Dedication

To the residents of Veterans Row, every advocate fighting to end homelessness and the entire unhoused community of Los Angeles.
Acknowledgments

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Abstract

As the nation’s capital of homelessness, California needs to find more solutions for the unhoused community. According to the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, there were 66,436 people experiencing homelessness. This was a 12.7% increase from 2019 and the homeless population is continuing to grow today. Building affordable housing has become a prominent initiative for the city, however projects have been slow to move as the unhoused population increased. A handful of these projects have rehabilitated historic buildings in order to use them as permanent supportive and affordable housing.

While thousands of people are living on the street, these under-utilized buildings have the potential to be used as permanent supportive and affordable housing. This thesis uses three case studies to demonstrate how adaptively reusing historic properties can be an effective approach to providing housing. The three different projects, The Veteran’s Transitional Housing Facility, The Downtown Women’s Center, and The 28th Street Apartments are all success stories demonstrating how rehabilitating historic properties can provide affordable housing while maintaining the integrity of a building’s history.

Each of these projects also emphasize how community involvement and the history of each respective building contribute to the quality of life of residents. Analysis of the reuse of historic properties as permanent supportive and affordable housing, demonstrates how this alternative approach to providing housing is not only effective but also utilizes innovative strategies to provide housing with character and history that contributes to a greater quality of life.
Introduction

History of Homelessness

Los Angeles is in the midst of an unprecedented housing crisis, forcing many people into homelessness. The causes of chronic homelessness in Los Angeles can be attributed to many historical and contemporary policies and factors. The city's original zoning policies led to a lack of access to housing and established the foundation of Los Angeles' segregated geography. This damaging legacy of inadequate access housing remains today in addition to other factors like lack of social services, employment shortage and discrimination, rent increase, gentrification, and criminalization of homelessness.

Like many American cities, Los Angeles’ original zoning policies created class discrimination by reserving middle class neighborhoods for single-family homes that low-income families could not afford.1 Another historical policy, redlining, was developed by the Home Owners Loan Association and created color coded maps to define the property value of a given neighborhood. These maps shared a trend that labeled both low income and communities of color as “hazardous.” Lenders and government agencies used HOLC maps to determine their lending policies and therefore limited accessibility of loans to middle and upper-class people who lived outside of these red “blighted” zones. The lasting effects of both racial zoning and redlining are evident in many ways. Since low-income families of color were denied access to buying single family homes by both zoning ordinances and redlining, they tended to rent, living in apartment buildings and neighborhoods with high density. Renters are always in danger of facing rent increases that often lead to eviction based on inability to afford rent. Redlining is also

a big factor in the legacy of how segregated Los Angeles is both by race and class. Since the communities who lived in redlined neighborhoods were systematically denied access to loans, these disenfranchised neighborhoods lack access to both economic and social capital that prohibits them from the same economic and social opportunities as other Los Angeles residents.

The destruction of the Chavez Ravine community highlights how these policies lead to displacement and inevitably homelessness. The neighborhood, made up of mostly Mexican American residents, was deemed a “blighted” by the HOLC and eventually residents were forced to sell their homes and the entire community was wiped out in order to make way for Dodger Stadium. The destruction of Chavez Ravine also demonstrates how profit is prioritized over history and collective memory. The Chavez Ravine was one of Los Angeles’ oldest communities and the construction of Dodger Stadium erased all remnants of its past.

38% of people experiencing chronic homelessness are black and 33% or Latinx. Other populations that make up a large percentage of the homeless population are veterans, people who suffer from substance abuse (28%), those with serious mental illness (25%), those with a physical disability (19%), and people who suffer from domestic violence (32%). While each of these populations are different, the factors that contribute to their chronic homelessness are the same. Globally speaking a lack of access to social services is extremely important to the


5 Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count.”
livelihood of these different populations since mental health is an integral aspect of life. While these demographics are important, they categorize people into data points while neglecting the similarities they share with each other. For example, those who suffer from domestic violence and substance abuse are at risk for, or may already also suffer from, a serious mental illness. The lack of social services provided by the city makes mental wellness extremely difficult and affects many parts of life like maintaining a job, an integral factor in housing. Additionally, those who suffer from mental health issues are often discriminated against in the workplace and have less work opportunities. As discussed previously, renters, who are disproportionately Black and Latinx are subject to rent increases, another factor that leads to homelessness. Increased rent can often be attributed to gentrification, which pushes people out of their homes and neighborhoods and further from the city center. Lastly, criminalization of people experiencing homelessness is a huge factor in perpetuating a vicious cycle. If you are forced out of your home by all or some of the factors previously mentioned you are automatically criminalized as living on the street is illegal. People living in tents are perpetually plagued by police street sweeps furthering their existing trauma of displacement.

**Historic Buildings**

Historic buildings are an important aspect of the built environment as they provide a given place with character and history that bring communities together. There is a special quality of authenticity historic properties bring to a neighborhood and a 2017 survey conducted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, “found that more than half of millennials view historic
preservation as important through the lens of engaging in authentic experiences.” Historic buildings that are adapted for new purposes tend to be longstanding structures that serve as landmarks that connect people to their neighborhood, “transforming these places and infusing them with new use builds upon decades of local identification and connection, drawing immediately upon an accessible reservoir of goodwill.” In our ever changing fast paced world, historic places have the potential to ground people. This is specifically relevant to individuals who have faced displacement repeatedly. Without permanent shelter or any sense of home, the built environment of a city can provide familiarity that grounds people emotionally.

In the context of affordable housing, historic buildings are opportune spaces for housing, “because a historic building is already constructed and well-accepted in its community, its conversion to housing can happen relatively quickly: reuse does not typically trigger community opposition or lengthy delays in the project approves necessary to build new housing from the ground up.” Historic properties also have both tax incentives and potential funding from the government under the United States Historic National Preservation Act of 1966. If a project meets the requirements, funding can also be provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development through community block grants. To obtain a Community Block Grant, a project must be geared towards the HUD’s community development activities:

Community development activities build stronger and more resilient communities. To support community development, activities are identified through an ongoing process. Activities may address needs such as infrastructure,


7 Bernstein and Schafer, Preserving Los Angeles, 129.

8 Bernstein and Schafer, Preserving Los Angeles, 130.
economic development projects, public facilities installation, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, clearance/acquisition, micro-enterprise assistance, code enforcement, homeowner assistance, etc. Federal support encourages systematic and sustained action by state and local governments.\textsuperscript{9}

Rehabilitation

Los Angeles is home to a variety of historic buildings that are locally, nationally, and federally recognized. Once a building is listed on a register it necessitates special treatment under the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Historic preservation requirements can deter people from purchasing historic buildings since architectural changes must follow specific guidelines. According to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, “rehabilitation acknowledges the need to alter or add to a historic property to meet continuing or changing uses while retaining the property's historic character.” Rehabilitation often goes hand in hand with adaptive reuse, reusing an existing building for a different purpose than it was originally intended for. For any given rehabilitation project, a preservation consultant firm is often enlisted to advise on the preservation needs of the project. Usually, a preservation consultant will do a historical assessment and/or a historic structure report prior to starting the project. That informs the owner and the architect about; Why is this building significant? What makes the building historical? What are the regulations? What are the opportunities and constraints? What's its developmental history? How is it been built and changed over the years? And what are its character defining features and spaces? For example, the lobby might be an important feature to communicate the history of the building, but the closet is less important. An inventory of character-defining features is created, and it shows photographs, descriptions, and conditions of the spaces and the things in the building you need to take care of. After this, the

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preservation consultant, architect, planning consultant come together to figure out the design of the project, so that it will get the support of the community.

**Adaptive Reuse**

Adaptive reuse refers to, “the conversion of an existing building to accommodate an activity different from its original purpose.” There are many variants of adaptive reuse projects, such as train stations becoming retail centers or bank lobbies becoming restaurants. Adaptive reuse has many benefits - it can be environmentally and economically sustainable by eliminating new construction and it often saves time on a project since it is not built from scratch. It takes more time and effort to get permission to build a new building than to repair an existing building that is already there. If “time equals money,” then adaptive reuse is more cost effective by avoiding the time-consuming intricacies of new construction.

