

## Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing

Crane Ordway Apartments, St Paul, MN



photo: Aaron Holmberg

Printers' Square Apartments, Baltimore, MD



photo: Brough Schamp

<b>Session One:</b>	<b>Adaptive Reuse in Affordable Housing</b>
Session Date:	February 17, 2010
Memo Date:	March 4, 2010
Presenters:	Todd Rhoades, Cermak Rhoades Architects Rosemary Dolata, Aeon
Attendees:	See list at the end of this document

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### Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

#### Land Use & Transit Orientation

**Parking.** Both projects are located in proximity to bus or transit, but each project took a different approach to the provision of off-street parking: at Crane Ordway, zero parking spaces were required by zoning and zero parking spaces were provided. At Printers Square, 15 parking spaces were required by zoning, and 45 were provided. Aeon articulated their organization's commitment to careful site selection for every project so that residents of their properties can choose to avoid the expense of owning a car. The motivation behind providing the additional parking spaces at Printers Square was not clear. The two very different approaches to parking represented by the Crane Ordway and Printers Square projects, while not a focus of the group's discussion on February 17, could merit further analysis in future forum sessions.

#### Code, Zoning & Development Process

**Duration of development process.** The sheer length of development process in both cases was notable – more than 5 years for each the Crane Ordway and Printers' Square Apartments. While long timelines are not unique to adaptive reuse projects, they can often be stretched out longer than typical for new-construction affordable housing developments. In general, these long durations do not benefit the building design, as it's not a sustained effort on the part of the design team, it's stop-and-start. Team members are lost and replaced along the way, momentum is lost, and these can lead to inefficiencies and costly mistakes. The length of the development process is not the doing of any one entity, therefore its undoing cannot be the work of any one entity. Is the development of affordable housing inevitably a very long process? Are there ways to assemble full funding packages more quickly to reduce the affordable housing development timeline through the existing Super RFP process?

**Building code.** The unique circumstances presented by adapting existing buildings to new uses creates openings for varying interpretation of building code. At Crane Ordway, the biggest obstacle presented by code was the building inspector's interpretation of requirements for sprinkler distribution. The developer and architect worked diligently to resolve this issue in the project's favor. Because each adaptive reuse project will likely encounter unique code-related challenges, the lessons from one project will likely not translate neatly to the next. However, the Crane Ordway case does demonstrate the greater complexity and necessity of higher fees in adaptive reuse projects.

**Neighborhood involvement.** Both of the presented projects were in warehouse areas of cities and did not involve any significant amount of input from neighbors despite variances required (Crane Ordway) and street closures (Printers Square.) In fact, the promise of bringing new life to vacant existing buildings offered expedited neighborhood support in both cases, though in the case of Crane Ordway the project generated a conversation within the neighborhood about whether Lowertown in St Paul should be asked to accommodate more low-income residents. Adaptive reuse projects seem to present an opportunity in this regard: they tend to generate neighborhood support quite easily because of the preservation of a historic building and certainly decrease opposition from neighbors, which leads to a degree of freedom on the part of the design and development team.

## Financing, Cost & Incentives

**Architecture fees.** The majority of affordable housing projects in Minnesota go through Minnesota Housing (MHFA) at some point in their development process. Minnesota Housing sets architects' fees according to a schedule that takes low-rise new construction projects as the standard; the fee schedule varies according to the size of the project, with percentage fee decreasing as project size increases. For more complicated projects such as adaptive reuse, architect's fees may be negotiated upwards from Minnesota Housing's baseline fee schedule. The group clearly voiced low architecture fees as a barrier to innovation in affordable housing design. They cited many reasons: consultants' fees are continually rising, which is a cost that is almost always absorbed by the architect; it seems illogical to dictate the price of architectural services when the costs of so many other components of the project are simply market-driven; lower fees encourage repetition of design from project to project rather than highly program- or site-specific work. In general the fee schedule for architects that work on housing is much lower than, say, engineers that focus on pipeline projects. This is a reflection that as a society we don't value housing very highly. The architect of the Printers Square project was not willing to share fee information except to say that their fee was negotiated with the project developer.

## Sustainability & Durability

**Sustainability.** Both projects preserved existing buildings, a sustainability measure that conserved the energy and materials embedded in the existing structures. Sustainability was not a focus of the discussion, however.

## Special Considerations by Building or Project Type

**Opportunities afforded by adaptive reuse.** Both the Crane Ordway and Printers Square made the most of design opportunities presented by the specific cases of each existing building. Adaptive reuse projects often have great design built in, first, due to the existing structures themselves, and second, because of the creative solutions and diligent attention to detail required to fit a new program into an existing space.

Though not without its challenges, adaptive reuse allows for:

- Fitting an often-controversial building program (affordable housing) perfectly into an existing urban context. The ability to blend in with neighboring buildings of equally high quality can be a great advertisement for affordable housing.
- An intense focus on special details that wouldn't be acceptable in a new construction affordable housing project proforma. The renovation of the glass and cast iron stair at Crane Ordway is a great example of this. In an historic renovation project, these details are acceptable to developers and funders as a required part of the project because it is understood that exactly this kind of attention to detail is required to meet historic guidelines.

- Unique building configurations that result in non-standard spaces: from as simple as a single-loaded corridor that weaves indoors and out, which would likely not be permissible in new construction, as too inefficient, to as elegant and unique a solution as long, narrow apartment units with raised platforms at the exterior wall.

**Interpretation of historic standards.** Forum participants questioned how consistently the National Park Service's historic standards are applied across the country and were concerned that local agencies are much more literal than other locales. While no consensus was reached on that question as it relates to project-specific construction details, it does seem that Minnesota's historic preservation offices hold to a stricter standard when it comes to the designation of historic buildings. This could be a significant barrier to developing more adaptive reuse projects, as those projects typically depend upon funding from the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. Buildings must be designated as historic, or contributing to an historic district, in order to qualify for this funding source. As MN faces the challenges of constrained governmental resources and growing demands to reduce carbon emissions the preservation and efficient use of existing infrastructure is a necessity. Greater flexibility for pursuit of adaptive re-use projects would encourage innovation and potentially greater focus on preservation and rehabilitation of existing communities.

## **Potential Solutions**

**The discussion raised a few suggestions for lowering barriers to innovation:**

- Could MHFA, McKnight or another funding partner provide a small pool of funds developers could draw from to pay architects to do feasibility studies? Architects usually undertake these for free as a marketing effort, but they are then incurring risk. Site selection is a critical part of the design process, and providing payment for feasibility studies could mean better work on the part of the architecture team, and a more thorough assessment of a site's positive and negative attributes.
- Identify a geographically limited area to test some of the ideas that come out of these forums. The Central Corridor could be an ideal laboratory to see what effect proposed modifications on the development process have on building design.

Meeting Attendees:

Abbie Loosen	Project for Pride in Living
Amy Spong	City of St Paul
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota
Dave Miller	Urban Works Architecture
David Graham	ESG Architects
Eric Muschler	The McKnight Foundation
Jeff Schoeneck	Urban Works Architecture
Jerry Narlach	Minnesota Housing
John Hamilton	Urban Works Architecture
Kim Breithem	LHB Engineers & Architects
Lyn Bruin	University of Minnesota
Renee Richie	The McKnight Foundation
Rosemary Dolata	Aeon
Tim Griffin	St Paul Riverfront Corporation
Todd Rhoades	Cermak Rhoades Architects
Tom Meyer	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle

## Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing

Touchstone Supportive Housing, Minneapolis, MN



image: Urban Works Architecture

Wentworth Commons, Chicago, IL



photo: Anthony May

### Session Two:

### Supportive Housing

Session Date:

March 17, 2010

Memo Date:

April 2, 2010

Presenters:

Jeff Schoeneck, Urban Works Architecture

David Miller, Urban Works Architecture

John Hamilton, Urban Works Architecture

Jennifer Baumgartner, Touchstone Mental Health

Chris Wilson, Project for Pride in Living

Attendees:

See list at the end of this document

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## Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

### Land Use & Transit Orientation

**Parking & Multi-Modal Transportation Options.** Both projects are located within walking distance of bus and rail or light rail. Both provide (or will provide) off-street parking – Wentworth Commons in the form of a surface parking lot across a side street from the building, and Touchstone via below-grade parking. The development team's decisions regarding the type of parking the projects include has had an influence on the building design and the project's impact on the neighborhood. In the case of Wentworth Commons, the lower first cost of surface parking freed up funds for building construction and allowed for some flexibility in building massing; in the case of Touchstone, removing surface parking from the neighborhood contributes to safety and walkability, but the 60' width required for underground parking bays does play a role in determining building massing.

