunk or mast would support circular or hexagonal floors by tension rather than compression (Gorman, 2005, pp. 34-37). Fuller's design interest and belief that technology and science should be applied to service the needs of humanity, including housing, education and resource management led to the development of his first notable design work, the Dymaxion House ("R. Buckminster Fuller Collection," n.d.).

The onset of World War II brought a demand for economical and easily deployed emergency shelters and the military turned to Fuller for a solution. During the war, the first Dymaxion-type housing units constructed were based on a mass-produced sheet metal grain bin developed by the Butler Manufacturing Company of Wichita, Kansas. The U.S. military contracted with Fuller and Butler to produce these units as low-cost, easy to assemble and disassemble temporary housing for troops. Fuller observed that the domed silo shape of these units created a heat-driven vortex that sucked cooler air downward if vented properly with an overhead vent and peripheral vents at the skirt. After World War II, Fuller modified the design of the Dymaxion House to

capitalize on this domed ventilation effect. The first Dymaxion House, dubbed the Dymaxion Dwelling Machine, was manufactured by Beech Aircraft in 1946 and constructed of aluminum-copper alloys typically used in aircraft construction, making it lightweight and inexpensive—a direct example of Fuller’s interest in using advanced technology to enhance people’s lives. Fuller intended to mass-produce the Dymaxion House; however, unresolved engineering challenges as well as investor and construction trade issues led Fuller to abandoned the project (Gorman, 2005, pp. 65, 70). The significance of the Dymaxion House is that it was the first conscious effort to develop an autonomous living building in the twentieth century with the novel use of aluminum construction which later led to the development of Fuller’s geodesic dome design (“Pioneer Theater-Auditorium,” 2005, §8 p. 10; “Buckminster Fuller’s Dymaxion,” 2014).

Despite that Fuller is often associated as the inventor of the geodesic dome, the Carl Zeiss Optical Works planetarium is considered to be the first geodesic structure constructed in Jena, Germany in 1922 but was dismantled by 1929. While Fuller may have seen images of this metal lattice dome that was covered with a thin coat of concrete in the September 1929 issue of *Popular Mechanics*, it was not until World War II and after that Fuller developed an interest in designing dome shaped structures (“Bucky Missed Geodesic Dome,” 2015).

After World War II, Fuller and his assistant, Don Richter, spent several years developing the design and calculations of the geodesic dome. The first designs and computations were tested at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in the summers of 1948 and 1949 with not much success. However, over the next few years, Fuller and Richter continued to refine the design resulting in revolutionary discoveries about balancing the forces of compression and tension in building. The first successful geodesic dome design was constructed in 1950 near Montreal, Canada with the assistance of Don Richter and another student, Jeffrey Lindsay. Fuller and his associates continued to refine the geodesic dome design that Fuller later patented (Gorman, 2005, pp. 106-108, 115). The development of the geodesic dome and resulting patent in 1954 dominated Fuller’s life and career until his death in 1983 (“Pioneer Theater-Auditorium,” 2005, §8 p. 11). In honor of Fuller’s contributions to science, engineering and architecture, the United States Post Office issued a commemorative stamp on July 12, 2004, the fiftieth anniversary of his geodesic dome patent (“R. Buckminster Fuller USPS Stamp,” n.d.).

The Ford Motor Company commissioned Buckminster Fuller to create the first commercial application of his geodesic dome in May 1953 as part of the company’s fiftieth anniversary celebration. The 90-foot span dome was constructed of an aluminum frame with a plastic skin as part of renovations to the Ford Rotunda building from the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair. The dome provided a lightweight covering to the central courtyard area of the Rotunda. The Rotunda became a major tourist attraction from 1953 to 1962 when the building was destroyed by a fire (“The Ford Rotunda,” n.d.).

A year later, Fuller submitted a cardboard dome shelter display for the 1954 Milan Triennale exhibition. The theme of the Triennale was “Life Between Artifact and Nature: Design and the Environmental Challenge” which matched Fuller’s interest in using the earth’s finite resources wisely while also meeting the needs of humanity. Fuller’s forty-two foot cardboard geodesic shelter embodied this theme as it could easily be shipped and assembled with the directions printed right on the cardboard, earning it the exhibition’s highest award, the Gran Premio. As a result, Fuller’s domes began to gain worldwide attention and public appeal (“Geodesic Domes,” n.d.). Fuller received contracts to construct geodesic domes for civilian and military uses including several trade fair pavilions and the ‘radomes’ to house the U.S. military Distant Early Warning (DEW) line radar station equipment (Gorman, 2005, pp. 125-126).

Fuller's patent also caught the attention of Henry Kaiser, owner of Kaiser Aluminum, who sought a license from Fuller to mass produce geodesic domes in his Oakland, California aluminum works. By 1957, Don Richter was employed as chief engineer and designer at Kaiser Aluminum to lead the company's production and sales of geodesic domes. The first commission for a Kaiser manufactured dome was in 1957 for the 'Hilton Dome' auditorium at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel in Waikiki, Honolulu, Hawaii. The 145-foot span Hilton Dome was erected in twenty-two hours and spurred tremendous publicity. That same year, Kaiser constructed geodesic domes as municipal buildings in Virginia Beach, Virginia and in Borger, Texas ("Pioneer Theater-Auditorium," 2005, §8 pp. 11-12).