In Los Angeles, the most transformative adaptive reuse has involved the conversion of older commercial buildings into new housing units. In the late 1990s, the zoning codes were structured around construction in suburban neighborhoods, not in the reuse of existing buildings. To update these codes, the City Planning Department developed a new zoning ordinance called, The Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO) With the help of the Central City Association and the Los Angeles Conservancy, “The Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO), approved by the city council in 1999, waived most zoning requirements for housing conversion: no new parking needed to be provided, and existing building conditions that did not conform to new zoning requirements

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could remain.” More flexible strategies to retrofit historical buildings for fire safety and seismic stability were also addressed alongside the ARO. Once new guidelines had been tested on actual building projects the code was permanently amended. “These relatively straightforward changes triggered some of the most striking results seen anywhere in the nation from a zoning code action. In just over a decade (1999-2010), the Adaptive Reuse Program facilitated the conversion of more than seventy older or historic structures in Downtown Los Angeles alone, creating more than 9,000 housing units.” However Adaptive Reuse and the rehabilitation of historic properties is not limited to Downtown Los Angeles.

In the context of affordable housing, an adaptive reuse project qualifies for the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CBDG), by providing a public service, homeowner assistance, and potentially community centers or housing rehabilitation. More specifically, an adaptive reuse project for affordable housing falls under the Entitlement Program that, "provides annual grants on a formula basis to entitled cities and counties to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons.”

Additionally, adaptive reuse helps maintain community identity by conserving important historic buildings that contribute to a community’s distinctive architectural character. Reusing historic properties can reap economic and sustainable benefits but most importantly maintain

14 Bernstein and Schafer, Preserving Los Angeles, 114.

15 Ibid.

historical character not just for the sake of the building but for future residents and the community at large. The Downtown Women’s Center, 28th Street Apartments, and The Veterans Transitional Housing Facility are all examples of projects that successfully maintained the historic character of a building that had historic significance to not only the broader community but more importantly to the residents themselves. By preserving the original physical features of a building, the architectural integrity is maintained which helps enhance the experience of the resident by connecting them to the history of the place.

Supportive Services and Community

As mentioned above, historic buildings have the potential to enhance community identity by providing a sense of history. The Veteran’s Transitional Housing Site, Downtown Women’s Center, and 28th Street Apartments all collaborated with their future residents throughout the development of the project which contributed to their success. While they all serve different demographic populations, the residents have all faced severe trauma in their lives and primarily share the experience of being chronically homeless and repeatedly displaced. Incorporating future residents into the design process is key to ensure people will feel comfortable, safe, and content in their new home. A core design characteristic of these projects emphasized creating communal environments with shared spaces for residents to socialize and create community amongst themselves. However, it is also important to consider individual needs and provide adequate privacy and space for individuals. Thoughtful planning and collaboration are what make these projects so successful in not just providing housing but creating an environment that people can feel proud to call their home.
The following chapters will examine three case studies of projects that rehabilitated historic properties for permanent supportive housing. Each case study, The Veteran’s Transitional Housing Facility, The Downtown Women’s Center and the 28th Street Apartments each exemplify how employing this mode of adaptive reuse is a successful method in creating community-oriented housing that provides supportive services and also utilizes important historic properties.
Chapter 1: Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing

Overview and History

As the nation’s capital of homelessness, our city’s need to find solutions for the unhoused community is dire.\textsuperscript{17} In California, 27.9\% of the population are people experiencing homelessness.\textsuperscript{18} For context this is 12.14\% more than in New York, which has the 2nd largest unhoused population the country, and 23.13\% more than Florida, which has the 3rd largest.\textsuperscript{19} According to the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, veterans make up about 5\% (~2000) of the 40,000 people who are unhoused. In these dire times, innovative solutions like the rehabilitation of historic buildings are necessary. Vacant historic buildings are opportune spaces for housing since their historic designation inhibits demolition and often leaves them unused and empty for years. Additionally, they provide a connection to a given population’s history. The buildings located on the VA campus that have belonged veterans since the 1880s are finally being returned to them. Historic buildings both spatially and temporally provide a solution to the current housing crisis, and the rehabilitation of Building 209 is a successful example of adaptive re-use for permanent supportive housing.

The West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs (VA) Campus located in West Los Angeles is a sprawling 380-acre campus with multiple historic buildings (Figure 1.0) The history of the site dates back to 1887, when 500 acres of vacant land was donated to the National Home for

#fn[]=1300&fn[]=2900&fn[]=6400&fn[]=10200&fn[]=13400&all_types=true&year=2020.

#fn[]=1300&fn[]=2900&fn[]=6400&fn[]=10200&fn[]=13400&all_types=true&year=2020.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
Disabled Volunteer Soldiers along with $250,000 to develop the land.\textsuperscript{20} Construction began in 1888 and the first buildings erected were the home of the branch administrator, barracks, a mess hall, and small hospital.\textsuperscript{21} A 1908 account of the campus describes the picturesque grounds adorned by trees and flowers, as, “one of the most beautifully arranged and kept parks in the county.”\textsuperscript{22} When many veterans returned after World War I, the barracks became overcrowded and put the hospital over capacity.

The hospital and wood barracks were later destroyed by fires. The need for new construction was dire and most of the wooden construction was replaced by concrete, brick, and stucco. As well, a large portion of the famous gardens were removed.\textsuperscript{23} Many of these new buildings reflected the Mission and Colonial revival styles that were popular in the period. As time went on, the campus experienced many significant changes both bureaucratically and physically, inevitably altering the architecture and geography of the land. While most of the physical remnants were lost through time, the site still maintains historical properties, such as the Wadsworth Hospital and Canteen (Building 209), which is now known as the Veteran’s Transitional Housing Building.

After years of negligence, most of the historic buildings (including the Wadsworth Hospital) were in terrible condition. Zev Yaroslavsky, former member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors from 1994-2014 and representative of District 3 where the VA is located


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
described the buildings, “Like going into a time machine… Before the renovation started, I went on a tour and the basement was piled high with wheelchairs from World War II vets. In the [former] dining hall the dishes are there. It's like going to Chernobyl. The silverware is from 1945 - I mean, nothing has changed.”

Figure 1.1: Aerial view of VA Campus, screenshot from Google Maps, annotations by the author.

The VA campus has belonged to veterans since March 1888 when the United States received a “donation of the land with the understanding and intent for the site to be used to establish a Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Shortly after

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the Korean War, nearly 5,000 veterans called the campus home.” However the veterans of Los Angeles have struggled to secure their lawful right to this land for years. The Federal government maintained this purpose for the property until the 1970s, “but over years it transitioned into a condensed healthcare and research campus leaving land, housing and amenities unused and in disrepair.” As well, VA officials allowed commercial and non-profit leasing of the land.

The West LA VA is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District. for its contribution to the “development of a national policy for Veteran health care” and as a “tangible manifestation of the federal government’s commitment to the health care of Veterans of World War I, which resulted in the nation’s largest network of hospitals.” Additionally the district is listed for its significance in architecture as it showcases the Mission Revival style, “which reflected both the national taste for reviving Colonial-era styles and a local desire for reflecting local history and context in architecture.”