**Sense of Place.** Whether or not a project contributes (or will contribute) to a sense of place is a highly subjective matter. It is clear, however, that the designers of Wentworth Commons and Touchstone have taken very different approaches to the creation of a sense of place. Wentworth Commons is a successful example of 'design as neighborhood catalyst': the project's designers have taken cues from the neighborhood's Dutch roots to a very abstract level and created a colorful contemporary building that intentionally stands out from its surroundings. The building has begun to inform more recent developments in the area, with other contemporary projects now under construction. The approach of the Touchstone project team is to create a softer, "homier" presence based on the close program-to-design fit described in more detail below.

## Code, Zoning & Development Process

**Outline of development process.** Wentworth Commons' development team noted that in general, permanent supportive housing takes longer to develop than other types of affordable housing because operating funds must be assembled in addition to capital funds. Touchstone is still in the design & funding assembly phases; its complete development trajectory is not yet known.

**Political & neighborhood involvement.** The Wentworth Commons project started when the Alderman for the Roseland neighborhood approached Mercy Housing Lakefront with a site that she wanted to see developed. Throughout the process, the Alderman mediated any conversations between the neighborhood and the project, including calling public meetings when necessary. Chicago does not have a built-in mechanism by which projects are denied, modified or approved by local residents. Neighbors do have the ability to influence the project's design, but only to a very limited extent and only by working through the Alderman. Close Alderman involvement in the project continued after the project was completed: when neighbors had concerns about the building's appearance, the Alderman called and ran a public meeting and, with the help of the developer, addressed the neighborhood concerns. This Alderman-led approach is very typical for Chicago affordable housing developments.

The Touchstone project found its site through the neighborhood itself: a member of the project team was approached by Seward Redesign, a neighborhood-based redevelopment group. Though the development process is nowhere near complete, neighborhood involvement in the project has already been fairly intensive: the development team has attended more than 6 community meetings through the project's evolution, and selected community members participated in a recent design charrette focused on sustainability. The degree of neighborhood involvement in the Touchstone project is perhaps more intensive than most, but it follows the typical model for Minneapolis, in which projects undergo neighborhood review – and often design compromise – as a matter of course.

The top-down approach typical to Chicago's development process allows for building design that may rub some neighbors the wrong way, whereas compromise with neighbors' project-related wishes is built into the ground-up system typical to development in Minneapolis. Our system, noted one forum participant, is both a blessing and a curse: it is highly democratic, but the design compromises required to allow some neighborhoods to accept low-income residents can result in bland design.

## Financing, Cost & Incentives

**Incentives.** Wentworth Commons is partially funded by the Illinois Clean Energy Community Loan Fund and the DCEO Energy Natural Resources Grant. These sources allowed the project to install photovoltaic panels and required that a certain insulation value was met in walls and roof. Touchstone's funding assembly is not yet complete, but funds from sources that incentivize green building are anticipated.

## Sustainability & Durability

**Sustainability.** Wentworth Commons met Green Communities criteria and obtained LEED certification. This was the first LEED-certified multi-family project in the Midwest when it was completed in 2005. The project prioritized energy conservation through high insulation values in the envelope, renewable energy generation through photovoltaic panels, and good indoor air quality through increased ventilation. The building design expresses the commitment to sustainability in various ways: for example, by mounting the PV panels on large racks to make them visible from the street.

Touchstone will likewise meet Green Communities criteria, and the project team has sought to push beyond this standard by holding a charrette to focus on energy efficiency and indoor air quality and begin to approach the goals set by the MN 3020 challenge. The charrette focused on how to pair the requirements of the future resident population –

which includes greater sensitivities to noise, temperature, and environmental contaminants – with ambitious goals to reduce energy usage.

**Durability & Adaptability.** Both Wentworth Commons and Touchstone have approached the durability question through careful material selection, both indoors and outside. Additionally, forum participants raised the question of designing the Touchstone project for adaptability to residents' changing needs as they age. Because the intention is that the project is permanent supportive housing, residents could live in the building for 30 years or more. Could the project embrace the principles of universal design and allow residents to age in place?

**Post-Occupancy Studies.** While neither project has undertaken a post-occupancy study (an impossibility in Touchstone's case as it is not yet built), forum participants concurred that the level of commitment to research by the Touchstone team – and the residents of future projects similar to Touchstone – would be well-served by following up with an equally intensive post-occupancy study.

## Special Considerations by Building or Project Type

**Fit Between Building Program & Building Design.** Because uses within the building are more highly varied, and because more tends to be known about the future residents, supportive housing projects offer the opportunity to tailor building design (both exterior and interior) very specifically to future residents' needs. Each project's approach to programming and building fit is as follows:

At Wentworth Commons, half of the resident population is formerly homeless. The remaining units are rented to low-income households that are not necessarily formerly homeless but can benefit from on-site services as well. Unit sizes range from studios to three-bedroom apartments, and the unit types are thoroughly mixed on each floor. The resident services manager for Wentworth Commons noted that earlier designs had shown the building divided into unit types, with the idea of keeping single adults from mingling too closely with families. Rather than continue with this approach, the development team chose to have each floor of the building more closely reflect the age diversity that you might find on an average Chicago sidewalk. This philosophical stance (in built form) has in fact proved to be no problem to manage from a practical standpoint.

Services provided on site at Wentworth Commons include a very broad range of case management services: assistance with daily living skills, help resolving family problems, mental health counseling, after school programs, and homework help. The ground floor of the building is devoted to service and community spaces (approximately one-third of which is a tenant space intended for a day care facility that has been vacant since the project's completion in 2005.) Smaller community spaces located on the upper three floors include laundry rooms with lounge areas attached. The project's architect noted that the laundry lounges seem underutilized, and forum participants questioned the appropriateness of laundry rooms as social spaces for this population. (It works well for students and for seniors, but families might prefer in-unit laundries.) The resident services manager noted that the ground-floor service and community spaces were designed for maximum flexibility, and his team is very pleased with how they function.

Whereas Wentworth Commons was based on the refinement of existing housing models, the Touchstone project has sought to take an entirely new approach to providing stable housing for those with serious and persistent mental illness. The development team's approach to this task has been research-based and informed by three distinct workgroups: a workgroup of mental-health professionals; a 'design & development' work group that includes the project's architect, developer, and project sponsors from the County; and a group of approximately 150 of Touchstone's current clients who represent the building's future resident population.

Touchstone's workgroup of mental-health professionals undertook an ambitious research project into evidence-based design and created a matrix of 138 design elements, organized into six categories – reduced isolation, nurture the senses, reduce environmental stressors, promote healthy lifestyle, privacy, and safety – that had to be addressed in order to meet the project's goals of maximizing mental health & stability and minimizing episodes of hospitalization. The matrix rates each design element on how well it supports health and healing, and was intended to provide a very objective set of criteria on which the design could be based. The matrix has proved invaluable to the team's

decisionmaking as the design process has progressed. The building design was developed in tandem with the matrix and reflects the emphasis on mental health and stability: for example, based on the need many mentally ill individuals have for assistance with socializing and integration into a community, the project includes, in addition to 40 apartments, a health and wellness center that will be open to both resident and non-resident mentally ill individuals, and Touchstone Mental Health's administrative offices. The exterior of the building as currently is deeply informed by the matrix and the workgroups as well, with a pitched roof and natural materials used as cladding suggesting 'home' – as opposed to 'institution' – to the vast majority of Touchstone's current clients.

