

106 SUCCESS STORY

Public-Private Partnership Rehabs Historic Building for Homeless Veterans San Francisco, California



“All of us here, we all have some damage, we can all relate. We can have each other’s backs again. We can have new lives.”

—MARK HEDTKE
Air Force veteran and resident



THE STORY

In 1914, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors appropriated money for a nine-story juvenile court and detention center in the Mission District. The facility was designed by architect Louis Christian Mullgardt, who combined modern theories of juvenile justice with his Progressive Movement theory that tall buildings were the solution to architectural problems in the early 20th century. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011 for its association with the development of the city’s juvenile justice system during the early 20th century. Over the years, the Juvenile Court and Detention Center was abandoned, then retrofitted for office space, and then vacated again after the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989.

THE PROJECT

In 2004, San Francisco estimated more than 3,000 veterans were without homes in the city, including more than 300 categorized as chronically homeless. In 2008, the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development issued a request for proposals to develop the former Juvenile Court and Detention Center facility as permanent housing for the chronically homeless.

The city saw the empty structure, once a national model of progressive reform in juvenile justice, as an avenue for serving another noble aim: the reduction of chronic homelessness among veterans. Non-profit Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC) and veterans’ advocacy organization Swords to Plowshares (STP) were awarded the development project in May 2008.

Drawing on CCDC’s extensive experience providing development services, and STP’s veteran-specific housing expertise, the partners rehabilitated the detention facility. Financial backing was received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—which supplied capital funds of \$2.1 million and ongoing rental subsidies of \$3.6 million—and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which provided rental subsidies, health services, and administrative support. The Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development also provided financial and technical assistance.

Photos: Above, renovation maintains Mullgardt’s character-defining features—artificial travertine finish and eave details in the gable; Right, interior before the renovation; after the renovation (photos courtesy California Office of Historic Preservation)

CONTINUED >>>



Photos: After the renovation, studio apartment (left) and common area (right) (photos courtesy California Office of Historic Preservation)



THE 106 PROCESS

HUD was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects on those properties of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur.

The detention center's original steel sash windows were removed long ago, but the character of the historic windows was matched through the use of double-pane aluminum windows. The \$34.3 million rehabilitation met the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and qualified for a federal historic tax credit, another significant source of project equity. At the urging of the San Francisco Planning Department, the proposed color scheme was also revised in order to align with the palette of the original structure.

Using a comprehensive Programmatic Agreement to streamline the Section 106 process between the city and the California State Historic Preservation Officer, the project was determined to have no adverse effects to the historic property. To meet strict seismic codes, engineers braced the tall and narrow reinforced concrete building with a new elevator tower, and reinforced stair towers on the rear façade. The project also surpassed California energy requirements by more than 23 percent and complied with non-profit Build It Green's construction standards.

THE SUCCESS

In January 2013, the building was reopened in a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by more than 100 supporters, including San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi. Veterans Commons provided studio apartments for 75 veterans, or one-quarter of the city's population of chronically homeless veterans, and onsite support services such as case management, mental health and drug dependency counseling, and employment programs.

In the two years following the opening of Veterans Commons, overall veteran homelessness in San Francisco dropped to just more than 700 persons. The project—which won the Peter Dougherty Award for Excellence in Supportive Housing for Homeless Veterans in 2013—is a shining example of the role preservation can play in addressing social ills, as well as how public-private partnerships can use legacy buildings to build a new future for the neediest citizens.

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

401 F Street NW, Suite 308, Washington DC 20001

Phone: 202-517-0200 • Fax: 202-517-6381 • achp@achp.gov • www.achp.gov

Consulting Parties:

U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs

California State
Historic
Preservation
Officer

Swords to Plowshares

Chinatown
Community
Development
Center

San Francisco Mayor's
Office of Housing
and Community
Development

San Francisco Planning
Department

Gelfand Partners
Architects

For more about
Section 106 and
the ACHP go to
www.achp.gov



Preserving America's Heritage