In 2013, a U.S. Federal court ruled that nine Enhanced Sharing Agreements between the VA and outside parties (non-veteran) were illegal. These illegal tenants included Marriott Hotels, which managed a laundry facility, 20th Century Fox who used the land as storage, and even Brentwood School, a $40,000 per year K-12 private school around the corner that operated a


twenty-acre athletic complex. These problems worsened, and in 2018 it was deemed that more than 60% of the campus’s land-use agreements were illegal, citing a dog park, Red Cross offices, a Shakespeare festival, and a parrot sanctuary. In the same year, a VA official was bribed with $300,000 by an operator of a parking lot located on the property. Additionally, he was found with $11 million in unreported revenue.29

While the VA has been engaging in illegal land use, the campus is now surrounded by approximately fifty tents sheltering unhoused veterans. As well, there are now veterans living in tents inside the property gates. Since living in a tent on the street is “illegal,” the veterans who live outside the gates of the VA property live a life that is criminalized by the same government that failed to provide sustainable housing after their military service. As Yaroslavsky states, “The feds basically think that by letting their property be used for this, as long as they don't have to pay for it, that they're doing everybody a favor. One of the responsibilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs is to provide services for these folks and not force them to walk from South LA over to the West LA and say, Hey, I need help.”30

**Rehabilitation**

Finally, in 2011 the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) proposed to rehabilitate the long vacant Building 209 to provide long-term supportive housing for unhoused veterans. The project architect was Leo A. Daly, a nationwide architectural firm. After years of neglect, the building needed significant rehabilitation work to stabilize, provide seismic

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upgrades, and retrofit the building. As an adaptive re-use project, the interior needed to be redesigned to accommodate residential units with space for supportive services. The project included new mechanical, electrical, and life safety systems.  

Figure 1.2: The Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing Facility upon completion. Courtesy of the American Institute of Architects.

The rehabilitation process of the Veterans Transitional Housing Building is also notable as a case study for rehabilitating a building listed on the National Register. (Figure 1.2) Since Building 209 is a contributing resource to the West Los Angeles VA Historical District, the

project necessitated both an architecture firm and preservation consultant to ensure compliance with section 106 on the design of the project.

Section 106 has four basic steps:

1. Consult on the project by notifying the appropriate consulting parties which include; the federal agency, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), and other parties including but not limited to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, certified local governments, and members of the general public with an economic, social or cultural interest in the project.

2. Identify properties that may be affected by the project and determine if the property or properties are historic as determined by eligibility or listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

3. Assess the effects of the undertaking on the resources in consultation with the SHPO or THPO and establish if they are adverse. Determining adverse effects on historic resources is based on criteria established by the regulations set by the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation and

4. Resolve adverse effects by developing and evaluating alternatives that could avoid, minimize, or mitigate these impacts on historic resources. The consultation results in a legally binding document that provides evidence that the agency complies with Section 106. Additionally, the document demonstrates the agency’s compliance with Section 106 and records the outcome of the consultation and the effect of the given project on historic resources.32

The Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) had to consult with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on the effects the rehabilitation would have on the larger historical property. The VAMC planned to replace the original metal sash windows but since they were a contributing feature under the Secretary of Interior's Standards, SHPO advised the VAMC not to replace the windows. After further consultation an alternative approach was proposed where the steel frames and sashes would be preserved while the existing glass would be replaced

with new laminated glass to help with energy performance requirements. The VAMC now aims to renovate other structures on the West LA and other VAMC campuses. The project won several honors, including the Los Angeles Conservancy Preservation Award, California Preservation Foundation Preservation Award, Society for History in the Federal Government Award, and the American Institute of Architects Housing Award. After sitting vacant and falling into decay following years of vacancy, the AIA recognized both the rehabilitation challenges and innovative approach the design team undertook successfully. The AIA also points to the “evidence-based design and close collaboration with formerly homeless Veterans.” This aspect of rehabilitating historic buildings for permanent supportive housing is extremely important to the lasting success of a site. When the community is part of the design process, they are provided with an opportunity to express what they would like their future home to look like. This collaborative effort is important not only to ensure safety and comfort but also a sense of empowerment to a group of people who have been displaced over and over again by the hand of the government against their will. No matter where you come from, a house will never feel like a home if you are not provided with the opportunity to express and see your own voice in both the process and result.

The rehabilitation of Building 209 is clearly an important step in housing veterans experiencing homelessness and for returning the VA property to its intended use. The rehabilitated Building 209 opened in 2015 as The Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing


Facility. The building houses sixty-five formerly unhoused veterans incorporating thoughtful design like the spacious atrium entrance and important amenities such as a fitness center, a large kitchen that offers culinary skill classes, and communal sitting areas with Wifi. The building contains fifty-five single and ten double-occupancy units that house a total of sixty-five veterans. Some units on the upper floor even boast ocean views. Twenty women live in a secure wing with an exit to a "serenity garden."  

Figure 1.3: Studio Apartment at Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing Facility. Courtesy of American Institute of Architects. Photo by Lawrence Anderson.

**Supportive Services and Community**

The successful reception of the project is exemplified by the residents’ satisfaction with 

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their new homes. For example, Keith Hudson, one of sixty-five formerly unhoused veterans who now live in the Homeless Veteran’s Transitional Housing Facility, walked into his new apartment and said, “it was like one of those movies when you walk through a cloud and you’re like: ‘Whoa! Wow!’ Everything was state of the art, brand new. It’s like an apartment complex and a five-star hotel combined into one, with all the amenities.” Hudson’s one bedroom apartment comes furnished with a TV and includes a living room and full kitchen. (Figure 1.3) Hudson plans to spend a lot of time “perfecting recipes taught to him by his Chinese, Cherokee and African American relatives.” Bill Daniels, a Homelessness Consultant to the Chief of Staff for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VAGLAHS) remarked on the success of the project, “The facility is so beautiful, and some of the rooms have ocean views... But as beautiful as it is, it’s really a working environment, and this facility is going to help our veterans move to a higher level of independence and self-sufficiency. It’s going to be a real model for the entire VA.”

Upon opening, the VA communications office released a statement: “Establishing a sense of community was a primary driver throughout the design process. Each floor was organized around the concept of a neighborhood, where the central corridor is equated to a main avenue and branching corridors to streets. Park-like areas for socialization were designed at the

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36 “Groves, “VA Unveils Housing for 65 Homeless Veterans.”

37 “Groves, “VA Unveils Housing for 65 Homeless Veterans.”

38 “VA Opens Homeless Housing Project on West LA Campus,” June 4, 2015, https://www.losangeles.va.gov/LosAngeles/pressreleases/VAOpens_Homeless_Housing_Project_on_West_LA_Campus.asp.
intersections to further the sense of community and encourage social interaction.” The final product demonstrates how the emphasis of community living also breeds a dynamic design with unique character. The conceptual neighborhood design creates a microcosm of a city, something that residents were systematically denied the right to for years and now finally have the chance to live without fear of being displaced again. Additionally, the 380-acre piece of land that houses the building is notably scenic and lush, described by Yaroslavsky as a “sanctuary.” He recalled going to visit a family friend, a World War II vet that suffered from PTSD: “The thing I remember then, that I've never forgotten is, is seeing all these vets sitting around on the benches peacefully and quietly.” The property’s beauty is not only relevant in how it positively contributes to the transitional housing building alone, but it also points to how the picturesque land, largely vacant, should be utilized for more housing.

While the rehabilitation project was successful, the costliness of the project ($20 million) should be taken into consideration in comparison to construction from the ground up. While there is no cost analysis here, it should be noted that rehabilitation and adaptive reuse are not always the most cost-effective options. As pointed out by Yaroslavsky, adaptive reuse of historic buildings can complicate the process. “The problem with historical buildings is you’re held to a much higher standard…. Your windows have to be like they were….and you really can't even fudge so it's very expensive. It’s very time consuming. Once you open it up, there's no telling where it's going to lead. But you've got tons of infrastructure there. And it's not going to be


40 Zev Yaroslavsky, interview by author, Los Angeles, May 6, 2021.
cheap, but it's not going to be cheap to do anything. These are our vets. So, it makes absolutely
good sense. It's the right thing to do to repurpose those buildings. ”

Although the rehabilitation of Building 209 is a successful, award winning case study using adaptive reuse as a mode of housing a population experiencing homelessness, the road to completion was clearly challenging for numerous reasons. On a national scale, the Veterans Administration’s inability to help house veterans experiencing homelessness sets a difficult tone. The ongoing deferred maintenance led to the degradation of the historic VA buildings. Ironically, if the VA had given proper attention to the property and buildings from the beginning, it would have lessened the dilapidated conditions and eased rehabilitation costs, made the project more financially viable, and saved time. Due to its landmark designation the project was inherently bound by the Secretary of the Interior’s standards. This also posed challenges to the construction of the project as it necessitated multiple parties in the private and public sector on both the state and federal levels. It is important to note the challenges in this project not only to ensure a well-rounded analysis of the case study but also to learn from.