## **Meeting Attendees:**

Abbie Loosen	Project for Pride in Living
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota, Department of Design, Housing & Apparel
Billy Weber	University of Minnesota, Center for Sustainable Building Research
Bruce Watson	Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
Chris Wilson	Project for Pride in Living
David Miller	Urban Works Architecture
Eric Muschler	The McKnight Foundation
Ignacio San Martin	University of Minnesota, Metropolitan Design Center
Jeff Schoeneck	Urban Works Architecture
Jennifer Baumgartner	Touchstone Mental Health
Jerry Narlach	Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
John Hamilton	Urban Works Architecture
Paul Melblom	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle
Renee Richie	The McKnight Foundation
Tim Griffin	St Paul Riverfront Corporation
Todd Rhoades	Cermak Rhoades Architects
Tom Meyer	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle
Tom Streit	City of Minneapolis Community Planning & Economic Development

## Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing

Lincoln Place, Eagan, MN



photo: Kim Bretheim

Resource Access Center, Portland, OR



image: Holst Architecture

<b>Session Three:</b>	<b>New Typologies</b>
Session Date:	April 7, 2010
Memo Date:	April 20, 2010
Presenters:	Kim Bretheim, LHB Architects Kari Gill, Dakota County CDA
Attendees:	See list at the end of this document

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### Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

#### Land Use & Transit Orientation

**Parking & Multi-Modal Transportation Options.** The contrast between parking requirements for Eagan’s Lincoln Place versus downtown Portland’s Resource Access Center is striking: at Lincoln Place, the zoning code asked for 2 spaces per dwelling unit; at the RAC, no parking was required. Much of the variation can be attributed to the projects’ contexts (urban vs suburban) but Portland’s aggressive policies discouraging the provision of automobile parking are also noteworthy: no parking is required by zoning code throughout downtown Portland, and building new parking is discouraged through a cap on the number of total parking spaces allowed within the central city. The area around the Resource Access Center – indeed almost all of downtown Portland – is highly walkable and very well connected to transit, which allows the zero-parking rule to succeed. This has obvious financial benefits to the project in that funding can be focused on habitable spaces rather than car storage areas. At Lincoln Place, the development team successfully made the argument that many of the building’s residents would not own cars and could depend on nearby trails and buses, and were able to negotiate a reduction from zoning code in the number of parking spaces provided.

**Building Design to Accommodate Bicycles.** For many residents of the Resource Access Center, a bicycle is the single most valuable item they possess. Acknowledging this, the designers and developers of the project chose to locate a wall rack for bicycle storage within each of the permanent supportive housing apartments. While this might seem like a minor detail in a \$47 million dollar project, Kim Bretheim noted that, in fact, this represents a whole new way of thinking about transportation and design. Instead of designing around the automobile and its spatial requirements, the RAC has started a new way of thinking holistically about the bicycle as a important design generator.

#### Code, Zoning & Development Process

**Neighborhood Involvement.** The two projects took opposite approaches to neighborhood involvement in project development. As with so many other aspects of comparison between Lincoln Place and the Resource Access Center, this was highly dependent on the project's context. The Dakota County CDA works in suburban areas, and primarily in single-family residential neighborhoods; their recent experience has been that neighborhood meetings tend to only facilitate the mobilization of opposition to their projects. Based on this experience, the development team held just one public meeting in addition to a public hearing at the planning council. Elected officials saw the need for the project and were supportive throughout the process. The Resource Access Center had an intensive public charrette process that resulted in highly developed and proactive goals for the project. Outcomes ranged from specific sustainability targets to broad philosophical goals: including the goal of reaching zero net energy for the building, and the mission of the building being to serve people with dignity – the building should be designed as a guide for how to treat fellow human beings.

**Zoning Code & Local Redevelopment District Design Guidelines.** Code and guidelines governing the design of Lincoln Place, including both Eagan zoning code and the Cedar Grove redevelopment district overlay, were highly prescriptive. They dictated everything from the building setback from the property line to the exterior materials – for example, the building must be clad in a certain minimum percentage of either brick or stone. The designers of the Resource Access Center, while also governed by both city zoning code and a district overlay (the Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines), had much more latitude because those code and guidelines are descriptive rather than prescriptive. In addition to written standards, in Portland all buildings over a certain size must pass through a design review process. Some discussion participants are working on projects in Portland and expressed admiration for the thoughtfulness of the design review committee as well as its effectiveness overall. The difference in outcomes between prescriptive and descriptive codes and guidelines was emphasized throughout the discussion, with comments including: “if we want innovation, we can't start with prescriptive zoning models.” Prescriptive models often represent a defensive way of thinking – “this didn't work before, so we want to avoid repeating that mistake.” Descriptive models backed by a thoughtful review process, give more authority to designers, city officials, and the community at large, and better define a vision of where the community wants to be in the future.

**Aesthetic Expectations as a Part of Local Culture.** The presentation emphasized the importance of context to the formation of the resulting built project. Though often difficult to quantify, local expectations played an important role in each building's design. In Eagan (and Minnesota generally), our tradition of exterior materials drives so many buildings' aesthetic, with brick and stone presumed as the preferred materials for all mid-rise buildings and larger. So often the design goal is for the building to ‘blend in to the neighborhood,’ even when building scale or stylistically mixed neighborhoods make that an impossibility. In Portland, the general expectation is that the building won't blend in, and the informal culture within Portland's local government contains a commitment to promoting quality design and sustainability. How did Portland get to where they are? One discussion participant asked whether designers and their clients can change local culture slowly, by pushing each project aesthetically. This is a critical issue, as local aesthetic expectations often drive written design guidelines and administrative processes that, in turn, generate their own inertia.

**Affordable Housing Expectations as a Part of Local Culture.** While both projects were located in TIF districts and were at least partially funded by TIF, the Resource Access Center benefited from Portland's rule that 35% of all TIF funds must be used to develop affordable housing. This rule demonstrates Portland's commitment to providing affordable housing. It also seems to affect the tone of the public discussion when new affordable housing projects are proposed. When new projects are proposed, the question is no longer “if,” or even “where,” because the TIF districts establish boundaries within which a certain number of affordable housing units must be located. It becomes a question of “how.” The project team no longer needs to make aesthetic trade-offs with neighborhoods or elected officials in order to gain acceptance of the project's population.

## **Financing, Cost & Incentives**

**Architecture Fees.** At Lincoln Place, as with all projects funded by MHFA, architecture fees are set relative to the schedule established by the Agency. Oregon Housing and Community Services, on the other hand, does not set minimums or maximums on architecture fees. If the Resource Access Center were built in Minnesota, the architect's fee would have been limited to \$800,000. In fact, the architects of the Portland project received \$3 million dollars in fee

(this included a scope of work that included incorporating many advanced sustainability measures and ensuring that the building obtained LEED platinum certification.) In addition, the designers of the Portland project were paid for predevelopment work and did not carry any risk through the long development process.

**Incentives.** Lincoln Place was funded by a variety of grants and loans, including funding from MHFA's Ending Long Term Homelessness program. A wide variety of funding sources and incentives supported the development of the Resource Access Center. A large percentage of the project's funding was in tax increment financing: Portland requires that 30% of all TIF funds go to developing affordable housing, which supports not only stand-alone affordable housing projects but is also available to market-rate developers that would build mixed-income housing. A 'vertical design' incentive fund helps to support mixed-use development. (It was noted in the discussion that in the Twin Cities, developers of mixed-used projects often need to write their proformas to reflect zero income from commercial spaces, so difficult is it to make the commercial spaces within mixed-use buildings financially viable.) Finally, Oregon's wide variety of incentives to continually advance sustainable construction contributed to funding for the Resource Access Center.

## **Sustainability & Durability**

**Sustainability.** Both projects were extremely ambitious from a sustainability standpoint. Lincoln Place will achieve LEED gold, and the Resource Access Center will attain LEED platinum. Lincoln Place's design includes advanced stormwater features and a very high efficiency envelope and HVAC systems. The Resource Access Center includes greywater recycling systems and key control – similar to some hotels – to limit electrical use within apartments when occupants are not at home.

**Durability & Adaptability.** The two projects presented each approached the question of adaptability – indeed the need for adaptability – quite differently. At Lincoln Place, project sponsors and the development team discussed the future of the building after homelessness has been eliminated. (It was designed to also function as market-rate apartments.) The Resource Access Center, with its 90-bed shelter and resource center that aims to provide services to more than 1000 people per day, and its commitment to building a “100-year building” is based on the premise that there will still be homelessness in 100 years. At the Resource Access Center, durability has been addressed; adaptability less so.

