

Urban Land

Preservation Through Placement

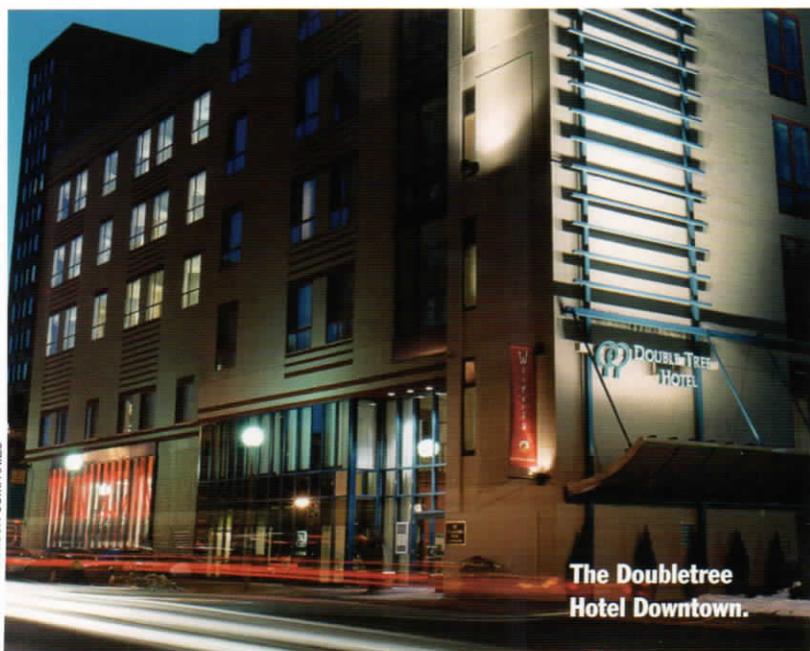
The \$40 million rehabilitation in 1999 and 2000 of the former Don Bosco Technical High School in Boston's Chinatown community turned this closed school into the 268-room Doubletree Hotel Downtown and the 45,000-square-foot Wang YMCA at Chinatown, saving neighborhood history.

The site, across the street from the New England Medical Center, is on the cusp of the Theater District and Boston's Chinatown neighborhood, and is at the center of Boston's nightclub activity. It originally contained three structures, built in 1925, 1975, and 1985. The Don Bosco order of the Salesian Brothers, a Catholic religious order dedicated to serving youth and the community, operated the school until 1998, when it closed due to competition from other private schools and a dwindling pool of students.

The 1975 building housed the athletic facilities for the school, including a much loved championship basketball court where NBA stars like Patrick Ewing of the New York Knicks and the late Reggie Lewis of the Boston Celtics played in their early years.

Just two blocks from the school, the Chinatown branch of the YMCA had operated under a 4,000-square-foot, dilapidated inflatable temporary structure for 27 years. Due to high land costs, the YMCA had been unable to move to a larger, permanent space in the neighborhood. Developer Corcoran Jennison Companies approached the Y with the opportunity to convert the Don Bosco gymnasium facility into what is now the Wang YMCA at Chinatown, named after An Wang, founder of Wang Computers, who contributed \$1 million to the Chinatown YMCA. The 45,000-square-foot space includes the original Don Bosco basketball court, an Olympic-size swimming pool, a fitness facility, a community classroom, and daycare space.

Corcoran Jennison teamed up with Doubletree to create an upscale business hotel. The layout of the old school, with its wide corridors, high ceilings, and oversized windows, adds a touch of old-world Boston charm to the new hotel. The hotel's location in Chinatown also lent itself to a unique opportunity to incorporate authentic aspects of Asian cultures through the use of feng shui.



**The Doubletree
Hotel Downtown.**

CORCORAN JENNISSON COMPANIES

The Doubletree is the first hotel in Boston whose interior design incorporates elements of feng shui, the ancient Chinese discipline of bringing the balance and harmony of nature into the living and working environment. Feng shui elements include fountains and live plants at the elevators on every floor and an oversized fish tank in the lobby with different colored fish meant to balance the energy of the room.

With the Doubletree Hotel Downtown, Corcoran Jennison was able to preserve one of Boston's most loved basketball courts, while incorporating the community's Asian culture into the interior design. And at the Wang YMCA in Chinatown, St. Don Bosco's mission of serving youth lives on.—
Suzanne Corcoran

Suzanne Corcoran is senior project director for Corcoran Jennison Companies, a national real estate development, management, and construction company based in Boston.

