



Revitalization of Albuquerque High School

Old Albuquerque High School was closed in 1974 and sold to a number of private interests. Several development attempts over the years failed to materialize. The campus and the surrounding neighborhood were in a state of decay. Most of the residences in the neighborhood were constructed around the turn of the century; some of these residences were kept in a good state of repair while others were not. Old Albuquerque High School, like many of the existing residences was historically significant. The high school and the neighborhood were both in serious danger of being lost because of neglect until 1996 when the City of Albuquerque acquired all 7.26 acres of the Old Albuquerque High School property and four of the campus' five historic buildings. In 1997, the city began a Request for Proposals process to renovate and redevelop the property. This process resulted in the selection of Paradigm & Company Development which teamed with local architects Dekker/Perich/Sabatini in early 1999. A development agreement between the City of Albuquerque and Paradigm was signed October 27, 1999. Over the next 18 months, permits and approvals were sought and received from the local, state, and federal governments, and the first round of financing was put into place.

Dekker/Perich/Sabatini and Paradigm's Rob Dickson came up with the concept for the revitalization of Old Albuquerque High School. The school campus consisted of five buildings surrounding a large landscaped courtyard. Paradigm's master plan included the adaptation of three of these five historic buildings into loft apartments and office space, as well as the creation of a beautiful, well lit courtyard, plaza and streetscapes. The plan also provided for the construction of a parking structure wrapped by new buildings with compatible architecture on the north and east sides of the campus. The new buildings would include condominiums, town homes, live/work units, retail and office spaces.

This concept would play a major role in the revitalization efforts of Downtown Albuquerque. In order to complete the overall master plan, the project was phased. Phase I involved converting the original Classroom and Old Main buildings into loft apartments for lease, renovation of the Campus streetscape, landscaping, lighting, and the construction of a City owned parking garage.

Old Main & Classroom

The first phase of the project involved remodeling Old Main and Classroom, two of the five historic buildings on campus, into loft apartments. Old Main fronts Central Avenue and was constructed in 1914. Classroom was constructed in 1938 and fronts Broadway. In the past, Central and Broadway was one of Downtown Albuquerque's major intersections. A critical component to the success of this project



was retaining the architectural character of the buildings. Of equal challenge was converting classroom space into living quarters.

Most of the wood-cased windows in the buildings were broken and the roofs leaked, causing the interior plaster ceilings and wood floors to rot and destroy the steam pipe radiators. It was not uncommon to see the local fire department respond to arson fires started by vandals or vagrants.

After the aggressive renovation and restoration effort, Old Main and Classroom were renovated to house 72 loft apartments. The resulting design and construction solutions retained the historic character of each space which made each of the residential lofts unique in a variety of ways. They were completely leased before construction was completed in March of 2002. The lofts were the first of their kind in Albuquerque with 15 foot wide historic hallways, laundry and fitness rooms and elevators. The individual lofts have 13 foot high ceilings, original wood floors, historically renovated and insulated double-hung 10 foot high wood windows, and open kitchen plans and baths. Some of the lofts have the original 15 foot long chalkboards on the walls. By utilizing the original construction plans, photographs, and site-obtained measurements, the design and construction team was successful in returning Old Main and Classroom to their former glory.

Bulldog Plaza

The main campus entry was also restored and named Bulldog Plaza after the high school mascot. Monumental gates were constructed with a state-of-the-art entry/security system. Ornamental brick and iron fencing surround the monumental gate which is the main entry to the campus. Located at the corner of Arno and Central, a paved drive wraps around and circles a fountain, convenient for tenant drop off and pick up. Decorative street lighting and landscaping were designed in coordination with the City of Albuquerque's improvements.

Courtyard

Along with Bulldog Plaza, the Old Albuquerque High School Courtyard was reworked with new landscaping, paving, and lighting. The historic courtyard was surrounded by the five buildings of the old high school and contained the original raised fountain and old wishing well. The fountain was restored as the central focal point of the courtyard and the old wishing well was converted into a central mailing station for the whole complex. The courtyard is a public park and it was designed with new, shaded seating areas, open areas for public events, decorative bike racks, waste receptacles and other public amenities. New landscaping emphasizes the historic buildings and the site lighting highlights historic features of the buildings. Simple black iron fencing



Awards

The Phoenix Award, 2002

Urban Revitalization Award, Home Builders Association - Central New Mexico, 2002

The Albuquerque Conservation Association (TACA), 2002

Publications

"Lofty Achievement: Architects Convert Historic School Into Apartments," UNITS, March 2003; pp. 65-69.

between the buildings provides security while leaving the fronts of the buildings open to the street as they were originally constructed.

The courtyard was designed to contain a small landscaped plaza dedicated to the Albuquerque High School Alumni. The area around the wishing well was paved with engraved bricks bearing the names of alumni and their graduation year. Complete handicap access was established from Bulldog Plaza to the courtyard and from the courtyard to all of the campus buildings.

The streetscape was designed to complement the historic buildings, coordinate with the public cityscape and be pedestrian friendly. The sidewalks were widened and on-street curbside parking was returned. Large trees flank the buildings. Park entries provide shade for pedestrians. New decorative street lighting was spaced between the street trees. Smaller decorative pole lights and bollard lights illuminate the pathway into the park without any glare. Concrete sidewalks and brick pavers were fashioned in a decorative pattern that is attractive from the street and can be seen from the lofts above.

Due to the tremendous success of the Courtyard, Bulldog Plaza and the Classroom and Old Main buildings, Rob Dickson pursued the second phase of his concept. This phase included a new City financed parking structure containing 260 spaces, and four new buildings with loft apartments. The project created a New Urbanist development with high density living and a pedestrian friendly on-street presence with street trees and landscaping and convenient on-street parking. It also provided employment opportunities and redeveloped a major historic site located in the heart of a federally designated Enterprise Community boundary.

Location: Albuquerque, NM

Cost: \$4.29 million

Size: 75,637sf

Completion: 2002

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