**Post-Occupancy Studies.** In light of the vast stylistic differences between Lincoln Place and the Resource Access Center, discussion participants asked whether a building's appearance makes much of a difference to residents' daily lives. Are we focused on how the building looks simply because we are trained as architects? Including the question of building style in post-occupancy studies – and developing large 'sample sizes' by making post-occupancy study much more widespread – can begin to answer this question. Neither project has undergone a post-occupancy study – Lincoln Place was completed only very recently, and the Resource Access Center will be under construction for another year.

## **Special Considerations by Building or Project Type**

**Visibility of the Homeless.** The presenters of the two projects noted that Lincoln Place intended to create a 'home' for the 24 young residents of the building, while the Resource Access Center intended to create a 'home base' for the over 200 homeless individuals it will house nightly. Each project's goals drove the appearance of the buildings: Lincoln Place is a quietly elegant building that does not stand out from its suburban neighbors; at the whole-building scale, the Resource Access Center does not shy away from making its population visible. Some discussion arose, however, regarding the courtyard provided. The courtyard's stated intention was to give homeless individuals a pleasant place to wait for services – individuals can sit comfortably with a cup of coffee instead of standing in long lines that snake for blocks down the sidewalk. Discussion participants wondered whether a secondary intention of the courtyard was to bring homeless individuals off the street to make Portland's large homeless population less visible at the street scale.

**Concentration of Poverty.** While Lincoln Place's 24 efficiency apartments set within a relatively wealthy suburb did not generate much discussion about concentration of poverty, many other affordable housing projects throughout the Twin Cities have faced opposition based on this premise. The Resource Access Center, with 130 units of permanent supportive housing and a 90-bed shelter, did encounter some discussion of the topic: the Old Town neighborhood within which the project is set was primarily low-income already, and some Old Town residents would have liked to see

market-rate development instead of supportive housing in order to create more economic mix within their neighborhood. However, the majority of Old Town residents were supportive of the project, and the project has been seen as a catalyst for future development – the \$47 million dollar building as a substantial investment in the neighborhood. Discussion participants noted that the same project built in the Twin Cities would have had to face considerable opposition due to the apparent concentration of housing for those with very low incomes within one building.

## Potential Solutions

**The discussion raised a few suggestions for lowering barriers to innovation:**

- Portland (and Oregon) have a variety of funding sources and incentives to encourage good design:
  - o TIF dollars – 35% mandated for affordable housing. Can change the discussion from “if” to “how.”
  - o Portland’s vertical design incentive
  - o Oregon’s various green building incentives
- Prescriptive vs descriptive codes and design guidelines (plus Portland’s design review process) allow for more expansive thinking rather than a “checklist” approach
- Post-occupancy studies: how do residents feel about style?

## Meeting Attendees:

Abbie Loosen	Project for Pride in Living
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota
David Graham	Elness, Swenson & Graham Architects
David Miller	Urban Works Architecture
Eric Muschler	The McKnight Foundation
Jeff Schoeneck	Urban Works Architecture
John Hamilton	Urban Works Architecture
Kari Gill	Dakota County Community Development Agency
Kim Bretheim	LHB Architects
Lyn Bruin	University of Minnesota
Renee Richie	The McKnight Foundation
Todd Rhoades	Cermak Rhoades Architects
Tom Meyer	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle
Tracy Jacques	Elness, Swenson & Graham Architects

## Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing

Alliance Addition, Minneapolis, MN



image: Cermak Rhoades Architects

Richard L. Harris Building, Portland, OR



photo: Michael Mathers

**Session Three: Supportive Housing II**  
Session Date: April 21, 2010  
Memo Date: May 4, 2010  
Presenters: Michelle Baltus Pribyl, Cermak Rhoades Architects  
Todd Rhoades, Cermak Rhoades Architects  
Rosemary Dolata, Aeon  
Attendees: See list at the end of this document

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### Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

#### Land Use & Transit Orientation

**Parking & Multi-Modal Transportation Options.** Both the Portland and the Minneapolis projects were well-located to take advantage of existing transit-oriented neighborhoods. Residents of both projects have access to services, amenities and transit within walking distance. Neither project provided off-street parking of any kind. At the Alliance Addition, the neighborhood supported a variance to reduce the parking provided to zero.

**Building Design to Accommodate Bicycle Storage.** At the Richard L Harris Building in Portland, residents are permitted to bring their bicycles into their units (though units haven't specifically been designed to accommodate them.) There is little other bicycle storage available on site. Central City Concern, the project's developer and owner, recognized this as an oversight and now provides more bicycle storage at their newer facilities.

#### Code, Zoning & Development Process

**Neighborhood Involvement.** The neighborhood's involvement in the development of the design of the Richard L Harris building led to the developer's hiring of SERA Architects to replace the architecture firm originally under contract. As noted below, the neighborhood went from resistant to supportive as the project was completed. The project also had to undergo a 'Type 1' design review process as required by Portland zoning code. (For an explanation of Portland's design review process, see the notes from the April 7 session.)

Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc (EPNI), the group representing the neighborhood in which the Alliance Addition is located, is very proactive when it comes to working with developers. Beginning in 2003, EPNI worked to develop both a master plan for their neighborhood and design guidelines that would illustrate the neighborhood's goals to developers. EPNI sees their role as educating developers as to how their proposals will affect street life. The plan and guidelines were in

place at the start of the design process for the Alliance Addition, and the development team noted that having these documents was extremely helpful – even given Aeon’s longstanding relationship with the Elliot Park Neighborhood, the documents clearly laid out their neighborhood’s priorities. As the design process progressed, much of the discussion centered around ensuring that 17<sup>th</sup> Street didn’t become the Addition’s ‘back door.’ (The Alliance building, with the addition, crosses the block from 16<sup>th</sup> Street to 17<sup>th</sup> Street, and the primary building entrance is located on 16<sup>th</sup>.) Without a positive presence on 17<sup>th</sup>, EPNI was concerned that vulnerable populations within the neighborhood who use the street as access between services would be targeted by drug dealers. Cermak Rhoades resolved this concern by providing a handful of townhouse-style units that have front doors on 17<sup>th</sup>.

As a result of the collaboration between Aeon, Cermak Rhoades and EPNI on the building’s design, EPNI has formed a coalition of organizations within the neighborhood and hired a landscape architecture firm to conduct a series of charrettes related to further improving 17<sup>th</sup> Street. While the intensity of neighborhood involvement typical in projects in Minneapolis can often seem a barrier to good design, the Alliance Addition is an excellent example of how collaboration with the public can sometimes lead to improvements that expand beyond the building site.

**Affordable Housing Expectations as a Part of Local/Neighborhood Culture.** We have had the benefit of hearing about two projects in close proximity in Portland over the course of two back-to-back forum sessions. The Richard L Harris Building, completed in 2004, initially encountered neighborhood resistance - NIMBYism – largely due to the fact that it proposed to serve as supportive housing for individuals undergoing treatment for chemical dependency. However, the development team managed to work through obstacles to get this high-quality, highly-visible project built, and now credits the building itself with working to change the perception of supportive housing in Portland. Indeed, the Resource Access Center, under construction in 2010, seems to have had broad support and deep neighborhood involvement throughout the Pearl District and Portland in general. If it is the case that the Richard L Harris Building has had such a profound impact on public acceptance of supportive housing, how might we in the Twin Cities likewise construct a ‘living endorsement’ of this building type?

Aeon has had a long history of working with the Elliot Park Neighborhood Association. When an expansion of the Alliance Apartments was proposed, the conversation with the neighborhood was more nuanced than “not in my backyard.” For the most part, neighbors are great supporters of affordable housing in general, and were supportive of the expansion. Those that weren’t offered this argument: Elliot Park doesn’t have an extremely high ratio of affordable to market rate housing, but what affordable housing it does have is for those with very low incomes. This affects the economy of the neighborhood and prohibits it from attracting retail and other services that could round out the district. Ultimately it was Aeon’s longstanding relationship with the neighborhood that won the support of the Eliot Park Neighborhood.