By the spring of 1958, Kaiser Aluminum received over 12,000 inquiries and requests to construct domes for a wide variety of commercial uses, including the construction of the Citizens State Bank in Oklahoma City in 1958. While the 145-foot gold colored geodesic dome is credited as being the fifth geodesic dome constructed in the world and the first to be used as a bank, its revolutionary design was touted as the "Bank of Tomorrow." However, incorporating office uses and climate control proved to be challenging design issues for this structure. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, with Don Richter as head designer and engineer, Kaiser Aluminum continued constructing geodesic domes including a theater-in-the-round in Fort Worth, Texas and a number of Cinerama Theaters across the country ("Pioneer Theater-Auditorium," 2005, 8 pp. 11-12; "Citizens State Bank," n.d.).

In 1962, two years before the official establishment of his own corporation, Don Richter secured a contract to construct the Valley National Bank dome in Tempe, Arizona. Richter officially separated from Kaiser Aluminum in 1964 to co-found Temcor, with Buckminster Fuller serving on the company's board of directors until his death in 1983. Leveraging his experience with designing Kaiser domes, Richter's Temcor corporation specialized in the construction of geodesic domes for industrial and architectural applications ("Pioneer-Theater Auditorium," 2005, §8 p.13).

Besides the bank in Tempe, the Placer County Administrative Center complex was one of Temcor's earliest projects, and the only project to connect a series of geodesic domes into a single building. Other Temcor domes constructed before or in the same year as the Placer County Administrative Center include an amphitheater cover for Aquatarium Marine Attractions in St. Petersburg, Florida (1963), Central Catholic High School gymnasium in Clearwater, Florida (1966) and the Alaska Centennial Exposition Dome in Fairbanks, Alaska (1966). By 1967, Temcor constructed a total of six gold-anodized geodesic dome structures around the country with several more constructed throughout the 1970s (Temcor, 2004). Throughout his career as an assistant to Buckminster Fuller, and as chief engineer and designer at Kaiser Aluminum and at Temcor, Don Richter was responsible for the construction of more than 5,000 aluminum geodesic dome structures ("Pioneer Theater-Auditorium, 2005, §8 p. 13). It is through Don Richter's direct association as Buckminster Fuller's assistant in the development of the geodesic dome patent—and through Richter's association with Kaiser Aluminum's license to be the first to mass produce and market Fuller's geodesic dome—that the Placer County Administrative Center is a product directly related to Buckminster Fuller and his assistant Don Richter.

### **Placer County Administrative Center History**

For about one hundred years, 1860s-1970s, the fruit and timber industries were an economic mainstay for Placer County. As the county seat, Auburn serviced the surrounding rural farm and

timber communities. This dynamic began to change with the completion of Interstate 80 through Placer County in 1964 prompting Sacramento area commuters to move farther out into the country followed by the construction of suburban housing developments on former farm lands southwest of Auburn. Major industries were also attracted to locate southwest of Auburn in the environs of Roseville and Rocklin. Contemporary with the population, economic and development pattern changes the county was experiencing, the Placer County government embarked on a major change of its own by opting to move its administrative center out of the courthouse that had served as headquarters for the county government for over 115 years.

Since the establishment of Placer County on April 25, 1851 until 1966, the Placer County courthouse, located in the historic center of Auburn, had served as the official home for the Board of Supervisors and county administration. A newsman for the Auburn Journal once recalled that in 1940 the seat of the whole government was collected into the courthouse. While a new two-story sheriff and jail building was constructed in 1941, the Placer County Administrative Center, colloquially referred to as “The Domes,” was the first major county facility to be constructed since the courthouse was completed in 1898 (“The Placer County Courthouse,” n.d., pp. 13-16).

Although additional space needs of the courthouse were noted in a 1925 Placer County Grand Jury report, it was not until 1959 that the Board of Supervisors authorized a facility needs study by Louis J. Kroger and Associates of San Francisco. The study resulted in county acquisition of roughly twenty-two acres of vacant land at the corner of Fulweiler Avenue and Nevada Street, approximately one mile north of the courthouse, for a new administrative center. In 1963, a conventional two-story office building was constructed at the site to house County Health and Welfare staff at the cost of \$700,000 which left the county with limited funds to construct an administrative building to house the Supervisors and other county offices. Looking for affordable and timely construction options, the Board of Supervisors selected a Temcor geodesic dome as the solution to their needs. While time and cost efficiencies were paramount in selecting a geodesic dome for their new administrative center, county officials embraced that the new building would project a modern and positive image of the future for the county. Constructed in 1966, the new administrative building housed the county’s administrative, engineering and planning offices. (“The Placer County Courthouse,” n.d., p. 18; Holmes, 2015, p. A4).

After the purchase of the twenty-two acre Fulweiler site and the construction of the new county Health and Wellness office building, county officials grappled with finding options for much needed additional office space with limited funds. James E. Williams, the County Executive Officer at the time recalled that, “the county needed more room for staff, but did not have much money to spend on new buildings...there was no thought of borrowing money—we just had to find a way to build something in a hurry that was affordable” (Holmes, 2015, p. A4). Williams further recalled that his assistant, H.N. “Nick” Bishop was a student of Richard Buckminster Fuller and suggested that a geodesic dome may be the solution to their needs (“County Domes History,” 1999, p. 1).

Fuller’s student and assistant, Don L. Richter, founded the Temcor corporation in 1964 to primarily manufacture and erect clear-span domes with Fuller serving on the board of directors. In February 1965, Richter gave a presentation to county officials demonstrating how Temcor geodesic dome structures could function as the new county administrative center with an estimated cost of \$800,000. At the same time, the county was also considering constructing a standard multi-story administrative building (Carroll, 1965, p. 1). Executive Officer Williams recalls, “I kept an open mind listening to them, and eventually went to Tempe, Arizona to see

one of Fuller's Domes, a bank. Everything he'd done was considered to be good, so we decided to build Placer's Domes" ("County Domes History," 1999, p. 1). The bank in Tempe that Williams visited was the Valley National Bank geodesic dome building constructed in 1962 by Kaiser Aluminum, under license from Buckminster Fuller, with Don Richter as lead engineer for Kaiser ("Pioneer Theater-Auditorium," 2005, §8 p. 13).