Townhomes on Capitol Hill: Seamless Blend



Until 1996, disparagement of U.S. public housing policy was easily illustrated with a telephoto shot of the U.S. Capitol dome, framed by the shells of abandoned public housing on Capitol Hill. Today, that hyperbolic vista no longer exists, least of all from the doorsteps of the Townhomes on Capitol Hill, a residential development that blends into the surrounding neighborhood of single-family, attached townhouses.

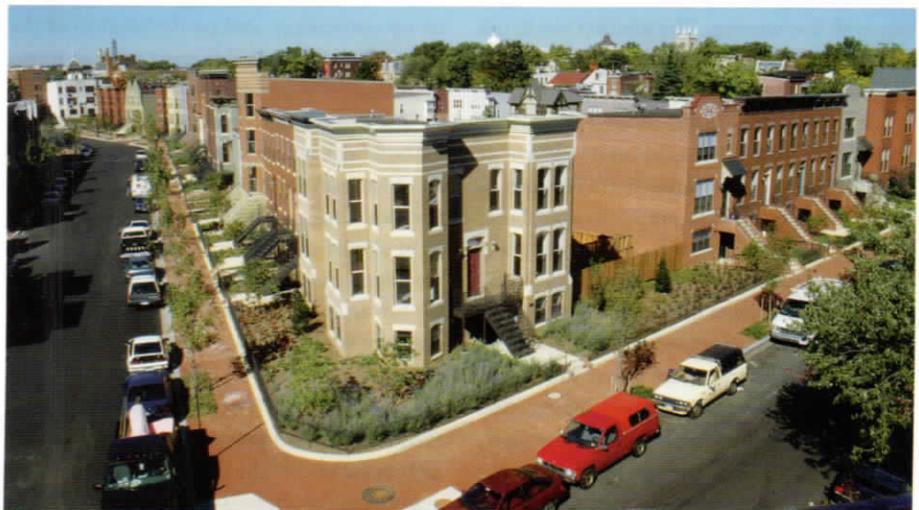
Capitol Hill is a mixed-income, richly diverse neighborhood of approximately 50,000 residents and two major commercial corridors. If the Mall forms the Capitol's front lawn, Capitol Hill is its backyard, starting immediately east of the U.S. Capitol, Supreme Court, and Library of Congress buildings. Since its earliest days as a rural village, the neighborhood has been home to workers associated with the government: congressional representatives, staffers, lobbyists, Navy Yard workers. In 1940, the government built an 18-building public housing complex of garden apartments in a mix of rowhouses and apartment blocks, seven blocks southeast of the Capitol. It was named the Ellen Wilson Dwellings, after the wife of President Woodrow Wilson, whose deathbed wish was to abolish substandard

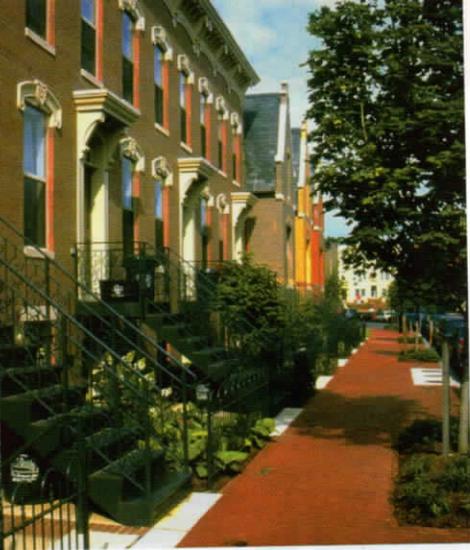
housing. In the early 1970s, the elevated Southeast Freeway was built, cutting off a corner of the block on which the complex was located. As a result, the surrounding area became an isolated and dead-end edge of its neighborhood. Finally in 1988, with a plan to renovate the buildings and return its 129 displaced households, city public housing officials closed the complex. But the city never rehabilitated the property. A judgment against the city in a 1992 lawsuit filed by families on the city's waiting list for public housing led to the city housing authority being placed under federal receivership, throwing all plans into further chaos.

The Ellen Wilson Dwellings became a haven for drug dealers, drug users, and squatters, traumatizing neighbors and threatening their property values. Not wanting to wait for the cash-strapped city to keep its promise, in 1990 the neighborhood formed a community development corporation (CDC) to redevelop the site. The CDC brought in Telesis, a local developer of affordable housing, and **Corcoran Jennison**, a Boston-based marketing and property-management firm, to implement a novel proposal: a limited-equity cooperative, wherein residents would buy a share in the development and pay a monthly fee. This plan would allow lower-income families to own property with

Official Statement of the Small-Scale Residential Award

The Townhomes on Capitol Hill rose from the debris of an abandoned public housing project to become a mixed-income residential development seamlessly incorporated into the surrounding neighborhood of single-family, attached townhouses. Its innovative co-op equity structure sustains the community without ongoing subsidies, and the transformed neighborhood is fully integrated—socially and physically—in its stable Capitol Hill surroundings.