**General Contractor as Part of the Development Team.** The presentation team offered the early and ongoing participation of the general contractor as an extremely critical factor in developing truly effective (and cost-effective) sustainability strategies in both projects. The presenters shared a graphic that charts how, with regard to sustainability, decisions made early in the development process have the biggest impact on the building’s resource use over its lifetime. Having a wide range of input early in the design process can have very long-lasting impact. Both projects used the negotiated approach to obtain input from general contractors – at the Richard L Harris Building, the GC provided predevelopment services, pricing estimates, assistance with value engineering, and a final guaranteed maximum price at the conclusion of construction documents. At the Alliance, input by Weis Builders early in the design process was vital to making good decisions regarding the advanced mechanical system and the building envelope, to name two examples. At the conclusion of construction documents, Weis bid the project out to subcontractors and determined the fixed construction price. Weis’ fee was a negotiated percentage. The City of Minneapolis’ procurement policy no longer allows negotiated contracts with general contractors, and MHFA’s policy encourages bidding over negotiation as well. Discussion participants identified the mandatory (or near-mandatory) bid process as an obstacle in continuing to develop increasingly high-performance buildings.

## Financing, Cost & Incentives

**Sources.** Financing, cost and incentives were not a focus of the discussion, though Aeon did note that the primary funding source for the Alliance Addition was bonds, which was a timely choice given the crash in the housing tax credit market. Also noteworthy is the funding Aeon has secured for their 'Homes for Generations' initiative, which has supported their efforts to create high-performance buildings at two other Aeon Twin Cities developments in addition to the Alliance Addition.

## Sustainability & Durability

**Sustainability.** Outlining the local project's approach to sustainability was one of the primary focuses of the presentation and served to underline how much research and investigation must be invested before arriving at the correct solution for each project – it's not a matter of 'one answer fits all buildings.' In the case of the Alliance Addition, the design team developed matrices that laid out all viable options for both building envelope and mechanical systems. Generating these options and gathering information on the pros and cons of each, required the input of architect, developer, engineers, the general contractor, operations & maintenance technicians, a green consultant, as well as experts at the Center for Sustainable Building Research and the Center for Energy and Environment. The additional work required by this in-depth look was supported by additional funding raised through Aeon's 'Homes for Generations' initiative.

**Durability.** The architect of the Richard L Harris Building noted that the developer wished to build a "100-year building," and Aeon noted that their goal with the Alliance Addition was to create a "150-year building." Clearly durability and building longevity were priorities in both cases. Central City Concern in Portland noted that they held a 100-year mortgage on the property. In addition to valuing durability as a sustainability measure, one of the driving forces behind the desire to create a very long-lasting building is the relative ease of finding funds for new construction versus the difficulty of securing funding for renovation. Aeon in Minneapolis cited the 'triple bottom line' as their motivation for designing for building longevity, with priority given to those building components that are not easily changed out later – structure and cladding, to name two examples. Discussion ranged over material choices and questioned whether wood-frame or SIPs buildings are the most durable options if very long lasting buildings are the goal. Might a bigger investment in a more expensive structural system (i.e. concrete) pay off one day if these buildings are intended to last a century or more?

## Special Considerations by Building or Project Type

**Dwelling Unit Minimum Sizes.** The Richard L Harris Building contains 120 SROs that are 150 square feet each, and 60 studio apartments at 225 square feet. (A later clarification with CCC revealed that the SROs were designed as transitional housing and weren't meant to be "too comfortable." The intention is that residents will move on after they finish their treatment program.) The Alliance Addition does not contain any SROs, but does offer 59 studios at 400 square feet. Much of Wednesday's discussion focused on how small apartments or SROs can be and still offer a humane living environment. Some argued that the SROs in the Portland project do not provide a humane living environment: the units are too small, and residents cannot even prepare a meal for him- or herself in the unit. Others disagreed, and cited the fact that the Portland project offers much more common space – including a full kitchen, social area and balcony on each floor – as a deliberate trade-off for small private spaces. The developer of the Portland project stated that one of the intentions of the building is to "encourage the integration of tenants back into society," and the small units and abundant social spaces were seen as one way to accomplish this goal. Others argued that even outside of the realm of affordable housing, our perception of how much space we really need is changing, and that there is a growing understanding of the value in choosing a small apartment in a great neighborhood. In fact, the Portland studios, which contain kitchens, would not be able to be built in the Twin Cities due to unit-size minimums set by state and municipal building codes. The minimum unit size in Minneapolis is 350 square feet.

No one challenged the Alliance Addition's 400 square foot units in terms of being too small for long-term livability. Those units did, however, raise the question of how accessibility and adaptability requirements dovetail with the need

to keep square footage down to maintain affordability. Discussion participants seemed in agreement that every time a new ADA requirement comes out, it adds 10% or more to each unit's footprint. One participant asked whether it is necessary or appropriate that 100% of new units meet adaptability requirements, which require as much interior space as full accessibility requirements do.

As one discussion participant pointed out, demographers expect the Twin Cities' largest growth in the next decade will come in the form of 1-person households. The question of minimum apartment size will become increasingly relevant as these shifts take place.

## Potential Solutions

### The discussion raised a few suggestions for lowering barriers to innovation:

- The presentation team emphasized, and the discussion supported, the importance of being able to include a general contractor as a member of the design & development team in order to make impactful decisions regarding building sustainability.
- It would be helpful to undertake a more thorough examination of minimum sizes for dwelling units across the state or even the country.
- Portland appears to have undergone a major shift in the public's attitude toward supportive housing in the six years between the development of the Richard L Harris Building and the Resource Access Center, and with the Resource Access Center we have seen how deep and effective public involvement was in the later project's development. How much of this shift was a result of the positive reception of the Harris Building itself, once it was finished? Portland would be a good case-study if the affordable housing community in the Twin Cities wished to build public support for affordable housing.

## Meeting Attendees:

Abbie Loosen	Project for Pride in Living
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota
Bruce Watson	Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
David Miller	Urban Works Architects
Eric Muschler	The McKnight Foundation
Janne Flissrand	Minnesota Green Communities
Jerry Narlach	Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
Kari Gill	Dakota County Community Development Agency
Kim Bretheim	LHB Architects
Lyn Bruin	University of Minnesota
Michelle Baltus Pribyl	Cermak Rhoades Architects
Renee Richie	The McKnight Foundation
Rosemary Dolata	Aeon
Susan Braun	Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc
Todd Rhoades	Cermak Rhoades Architects

## **Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing**

Near North Rehabs, Minneapolis, MN



*photo: Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle*

Colorado Court, Santa Monica, CA



*photo: Marvin Rand*

**Session Five: Affordable Housing as Placemaking**  
Session Date: May 5, 2010  
Memo Date: May 25, 2010  
Presenters: Paul Mellblom, Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle  
Rhys MacPherson, Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle  
Sam Olbekson, Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle  
Mary Novak, Project for Pride in Living  
Attendees: See list at the end of this document

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### **Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation**

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

#### **Land Use & Transit Orientation**

**Site Selection.** Much of the presentation focused on the attributes of the neighborhoods in which the two case study projects are located and the site-selection strategies of the two developers involved. Santa Monica's Colorado Court – like the majority of the projects developed by the Community Corporation of Santa Monica (CCSM) – is located at the intersection of a major commercial corridor and Interstate I10. In locating their affordable housing projects along commercial corridors, the CCSM sites their projects within walking distance of services (social services offered by other organizations) and other amenities. Proximity to the interstate offers the building excellent visibility as a 'billboard' for sustainable design but also encouraged other design decisions that do not enhance the project's ability to contribute to the life of the street.

With the Near North Project, Project for Pride in Living (PPL) is working to revitalize a portion of North Minneapolis through strategic building renovations. This, too, is part of a larger strategy, one that locates projects within hard-hit neighborhoods in an effort to raise the quality of life in the neighborhood generally. The 10 buildings in the case study project are clustered together in the Near North neighborhood of Minneapolis and form part of the existing residential fabric of the neighborhood. The 'cluster' approach allows PPL to reach all residents by locating services and community spaces within some of the rehabbed buildings.

The presentation and discussion proposes that thoughtful and strategic site selection – not just for one building, but across a developer's entire portfolio – is one of the primary factors determining the project's ability to contribute to a neighborhood's sense of place.

