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# ADSW PRESERVATION CASE STUDIES

## GREENBELT CENTER SCHOOL

ADSW assisted with the actions shown in *Italics*.



**Location:** 15 Crescent Road, Greenbelt, Maryland

**Original Name:** Greenbelt Center School

**Original Use:** Civic and Religious

**Year of Construction:** 1937

**Restoration:** 1995

**Architect (1937):** Douglas Ellington & Reginald D. Wadsworth

**Architects (1995):** Florance, Eichbaum, Esocoff, King; Vitetta Group

**Current Use:** Civic

*LANDMARKED 1983*

## DESCRIPTION

Greenbelt was one of three utopian green towns built by the New Deal's Resettlement Administration. (Greendale, WI and Greenhills, OH were the other two.) The town was planned for suburban resettlement of rural migrants but also to prove the viability of garden-city planning principles. The original community was beautifully integrated into its site, a wooded crescent-shaped ridge, with careful planning to separate pedestrian and road traffic and provide open space for recreation. It was a self-contained town with a shopping center and its own school which was intended to be the focal point of the community.

While the housing was designed with the International Style in mind, the school was more Moderne, featuring a series of setbacks marked by streamlined buttresses, strips of casement windows, low relief panels, and smooth wall finishes. The design focuses attention on the notable bas-relief panels sculpted in place by Lenore Thomas that depict the preamble of the Constitution beginning with "We The People," intended to reflect the social and economic concerns of the era. The design of the building facade and the placement of the bas-relief panels may have drawn inspiration from the design of the Folger Shakespeare Library. Thomas later executed a sculpture for the shopping center entitled "*Mother and Child*."

## ADSW PRESERVATION

The threat to Greenbelt Center School was ADSW's first preservation emergency. In 1983, Greenbelt residents felt that they needed a new, more modern elementary school. ADSW persuaded residents and the County public school system to build the new school on a different site and to allow the city to retain the original school building as a community center.