STAR APARTMENTS | SKID ROW, LOS ANGELES CA

Developer: Skid Row Housing Trust  
Architect: Michael Maltzan Architecture  
Partners: LA County Health Services + Housing for Health

Building Type: 100 unit Efficiency Multi-Use Complex  
Project Type: Permanent Supportive Housing  
Resident Profile: 77 units at 30% AMI, 23 at 60%

How can affordable housing help to end homelessness?

A Catalyst For Community Health
Rather than simply providing homes for as many people as possible, Skid Row Housing Trust has come to recognize the immense potential supportive housing has to act as a catalyst for strengthening community health and wellness. The ground floor of Star includes a health clinic open to the public and a social enterprise workspace to help support socioeconomic development in the neighborhood, while the architecture of the building itself helps to challenge stigmas of what affordable housing looks like.

Pioneering A New Model Of Permanent Supportive Housing
Star Apartments represents a new approach to supportive housing in both design and management. The building includes clinical and social services to help individuals overcome the numerous mental and physical challenges of homelessness, including therapeutic activities like yoga, art and gardening. The building also serves as a central community hub for residents of all of Skid Row Housing Trust’s supportive housing units in the neighborhood, which is a key mechanism for pioneering a new integrated model of supporting housing aimed at supporting an entire community.
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PROJECT CONTEXT

The Evolution of Skid Row
Originally a transient neighborhood where migrant workers found cheap seasonal housing, Skid Row grew into a hub for illicit activity and violence. Today it is a highly stigmatized neighborhood, home to a diverse homeless population of over 4,100, many of whom are chronically homeless and live in absolute poverty. Located in the heart of Downtown LA, Skid Row’s 50 square blocks represent the highest concentration of homelessness in the entire U.S.

Demographics of Skid Row
Skid Row has an estimated total population of 10,000 residents, with approximately 2,500 people occupying beds and missions and transitional facilities and over 1,000 sleeping on the streets. The median household income is just over $11,000, a fraction of the $46,000 average income of the City of Los Angeles.

Why Homelessness Costs $875 Million Each Year
Los Angeles is part of LA County, which spends $875m each year to manage homelessness. This is because the homeless are dependant on public services when a crisis arises. This includes the cost of ambulance runs, ER and hospital visits, food stamps, general relief vouchers and shelters. Managing homeless populations also requires additional police forces, costs of jail time, prosecutors, public defenders and probation costs. On average, a homeless person costs the public $42,000 per year.

The Cost Savings of Supportive Housing
National studies have shown that on average it is five time cheaper to provide supporting housing for homeless individuals than it is to leave them on the street, and that does not even account for the immeasurable social benefits of reducing homelessness such as increased safety, public health and decreased crime and vandalism. By getting people off the street and into supportive housing with on-site medical services we save $23K per person, per year.

“Homelessness is not simply solved by providing a roof over one’s head. It is a layered and complex social condition that requires an equally layered and nuanced approach.”

- Theresa Hwang, Rose Fellow
Star Apartments pioneers a new model to address the core factors that cause homelessness:

SAFE, STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING
A permanent home, regardless of state of health or income, is the first step to helping individuals who are homeless to rebuild their lives and become self-sufficient.

HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL TREATMENT
On-site medical services, substance abuse treatment and clinical therapy to help address the physical and mental traumas often linked with homelessness.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT
Social services to build community amongst residents, provide job training, and help individuals re-integrate with society, breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Understanding Homelessness

Homelessness is not caused by lack of shelter, but by detachment from society and lack of social support. Often it begins with a traumatic life crisis leading to depression and social isolation. As individuals become increasingly detached from reality and society their lives begin to unravel, often leading to poverty and housing insecurity. Living on the street becomes a last resort for those with no where else to turn.

“It sneaks up on you... a lot of things can go wrong at the same time, and overnight you can end up on the streets”

-Will Robey: formerly homeless, current Trust Resident

Star Apartments, amongst the Trust’s other building within the Skid Row neighborhood.

Communities To End Homelessness

The map on the right shows the network of buildings that the Trust has developed within Skid Row. Star will function as a strategic hub for the neighborhood, providing communal space for all of the Trust's residents throughout the city.

Partnerships To Provide Comprehensive Support

Skid Row Housing Trust worked closely with both the LA County Department of Health Services, Housing for Health Program in order to integrate on-site clinical and social support serves for all residents. These partnerships not only allowed for successful operations but help both departments better serve their target populations by providing centrally located offices within Skid Row.

Design, Ownership & Management

The Trust believes design is a key factor in creating not just a supportive housing project but a place of recovery for residents. This means not only a deep investment of time and resources in the architecture and design, but also a commitment to the building functioning at its highest potential, which is why the Trust owns and manages all its properties to ensure they remain places of recovery.
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MODULAR AND PRE-FAB UNITS

Investing in Architect-Developer Relationships

Skid Row Housing Trust has worked with Michael Maltzan Architecture on two previous projects, helping the firm to gain a strong understanding of the programmatic requirement for supportive housing. To further deepen the firm's understanding of residents' needs, Rose Fellow Theresa Hwang implemented a participatory design process that highlighted residents' voices and critically informed design decisions for the firm.

Multi-Purpose Community Space

The super-structure design not only saved the existing building from demolition, it also created an opportunity to include 15,000 sq.ft of community programming space that provides a jogging track, activity court, art room, library, edible garden, patio and a community kitchen.