Placer County administrative office space needs and function soon reached a dire tipping point. The Placer County Grand Jury County Government Building Committee reported that office space conditions and space needs for the county were a serious issue needing immediate attention. At their March 16, 1965 meeting, the committee noted, "urgency for action in providing up-to-date facilities for a county government currently working from a basic facility constructed in 1894, which was originally designed to serve a population of some 7,000; this population today more closely approximates 65,000." This committee also inspected offices of departments housed outside of the courthouse and found them to be "greatly overcrowded and inadequate for efficiency." At their May 10, 1965 committee meeting, the Grand Jury Building Committee urged the Supervisors to "proceed with the geodesic dome type buildings...selected primarily for reasons of speed in erection and economy of construction, being about \$100,000 less than a conventional one-story office building...[and] would eliminate about \$2,000.00 per month rental [of other facilities]." Unfortunately, construction of the new facility had not started by November 1965 to which the Grand Jury noted their frustration, but continued with their recommendation that the construction of the geodesic dome structures be expedited (Grand Jury Report, 1965, pp. 19-20).

Hood Chatham, of Robert B. Liles Architect & Engineer from San Francisco, acted as the administrative center lead architect. The original design was for a complex of eight 5,000-square-foot domes. When construction bids came in too high, the project was redesigned down to five domes instead of eight, dropping the cost estimate by approximately \$200,000. Nimbus Construction of Fair Oaks, California was selected as general contractor. County Executive James E. Williams reported that, "Five domes were chosen, rather than one large geodesic structure, for aesthetic reasons. The County wanted a form that would fit snugly into the rolling foothills of its gold rush country." Richter was particularly interested in this project for promotional purposes and as a possible prototype for other office complexes (Carroll, 1966, p. 1; Placer County Reports, 1966, p. 4; "County Domes History," 1999, p. 2).

The groundbreaking ceremony for the Placer County Administrative Center geodesic domes facility was held on January 6, 1966 with Richard Buckminster Fuller joining the county Board of Supervisors in turning the first spade of dirt with gold painted shovels (Placer County Reports, 1966, p. 4). Despite the project receiving regional and international attention by being presented at an architectural conference in London and entered for the Governor's Annual Design Award, local news reports indicate that the unusual design of the new administrative center was a point of controversy in the community (Placer County Reports, 1966, pp. 2, 4). An editorial appeared in the Auburn Journal describing the groundbreaking a "bizarre event" and that the Board of Supervisors approved the controversial project after a "masterful job of pitchmanship by Assistant Executive Officer Nick Bishop" (Carroll, 1966, p. 1).

Construction progressed quickly and ten months later, a news article announced the building's October 29, 1966 dedication describing the project as a "Buck Rogersish complex" that was either loved or loathed and another article referred to the new administrative center as "one of the most radically designed public structures in northern California" ("Domed Building," 1966, p. 1; "Dome Dedication," 1966, p. 5). Despite the criticism, Placer County officials, including Placer County District 5 Supervisor William Briner, were supportive with selecting the unconventional

building type. Briner recalled that the domes would provide a “good building at a reasonable price,” and that “we wanted something innovative and a little creative, and we thought it would be good for Placer County” (Miller-Clark, 2008, p. A12).

While newspaper coverage of the building’s construction was brief, the entire October 1966 issue of Placer County Reports, a publication of the Placer County Board of Supervisors, was dedicated to the project. Articles touted the significance of R. Buckminster Fuller, Donald L. Richter, Temcor, the development of geodesic domes around the world, and the construction of the administrative center as a string of important geodesic dome “firsts”—the first to be built in northern California, the first to be used by a county government in the United States, the first to be erected by a hand portable tower, and the first time geodesic domes had been clustered. The report also included information about the construction and cost of the administrative center. Each .08 inch thick anodized aluminum dome was prefabricated at the Temcor factory in Torrance, California and shipped to Auburn by rail and assembled on site (pp. 1-4). The total project cost, including site work and landscaping was \$689,648.47 equaling \$25.50 per square foot versus \$60 per square foot for standard construction as reported by Mr. Williams. A diagram of the office space floor plan was also printed showing the location of the following offices: engineering, central services, planning, public works, purchasing, personnel, Placer County Water Agency, county executive, county counsel, clerk to the Board of Supervisors and the Supervisor’s hearing room (“County Domes History,” 1999, pp. 3-4).

The October 29, 1966 Minutes of the Board of Supervisors outlined the building dedication program of events as well as printed the text of the dedication address given by Board Chairman Will Jones. In his address, Mr. Jones emphasized that the old courthouse should “remain as a constant reminder of the very ideals upon which our country was founded,” but that the new building represents “a new start” dedicated to the people of Placer County where “we shall begin to make the history of this building and the government that will be associated with our times” (pp. 231-232).

The Placer County Board of Supervisors held their first meeting in the newly completed building on November 1, 1966 where a resolution of accolades from the Marin County Board of Supervisors was received. The resolution offered congratulations to Placer County for the construction of the new administrative building “designed by world renowned architect, engineer and teacher Richard Buckminster Fuller,” which should serve “as a source of inspiration to other public agencies and create a standard of excellence” not unlike their own renowned Frank Lloyd Wright designed civic center.