Project Data/Townhomes on Capitol Hill

Location: Washington, D.C.

Owner: Ellen Wilson Community Development Corporation

Developer: Telesis Corporation, Washington, D.C.

Architect: Weinstein and Associates, Washington, D.C.

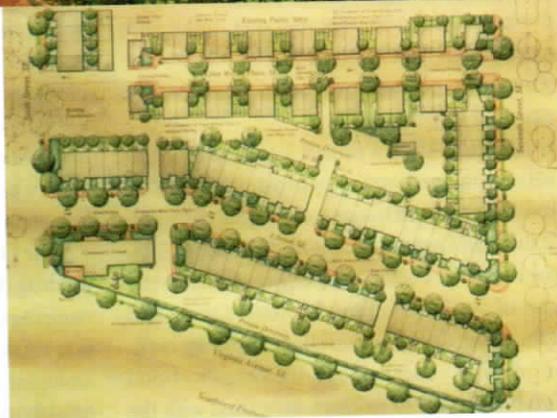
Size: 5.3 acres/134 units

Project Completion: November 2000

lower-than-conventional downpayments and monthly payments that would be partially subsidized by higher-income families. Under the HOPE VI (Homeownership Opportunities for People Everywhere) program, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued a \$25 million grant for construction.

HOPE VI funding requires that residents have low to moderate incomes. It also requires that the CDC work closely with tenants and community in its development strategy. Thus the CDC was faced with finding a balance between attracting enough higher-income families to offset the lower co-op fees of low-income families, while assuaging its gentrified community that was split on the issue of attracting new residents who could afford market-rate housing, and attracting back displaced former neighbors with low incomes. The solution was to use a banded-ownership formula and to meld architecturally the project into its neighborhood.

Of the 134 new units, 34 are reserved for households with incomes below 25 percent of the area median, 33 for households between 25 and 50 percent of median, and 67 for households between 50 and 115 percent. Downpayments—in the parlance of co-op ownership, “share price”—are as high as three times the monthly fee, and co-op fees are based on the home value and the income band of the unit owner. These monthly payments cover all operating expenses and the reserve. HUD’s \$25 million grant covered all capital costs up front, eliminating the need for debt service on the property. As a result,



the Townhomes on Capitol Hill will be maintained for 40 years without any ongoing public housing subsidies of any kind.

HOPE VI funding requires that the developer give displaced public housing families priority in the new project. At the Townhomes, only 11 households were able to return—partly because 11 years had elapsed since the diaspora, partly because of the high financial bar for co-op ownership, and partly because of the strict criteria households must meet in terms of fitness as tenants and financial credit.

The key architectural decision was to make the buildings indistinguishable from the prevalent Victorian-style townhouses of the neighborhood. That meant that houses not only must be of similar sizes and materials, but also that the street grid must extend into and through the 5.3-acre site, creating two new streets. The desired overall effect was that where the neighborhood ends not be distinguishable from where the “project” begins. It also meant that the lowest-priced townhouses have the same texture and feel of the highest-priced, with the entire range intermixed on the same street. The

CDC retained Weinstein and Associates, a Washington, D.C.-based architecture firm, which—working with a public housing budget—used only five building types, but achieved a seemingly infinite variety of facades and interiors by varying the use of the limited palette of building materials, fixtures, and colors. Most townhouses have two bedrooms and two bathrooms, with an English-basement rental unit. The higher-priced townhouses offer three bedrooms.

To newcomers and old-time residents alike, Capitol Hill is a small town, engendering loyalty to the neighborhood above all other communally held values. One does not simply move to Capitol Hill—one joins the community. The Townhomes on Capitol Hill have been embraced and its returning families welcomed back, while tourists intermingle, unmindful that they are in the midst of a public housing project. ■

DAVID TAKESUYE, a licensed architect, is a senior associate, policy and practice, at ULI. One of 11 projects selected for ULI’s 2000 Awards for Excellence, the Townhomes on Capitol Hill was the recipient of the Small-Scale Residential Award. For information on the other ten award winners, see pages 28 and 29 in the January 2001 issue of *Urban Land*; one of the winners is profiled in this space each month. For information about ULI’s awards program, contact the author at 202-624-7040 or by E-mail at awards@uli.org, or go to ULI’s Web page at www.uli.org.