This project demonstrated how heritage conservation is a delicate art with stringent guidelines that may change the scope of a project and has the potential to increase its cost. However, many of the challenges could have been avoided if this historic property had been cared for properly in the first place. If the building wasn’t neglected for so long, much of the cost, intensity, and time of the rehabilitation could have been mitigated. Considering the current state of the VA campus, populated by more unhoused veterans than ever, rehabilitating other existing historic structures is imperative. While tents around the VA were common prior to the

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41 Zev Yaroslavsky, interview by author, Los Angeles, May 6, 2021.
pandemic, both their permanence and number are unprecedented. (Figure 1.4). Additionally, veterans are also now living in tents on the grounds inside the property. (Figure 1.5) However living inside necessitates both applying and being accepted by the institution and living under strict rules and regulations. All of these homeless veterans could eventually be housed if the Administration simply followed through on its promise to provide adequate housing at large, which could start by rehabilitating existing historic buildings on site. As a leading example of adaptive reuse, The Veterans Transitional Housing Facility provides a blueprint that can be followed by future housing projects.

Figure 1.4: Tents lining Wilshire Blvd. bordering the fence of the VA. Courtesy of LA Magazine.
Figure 1.5: Tents on the inside of the VA property. Photograph by the author.
Chapter 2: The Downtown Women’s Center

Overview and History

The Downtown Women’s Center (DWC) provides housing and services for women experiencing chronic homelessness. The San Pedro Residences, the flagship location of the DWC, was converted into permanent supportive housing from a former shoe factory. The San Pedro Residences are now home to seventy-one permanent supportive housing units and an array of supportive services that embody the Downtown Women’s Center’s model of care.

The original building, home to the Elias Katz Shoe Company, was built in 1927 and was developed by Florence C. Casler, a pioneer of her time as one of the only female real estate developers. The 67,000 square foot, six story structure was built by William Douglass Lee and is an example of gothic revival architecture. (Figure 2.1)

Figure 2.1: Exterior view of the Downtown Women’s Center San Pedro Residences. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Conservancy.

The Elias Katz Shoe Company was the largest footwear factory west of St. Louis. It would later be known as the Renaissance Building and in 1983 it was found eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2005, the Downtown Women’s Center needed a new location. Not only did the DWC outgrow its former space, but the entire block was purchased by a private developer which put the center in jeopardy. The city offered the DWC the vacant Renaissance building for one dollar. The former shoe factory was rehabilitated and transformed into seventy-one Permanent Supportive Housing units that opened in 2010. Not only was the DWC relocated into a building with architectural significance, but it is also historically significant. As a building developed by one of the only female developers at the time, there is a connection to women’s empowerment, one of the Downtown Women’s Center’s core principles. The Los Angeles Conservancy noted that, “the new Center’s design directly serves its mission of fostering dignity, respect and personal stability. In a fitting example of transformation, a former shoe factory now helps women get back on their feet.” The Conservancy also described the new building as “an inspiring blend of old and new” boasting, “high ceilings, large windows and elegant surroundings.”

The location of the San Pedro Residences in Downtown Los Angeles is an important characteristic of the site. Throughout the last 100 years, Downtown L.A. has experienced cycles of boom and bust. As a horizontal sprawling city, Los Angeles is an outlier amongst most large

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44 Los Angeles Conservancy, “Downtown Women’s Center.”

45 Los Angeles Conservancy, “Downtown Women’s Center.”

46 Los Angeles Conservancy, “Downtown Women’s Center.”
Metropolises that are centered around a bustling downtown where finance, government, retail, culture and residential life meet. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the period of the building’s historical significance, “Los Angeles had that type of Downtown: In photos of Broadway or Spring Street during the 1920s and 1930s, there's an intense urban scene with crowded sidewalks, abundant streetcars, bright neon lights and a diverse cross section of residents shoppers and entertainment patrons.” (Figure 2.3)

Figure 2.2: Pedestrian traffic at downtown Los Angeles intersection, Los Angeles, CA, 1927. Photo USC Libraries Special Collection/Automobile of Southern California Special Collection, 1892-1963; filename AAA-NG-1214 (http://doi.org/10.25549/acsc-m862).

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48 Bernstein and Schafer, Preserving Los Angeles, 113.
After World War II, Los Angeles spread horizontally, fragmenting the city into mini city centers and the once bustling Downtown faded into the background. By the 1990s, most of the high-rise architectural landmarks were vacant, and Downtown solely served as a commercial center that was primarily vacant after dark. (Figure 2.3)

However, by the mid-2000s, Downtown began to regenerate. Thousands of Angelenos moved into new housing in the area, sparking the opening of new restaurants, cafes, and retail stores but also creating a demand for new residential high-rise towers. (Figure 2.4) While these factors all contributed to the re-invention of Downtown, the addition of the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO) to the City’s Zoning Code was a main factor in the revitalization of Downtown Los Angeles, "in Los Angeles, the most transformative adaptive reuse has involved the
conversion of older commercial buildings into new housing units.” While the success of the ARO is nationally heralded, it has also been criticized for contributing to gentrification in Downtown especially in the context of displacing lower income residents - “these critiques note the proximity of Los Angeles’s Skid Row or Central City East, with its high concentration of homeless services, just a few blocks east of Historic Downtown.” (Figure 2.5)

Figure 2.4: Highsmith Carol M, photographer, *Rooftop pool at the Standard Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, California*. United States California Los Angeles, 2013. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2013631512/


While the Downtown Women’s Center is an exception to the rule, the ARO failed on the most part to build new affordable housing. “Affordable housing funding was scarce during this period, only 797 units out of the more than 9,000 new units created between 1999 and 2010 were income restricted based on federal regulations.” In this context, the rehabilitation of the Renaissance Building is even more significant as a standout example of one of the few affordable housing projects built during this period. The rehabilitation of the Renaissance Building not only saved the vacant building from further deterioration, but also preserved the details of this masterwork of gothic architecture. The careful attention to detail is not only important as a

51 Bernstein and Schafer, *Preserving Los Angeles*, 127.
physical act but is also significant in a socio-cultural context. According to Joe Altepeter, Chief Social Enterprise officer at Downtown Women’s Center, the neighborhood really noticed the rehabilitated building and appreciated the project not only for revitalizing an important community landmark, but also for the larger implication that people still care and pay attention to their community. The project prevailed as an award-winning work of adaptive reuse while simultaneously providing housing for the community at risk of displacement. Instead of contributing to gentrification, the rehabilitation of the Renaissance Building utilized the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance to preserve a historically significant building in order to serve the often-neglected community on Skid Row.

**Rehabilitation**

The Downtown Women’s Center acquired the building from the city’s community Redevelopment agency in 2009. Prior to this, building was leased to SRO Housing Corporation who used it as an economic development center for the community. The rehabilitation of the former Renaissance Building was a $26 million dollar project designed by the architecture firm, Pica and Sullivan. The project is LEED Gold Certified and won numerous awards including, the Corporation for Supportive Housing’s Best Design Quality Award (2011), Los Angeles Conservancy Preservation Award (2011), National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Honor Award (2011), and California Preservation Foundation’s Preservation Design Award (2014). Future residents were heavily involved in the planning and design of the new San Pedro space. The


women collaborated with designers and even came up with options of different themed rooms. Their opinions were carried through the small details, each resident was able to choose their own wall color and which specific room to live in.\(^5^4\) (Figure 2.6)

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2.6: DWC Resident, Victoria, in her new apartment. Courtesy of the Downtown Women’s Center.