In 1968, the Placer County Grand Jury evaluated the performance of the new administrative center building and presented the following findings and recommendations in their final report, “The Domes are of unusual construction and shape. Sometimes these new methods of construction present unforeseen problems. The roof, being constructed of aluminum pieces over an aluminum frame, offers many expansion and contraction problems. Also, the problem of condensation and a water soluble acoustic sprayed on the inside could prove to be troublesome. The high ceilings make heating and cooling more expensive and inefficient (as is the case in the Courthouse). The dome, however, does provide a very flexible building where all the inside partitions can be removed, leaving a clear floor space. That feature will allow the County to remodel these buildings without major costs. The 1965 Grand Jury was advised that these Domes would be less expensive than conventional construction and would be faster to build. This has not proved to be completely true. We recommend that no further geodesic domes be built until (1) a master plan be adopted, and (2) all the problems encountered with the existing Domes have been evaluated” (Placer County Grand Jury Final Report, 1968, p. 5).



In 1971, Placer County was negotiating acquisition of the DeWitt State Hospital property from the State for \$1.00, essentially rendering construction of additional new office space for the county unnecessary (“County Domes History,” 1999, p. 1; Thomson, 2001, pp. B1-B2). Over the next ten years, offices in the courthouse gradually shifted to the DeWitt Center and by 1980, the courthouse was completely vacant. At that time, the Placer County Administrative Center housed the Board of Supervisors offices and meeting chamber, the office of the auditor, tax collector and assessor (“The Placer County Courthouse,” n.d., pp. 18-19). Since its construction in 1966, the administrative center has undergone interior remodeling as foreshadowed in the 1968 Grand Jury Report, but there have been no significant changes to the building’s exterior besides routine maintenance (Thomson, 2001, p. B2; Miller-Carl, 2008, p. A12).

At present, the administrative center continues to house the Board of Supervisors offices and meeting chamber, the Clerk of the Board, the County Executive Offices, and County Counsel offices. “The Domes” are a distinctive building contributing to the county’s history and reflect a distinctive shift in the county’s population, economic and development patterns.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Thomson, Gus. "Global Vision: Buckminster Fuller's Domes in Auburn Stand the Test of Time." Auburn Journal 15 July 2001, pp. B1-B2. Print.

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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):** \_\_\_\_\_

10.

**Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 2.68 acres

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: 38°54'16.9"N                      Longitude: 121°04'50.7"W
- 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.)

The boundary to the Placer County Administrative Center property is the hexagonal shaped paved drive with a double row of angled parking spaces that surrounds the building.

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

This boundary was selected because the hexagonal drive with parking spaces separates the building and property from adjacent buildings.

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Ramona Brockman, MURP  
organization: Placer County Historical Foundation  
street & number: PO Box 3212  
city or town: Auburn state: CA zip code: 95604  
e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

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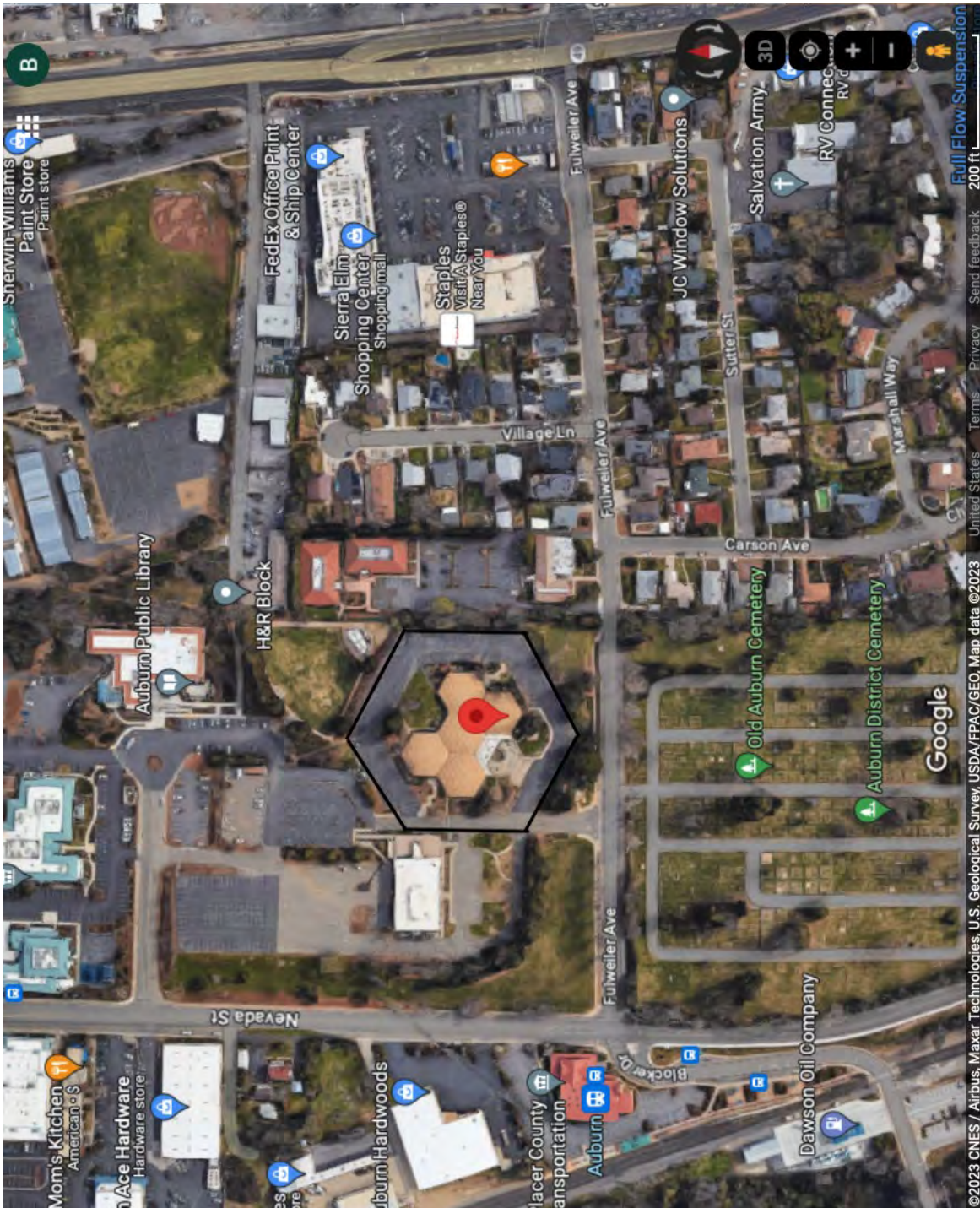
**Additional Documentation**