**Multi-Modal Transportation Options: Walkability.** Though not always foremost in the minds of architects and developers, affordable housing projects have the capacity to contribute a great deal to a neighborhood's walkability. As the presentation's fine-grained analysis of the two case studies reveals, this isn't simply a matter of distances. It is also affected by the location of private social spaces and community spaces within residential projects, and by the design of the exterior spaces around the buildings. Despite the project's proximity to amenities, Colorado Court is not friendly to walking when assessed at the scale of the sidewalk: its social spaces are courtyards located at the interior of the site; walls, fences and gates at the property's perimeter create a hard boundary at all edges; and entry to the residences isn't immediately apparent (i.e. there's no visible 'front door.')

Near North, on the other hand, has encouraged front-yard sociability by creating patio seating areas near buildings' front doors, and has defined the front yard spaces by adding visually permeable iron fences but no front gates. The Near North neighborhood's attributes lay the groundwork for walkability – such as a complete sidewalk grid, a shade-tree canopy, and a classic street section, with on-street parking, boulevards, sidewalks, front yards, and 2 to 3 story buildings – which is supported by the small interventions at the Near North buildings themselves.

**Density to Support Amenities.** The comparisons between Colorado Court and Near North, both in terms of project type and neighborhood context, helped discussion participants to articulate a vital economic relationship between housing density and neighborhood services and amenities. In Santa Monica, existing densities support amenities such as shopping and transportation, which in turn supports the viability of affordable housing placed there. In Near North, despite densities that could support amenities, widespread poverty and persistent crime have prevented much economic development. Simply put, neighborhood amenities become much more viable when set within a moderately dense economically mixed neighborhood; affordable housing is a critical component of this mixture. This might be an effective argument to use locally when affordable housing projects, or even proposed zoning changes to increase density, encounter neighborhood resistance.

## Financing, Cost & Incentives

**Sources.** Though not a focus of the discussion, it is important to note of the types of funding Colorado Court obtained to support its net-zero energy goals, including subsidies from the cities of Santa Monica and Irvine, the local utility (Southern California Edison) and the California Energy Coalition. Together these sources provided over \$500,000 in funding on a \$4,674,000 project (in 2002 dollars.) The remainder of the project was funded through government appropriations, public and private loans and grants, and tax credits. Though it too contains some renewable-energy generation in the form of solar thermal panels on some of the 10 buildings, the Near North project's funding structure is more typical of affordable housing projects and includes tax credits and public deferred loans.

## Sustainability & Durability

**The Iconography of Sustainability.** The presentation's comparisons between Colorado Court and Near North revealed vastly different approaches to sustainability. Colorado Court achieved an extremely ambitious goal of net-zero energy consumption for the building through low-tech strategies such as natural ventilation as well as through high-tech strategies, including the vivid blue photovoltaic panels that comprise the front façade of the building. The building's aesthetic celebration of sustainable features has turned it into an icon of affordable, sustainable design. The Near North project's approach to sustainability is much more subtle: first, the project's ten existing buildings, all approaching 100 years old, will be preserved through building rehab and continued use; second, the project meets the Green Communities Criteria, a set of criteria developed by Enterprise Community Partners specifically for affordable housing; and third, the project will incorporate new solar thermal systems to offset fuel-fired heating and hot water systems in about half of the buildings. After renovation, building performance will improve dramatically, but the buildings' appearance will not change much: many of the green upgrades are hidden on roofs or within wall cavities.

The discussion circled around various ways to account for these vastly different approaches. Was the Colorado Court approach fundamentally different from the Near North approach simply due to differences in temperament between these regions: i.e.: California is flashy, therefore Colorado Court; Minnesota is understated, therefore Near North? Can the differences be accounted for by understanding the perception of sustainable architecture in 2002 vs 2010? Eight

years ago, sustainability focused on optimizing the performance of the building itself, whereas now our view has broadened to include neighborhood and regional context. The argument with perhaps the most explanatory power was arrived at through an examination of the development process: when Colorado Court was originally proposed, Santa Monica residents opposed it due to the fact that it would provide affordable housing. The community was highly supportive of sustainable design, however. The emphasis on pushing the sustainability agenda – and making it so very visible– was, therefore, part of an effort to appease unhappy neighbors.

**Durability.** When viewed through the lens of durability, the two case studies once again revealed differences in approach. Colorado Court is a new-construction project and has placed the emphasis on durable materials and finishes. For example, natural materials (with consistent appearance through the body of the material) were selected whenever possible so that when the material suffers from wear, it shows less, looks better and needs to be replaced less often. Discussion regarding the continued appeal of the classic apartment buildings comprising the Near North project, and PPL and MS&R’s light hand when it came to making changes to either the interior or exterior, emphasized the effectiveness of building for durability. The Near North buildings were built as market-rate housing 80 to 100 years ago, using high-quality materials and layouts that are gracious but not excessively spacious; with some renovation work, the buildings will continue to serve as high-quality housing for decades to come.

## Special Considerations by Building or Project Type

**The Social Life of the Street.** When assessed in terms of placemaking, the much-lauded Colorado Court project, an icon of innovative affordable housing, loses its luster, whereas the Near North project, a visually quiet project if ever there was one, provides an excellent demonstration of how to support the social life of the street through low-cost, effective design measures. The presentation and discussion seemed to ask: if an innovative project can at the same time create a sense of place that is uninviting and barren, and a high-quality but understated cluster of renovations can accomplish the important work of supporting the social life of the street, are we asking the right question? How important is innovation in the design of affordable housing? And how should ‘innovation’ be defined? It’s important to recognize that the two case studies were not selected to prove that radically new-looking modern buildings automatically detract from a neighborhood’s sense of place, nor that classic old buildings automatically contribute to it – it would take more than two case studies to prove this in any case! The comparison of two very different projects through a very consistent analytical lens does, however, call snapshot assessments of projects’ effectiveness and innovation into question.

## Potential Solutions

**The discussion raised one suggestion for lowering barriers to innovation:**

**Design Specific to Resident Groups.** Colorado Court and Near North (with a few buildings as exceptions) are both standard affordable housing. That is, neither project addresses the specific needs of a target population, such as the supportive housing projects we have seen that address homelessness, mental illness or chemical dependency. The absence of a strong correlation between resident needs and building design for both case study projects raised the suggestion that affordable housing developers could improve their “standard” product through a closer focus on the needs of the “standard” population. In the Twin Cities, this often means recent immigrants. The suggestion was not that apartments be designed specifically for each population – discussion participants recognized that immigrant groups come in waves, and apartment design for a specific group could become obsolete in 5 years – but that we work to understand the intersections where design features will work well for multiple populations. Front porches were named as an almost-universally beloved feature, and Tassoula Hadjiyanni’s work at the University of Minnesota was cited as a source for better understanding these intersections.

## Meeting Attendees:

Abbie Loosen	Project for Pride in Living
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota
Chris Wilson	Project for Pride in Living
David Miller	Urban Works Architects
Eric Muschler	The McKnight Foundation
Jeff Schoeneck	Urban Works
Jerry Narlach	Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
Kent Simon	Miller Hanson Partners
Kim Bretheim	LHB Architects
Lyn Bruin	University of Minnesota
Mary Novak	Project for Pride in Living
Miranda Walker	Project for Pride in Living
Paul Melblom	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle
Renee Richie	The McKnight Foundation
Rhys MacPherson	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle
Sam Olbekson	Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle
Susan Braun	Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc
Todd Rhoades	Cermak Rhoades Architects

## Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing

St. Anthony Mills Apartments (SAMA), Minneapolis, MN



Photo: Trace Jacques

8<sup>th</sup> & Howard/SOMA Studios, San Francisco, CA



Photo: Brian Rose

**Session Six: Mixed Use Affordable Housing**  
Session Date: May 19, 2010  
Memo Date: September 9, 2010  
Presenters: David Graham, Elness Swenson Graham Architects, Inc  
Tracey Jacques, Elness Swenson Graham Architects, Inc  
Deidre Schmidt, Affordable Housing Institute  
Attendees: See list at the end of this document

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### Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

#### Land Use & Transit Orientation

**Parking & Multi-Modal Transportation Options.** Minneapolis' SAMA building is a 'wrapper building,' with residential units wrapped around a parking ramp. The ramp, was developed in conjunction with the City of Minneapolis and allows residents and visitors to the Mill District to share parking. This allowed the developers to provide parking for residential units than zoning required (0.8 stalls/unit vs 1.0 stalls/unit.), and no parking for the commercial space. In San Francisco's SOMA building, no parking spaces were set aside for residents' private cars, but 66 spots were built to house a car-sharing program. District parking in Minneapolis and car-sharing in San Francisco both represent creative ways to reduce the total number of parking stalls built.