For example, a new resident, Russel, a devout Muslim chose her room in the “traditional palette, ’I love it,’ she said of the yellow walls. These are my colors.”\(^5^5\) The staff even asked women to help set up house rules. For example, television programs in the common areas were to be determined by a sign-up sheet and turned off at nine pm.

\(^{54}\) Joe Altepeter, interview by author, Los Angeles, May 5, 2021.

According to Altepeter, when the project began the space was “bad on all fronts. It was underutilized and did not meet standards aesthetically or structurally.”\textsuperscript{56} The exterior of the building necessitated the bulk of the rehabilitation. More specifically the front facing facade and windows needed a substantial amount of work. As an industrial building, the main character defining features that had to be maintained were the columns, the windows, the façade, and the design of wide-open spaces in the interior. (Figure 2.7) To meet the standards of rehabilitation, the new design had to maintain the existing footprint, and interior walls or internal columns could not be knocked down. One way the original footprint was incorporated into the building was through the design of the community spaces which are very large open rooms on each residential floor. Fortunately, this benefited both the historical character of the building and also the mission of the DWC by creating communal space where the residents could create community among themselves. The columns were very thoughtfully incorporated into the new design as every room has a column that is exposed. (Figure 2.8) On the office floor there is a hallway running down the middle with offices on either side. The new design added three windows around the columns so when you are looking at the offices from the hallway, you can see the offices with columns through the windows. Additionally, the wall dividing one office from another is located at the column point and the third window inside the office allows a full circumference view of the column.\textsuperscript{57} (Figure 2.9)

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\textsuperscript{56} Altepeter, interview.
\textsuperscript{57} Altepeter, interview.
Figure 2.7: Original windows in residential community space. Photo by author.
Figure 2.8: Original columns in open office space. Photo by author.
The Renaissance Building was not just an opportune site for the DWC but also an important building within the community. The rehabilitation of the Renaissance Building exemplifies how adaptive reuse emphasizes historical characteristics of the built environment that are important to a given neighborhood. Prior to its neglect, the Renaissance Building was an
architectural landmark of the neighborhood and according to Altepeter, the surrounding neighbors appreciated the project for bringing the building back to life. In fact, Altepeter noticed that people walking in the neighborhood would stop and take notice of the building upon its completion.

Supportive Services and Community

The center operates under the “Housing First” model, where permanent housing is the priority and an individual is not required to be employed, enrolled in substance use counseling or receiving any supportive services before they are considered eligible for housing. A lot of shelters and transitional housing facilities require sobriety and proof of treatment. However, the Housing First model is founded on the principle that these issues are better addressed once a stable home environment is provided. While the San Pedro Residences are home to most women, the DWC also provides 48 other units of Permanent Supportive Housing in Downtown LA. In addition to permanent supportive housing, the DWC provides Bridge Housing that shelters twenty-five women on Skid Row a night and a Community Based Housing Program that helps single women, and women with children find housing throughout LA county. The Rapid Rehousing Program also operates off a Housing First model and helps women in vulnerable positions exit homelessness quickly and further connects women to supportive services in order to stay housed. The DWC’S newest initiative, The Housing Justice Program, aims to provide services to 100 unhoused women living in Skid Row who have experienced chronic homelessness and have been historically neglected by traditional housing programs. The San
Pedro Residences is an exemplary case study of an award-winning adaptive reuse project that also provides pioneering yet highly effective supportive services.

From its inception to present, the former Renaissance Building, now the San Pedro Street Residences have gone above and beyond in the quality of care for both their residents and community at large. In addition to the seventy-one apartments, the San Pedro Street Residences also include on-site supportive service offices and community spaces. The supportive services offered are extensive; individual and group counseling, medical care, mental health services and preventive screening, trauma recovery services and enrichment activities, job readiness and employment training, advocacy training that empowers women to become advocates for both themselves and others by participating in interviews, public policy meetings lobby visits with legislators, fundraising events, press conferences, and more. The community effort to collaborate with residents proves successful as the center boasts a 95% retention rate.58

This collaboration was also important in designing the communal spaces. For example, the outdoor patio on the second floor was created in response to “participants’ desire for a safe, outdoor space where they could socialize, read, take a phone call, or just soak up the L.A. sun. The 2,064-square foot patio has become a special place for staff and residents alike, many of whom have not felt safe outdoors since first entering homelessness.”59 The patio is lined by citrus trees and also boasts vertical hydroponic gardens donated by Urban Gardens where women can grow lettuce, kale, and seasonal vegetables. The patio also serves as an area for events and


activities for both staff and residents ranging from 4th of July celebrations to gardening clubs, special lunches and exercises classes. (Figure 2.10) The San Pedro Residences are also home to a Cafe, and a Resale and Gift Boutique. (Figure 2.11)

Figure 2.10: Patio with community garden. Photo by author.

60 Downtown Women’s Center, “Housing program.”
These businesses are operated under MADE by DWC, a program launched as part of the job readiness and employment training that offers women the opportunity to earn income while gaining job skills and experience. Through MADE, women are employed at the cafe or one of the boutiques while simultaneously attending skill-development workshops and receiving additional employment services. This innovative approach helps women gain skills and experience for future employment that fosters their transition out of homelessness. The Gift Boutique not only provides on-site retail employment but also serves as a creative enterprise selling products made by women who are enrolled in the program. In addition, the Cafe offers coffee tea and baked goods and also serves as a gathering place for women in the community.

Even in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, job training prevailed by shifting the program to e-commerce and social media marketing.\textsuperscript{62}

As mentioned, Downtown Women’s Center’s care goes beyond the scope of the residents and includes the community of unhoused women at large. For example, The DWC Day Center is open to all women living on skid row and offers three meals a day, bathrooms and showers, clean clothes, access to mailboxes, a safe space for socializing with other women and access to case management services and the Health Clinic. For some women, The Day Center can be a catalyst for coming out of homelessness.

Marjorie Hauser came to Los Angeles from New York after her husband died and she subsequently lost her home and car. Church members in New York had bought Hauser a train ticket to Los Angeles in hopes of connecting her with a man who had said he could help her find work and housing; however when she arrived no one showed up and the address given did not exist.\textsuperscript{63} By word of mouth, she found out about the Union Rescue Mission Shelter on Skid Row, where she would line up daily in hopes of getting a bed to sleep in at night. Hauser eventually made her way to the Downtown Women’s Center in hopes of finding a shower. She began to use the computer center and met other women like Marie, who fled an abusive partner in Tennessee. The center provided a safe space for the two women who not only found companionship in one another but a larger network of support that leads to a better life. Shelter life, Hauser said “felt pretty scary sometimes. You can’t get away from the stress, the noise, people arguing over what


channel to watch on TV or fighting over possessions…. Here, you can talk, you can cry, you can let your guard down, … people know your name, they encourage you. It feels like they really do love us.”  

Both women eventually found jobs at Groundwork Coffee Co, a local business that partners with the Downtown Women’s Center. Soon after they also found permanent housing with the help of a DWC counselor.

Bertha, now a resident of the DWC San Pedro location, previously lived on Skid Row and found solace at the DWC. After Bertha retired, she moved in with her daughter and her then husband who harassed her daily. His actions eventually led to her homelessness since she had no other options but to flee their home with nowhere to go. Bertha eventually found temporary shelter downtown and made her way to DWC every day. At first Bertha diligently helped out with chores like drying dishes. Her position developed and she began to cook again, one of her greatest joys in life. Eventually, Bertha connected with a DWC case manager and became a permanent resident at DWC. (Figure 2.12)

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64 Banks, "Downtown Women’s Center Offers a Refuge from the Street,” December 9, 2013.

65 Banks, "Downtown Women’s Center Offers a Refuge from the Street,” December 9, 2013.

Women like Marjorie, Marie, and Bertha are representative of thousands of other unhoused women who find community and support at the Downtown Women’s Center.

