

Adapting Historic Schools

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| What We Are Working On



2101 McCullough
San Antonio, TX | Offices

This early twentieth century property is nestled in a commercial cluster in San Antonio's Monte Vista Residential Historic District. Formerly a showroom for local furniture concerns (Noel Brothers and W.R. Dallas), **Headwall Investments** is rehabilitating the building for office use. MHA Houston is advising on state and federal historic tax credits for the project.



Borden Ice Cream Factory
Greenville, SC | Offices

The 1923 ice cream factory, with later mid-century additions, is a unique piece of South Carolina's twentieth century industrial and agricultural history. **The Furman Co.** is converting the manufacturing site into modern office spaces. MHA Charleston is completing state and federal historic tax credit applications for The Furman Co.



Our Lady of Lourdes School
New Orleans, LA | Affordable Housing

MHA New Orleans is consulting on the National Register nomination, and state and federal historic tax credits, for this former elementary school, built in 1957. **Providence Community Housing** is adapting the mid-century modern-style building into an affordable apartment complex with 62 apartments for low-income seniors.



Stouffer's Dayton Plaza Hotel
Dayton, OH | Mixed-Use

MHA Chicago is providing historic tax credit consulting services for this 1970s hotel in Dayton's commercial center. The building stands fourteen stories tall and is perched on concrete pillars, with glazed facades and skybridges. The building is being rehabilitated into hotel and affordable housing use by **Veteran Services USA**.



YWCA Boston
Boston, MA | Affordable Housing

Constructed in 1927-1929, YWCA Boston has served as the organization's headquarters for nearly a century. MHA Boston is consulting on federal tax credits for the **Beacon Communities** project, which will retain its historic tenant, YWCA, and update the residential spaces into 210 units of permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless individuals as well as conventional affordable housing.

Completed Projects

July - October 2021

1212 Larkin | Elgin, IL

Crescent Lofts | Appleton, WI

Driskill Hotel | Austin, TX

Lowenstein Building
Rock Hill, SC

Motley School Apartments
Chicago, IL

Muridale Sanitarium Power House (M10) | Wauwatosa, WI

The Texas Theatre | Dallas, TX

Five Reasons Historic Schools Make for Good Adaptive Reuse



MHA recently worked with Laborers' Home Development Corp. (LHDC) to rehabilitate and convert a circa 1909-1922 former high school in Paris, Illinois into low-income senior housing. More than half of the residents of the 42-unit property are former Paris High School students.

Now that we have reached fall, students and teachers alike have returned to their classrooms in some form (virtually and/or physically). At the same time, some historic schools across the country are shuttering for many reasons unrelated to COVID-19: the need for new and larger facilities, demographic changes, or because years of deferred maintenance make them unsuitable for further use as a school. What historic schools lack in modern conveniences, however, they make up for in location and a long collective community investment.

MHA has consulted on adaptive reuse projects of former school buildings throughout the country. Through this work, MHA has gathered key insights into the redevelopment of these historic buildings. Read more below to see five reasons MHA believes that redeveloping a historic school may be a good choice for you, your development partners, and your local community.

1. Many historically significant schools represent the best architecture of a community.

Many schools built in the early decades of the 20th century were the products of newly organized school systems that received substantial investment from their municipalities or faith-based communities. They are often fine examples of architectural styles such as Classical Revival, Gothic Revival, and Art Deco.

A second wave of investment occurred alongside the economic and population boom that followed WWII, resulting in a new wave of growth within the building industry. Historic mid-century schools now represent many of the nation's most promising redevelopment opportunities today.

2. The location of early 20th century schools often make them well-suited for reuse as housing.

Most schools of this period are connected to walkable neighborhoods, which make them a good target for reuse as housing: affordable, senior living, and occasionally market-rate.

3. Historic schools often have favorable floor plans and retain historic proportions and fabric—details that are both good for reuse as housing and attractive to renters.

While elements intrinsic to historic school buildings can create challenges for the development and design team, retaining these character-defining features often creates interesting apartments, marketability, and a continued sense of place for a community. Think millwork, built-in cabinetry, tilework, lockers, and chalkboards.

In addition to favorable floor plans, schools are often located on large parcels. This usually means that there are opportunities

for off-street parking and tenant amenities such as pools. Some parcels allow for new construction buildings that can be sensitively designed to complement the adjacent historic structure.

4. The architectural rhythm of historic corridors can be retained while adapting these spaces to modern safety standards.