**Mixed Use, 'Convertible' Use.** The comparison of the SOMA and SAMA buildings provide an excellent illustration of the risk and difficulty involved in developing true mixed-use projects in medium-sized cities such as Minneapolis. The entire first floor of the SOMA building in San Francisco is devoted to non-residential uses, and all tenants, including a child-care facility and a locally-owned grocery store, appear to be thriving. This success is likely due to the building's location in pedestrian-dense San Francisco. Indeed, one discussion participant noted, in New York City, ground-floor commercial uses are typically so successful that they are able to subsidize affordable housing above. In Minneapolis it is a different story: the corner commercial spaces in Minneapolis' SAMA building are now occupied, but only after months of vacancy, and not by tenants that one expects when one thinks of mixed-use (one space is rented by a ticket vending company.) The presentation team strongly emphasized the difficulty of including commercial spaces in the project and noted that they continue to pose a financial risk. There are no funding sources like the affordable housing tax credit to support the development of commercial space in locations where this is desirable but not economically viable.

Given the difficulty of funding and managing purpose-built commercial space, might it make sense to build ground-floor spaces as residential now, but construct them in such a way that allows them to be converted to commercial space in the future? This could work, noted the presentation team, provided that the housing units remain affordable housing for the 30-year compliance period. Could, instead, live-work units or other transitional models help untangle this issue? Can existing tax credit programs pay for any of these ‘convertible’ uses? The presentation team cautioned that while live/work spaces can qualify under the tax credit program, conversion of these units to purely commercial use will trigger recapture.

## Code, Zoning & Development Process

**Neighborhood Involvement.** The comparison of the two projects reinforces what we have been learning through the forums throughout the spring: the typical Twin Cities project sees much more input from neighbors and neighborhood organizations than projects in other cities, and building design is substantially affected by that input. The St Anthony Mills Apartments benefitted from great support from its Mill District and downtown neighbors, including a \$1 million contribution to the project’s funding. Presenters attributed neighborhood support for this affordable housing project to the ongoing relationship the developer had with the neighborhood. Brighton had development rights to 5 blocks in the Mill District and had performed on previous projects; therefore neighbors trusted that Brighton would produce a good project. However this accountability to neighbors resulted in the jettisoning of a portion of the proposed 5<sup>th</sup> floor, allowable under existing zoning, in order to preserve views of downtown for existing residents.. However, the presenters emphasized, some compromises were worth it in order to have affordable housing built in the quickly-gentrifying Mill District.

**General Contractor as Part of the Development Team.** The presentation of the St Anthony Mills Apartments again reinforced the importance of having the general contractor as part of the project team early, rather than relying on a bid process and receiving important cost information too late to substantially affect project design. Bor-Son, the general in this case, offered almost constant cost-information updates throughout the design process, and helped save cost where it was appropriate in order to preserve funds for design features. “We never would have gotten items on our ‘contingency wish-list’ without Bor-Son’s early participation,” stated the development team.

## Sustainability & Durability

**Materials.** The two projects used standard materials for opposite effects: SAMA in Minneapolis was primarily clad in brick to fit into the neighborhood context, while SOMA in San Francisco used stucco and other off-the-shelf products for an iconic effect. While neither project used materials new to its region, the contrast prompted discussion the difficulty of working with new or alternative materials on tight budgets. With new or innovative materials, architects must educate general contractors and subs through the construction process, and affordable housing fee schedules don’t typically allow for this investment of time. Furthermore, our climate is an unforgiving one, and good detailing and proper installation are of critical importance. These two obstacles slow innovation in exterior cladding design for affordable housing in the Twin Cities.

**Public Private Partnership.** The St Anthony Mills Apartments demonstrate a deep and effective commitment to public private partnership. First, the project team challenged the City’s original diagram for the relationship between parking ramp and building. The plans had included a through-block parking ramp, with residential buildings to the east and west. The development team proposed that the residences instead wrap the parking ramp, which benefitted not only the building’s occupants but also served to activate the street on three sides of the block. (The fourth side leaves room for a future residential building.) To accomplish the residential “wrap” around the City-owned ramp – structure and roof

are in some cases shared – the development team and the City had to work very closely with one another. This degree of public/private partnership wasn't easily accomplished, emphasized the presenters, but the street-level vitality that resulted was worth the extra effort.

## Other Considerations

**Iconic buildings vs 'fabric' buildings.** The similarities between the two projects in terms of density and scale, and the difference in visual effect between the Minneapolis and San Francisco buildings, point to important local expectations about affordable housing design. The St Anthony Mills Apartments was designed to fit into its context and visually support the neighborhood fabric. In the terms used throughout the discussion, it is a "textural" building and is very successful as such. It should be noted that SAMA stands in immediate proximity to the most iconic building constructed in Minneapolis in recent history (Jean Nouvel's Guthrie Theater) as well as a half dozen AIA award-winning new construction and historic renovations. Given this context, SAMA, with a much lower budget compares favorably. The 8<sup>th</sup> & Howard/SOMA Studios building, on the other hand, draws from its layered visual context which is on the whole less dramatic and intends to stand out. It is an "iconic" building in the discussion's terms.

Why, discussion participants asked, are there no affordable housing projects in the Twin Cities that strive to be iconic? Why are all of the local examples we have seen textural buildings? Can affordable-housing design in the Twin Cities move forward if all affordable housing projects wish to blend into their surroundings? Are iconic affordable-housing projects appropriate here?

Local architects and developers participating in the discussion offered thoughts on the above questions: because affordable housing isn't almost-universally accepted as an important part of the urban landscape in the Twin Cities (as it appears to be in San Francisco), 'textural' buildings are a defense against criticism because they seem less easily identified. Someone offered (and another seconded) the following example: if something negative happens in or around an affordable housing project and it makes the news, the iconic building will forever be associated with that negative activity. Another person questioned whether the SOMA Studios building would have made it through the MHFA review process or if it would be viewed as too extravagant. In fact, the room seemed to be split as to whether affordable housing should ever take the iconic approach. Some argued that this could cause affordable-housing residents to feel singled out.

The discussion revealed that, for better or for worse, the expectation in the Twin Cities is that affordable housing should blend into its surroundings. Some discussion participants disagreed with this expectation and wished that it would change, but others thought that restraint and modesty were appropriate for affordable housing.

## Potential Solutions

**The discussion raised one suggestion for lowering barriers to innovation:**

**Architecture Awards.** Though the discussion ranged over whether iconic buildings are appropriate for affordable housing, discussion participants acknowledged that the SAMA building was quite successful (and appropriate) as a textural building. Success through this approach needs to be better-rewarded: juries for architecture awards need to stop focusing solely on iconic buildings and reward well-executed 'textural' buildings as well.