The San Pedro Residences is an exemplary case study that not only highlights excellence in adaptive reuse but also how the Downtown Women’s Center provides exceptional supportive services that extend to the community at large. With the Housing First model at its core, the DWC is committed to caring for both residents and all women living on skid row. The level of care fosters an environment where the San Pedro Residences are more than just affordable housing but a space for everyone. In the same vein, the building itself serves as more than just a building for the residents. Rehabilitating the Renaissance Building also brought life back to a
forgotten local landmark. The community at large noticed and appreciated the building bringing people together regardless of housing status.
Chapter 3: The 28th Street Apartments

Overview and History

The historic 28th Street YMCA, built by renowned architect Paul R. Williams was converted into the 28th Street Apartments, a supportive housing facility in south central Los Angeles. After years of neglect, the building was converted to housing for people aging out of foster care, the developmentally disabled, and individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. The Los Angeles architecture firm, Koning Eizenberg not only rehabilitated the existing structure which includes twenty-four studio units, but also added a new wing to the rear of the building that contains an additional twenty-five units. The original building consisted of fifty-two small (85-110 square feet) single room occupancy rooms that were expanded to 280-350 square feet and equipped with kitchens and bathrooms. In addition to housing, other features include the supportive services provided on site by Kedren Community Mental Health, a 7,000 square foot community center, gymnasium, rooftop gardens, and lastly both a community and separate residential lounge equipped with computers.

The history of the 28th Street Apartments is an important characteristic of the site. The former YMCA was designed by Paul Revere Williams, one of Southern California’s most important architects and the first Black member of the American Institute of Architects. He also received the AIA Award of Merit, the NAACP Spingarn Medal, and the USC School of Architecture’s Distinguished Alumni Award. In 2017, Williams was posthumously awarded the AIA’s Gold Medal, America’s highest honor for an architect. He was the first Black American to
receive this medal. Working as a Black architect in the 1920s, Revere faced many racial obstacles. For example, he had to learn how to draw upside down since he was forced to sit across from white clients at the table. Despite these challenges, Williams had an extensive career as a Los Angeles architect in both the high-end residential field and public housing, commercial, civic and institutional buildings. He designed almost 2,000 homes in Los Angeles alone, many of which served wealthy businessmen and famous Hollywood stars, “regardless of style or use, his work shared the common threads of elegant composition and perfect proportion.” The YMCA, one of Williams’ earliest works, established his dedication to affordable housing that re-emerged later in his career. The YMCA was built in 1926 and served as a space for young Black men during a time of racial segregation. The YMCA not only provided a recreational facility with a pool, but also provided affordable accommodations for young Black men who were unable to stay at hotels due to segregation. In the 1926 issue of Association Men, a magazine published by the YMCA, Williams stated; "I went after the job purely on the stand-point of merit, rather than from a sentimental angle, which I think is the only real way to meet competition ... that I had designed several large residences the committee felt that an architect who specialized in this type of work would probably give the men a more homelike building rather than a building of a commercial type."


68 Los Angeles Conservancy, “Paul R. Williams.”

69 Los Angeles Conservancy, “Paul R. Williams.”

The 28th Street Apartments are listed on the local, state, and National Register of Historic Places. According to Historic Places LA, an online resource that maps and inventories Los Angeles’ significant historic resources, the property meets the criteria for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) designation because it reflects “the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community” for both its association with the institution of the YMCA, and its significance in the context of the social and cultural history of the city as the first YMCA for Black men in Los Angeles. Although it was not nominated for its significance in style, the property further meets the criteria for HCM designation as masterful work of Spanish Colonial Revival style architecture. The property also meets the criteria for HCM designation since it is a “notable” work by Paul R. Williams (1894-1980), a master architect who was one of the most prominent period revival architects in Los Angeles and the first African American member of the AIA. (Figure 3.1) Since it is “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history,” property meets Criteria A, on the National Register of Historic Places.

The building boasts typical Spanish Colonial features like red clay Granada roofing tiles, arched windows, and stucco finish. Bas reliefs honor important Black historical figures like Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass. (Figure 3.2) Williams' design plan ensured that it integrated seamlessly into the neighborhood, described by W.E.B Du Bois as “the most


beautifully housed group of colored people in the United States.”74

Figure 3.1: Paul R. Williams YMCA, 1949. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.

74 Paul Revere Williams Project, “YMCA, 28th Street, Los Angeles.”
Rehabilitation

Continuing to honor the history that was originally incorporated into the design was an important consideration throughout the rehabilitation process since design and history was important to many residents and the surrounding community. By converting the YMCA into top notch supportive housing, the building’s legacy lives on to not only provide “homelike” housing, but also incorporate for the surrounding community of South Central, one of Los Angeles’ most important historic Black neighborhoods.

According to Brian Lane Principal at Koning Eizenberg,

when you’ve invested some thought and energy and good design people notice and the tenants notice. They notice, because they’re the ones living there, they get the benefit of all this interesting architecture and history. They also notice in another way, because people are interested in where they live and think that it has value, and the community loves that. They’re proud to say I live at 28th Street Apartments. Some people will just say it's really great because I have a bathroom and a kitchen. Others will notice the story of the building, and that there's unique aspects to it. So you’ll get different interpretations from different people, architecture doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. But at the end of the day, I think people notice, and for the population that’s served, they get their dignity out of that. And that helps people in their recovery and their well-being. I think if you throw people into environments that feel institutional they won’t feel like their home. We want things to feel special, we want things to feel like home, we want things that people do notice. We are trying to avoid a lot of factors that come into these projects that tend to make them feel institutional and we resist them at every step of the way.75

In addition, Koning Eizenberg collaborated with surrounding community members to ensure the project suited their needs as well. “Our goal was to create a building that expressed contemporary attitudes to community and the environment and at the same time dignifying the existing structure.”76 Upon the buildings re-opening in 2012, local Councilwoman Jan Perry made a public statement on the milestone project, “we are witnessing the culmination of our shared dream to celebrate our rich history, develop quality housing for our young people and  

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75 Brian lane interview by author, Los Angeles, April 12, 2021.

create a space in which they can grow and thrive.” As the local council woman, Perry was an important spokesperson for the community. She worked closely with the developers to ensure the historic landmark was brought back to life and would continue to serve the community. In her statement Perry also thanked both the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD) and Clifford Beers Housing, which provides housing for people experiencing homelessness, for “investing in our youth and their future.” Other community members like Walter Nelton, property manager of the 28th Street Apartments had more personal connections to the building that motivated them to be a part of the project and give back to the community. Nelton's dad lived a couple of blocks away from the YMCA and he told Nelton that if it weren't for YMCA, he would have been lost to the streets. Nelton finds that “Some of the tenants epitomize the original mission of the 28th Street YMCA. It’s recreating history. How many times does a person get a chance to live today and experience actually what happened decades ago.”

When the building was bought by Clifford Beers in 2007, the ground floor community spaces had fallen into disrepair, equipment needed to be replaced. Fifteen State Building Code modifications were requested to preserve the integrity of the historic building while allowing for enlargement of existing residential units (to meet current standards) and the addition of new

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78 The Office of 9th District Councilwoman Jan Perry, “South LA Landmark YMCA Opens as 28th Street Apartments.”


To ensure the rehabilitation maintained its historical integrity under the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, Historic Resources Group was hired as a preservation consultant for the project. The firm is made up of historians, architects, and planners that work to determine the most effective approach in a project’s particular needs. In this case, the project necessitated conservation of character defining features while both adaptively re-using the existing building and constructing a new wing. To conserve important character-defining features, the restoration process maintained important design aspects like “wood windows, doors, and millwork, cast stone ornament, and ‘Batchelder’ tile.” (Figures 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5)

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Figure 3.3: Batchelder Tile after restoration. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.
Figure 3.4: Neglected windows and coatings, cracked and spalled concrete with exposed rusting rebar. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.
Figure 3.5: Original clay tiles removed, cleaned and returned to the roof; integral gutter system restored. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.