The super-structure under construction

Super-Structure

SRHT challenged MMA to develop a design that could make use of the existing building. MMA's solution was to pour a concrete "super-structure" to support modular units.

Modular Pre-Fab Construction

Modular units saved not only construction costs and material waste, but also allowed for a maximum amount of units to be included in the project and insured each resident a room with natural light and ventilation, both of which help reduce energy costs.

Urban Fabric Improvements

The ground floor of the building is home to a medical clinic open to all neighborhood residents, the Trust's leasing office, and the administrative offices of the Department of Health Services, helping to improve the physical and economic vitality of the neighborhood.

The Impacts of Architecture

Research in environmental psychology help us to understand how architecture and design have a huge impact on all aspects of health and well being, from light and air quality, to emotional attachment of space, to the implicit social assumptions associated with certain types of buildings and aesthetics. We know that supportive housing in a well designed space can truly help facilitate the rehabilitation process more effectively.

Participatory Design Process

The Trust has already built 23 other supportive housing projects, so from the start they had extensive knowledge to convey to architects. The Trust helped to facilitate a participatory design process. They met and spoke with residents and staff of their other buildings to get feedback on what works and what doesn't. Their input provided SRHT the insights to know what aspects were critical to remain and which should be re-thought.
**Addressing Population-Specific Needs**

By investing time in building a collaborative relationship, MMA and the Trust were able to develop many unique design solutions, such as the offices for social workers, which require privacy so patients feel safe opening up, but also visual transparency to ensure safety for the social worker. Understanding this dual requirement led MMA to a unique design solution; frosted glass window walls to provide visual privacy, but transparent enough to ensure safety.

**Architectural Investments for Community**

Star represents an architectural investment in community building spaces and resources, the second floor Wellness Center offers outdoor green and open space coupled with group arts and exercise opportunities. In addition, the Wellness Center serves not only Star residents, but residents of all 23 Trust buildings, many of whom live in much older buildings with no significant community or outdoor space.

**Architecture as an Economic Force**

Skid Row Housing Trust believes that supportive housing can be a benefit for both residents and neighborhoods. Star’s ground-floor social enterprise workspace will help catalyze the locals economy. The on-site health clinic will be open to anyone in the neighborhood and will provide clinical services not only for residents but for many of the homeless living in the area, thus reducing the total costs for ambulance runs and ER/hospital visits.

**Designed to Uplift**

The importance of Star goes beyond the functionality and programming of the building, the exterior design and architecture play a critical role as well. The building not only inspires pride and sense of ownership amongst residents, which can lead to better maintenance and upkeep of the building, but also helps break stereotypes about what affordable housing looks like and how it can add aesthetically value to the urban fabric of a neighborhood and city.

**Green Design Features**

Each unit is prefabricated with materials and finishes that are entirely VOC free, ensuring a non-toxic and healthy environment for residents. The modular construction method helps reduce costs, construction time and material waste, while also providing a tighter building envelope to ensure greater energy efficiency.

“A building that stands out on the street has a huge impact on residents, they can point to it proudly and say ‘that is where I live.’”

- Theresa Hwang, Rose Fellow
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ADDITIONAL PHOTOS

Open lounge and community space on the first floor

Open lounge space from the other end of the room

Community living room space on the second floor

Second floor lounge space

Community meeting room adjacent to outdoor areas

Outdoor space on the third floor
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PROJECT DATA SHEET

Funding Sources and Structure:

Total Development Cost: $40 million
Total Construction Cost: $22 million
Cost per square foot: $183
Cost per unit: $253,000
Total Units: 102
Green Building Certifications: LEED Platinum
Building location: Downtown Los Angeles
Project Size: 98,575 sf
Residential SF: 78,040 sf
Commercial SF: 4,450 sf
Open Space: 13,194 sf
Developer: Skid Row Housing Trust
Architect: Michael Maltzan Architects
Contractor: Westport Construction Inc. & MBD Construction Inc.
Pre-fab Manufacturer: Guerdon Enterprises LLC

Project Financing Partners:

Acquisition/Predevelopment:
Century Housing Corporation
Low Income Investment Fund
Enterprise Community Partners
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Genesis LA Economic Growth Corporation

Construction/Permanent:
Wells Fargo, Los Angeles Housing Department,
State of California Department of HCD, State of California
Tax Credit Allocation Committee, Housing Authority of the
County of Los Angeles, Community Bank (Affordable Housing
Program, Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco)
National Equity Fund, Bank of America, Operating Subsidy,
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Awards:
• 2014 Downtown Breakfast Club Rose Award
• 2014 Affordable Housing News Readers’ Choice Award
• 2014 SCANPH Finalist (selection pending)
• 2012 Westside Urban Forum Winner
• 2012 AIA Next LA Design Winner
• 2012 Los Angeles Business Council Architectural Award

Rose Fellow: Theresa Hwang

“We need to recognize that shelter is not enough to shift the system that creates low-income and poverty concentrated areas. By using the Skid Row Housing Trust model of incorporating social services along with community building programs as an integral part of housing there is greater impact and a more holistic approach to meeting the needs, and providing more opportunity for our resident population.”

“The Trust places an importance on high design, for its programmatic and aesthetic impact. It brings a sense of dignity and pride to the residents who previously had no safe place to lay their heads. Rather than create homes that recede into the background, The Trust partners with talented architects to bring beauty, high performance, and positive attention to often neglected populations and portions of the city.”