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.)

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State



**Placer County Administrative Center**  
**175 Fulweiler Ave, Auburn, CA**



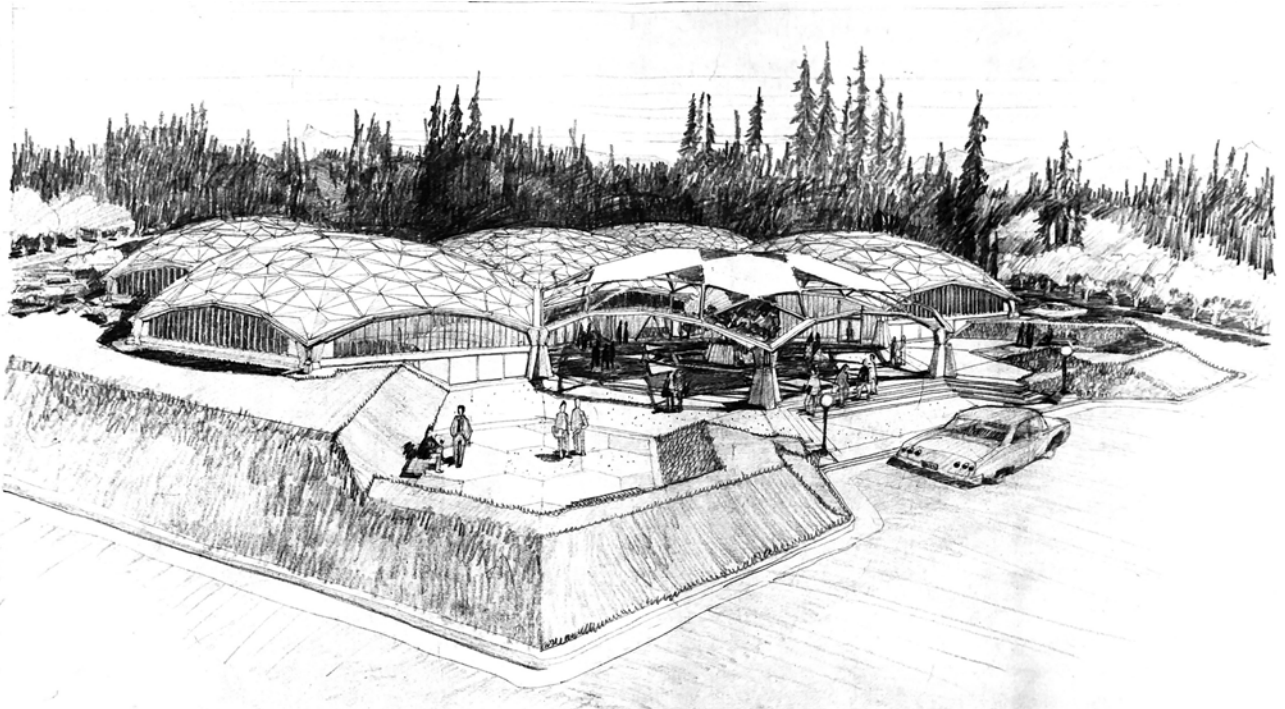
Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

**Latitude: 38°54'16.9"N      Longitude: 121°04'50.7"W**

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State



**PLACER COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING**

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

GEORGE LAMBERT  
ROBERT RADOVICH  
WILL JONES  
FRANK PAOLI  
WILLIAM S BRINER

**COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

COUNTY COUNSEL  
DIR. DEPT. PUBLIC WORKS  
LIAISON OFFICER

**J. E. WILLIAMS**

RICHARD SMITH  
JOHN MACCOUN  
NICK BISHOP

TEMCOR - DOME FABRICATORS & ERECTORS, TORRANCE, CALIF.