Historic documents and photographs were used to restore other features like the cast stone balcony and gymnasium. While the pool was once a key part of the building since Black people were banned from public pools, it is now a resident lounge. However, its history is memorialized by an outline that can still be traced on the wood floor. (Figure 3.6)
The original building consisted of fifty-two very small single room occupancy (SRO) units and the new design converted these SROs into studio apartments. Eliminating SROs is extremely important for the well-being of residents. Other affordable housing projects that exist in historical buildings but neglected to convert SROs face many issues like overcrowding in hallways and lack of personal space and privacy. For example, SROs are not equipped with
bathrooms and instead residents must share communal bathrooms that do not provide a sense of privacy.

Prior to the restoration, the rooms were in a state of decay. (Figure 3.7) The original floors, moldings and windows were restored, and the units were modernized and expanded to include kitchenettes and bathrooms. (Figure 3.8) However, updating amenities like the bathrooms, new heating, cooling, electrical, and plumbing systems was one of the biggest challenges. A raised “interstitial floor” was added to the second story to accommodate the plumbing, electrical, and fire service lines while also ensuring they did not damage the first story ceiling. An innovative approach was utilized to accommodate the heating and air conditioning systems, which were placed on a metal trellis allowing the roof of the gymnasium to be utilized as a garden connecting the original building with the new one. (Figure 3.9) These design solutions preserved communal areas, an important aspect in encouraging casual social interaction. These common spaces include the lobby/reception area, gymnasium, resident lounge, rooftop deck, and Coalition for Responsible Community Development programming space.


84 Office of Policy Development and Research, “Los Angeles, California: Reviving a Historic YMCA for Transitioning Youth and Chronically Homeless.”
Figure 3.7: SRO room before restoration. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.
Figure 3.8: Residential unit after restoration. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.
While the new design of the original building cut down the number units in order to add sufficient living space, the new wing added twenty-five new units to ensure no residential space was lost. Brian Lane, Principal at Koning Eisenberg, described how the firm aimed to do a “faithful historic rehabilitation of the front building, and add something new to the back that was both compatible, as well as energizing, giving a new life to the whole compound.”\footnote{Brian Lane interview by author, Los Angeles, April 12, 2021.} The community felt that the new addition should honor the design of the original building. In order to honor this, the new wing employs inventive design features that call back to the original building. For example, “perforated lightweight metal screens wrapped the walkway and stairs, to contrast and highlight the solidity of the historic building. . . the pattern, abstracted from the
reliefs on the historic building appears and disappears depending on the angle of the light."  

(Figure 3.10)

Figure 3.10: Ornamental perforated metal panels on new wing. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.

Additionally, the new addition boasts sophisticated technology that earned the building a LEED gold certification. To avoid damaging the historic terra-cotta roof tiles, the solar hot water panels and Photovoltaic panels were attached vertically to the south facade of the new wing. The vertical placement of the PV panels was a pretty revolutionary idea, only a few other buildings had employed this method making it difficult to prove it could be successful. The panels were placed on the south facade since at some times of the year received far more sun exposure than the rooftop. Some community members were concerned the panels would be a fire hazard, but Koning Eizenberg ensured this would not be the case by installing the panels a few inches away from the exterior wall. This inhibits the PV panels from transferring heat onto the building and allows air to circulate between the wall and panel creating both shade and insulation. The vertically oriented PV panels are not as energy efficient as rooftop panels, but they have lower costs because they do not necessitate as much operational and maintenance work.

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Other cost-effective measures were taken to lower the cost of the project. For example, a lot of money was saved by not adding any parking. Typically, when building housing, parking must increase when density of housing increases. However, since the project did not technically increase the number of units, it was not necessary to build more parking which is both expensive and takes up a lot of space. The total cost of the project was $21 million dollars and was financed by both federal and local government, the Tax Credit Equity for affordable housing provided $8.5 million dollars, the Mental Health Services Act, $4 million, Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles $2.3 million, Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment
Supportive Service and Community

In addition to much needed affordable housing for chronically homeless individuals, the 28th Street Apartments differ from other projects by including other populations like youth transitioning out of foster care as well as both mentally ill and developmentally disabled individuals. Due to lack of support, employment, or education accessibility, young adults who have aged out of the foster care system are at heightened risk of homelessness. According to the 2020 greater Los Angeles homeless count, people aged 18-24 make up 7% of the unhoused population. The Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRDC), provides case managers that work with residents to find employment and housing in the private market however there is no limit on length of residency. Individuals with serious mental health conditions make up 25% of the unhoused population and those with developmental disabilities make up an additional 7%. In addition to the CRDC, the Kedren Community Health Center provides mental health services, like access to a psychiatrist, for the residents who live in units funded by the Mental Health Services. One resident of the building who experienced chronic

89 Office of Policy Development and Research, “Los Angeles, California: Reviving a Historic YMCA for Transitioning Youth and Chronically Homeless.”


92 Office of Policy Development and Research, “Los Angeles, California: Reviving a Historic YMCA for Transitioning Youth and Chronically Homeless.”
homelessness and faced mental health issues stated that, “Before I got to this place I was homeless in L.A. The medicine is kind of helping me. I’m Bi-Polar, I want to be somebody, but it's going to take me some time because right now I don’t know where to start honestly. But I’m trying.” In 2013, Edgar Dumas, a Case Manager from Kedren, spoke on the importance of how having a voice is not only empowering to an individual but also builds community. By addressing concerns, residents can get to know other tenants and build the type of community they envision together.

The 28th Street Apartments not only provide services for residents but also for the community at large. Community residents have access to the basketball court, a community room and common room and a 7,000 square foot community center. (Figures 3.12 and 3.13) The CRCD provides job training to young people and works with local groups such as the All Peoples Community Center, Los Angeles Conservation Corps, and YouthBuild USA to provide employment services and economic development - “more than 40 YouthBuild apprentices assisted in the renovation of the 28th Street Apartments several of whom were hired by the contractor when the project was finished.”

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95 Office of Policy Development and Research, “Los Angeles, California: Reviving a Historic YMCA for Transitioning Youth and Chronically Homeless.”
Figure 3.12: Gym after restoration. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.

Figure 3.13: Community center. Courtesy of Koning Eizenberg.
The 28th Street Apartments are a preeminent example in the success of historic rehabilitation for affordable housing. The project’s achievement can be attributed not only to the outstanding rehabilitation work, but also the incorporation of the community’s ideas into the design process. By collaborating with the community, the project both successfully integrated important features but also empowered people by giving them a voice. The project is not only LEED Gold Certified by has won numerous awards including:

- Special Needs Project of the Year by SCANPH (2013)
- Honor Award for Excellence in Architectural Design by AIA Los Angeles (2013)
- Housing Award at the World Architecture Festival in Singapore (2013)
- Merit Award in Architecture category by AIA California Council (2013)
- Preservation Design Award - Rehabilitation by CA Preservation Foundation (2013)
- Historic Preservation Award by the city of Los Angeles (2013)
- Westside Prize Multi Unit Housing HONOR Award by Westside Urban Forum (2013)
- Award of Excellence Multi-Family Housing Los Angeles Business Council (2013)
- Australian Institute of Architecture International Award Finalist (2013)
- AIA Housing National Housing Awards (2014)
- AIA HUD Secretary's Housing and Community Design Award (2014)
- National Honor Award for Architecture by AIA National (2015)

The scope of these awards demonstrates how the project is not only recognized globally for its design excellence but also for its success as an affordable housing model in the field of heritage conservation.

