

106 SUCCESS STORY

Adaptive Use Saves Iconic Train Station St. Louis, Missouri



“This is more than a commercial project. It is the rededication of a major community resource.”

— MAYOR VINCENT C. SCHOEMEHL JR.

on the reopening of Union Station, August 29, 1985, as quoted in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

THE STORY

When it opened in 1894, Union Station in St. Louis, Missouri, was the largest single-level train station in the world. Its train shed—the largest ever built—covered 11.5 acres. The Romanesque-style station included a large, vaulted Grand Hall embellished with frescoes, gold-leaf detailing, mosaics, and stained glass windows. A major rail gateway to the east and west coasts, the station combined the St. Louis passenger services of 22 railroads and served 100,000 rail passengers a day during its peak years. The building was a critical component of a nationwide rail system that was the backbone of the country's trade and transport. In recognition of its architectural and historical significance, Union Station was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

THE PROJECT

By the time Union Station obtained landmark status, it had become a shadow of its former self. Passenger rail travel had plummeted, and the station was underutilized. In 1978, rail service to Union Station ceased. Its original use gone and its future uncertain, the building could have become a candidate for demolition. However, in 1979, the property was purchased by Oppenheimer Properties for redevelopment by its affiliate, St. Louis Station Associates. The developers brought in the Rouse Company, developers of the recently completed Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston, the first “festival marketplace” urban revitalization project. The festival marketplace concept was designed to energize urban areas through developments that blended shopping, restaurants, and cultural spaces, often in rehabilitated historic buildings. Work began on a proposal to adapt Union Station for a mix of uses, including hotel, retail, entertainment, and recreation.

THE 106 PROCESS

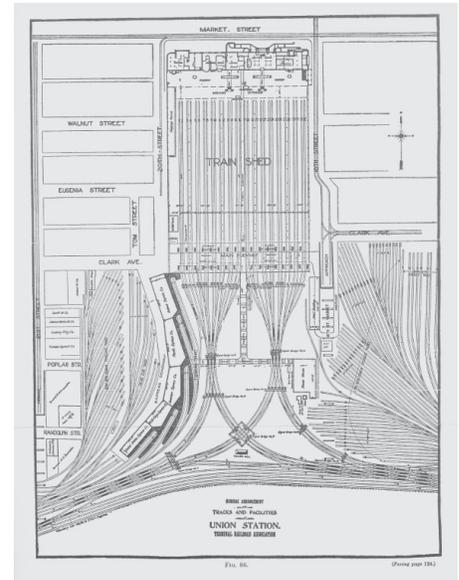
A portion of the project's funding came from an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). By law, HUD's environmental review responsibilities for UDAGs were delegated to recipient communities. Therefore, the City of St. Louis was responsible for conducting the Section

Photos: Above, Union Station 2015 (photo by Dustin Batt, Wikipedia); train shed redevelopment 2011 (photo by DB King, Flickr); stained glass 2016 (photo by Peter Berka, Flickr); Right, passengers jam the interior of Union Station 1941 (photo by Charles O'Rear, National Archives); historic postcard (Wikimedia Commons)

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Photos: Above, hotel lobby 2010 (photo by Pete LaMotte, Flickr); Right, interior train shed mall 2010 (photo by Pedro Szekely, Flickr); map of track layout 1916 (Wikimedia Commons)



106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur.

The developers proposed changes to adapt the building to new uses that could adversely affect the station. The consulting parties agreed that such effects could be avoided in many situations or at least mitigated, and signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that called for: adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation; design review and approval by the Missouri State Historic Preservation Officer; recordation of the station prior to the commencement of work; and salvage of any important architectural features that had to be removed. The MOA also called for consideration of potential impacts on two properties associated with the station—the Power House and Post Office Annex. Both properties were later found eligible for listing in the National Register. The Post Office Annex was rehabilitated, but the Power House was replaced by a new building after further consultation and an amendment to the MOA.

THE SUCCESS

Union Station reopened in 1985 after a \$150 million rehabilitation—at the time one of the largest adaptive use projects in the United States. It was repurposed to house shops, a hotel, restaurants, and entertainment and recreation areas. The project received the federal historic preservation tax credit and was the most expensive project to qualify for the credit as of that date. In the 30 years since, the complex has undergone ups and downs as a retail hub and tourist attraction, but it remains a city focal point, with new redevelopment currently underway that includes installation of an aquarium. Federal funding, federal tax credits, and the federal Section 106 review process helped save Union Station and ensure current and future generations can enjoy and use this important landmark property.

Consulting Parties:

- City of St. Louis
- ACHP
- Missouri State Historic Preservation Officer
- St. Louis Station Associates

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

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