

106 SUCCESS STORY

VA Medical Center: Consultation Leads to Innovative Solution

Leavenworth, Kansas

The 1886 Franklin Hall “was saved when it was selected by the VA as the location for its new Central Plains Consolidated Patient Account Center office. The building’s adaptive reuse and rehabilitation preserved historic character-defining features while adding modern amenities. Completed in 2011, the project utilized the building’s large open areas for flexible office systems and incorporated a raised floor to support IT requirements.”

— KANSAS PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE, INC.
2012 Award for Excellence presented to
Eisenhower Ridge Association



THE STORY

In 1883, the Grand Army of the Republic—the first major veterans group comprised of former Union soldiers who had served in the Civil War—began lobbying for a veterans care facility in the western U.S. In response, Congress appropriated money to create the Western Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, established at Leavenworth, Kansas. The Western Branch was part of the first national system to provide benefits to veterans, the precursor to the modern program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It is now known as the Dwight D. Eisenhower Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The Disabled Volunteer Soldier Historic District containing 38 historic structures was listed in the National Register in 1999.

THE PROJECT

VA received an \$11.9 million appropriation for a Facility Rightsizing and Gravesite Development Project in 1989 and planned to tear down the 38 historic structures in order to transfer 54 vacant acres to expand the adjacent Leavenworth National Cemetery. This would obliterate the historic district and the last vestiges of the original 1880s complex, including the iconic Queen Anne-style Ward Memorial building with its stained glass window dedicated to President Lincoln.

THE 106 PROCESS

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on such properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue. VA had a primary goal of creating open space for expansion of the National Cemetery. When accord with the consulting parties seemed unreachable, VA proposed to terminate the Section 106 process, obtain formal comments from the

Photos: Above, cemetery; Right, Building 46 east front facade and Ward Building. (photos courtesy VA)

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Photos: Left, Buildings 34, 76; Right, Building 76 hallway corridor after renovation (photos courtesy VA)



Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and proceed with the demolition of the significant buildings. However, the ACHP opted to participate in the consultation at the strong behest of local preservation organizations and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, so the Section 106 process was successfully resumed rather than terminated.

Considering the input from consulting parties, VA was able to revise its plans and use a smaller portion of the historic area for cemetery expansion. Ultimately, VA identified a private developer that would rehabilitate the historic buildings according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and apply for federal rehabilitation tax credits. The consulting parties executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) describing the review process for the development of rehabilitation plans for the historic buildings. In addition, the MOA provided that the Ward Building's stained glass would be reinstalled in its original location as part of the rehabilitation.

THE SUCCESS

The renewed consultation process turned the initial demolition proposal into a creative adaptive use project. This was one of VA's first uses of its Enhanced Use Lease Program when the agency entered into a 75-year lease with Eisenhower Ridge Association to renovate and adaptively reuse the historic properties. Nine acres of land in the historic district became part of the expanded cemetery, but the expansion did not affect the historic buildings. The VA provided for the needed space for the National Cemetery and forestalled the loss of an entire suite of historic buildings. The outcome was a preservation success through the use of an innovative legal alternative that can be a model for other federal agencies.

Consulting Parties:

- ACHP
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration
- Eisenhower Ridge Association
- Kansas State Historic Preservation Office
- Kansas Preservation Alliance
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Preservation Alliance of Leavenworth

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

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 803, Washington DC 20004
Phone: 202-606-8503 • Fax: 202-606-8647 • achp@achp.gov • www.achp.gov



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