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Conclusion

The Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing Facility, the 28th Street Apartments, and the Downtown Women’s Center’s San Pedro residences are all exemplary case studies of how adaptive re-use can be employed to rehabilitate a historic building for affordable housing. All three case studies demonstrate how rehabilitating a historic building and converting the structure into affordable housing is a highly effective yet underused solution for the housing crisis here in Los Angeles for many different reasons. As discussed, historic buildings with landmark designation have the potential to be rehabilitated and used as affordable housing. Many of these buildings are in poor condition and the longer they sit, the more dilapidated they become. Reusing these neglected buildings not only utilizes these empty spaces but also brings them back to life, enhancing the built environment of the city. By honoring a neighborhood’s history, this method of providing housing also helps foster community engagement on a larger level outside of the building and its residents. As opposed to new buildings, historic properties maintain historical character that often cannot be achieved or replicated in new construction. In these cases, the unique historical characteristics both architecturally and socio-culturally, contribute to the success of the project. An important aspect of these case studies is their success in not only providing the basics of affordable housing but also by fostering an environment that feels like home. Whether it be formerly homeless women, veterans, young adults, or people facing mental illness, each of these projects serves a vulnerable population that has endured significant trauma. Specifically in the case of formerly unhoused people who have been repeatedly displaced, a sense of emotional grounding is vital to their well-being. As opposed to new construction, these three projects have the ability to connect people with their built environment through their
historical context within a neighborhood. New residents are more likely to feel safe in an
environment that fosters relationships but provides solace and comfort. As the “Housing First"
model proposes, individuals are more likely to find success in the long term once they have a
stable home environment. When this is achieved, supportive services are more likely to be
effective, whether it be mental health counseling, job readiness, or life skills training.

While each of these cases studies share the larger structure of affordable housing in
rehabilitated historic buildings, they also differ in many ways. First of all, they are located in
very different parts of Los Angeles and utilize varying types of building structures. The
geographical location of each site impacts each project since the given neighborhood differs in
its cultural context and population group. While each of these projects share a fundamental
similarity in that they utilize an existing structure, they are all different building types attached to
a specific historical context. In the context of the recent past different factors like ownership and
building condition affect each building differently. Additionally, they all serve different
populations and are run by different organizations.

The Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing Facility is housed in a former psychiatric
hospital in the West Los Angeles VA Campus. As opposed to the 28th Street Apartments and the
San Pedro Residences, the Transitional Housing Facility is in a very affluent neighborhood of
Los Angeles. Even though the future residents were included throughout the design process of
the rehabilitation process, this case study lacks an integration to the community at large that the
28th Street Apartments and San Pedro Residences achieve. There is no shared programming and
services operate individually. Consequently, interaction with other communities of residents
within the space is limited. In addition, the property is gated, creating a stark division between
the VA Campus and surrounding community. However, the Homeless Veteran’s Transitional Housing Facility faces more difficulties in community integration than the 28th Street Apartments and Downtown Women’s center. While the building was able to be retrofitted to serve its new purpose the design possibilities were limited to within the federally owned property. The larger problematic system of the VA institution also makes it more complicated to use the surrounding environment most effectively. The Transitional Housing Facility still prevailed to serve the Veteran’s community on a larger scale by returning one of many buildings that belonged to the Veterans. While much of the land is unused and historic buildings are still vacant, hopefully, this project can serve as a model for more adaptive reuse housing at the VA campus. Like both the 28th Street Apartments and the San Pedro Residences, The Transitional Housing Facility is also an exemplary adaptive reuse project for its achievements in rehabilitative design and notable supportive services.

Upon first look, the 28th Street Apartment stands out from the Transitional Housing Facility and the Downtown Women’s Center as the only project that both rehabilitated the existing structure and added a new wing. However, the 28th Street Apartments were also originally designed by Paul R. Williams, an award-winning architect who achieved great success in the wake of facing discrimination as a Black architect in the early twentieth century. The former YMCA, located in South Los Angeles, served as a community center for young Black men in the early twentieth century. The period of significance was also a time of segregation, making the pool a character defining feature as one of the only places Black men could swim. While each project has a unique history that contributes to its current use, the story of the 28th Street Apartments is perhaps the most poignant in terms of its contribution to the site. The
surrounding neighborhood is still a predominantly a black community, making the legacy of Paul R. Williams and the YMCA building even more important as a landmark. While the 28th Street Apartments focus on housing chronically homeless individuals, people facing mental illness challenges, and young adults aging out of the foster care system, the facility maintains a very strong relationship with the neighborhood by giving access to communal spaces and supportive services to the surrounding community. Additionally, the new wing was designed with the input of both future residents and community members.

Like the Veteran’s Transitional Housing Facility and the 28th Street apartments, the San Pedro Residences, run by the Downtown Women’s Center, is also an award-winning rehabilitation project that employed adaptive reuse as a method to convert a historical building into affordable housing. The origin story of the San Pedro Residences is much different from the other two case studies with the Downtown Women’s center at its core. The San Pedro Residences only came about out of necessity when the center was in jeopardy of losing its facilities. As opposed to the other two projects, the San Pedro Residences were built with an incoming population of women housed by the DWC at a former location. Consequently, the residents already had a relationship with the Downtown Women’s Center, making collaboration with residents at the forefront of the project. As the first permanent supportive housing provider for women in the United States, the DWC has a longstanding history of creating a supportive environment that extends to the community at large.97 While all three case studies provide housing in conjunction with supportive services, the San Pedro Residences best exemplify how a safe home like environment will help residents benefit from top notch supportive services. The

Day Center, which is open to all women living on Skid Row provides a safe space to the community at large.

While all of the case studies focus on projects that rehabilitate historic buildings for permanent supportive housing each project has unique qualities that teach us different lessons about rehabilitation. They all differ in their physicality, design process and resident demographics. Analyzing these three case studies in this context, facilitates a broader understanding of what can be learned from each project’s idiosyncrasies. For example, the Homeless Veterans Transitional Housing Facility case study, demonstrates how dire the need for Veteran Housing is. While the facility is successful on an individual level, it has not propagated other adaptive reuse projects on the campus. It seems obvious that a need for housing on the VA Campus is urgent since a huge portion of unhoused veterans are living in tents on the border and even within the property. Historical buildings are sitting vacant and ready for rehabilitation while veterans remain living in tents just a short distance away. From this case study we can see that the longer the buildings sit vacant the more expensive and challenging the project will be. Lastly, a lot of these veterans have been living in the same tent communities for a long time. This would provide a new housing project with a foundational sense of community and also avoid further displacement.

While the Downtown Women’s Center’s San Pedro Residences located on Skid Row, also exist within a longstanding community of unhoused people, they work more closely with the people by providing supportive services to the community at large. Founded in 1978, the Downtown Women’s Center has stayed strong through tumultuous times by upholding their foundational philosophy of care. When residents were moved to the new San Pedro Residences a
sense of displacement was avoided by intense collaboration that made the new space feel like home.

Lastly the 28th Street Apartments present the most unique architectural case study given its history and implementation of new construction. As a work by Paul R. Williams both the physicality and the history of the building is significant and lends itself to architectural interest. With a renowned firm like Koning Eizenberg innovative design the old and the new were fused together with innovative design interventions like the rooftop deck that does not simply link the two buildings but also provides a communal outdoor space. Additionally, the deck provides a space where you can see both sides of the facility which encourages a passerby to stop and reflect on each space. The idiosyncrasies of each case study are invaluable lessons on how to continue the work of rehabilitating historical buildings to create permanent supportive housing. Given its longstanding history, the 28th Street Apartments provide outreach services so that the surrounding community also has access to the space.

As a successful project, the Transitional Veterans Housing Facility teaches us how crucial utilizing readily available buildings is in the context of both the housing crisis and the degradation of the buildings themselves. The Downtown Women’s Center’s San Pedro Residences exemplify how a nonprofit with a strong foundational model of care and community facilities connections between both the residents and the larger community of Skid Row. Lastly the 28th Street Apartments showcase how innovative architectural approaches have the possibility to achieve unparalleled design interventions that benefit the residents and community at large. While each case study presents different illustrious accomplishment, in conjunction,
they demonstrate that regardless of the building type, population, or design approach, reusing historic buildings as affordable housing is an effective solution to providing permanent supportive housing in Los Angeles.
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