School corridors tend to be very wide and long as they were intended for the circulation of many people at one time. They also tend to have limited openings, one or two per large classroom, creating a visible architectural rhythm in the hallway. It's these historic dimensions and distinctive rhythm that most regulatory agencies focus on when reviewing these projects, and developers are typically advised that door openings and transoms should be reused to the greatest extent possible. Where they cannot be used as active entrances, the doors can be secured in place and walled over on the unit side. If the opening can be reused, a new fire-rated door is installed and, if an existing door is present, it may be retained in the open position or pinned back on the corridor side. New unit openings must be visually differentiated from the historic openings to distinguish old from new. Other historic features found in school corridors, including lockers, chair and picture rails, and historic flooring, typically must be retained as well.

5. Classrooms can be divided into multiple units.

Classrooms can be divided into multiple dwelling units and, like the corridor, they may have features that also must be retained, such as chalkboards, built-in cabinets, coat closets or other millwork like cased openings between classrooms.

Often a balance can be struck relative to the number of retained chalkboards and similar elements that are found in every classroom, but there should be an

expectation that most of the millwork will need to be retained as a component of the project. Room layouts can account for built-in cabinetry and can be utilized in kitchens or as additional storage in dining, living, or bedroom areas. These special details are often highly marketable and favored among renters.

Public spaces such as auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias also present an opportunity for one-of-a-kind spaces. Attention must be paid to preserving their historic interior volumes and character-

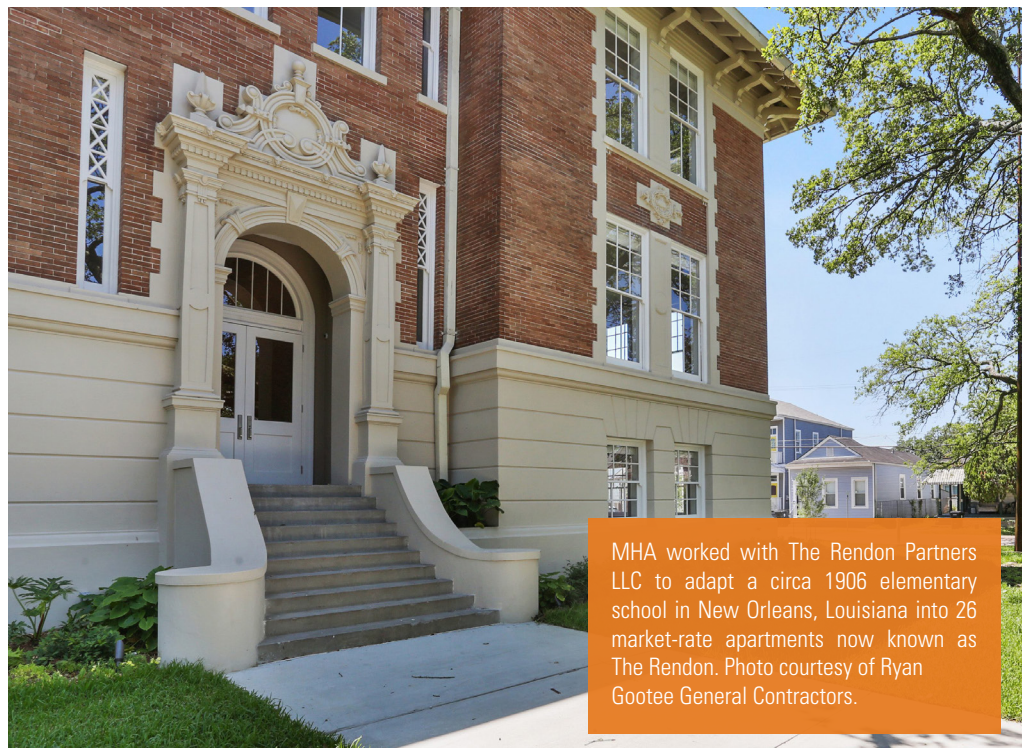
defining features, such as stages and court markings, but there are creative workable solutions to utilize them as community gathering spaces and, frequently, subdivide them into a limited number of units.

This article was adapted from the Fall 2016 issue of The Historic Advisor.

Interested in rehabilitating a historic school? Contact us at macrostiehistoric.com or call us at (202) 483-2020 to discuss opportunities near you.