ROBERT B. LILES ARCHITECT & ENGINEER

APPROVED  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

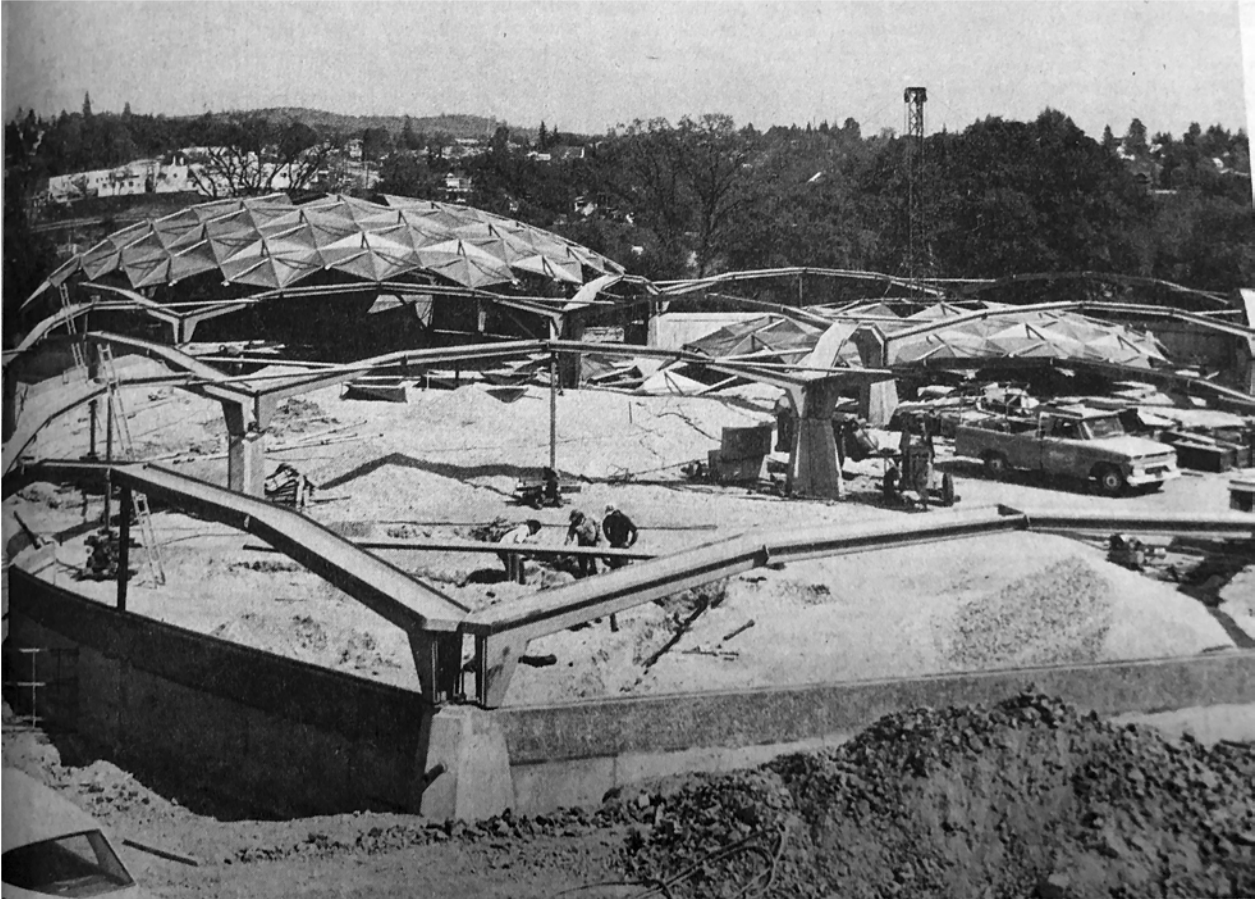
DATE 11/28/65

**Placer County Administrative Center**

**Architectural rendering from construction blueprints November 28, 1965**

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

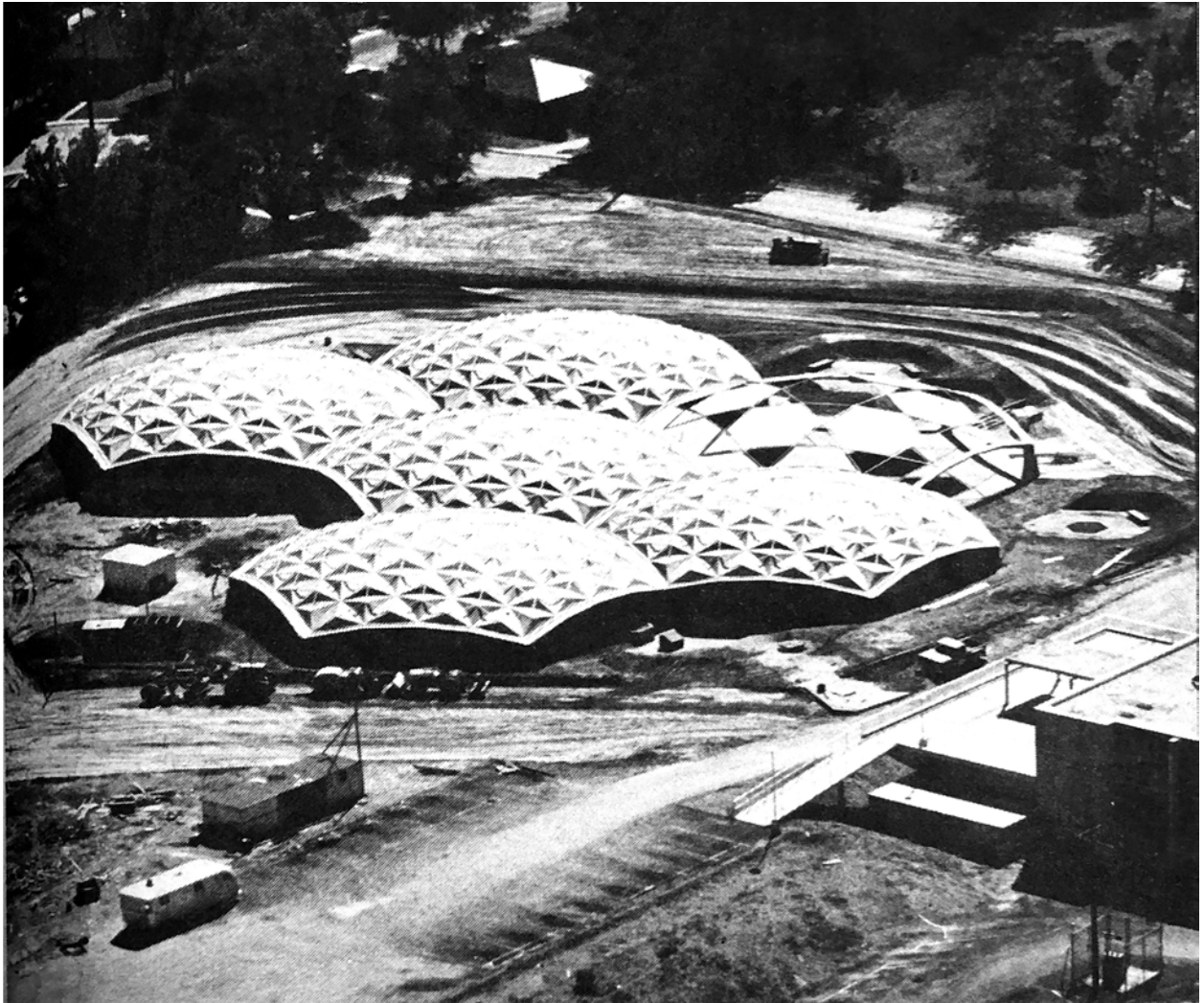
Placer County, CA  
County and State



**Placer County Administrative Center  
Construction April 14, 1966**

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

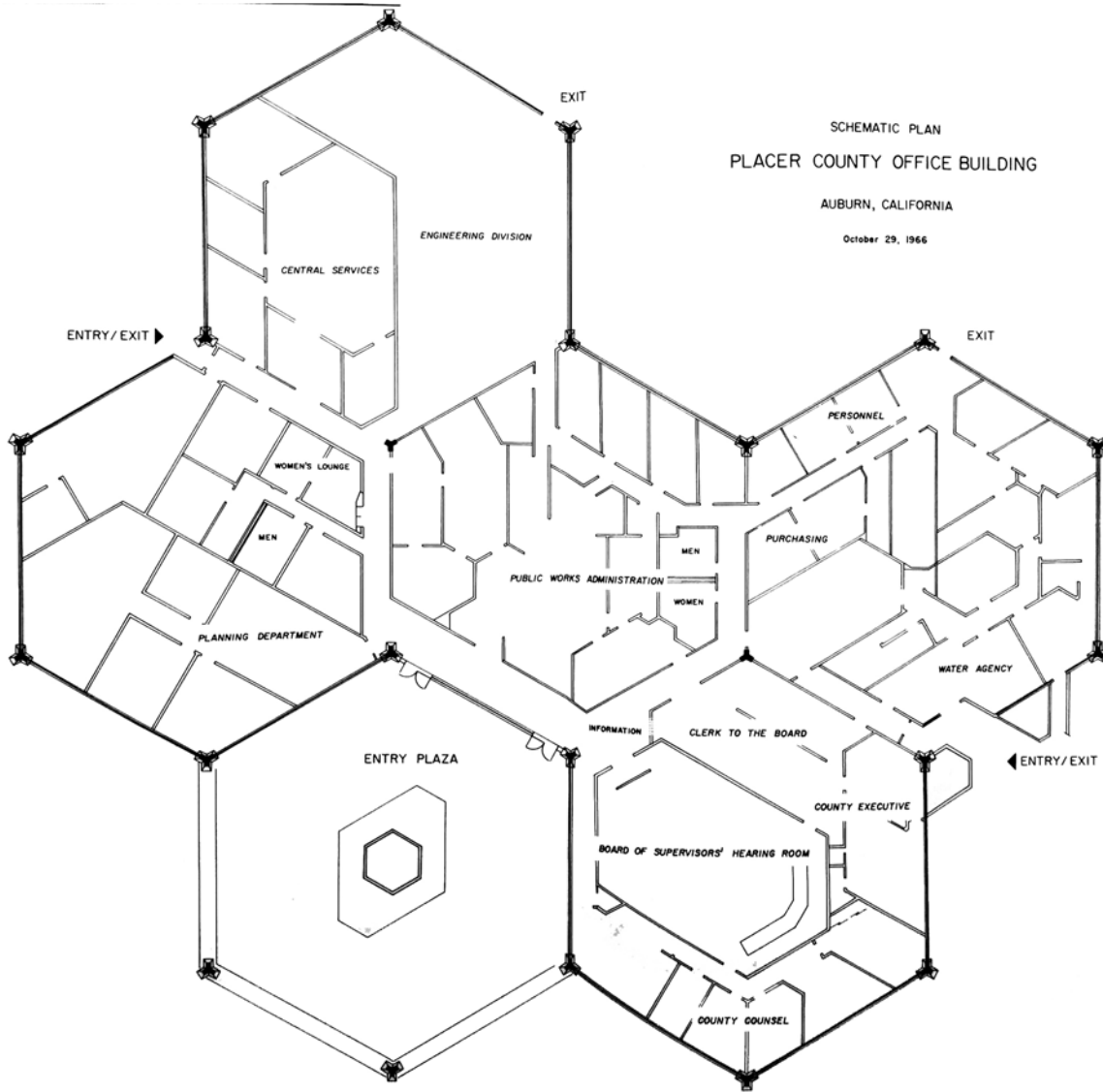
Placer County, CA  
County and State



**Placer County Administrative Center**  
**Aerial View October 27, 1966**

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

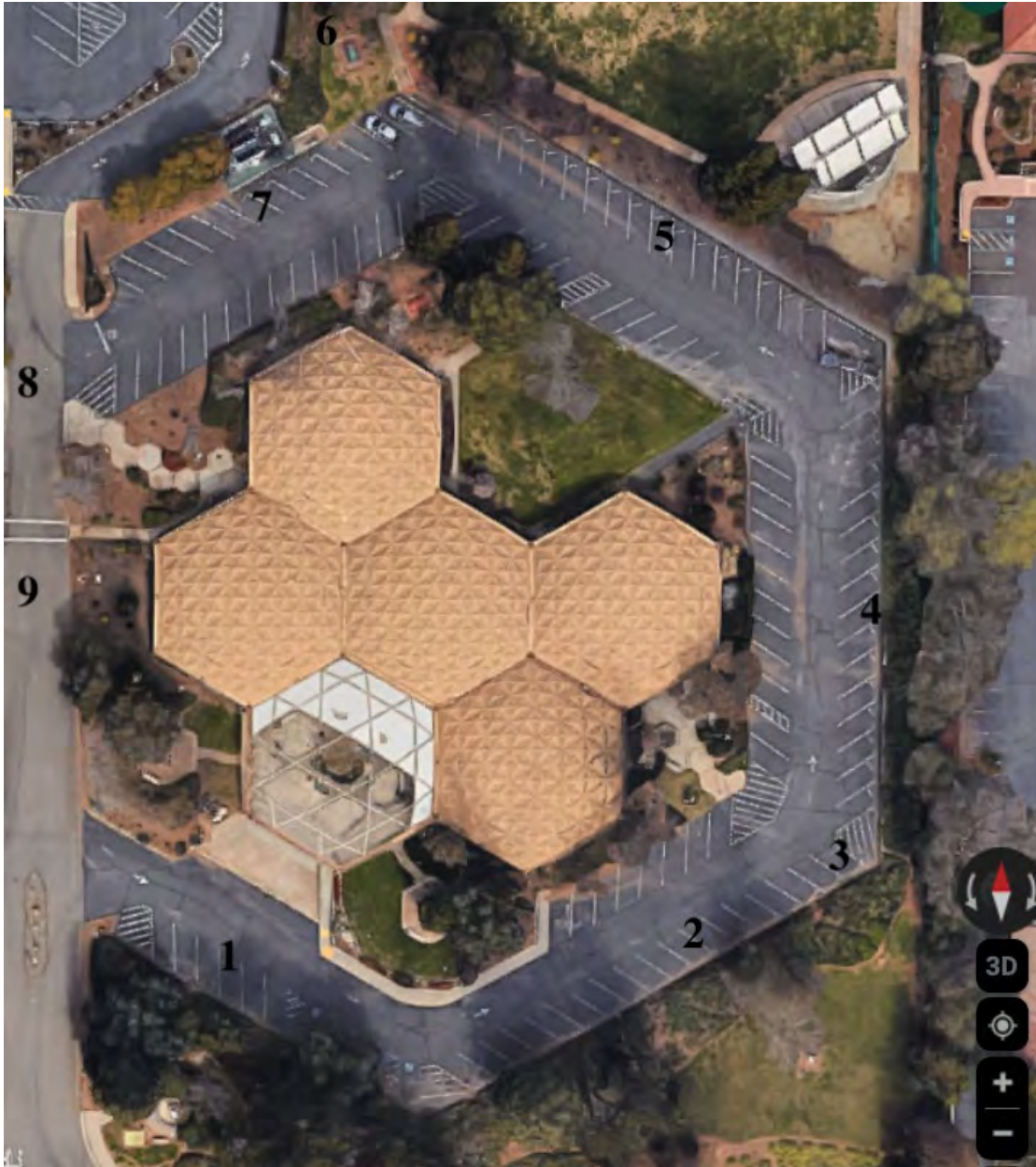
Placer County, CA  
County and State



**Placer County Administrative Center  
Interior Office Space Layout 1966**

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State



**Photographic Log Map**  
**Placer County Administrative Center**  
**175 Fulweiler Ave, Auburn, CA**

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

## 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: Placer County Administrative Center

City or Vicinity: Auburn

County: Placer

State: CA

Photographer: Ariana Brockman

Date Photographed: August 12, 2023

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

1 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0001

South elevation - view of entry plaza and central dome (dome 3). Camera facing northeast.

