

106 SUCCESS STORY

Rehabilitating the Architectural Heart of the City Showcases Partnerships

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



“The Skirvin Hilton Hotel is not only the largest and most complex certified rehabilitation project undertaken in Oklahoma, but also exemplifies the importance of partnerships and teamwork in historic preservation.”

— SHEILA SPURGEON, PH.D.
Former Executive Director,
Preservation Oklahoma, Inc. (2008)



THE STORY

Designed in 1911 by Solomon Andrew Layton and built by oil millionaire William Skirvin, for decades the Skirvin Hotel was the architectural and social heart of Oklahoma City. It was the premier place to dine, stay, and host an event for wealthy cattlemen, oilmen, socialites, and businessmen. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, the Skirvin Hotel hosted guests such as Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan, Bob Hope, and Elvis Presley. Unfortunately, the urban renewal period led to demolition of hundreds of Downtown buildings resulting in an economic downturn, and the hotel closed in 1988.

THE PROJECT

In 1999, Oklahoma City formed the Skirvin Solutions Committee to evaluate options for saving the building. Of particular concern was retaining the building's use and historic character, which required finding a proponent that would rehabilitate the property and return it to its use as a hotel. When it became clear public involvement was necessary to save the landmark hotel, the City purchased it with Community Development Block Grant funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

THE 106 PROCESS

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of projects they carry out, fund, or permit on historic properties prior to making final decisions on the projects. The law creating the Community Development Block Grant Program delegates that responsibility to HUD's grantees, so the City undertook compliance with Section 106. While no plan had been developed at the time of purchase, the City and the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to establish that any rehabilitation proposal considered by the City would require compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The use of the Standards would facilitate use of federal financial tools such as grants and tax credits. Following a Request for Proposals, the City chose Skirvin Partners LLC, which included the Hilton Hotel group, as the developer for the rehabilitation and re-use of the building.

Photos: Above, lobby after rehabilitation (photo courtesy Ira Montgomery, 2007); Right, Venetian Room pre-rehabilitation (photo courtesy Skirvin Partners LLC); Venetian Room after rehabilitation (photo courtesy Ira Montgomery, 2007)



Photos: Left, exterior after rehabilitation (photo courtesy Ira Montgomery, 2007); Right, Entry (south) canopy after rehabilitation (photo courtesy Kahler Slater, Inc.)

The rehabilitation included masonry restoration; roof replacement; installation of new plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems; installation of 900 new windows; and complete interior rehabilitation. While original corridors were left in place, guest rooms were reconfigured to retain the building's historic character. Special attention was given to the retention of other historic spaces and elements, such as the 29 hand-carved Bacchus busts accented with gold leaf, the lobby's arched wooden entry ways and the 1911 tile floor, art deco tile in the Skirvin's Park Avenue Grill (dating from the 1920s expansion), and the decorative lobby elevator doors. The rehabilitation also restored the original first and second floor façade and entry canopy, which had been masked by modern stucco.

The \$56.3 million project had a complex financial package which relied upon federal and state rehabilitation tax credits but also utilized New Markets Tax Credits, a HUD Economic Development Initiative grant, local funding from the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority, proceeds from the sale of the building, and private equity.

THE SUCCESS

After 19 years vacant, the property reopened as the Skirvin Hilton Hotel in 2007, with a grand ceremony attended by hundreds of people. The hotel has added great economic benefit to the City, creating approximately 230 permanent hotel jobs, stimulating tourism and convention business, increasing sales tax revenues, and improving Downtown property values.

By using its allotted federal funds to purchase the hotel and support community development, the City used the Section 106 process to guide the successful rehabilitation of the hotel. The project recognized the need for public-private partnerships to leverage federal funds. Neither the City nor a private entity could have completed a project of this scale or magnitude on its own. Together, though, they were able to access multiple sources of funding, making the rehabilitation financially feasible. The Section 106 process facilitated the needed collaboration, consultation, and compromise among the multiple partners.

The Skirvin Hilton Hotel project demonstrates that historic preservation works. The hotel's historic fabric and spaces evoking the memories of community residents remain, and the work necessary to accommodate the needs of a modern, first-class hotel were accomplished to boost the revitalization of the downtown area.

Consulting Parties:

City of Oklahoma City
(HUD Responsible Entity)

Oklahoma State
Historic Preservation Officer

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

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