## Meeting Attendees:

Abbie Loosen	Project for Pride in Living
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota
Brandon Stengler	Miller Hanson Partners
Chris Wilson	Project for Pride in Living
David Graham	ESG Architects, Inc
David Miller	Urban Works Architects
Deidre Schmidt	Affordable Housing Institute

Eric Muschler  
John Hamilton  
Kent Simon  
Kim Bretheim  
Mary Hale  
Nate Tickner  
Paul Melblom  
Susan Braun  
Todd Rhoades  
Tracey Jacques

The McKnight Foundation  
Urban Works Architects  
Miller Hanson Partners  
LHB Architects  
Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship  
University of Minnesota  
Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle  
Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc  
Cermak Rhoades Architects  
ESG Architects, Inc

## Innovation Beyond the Façade: Local and National Case Studies of Good Design in Affordable Housing

Heritage Commons at Pond's Edge, Minneapolis, MN



photo: George Heinrich

The Legacy, Pittsburgh, PA



photo: Doyno Rothschild Collaborative

**Session Seven: Housing for the Elderly**  
Session Date: June 9, 2010  
Memo Date: June 18, 2010  
Presenters: Kent Simon, Miller Hanson Partners  
Brandon Stengel, Miller Hanson Partners  
Darlene Walser, McCormack Baron Salazar  
Kathy Kopp, Augustana Care Corporation  
Attendees: See list at the end of this document

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### Barriers to Innovation / Opportunities for Innovation

Discussion of the two projects side-by-side raised the following key issues:

#### Land Use & Transit Orientation

**Siting.** Among the challenges for Heritage Commons were: the high water table requiring deep pilings, aesthetic mandates based on master design guidelines for the entire Heritage redevelopment site, security for the residents, and programming for supportive services. The site is park-like with a large pond on the north side of the building and is enhanced by gardens, outdoor gathering spaces, rainwater gathering, and walking paths. The Legacy is located blocks from downtown Pittsburgh in an area known for its jazz clubs and jazz artists. The surrounding neighborhood is undergoing redevelopment with the YMCA, Urban League, a restaurant, a library, a theater, and future retail in the area. The Legacy is close to parks and green spaces, but those features are not on the actual site itself.

**Transit.** Heritage Commons is situated to take advantage of public transit, but is oriented to the pond. While there is public transit available, the bus stops are about a block away—too far for many of the residents to walk. The Legacy is bounded on the north and the south by two major roadways and there are bus stops at each of the four corners of the building.

## Code, Zoning & Development Process

**Development process.** In the Heritage Commons development, the service provider (Augustana) was not involved in planning until the end because the contract for services was not let by the Housing Authority until the project was close to completion. The nature of this type of project may not allow for early identification of a third party service provider, although there was a consensus between Augustana, the architect, and the developer that the service provider should be involved from the beginning. The services allowed are determined by the state for a particular ratio of staffing to residents. This information was not able to inform the design, but it can also change over time.

**Political & Neighborhood Involvement.** Heritage Commons is located within a much larger redevelopment area that was formerly a public housing site. As a result of a successful lawsuit challenging the concentration of poverty, the final consent decree in 1995 specified that mixed income housing would replace the public housing. The distribution of the 900 new units include 440 rental (200 public housing, 90 affordable, and 150 market rate), 102 senior public housing, and 360 for sale units (55 at 60% AMI, 55 at 80% AMI, and 250 unrestricted). Thus, the concept of senior housing in the master plan had been determined a number of years before the building of Heritage Commons, but there was still neighborhood input into the design of the building. The Pittsburgh neighborhood around the Legacy was involved in the development of the site and supportive of a new structure. The developer, McCormack Baron Salazar, ensured that the history of the neighborhood was integrated into the design features of the Legacy.

## Financing, Cost & Incentives

Heritage Commons was funded through a Hope VI Grant to Minneapolis Public Housing. The building is 94,000sf and the units are 535sf; the total development cost was \$14.2 million. It was noted that funding is difficult, competitive, and takes partnering. Funding sources for senior developments include HUD 202, tax credits, subsidies, USDA/Rural Development, HUD 232, and Build America Bonds (interest credit). There are only about two HUD 202 projects per year in Minnesota. Additionally, Minnesota Housing's priorities are for affordable family housing, so tax credits are very difficult to obtain for projects targeting housing for elderly persons. Augustana subsidizes 20% of the units on rent and on services. They receive an average of \$1900/month per resident, which is below the average cost per resident. Funding for Augustana's services comes from: Elderly Waiver Program, Hennepin County waived services and private pay customers. Among services provided by Augustana are: meals, housekeeping, laundry, bathing assistance, medication set-up and administration, transportation, and education.

The Legacy development costs were \$16.2 million, with funding from tax credits and RHF Funds. It was also public housing owned by the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh and the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh. The building has 85,000sf for the residential area (545sf per unit) and an additional 5,000sf of commercial area. The City of Pittsburgh funded the commercial space, but it is not yet occupied. The service provider is LIFE Pittsburgh and funding for services is by LIFE PITT and PACE, providing all inclusive funding much like life insurance. PACE (Programs of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly) was prohibited in Minnesota until recently. LIFE services include transportation from Legacy to LIFE PITT (LIFE PITT provides food service, primary and specialty care, bathing, and centralized care and service). LIFE PITT also provides on-site, part-time staff to the Legacy.

**Supportive services.** There were many questions about services vis-à-vis development.

- How could/would PACE and/or long-term insurance assist in the development process? That is an unanswered question, but LIFE PITT is a forerunner.
- What are the cost implications of in-home care vs. on-site care vs. life centers (e.g., PACE)? These are larger societal and policy issues that need market and economic studies.
- Are there differences due to the residents' background? It was mentioned that ethnic and demographic differences influence the services provided more so than the design.
- Are the number of units driven by funding and policy in terms of how many units need to be planned? For Heritage Commons, because the service provider was not contracted until the end of the process, there was no

opportunity for input into the design process. Service providers need to be involved at the design stage for such considerations as maximum efficiency of labor, service provisions, and cost controls.

- With demographic and attitude changes, will today's aging population (seniors and soon-to-be- seniors) want to live in congregate arrangements and how can 'in-place' aging be assisted? Something different is happening – there is a different type of senior emerging. St. Louis has an example of seniors being integrated into community through adaptive housing. An important component is keeping seniors central, integrated, and active in communities. There are social, medical and nutritional advantages to living in congregate facilities.

## Sustainability & Durability

While Heritage Commons meets LEED-certification criteria, it was not certified as such. An issue at Heritage has been the use of scooters which was not considered during the design of the structure. Augustana was not involved at that time, but has learned from their other projects that sharp corners and turns often require repair from scooter damage. The entry into the units would have been designed slightly differently had the extensive use of scooters been known.

## Special Considerations by Building or Project Type

**Heritage Commons.** There was a conscious decision not to have a main lobby with seating, but there are community rooms nearby and a large dining space. Medical services are located on second floor so as not to remind residents of their frailties. Kitchens and bathrooms in the units are fully accessible with roll-under sinks and 34" countertops. Residents of Heritage Commons are predominantly women (74%), and those who receive assisted living services (40%) tend to be poorer, older, minority, female, and live alone. The average age when a resident moves in is 85 years. There were some lessons learned regarding the design of the interiors at Heritage Commons. For example, no built-in shower seat was preferable so there was room for an assistant to help the resident, horizontal sliding sash windows were easiest for the residents to use, doors and door jams receive scooter damage and need to be durable, laundry facilities, meeting rooms and beauty salons are necessary, and privacy for the service provider when working with files is important. Each unit has a built in shelf at the resident's door in the hallway, and a built-in memory hutch, a display area near the entry to the unit.

**The Legacy.** The issue of conceptualizing place based on the legacy of jazz clubs in the area occurred after urban renewal removed many of the buildings in the area. The architectural firm, Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, incorporated jazz syncopation in the design of The Legacy. Walls were very long, 400sf, and there was a 12 foot change in grade. The walls were "broken up" through the utilization of different colors (chosen to match the brick on the local synagogue), placement of awnings, and the placement of bricks. Inside, there is color coding by floor along with a change in lighting along the long, interior hallways. The common space on the first floor was large and visible to the main entry. But, it was designed so that residents in the open space would not deter access to the office spaces, etc

## Meeting Attendees:

Kent Simon	Miller Hanson Partners
Brandon Stengel	Miller Hanson Partners
Darlene Walser	McCormack Baron Salazar
Kathy Kopp	Augustana Care Corporation
Miranda Walker	Project for Pride in Living
Gerry Welf	Minneapolis Housing Authority
Rachel Robinson	CommonBond Communities
Rosemary Dolata	Aeon

Tom Meyer	Meyer, Scherer, & Rockcastle
Becky Yust	University of Minnesota
Eric Muschler	The McKnight Foundation
Kim Bretheim	LHB Architects
Lyn Bruin	University of Minnesota
Renee Richie	The McKnight Foundation
Susan Braun	Elliot Park Neighborhood, Incorporated
Todd Rhoades	Cermak Rhoades Architects