



MAKING HISTORY

Historic Building Renovation & Restoration

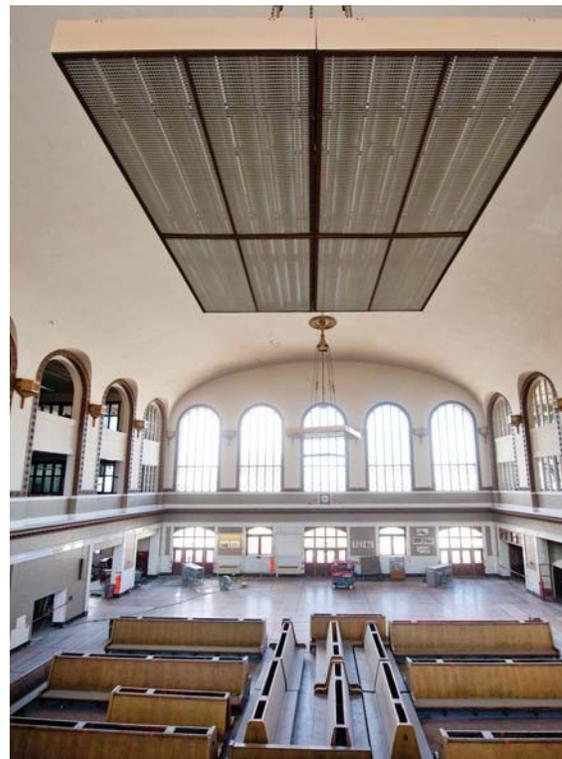
White Paper | December 2017



Introduction

The most esteemed properties in any city are often historic buildings that offer a glimpse of the area's vibrant past. Preserving these landmark structures is not only good for community culture, but also for a community's future and its local economy.

Redeveloping a historic building is a major undertaking. Not only do special precautions need to be taken when dealing with old structures and building materials, but old buildings are full of surprises, and costs can add up quickly. Historical buildings require special attention to detail and care when it comes to planning and execution. If there's one thing Milender White has learned, it's that a historic renovation done right can turn a dilapidated property into a celebrated local landmark. Here are three considerations to keep in mind when undertaking construction on a historic property.





Understand the Process

Historic redevelopment projects entail lengthy review and approval processes with local, state and federal agencies. To encourage consistent practices, the National Park Service (NPS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Interior, developed standards and guidelines that guide preservation work at the national, tribal, state, and local levels. The NPS requires that “the defining features” in any historic building must be maintained. Frequently, these defining features are not specifically identified or recorded at the time a building is designated historic. Accordingly, the developer, architect and contractor (the project team) will engage in a series of meetings with the NPS, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and/or local historic office having authority to determine the defining features comprising the historic property.

Many times, the features or spaces that the project team needs to change to make the project both financially and operationally viable encompass the defining features that constitute the property’s historic status. This presents bigger challenges because the defining features are almost always protected and changing these features is usually not approved.

Be prepared for multiple re-design efforts to preserve the defining features while embracing modern building codes and balancing the requirement to develop a project that meets the desired outcome and is financially feasible. Begin the design and review process early to verify conflicts that may result from the historic review process.

Anticipate the Unknown

Precision planning is vital to the success of any construction project. Details regarding safety, sequencing, logistics and schedule must be considered before mobilization. New builds or renovations to contemporary structures afford the luxury of known conditions. Historic structures, on the other hand, are full of surprises and necessitate additional attention to detail and care when it comes to construction planning and execution.

Building codes, testing procedures and safety practices in place today to promote safety did not necessarily apply when most historic buildings were built. Accordingly, every team member working on this type of project must be trained to identify and report unsafe conditions or hazardous materials that may be encountered even after standard environmental testing and property assessments have been completed.

Milender White has come across just about everything on our historic projects, including decaying stone foundations, unsupported load bearing walls, wiring not tied into the building panel, and framing held together only by gravity. These site conditions further emphasize the importance of planning, scheduling and conditioning each worker to use caution when starting any activity. No task or deadline is more important than safety.



Engage the Experts

When was the last time you had terracotta, plaster, large natural stone exteriors or even weight and rope windows on your construction project? Each historic building is unique and it is these defining features that make a historic property special. Consequently, it is critical to engage skilled specialists to address these features.

Too often a historic building redevelopment project fails to achieve the developer's vision or NPS standards due to inexperienced workforces. The historic treasures that make up the fabric of our cities have been around for decades and their longevity is due to the original craftsmanship. There are craftsmen out there that specialize in historic features like terracotta or plaster and it is well worth the time and effort to find them. Don't settle for a contractor that will attempt to match the original.

Construct mock-ups of every unique building feature for visual inspection and approval. Don't forget to account for mock-up construction, inspection and approval in the schedule. Anticipate and plan accordingly to have mock-ups rejected for color, texture and quality throughout the process. Start the mock-up process while the project team is working with the local, state and national historic authorities on the overall project approvals. This will help with both schedule and budget as the project progresses.



Conclusion

Historic building renovation and restoration projects present unique challenges. Compiling lengthy submittals for required local, state and federal approvals is an arduous process. Encountering unexpected conditions can derail the schedule and add significant costs. Identifying skilled craftsmen for defining features requires research. Stay focused on the overarching project team goal, account for surprises, take planning and preparedness to the highest level and hire experts and your project will be successful. The building you are working on achieved historical status for a reason. It has been a part of your community for years and you can both restore the purpose of the space while also introducing new and sustainable technology to ensure not only preservation, but also conservation.

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