2 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0002

South elevation - view of dome 4 and dome 5. Camera facing north.

3 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0003

East elevation - view of dome 4 and dome 5. Camera facing northwest.

4 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0004

East elevation - view of dome 5. Camera facing west.

5 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0005

North elevation - view of dome 1, dome 3 and dome 5. Camera facing southwest.

Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

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CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0006

North elevation - view of dome 1, dome 2 and dome 5. Camera facing south.

7 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0007

North elevation - view of dome 1, dome 2 and dome 5. Camera facing southeast.

8 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0008

West elevation - view of dome 1 and dome 2. Camera facing southeast.

9 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0009

West elevation - view of dome 1 and dome 2. Camera facing east.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

### Photographs

1 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0001

South elevation - view of entry plaza and central dome (dome 3). Camera facing northeast.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

2 of 9  
CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0002  
South elevation - view of dome 4 and dome 5. Camera facing north.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

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CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0003

East elevation - view of dome 4 and dome 5. Camera facing northwest.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

4 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0004

East elevation - view of dome 5. Camera facing west.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

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CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0005

North elevation - view of dome 1, dome 3 and dome 5. Camera facing southwest.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

6 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0006

North elevation - view of dome 1, dome 2 and dome 5. Camera facing south.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

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CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0007

North elevation - view of dome 1, dome 2 and dome 5. Camera facing southeast.



Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

8 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0008

West elevation - view of dome 1 and dome 2. Camera facing southeast.





Placer County Administrative Center  
Name of Property

Placer County, CA  
County and State

9 of 9

CA\_Placer County\_Placer County Administrative Center\_0009  
West elevation - view of dome 1 and dome 2. Camera facing east.