ASH NYC and Nathalie Jordi worked with MHA to retain and restore this elementary school, built in 1900, for reuse in part of the new Hotel Peter & Paul in New Orleans, Louisiana. The school's former theatre, seen here, was sensitively adapted according to the *Secretary of Interior's Standards*.



MHA worked with The Rendon Partners LLC to adapt a circa 1906 elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana into 26 market-rate apartments now known as The Rendon. Photo courtesy of Ryan Gootee General Contractors.

| School Conversion Project Spotlights

Briscoe Middle School (Beverly High School) | Beverly, MA

The former Beverly High School, an MHA Boston historic tax credit project, was recently featured in the Apple TV+ movie, *CODA* (*CODA* stands for “child of deaf adults” as the main character’s parents are deaf). Ruby, the film’s main character, attends a fictional high school depicted as the circa 1923-1925 Beverly High School in Beverly, Massachusetts.

Beacon Communities and Harborlight Community Partners are currently converting the historic school into the Briscoe Village for Living and the Arts (BVLA), a complex with 85 affordable apartments for seniors and six live/work studios for artists. The project features residential units located in former classrooms, newly created community spaces in the former gymnasium, a community park, and retention of the school’s historic theater. The \$38 million rehabilitation is also focused on sustainability, as project partners aim to make the school a LEED Silver Certified building.



A still from the Apple TV+ film *CODA*. Beverly High School is used to depict a fictional high school.

West Pullman School Senior Housing Community | Chicago, IL

West Pullman Elementary school, a historic neighborhood school on Chicago’s far South Side, has been sensitively adapted into affordable housing for senior citizens. MHA Chicago provided historic tax credit consulting services for the \$21 million project by developers Celadon Holdings, LLC and UrbanWorks. The Romanesque Revival and Classical Revival style building was originally built in three phases in 1894, 1900, and 1923 to accommodate the influx of new students in the neighborhood. The school served the population of the West Pullman community area until 2013 when the school was closed along with many other city schools.

Significant exterior and interior architectural features were preserved at the school. The exterior of the building features historic materials including red press brick with terra cotta and limestone trim. The new 60 residential units retain character-defining features of a former school, including original chalkboards, built-in bookcases, broad corridors, and a former nurse’s office. The school’s former large assembly spaces, including the historic gymnasium and auditorium, were also retained. The rehabilitation and construction work created more than 75 temporary jobs for locals and two permanent positions were added to staff the finished facility.



West Pullman School Senior Housing © Lee Bay
Courtesy Celadon Holdings, LLC and UrbanWorks



West Pullman School Senior Housing © Lee Bay
Courtesy Celadon Holdings, LLC and UrbanWorks

Project Honors

August - October 2021



- Bradley Symphony Center** MSO | Milwaukee, WI
 AIA Wisconsin | 2021 Honor Award
 Wisconsin Historical Society | 2021 Board of Curators Historic Restoration Award
- Cook County Hospital** Civic Health Development Group | Chicago, IL
 AIA Illinois | 2021 Historic Renovation Award
- Epiphany Center for the Arts** David Chase & Kimberly Rachal
 Chicago, IL
 Landmarks Illinois | 2021 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award for Adaptive Reuse
- Major Jenkins Apartments** Mercy Housing Lakefront | Chicago, IL
 Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits | 2021 Novoco Award - HTC Non-Residential Development that Overcame Significant Obstacles
- Pontiac Mills** Union Mill LLC | Warwick, RI
 Preserve Rhode Island and Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission | 2021 Historic Preservation Project (RHODY) Award
- Prospect Heights** Winn Development & Omni Development | Pawtucket, RI
 Preserve Rhode Island and Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission | 2021 Historic Preservation Project (RHODY) Award
- Pullman Artspace Lofts** Pullman Artspace, LLC | Chicago, IL
 Landmarks Illinois | 2021 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award for Adaptive Reuse
- The Saint John** MissionDG | San Antonio, TX
 ULI | 2021 Jack Kemp Excellence in Affordable and Workplace Housing Award
- Tiger Senior Apartments** Laborer's Home Development Corp. | Paris, IL
 Landmarks Illinois | 2021 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award for Adaptive Reuse
- The Dirt Palace** Dirt Palace Public Projects | Providence, RI
 Preserve Rhode Island and Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission | 2021 Historic Preservation Project (RHODY) Award
- West Pullman School Senior Housing** Celadon Holdings, LLC
 Chicago, IL
 Landmarks Illinois | 2021 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award for Adaptive Reuse



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