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Renovating History: Denver Dry Goods & Hanover Shoe

Cities were once the core of American civilization. They were the hearts of commerce, government, social, and cultural development. But a series of events in the twentieth century that began with the great depression through the savings and loan crises of the late 1980's led to the flight of many middle class residents to the suburbs and exurbs, taking their industry and commerce with them. The Denver Dry Goods Company flagship store in downtown Denver, CO and the Hanover Shoe Factory are two structures that stood as pillars of commerce and industry for more than 100 years, but were abandoned in the urban flight of the latter part of the twentieth century. Though they found these structures were once under threat of demolition they have been recently restored as models of smart growth and green building.

Founded in Denver, CO in 1889, the Denver Dry Goods Company was a staple in downtown Denver for almost 100 years. It provided generations of Denver residents with clothing and other daily necessities and its luxurious upper floor tea room served countless elegant meals until a competitor, May's department stores, purchased it in 1987. The rival chain promptly closed the historic downtown location to avoid competition with its existing downtown store. This left the fate of the historic building hanging in the balance, and as other historic structures were demolished in the vicinity due to the cost of renovations, the future did not look good for the building. Then the Denver Urban Renewal Authority stepped in and purchased the building from May's. For four years development ideas were proposed and fell through, for lack of funding or other reasons. Finally, developer Jonathan Rose, with the Affordable Housing Development Corp. stepped in and created a strong and achievable vision for the project. That vision involved a new mixed-use concept for the two-block building, which also allowed them to take advantage of multiple funding sources for historic buildings, low income housing, and Tax Increment Financing for infrastructure improvements (Benfield, Terris, Vorsanger).

The result of this extensive re-envisioning and redevelopment is a vibrant urban complex of market-rate apartments for sale and for rent, and affordable housing, shopping, and public offices. The lower levels of the building were renovated to house smaller retailers; discount clothing chain T.J. Maxx became the anchor store. The Denver Urban Redevelopment Authority and Visitors Bureau offices are housed on the second and third floors of the building. 40 of the 51 rental units are affordable housing (Horizons), many occupied by civil servants and other low wage but vital downtown employees (Benfield, Terris, Vorsanger). In the third and final phase of the project, 66 market rate condominiums on floors 4-7 were built and sold by private developer BCORP (Horizons).

The availability of affordable housing and the proximity to their places of work also gave many of the building's tenants the opportunity to lose the expense of owning a vehicle and relieved them of the hassle of driving to work. The building is located near the intersection of the light rail and 16th street Mall Shuttle, as well as being accessible by foot or bicycle to downtown Denver. These many transportation options mean that there is an average of less than one car per household in the residential units, and that shoppers and office workers coming to the complex do not need to drive either. The parking provided for retailers and tenants has been underutilized to date (Benfield, Terris, Vorsanger).

The building itself was also redesigned with the environment in mind- simply salvaging the massive structure prevented an incredible amount of construction waste from being sent to landfills, and many energy efficient features were incorporated into the project. New windows were custom fitted to the historic frames, which most restoration architects will testify is not an easy task. The incorporation of natural elements in the heating and cooling systems have yielded a 60% reduction in the energy used to heat and cool the new building from the old department store (Benfield, Terris, Vorsanger). These natural elements include the substitution of evaporative coolers in place of traditional air conditioning units, and utilizing the city of Denver's central steam loop for heating needs (Horizons).

The Denver Dry Goods redevelopment project encompasses many principles of smart growth, including close proximity to mass transit, bike and pedestrian friendly

design, green building techniques, mixed uses in a small area, and egalitarian principles of allowing market rate and affordable housing.

The renovation and reuse of another historic structure halfway across the country in Hanover, Pennsylvania also presented its own unique set of challenges and opportunities for the architects and developers it brought together. The Hanover Shoe company, founded in Hanover PA in the late 1800's, around the same time period as Denver Dry Goods, was the economic backbone of the small town of Hanover, Pennsylvania for almost a century. But much like the Denver Dry Goods Co. its economic fortunes turned in the late 1970's, and when the factory shuttered its doors the building sat vacant and crumbling for decades. The once bustling manufacturing complex became an eyesore in a town, which unlike Denver, was small enough that the white elephant could be seen from almost every part of town. The building was allowed to decay to a point that it became dangerous and structurally unsound. The roof on one building collapsed, and that section of the complex was demolished (Reardon). At one point the fire department informed the building's owners that should a fire break out, they would push the walls of the building in rather than save the structure (10,000 friends).

Penrose Property Developers responded to an RFP from Hanover Borough in conjunction with the York County Redevelopment Authority (Reardon, 10,000 friends), who recognized a need for affordable housing for blue collar workers and saw an opportunity to utilize the old shoe factory structure in a new and innovative way. The building required an extensive amount of work before it could be considered habitable. There was extensive water damage to the roof, original maple floors, and timber structure, and "Vandals broke almost all of the 850 windows a few at a time at night. Vagrants built little campfires on the floors for warmth in cold weather," (Clarke). In total nearly 80% of the original heavy timber structure was replaced and new, energy efficient windows were installed in the original frame openings.

Much of the work was accomplished, like the Denver Dry Goods project, by taking advantage of rehab incentive and tax credit programs available through the state and federal governments. The project was financed through a combination of, "Historic Tax Credits, Housing Tax Credits, Federal Home Loan Bank Financing, and State Department of Community and Economic Development. (10,000 friends)" These

enticements encourage the rehabilitation of historic structures, the incorporation of affordable housing elements, and mixed-use development close to transit and public services.

Now that the Shoe factory project has been completed, The Hanover Borough Fire Museum and the public library occupy commercial space on the ground level, though the developers had not been as successful in attracting retail and private commercial tenants as they had hoped. The building is very close to downtown Hanover and is within walking distance of parks, shopping, medical services (10,000 friends), the new Eichleberger Performing arts Center (Clarke) and the transportation services available in the area. Being a more rural community, the transportation options in Hanover are not as extensive as those available in Denver, but there are busses available and accessible within walking distance of the Residences at the Hanover Shoe Factory.

The Hanover Shoe factory, like Denver Dry Goods, has incorporated many elements of smart growth design. The availability of affordable housing of blue-collar workers in Hanover borough has helped to meet a previously under served need. The borough library and fire museum bring an element of mixed-use to the development, and it is close to the available transit options. The project has also brought in some aspects of environmentally conscious building techniques, like new energy efficient double-pane windows. One strong example of this is the transformation of many of the industrial-era impervious surfaces to green space, to reduce runoff and improve filtration of groundwater (10,000 friends). This is an especially important and thoughtful feature in a more rural area like Hanover, with many fields and farmland close by, as well as outlying residents who rely on wells for their water supply.

One of the fundamental differences between Hanover Shoe and Denver Dry Goods is the landscape in which they are found. Denver Dry Goods is in the heart of a bustling downtown metropolitan area with more than half a million residents, where Hanover Shoe is located in a more rural community of 14,000 people, surrounded by corn and soy bean fields. The transportation options available in Hanover are much more limited than in Denver, limiting the availability of funds from transit-oriented development sources. The lower median income in Hanover meant that the project's housing units had to be affordable to blue collar workers while still being cost feasible to

the developer, which may have contributed to the decision to make all of the housing units rental as opposed to available for purchase. In many ways, structural, economic, and conceptual, the success of Hanover Shoe was much more challenging than that of Denver Dry Goods, but by modeling the project on past success stories, like DDG, the developers achieved their goal and now have a waiting list for the Residences at Hanover Shoe.

Sources:

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