

# 106 SUCCESS STORY

## Successful Rehabilitation of Storm-Ravaged Historic Complex

Waterbury, Vermont



### THE STORY

Located on the banks of the Winooski River with abundant water, timber, and agricultural lands, Waterbury, Vermont, was settled by English colonists in 1763. The Central Vermont Railroad came to town in 1849, expanding transportation for the local mill industry and surrounding agricultural producers. The railroad spurred the relocation of business activity from Waterbury Center to Waterbury Village, and the Waterbury Village Historic District (WVHD) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

In the 1890s, Vermont constructed the State Hospital to relieve overcrowding at a private insane asylum, and at its peak in the 1930s, the patient population was 1,728. The State Hospital was converted into state office space called the Waterbury State Office Complex (WSOC) throughout the 1980s. It comprised 40 contributing buildings in the WVHD with the historic core consisting of 13 buildings ca. 1890s. In 2016, the WSOC historic core was individually listed in the National Register as the Vermont State Hospital Historic District.

### THE PROJECT

Record rainfall from Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 caused intense flooding, severely damaging historic Main Street. The President issued a disaster declaration, making the recovery activities eligible for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Assistance grant funding. A FEMA grant for the recovery and rehabilitation of the WSOC was awarded to the Vermont Building and General Services (BGS) through the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VAOT). VAOT was ultimately awarded \$32 million from FEMA to pass through to BGS, supplementing \$15 million from insurance and \$83 million in non-federal match state funds.

### THE 106 PROCESS

FEMA was responsible for conducting the Section 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

“Throughout the effort, which involved a vast team of local, state, and federal partners, historic preservation was valued as new construction was mingled with historic buildings, energy efficiency was maximized, and people returned to historic downtown Waterbury. With federal funding from FEMA, the Waterbury State Office Complex rehabilitation was the largest, most expensive, and most complex capital construction project ever undertaken by the State of Vermont. It is arguably the largest historic preservation project ever attempted in Vermont.”

—LAURA TRIESCHMANN  
Vermont SHPO

Photos: Above, downtown Waterbury (photo courtesy Discovery Waterbury); Right, historic state hospital building, 1904; Back page, from left, renovated WSOC; during the floods (photos courtesy Vermont SHPO)

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interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur.

Earlier in 2011, prior to Tropical Storm Irene, FEMA, the Vermont State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Vermont Emergency Management Division, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation executed a Statewide Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (Statewide PA) to cover FEMA's grant programs in Vermont for a period of seven years, per standard agency practice. In late 2012, FEMA, SHPO, VAOT, and BGS executed a project-specific Secondary Programmatic Agreement (Secondary PA) tiered off the Statewide PA to address impacts to historic properties at the WSOC specifically related to FEMA grant funding in the wake of Irene.

The Secondary PA required the restoration and reuse of the 13 historic core WSOC buildings and guided new infill construction behind the historic core and across the complex. This included repair, interior and exterior rehabilitation of the historic core buildings, floodproofing, new construction, and selective demolition and landscape modifications. The state office buildings were renovated for modern use, and the last medical building was closed and services relocated. The project also involved the demolition of 20 flood-prone buildings, 13 of which were contributing to the WVHD. Their functions were consolidated into new, flood-resistant buildings.

## THE SUCCESS

Through the Section 106 process, FEMA, SHPO, VAOT, and BGS successfully rehabilitated a historic complex that was severely damaged by the storm. Preservation benefits included refurbishing the external façades of the historic core buildings, including original architectural elements that had been removed, restoring the original viewscape of the WVHD. New construction, including a new, resilient office building and a central heating and cooling plant for the entire complex, was located at the rear of the historic core, minimally visible from Main Street. The creative design of the project was sufficient to retain the National Register of Historic Places listing for the WVHD and support a subsequent individual listing of the WSOC historic core. In addition, approximately 95 percent of the materials from the demolished buildings were recycled or diverted from landfills, making this a green project.

Making the complex more resilient to flood events required changing the interior of most buildings, including filling basements and old heating tunnels and elevating the first floors six inches above the 100-year flood level. Areas where buildings had to be demolished have been used as courtyards and open spaces and to establish a scenic entrance into the new portion of the complex.

The completed project has increased public awareness of the historic WSOC and illustrated how disaster recovery activities and flood mitigation best practices can be used to foster local redevelopment sensitive to historic preservation.

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