

Narrative

Spring Garden II was developed through a partnership of Michael's Development Company and Spring Garden Community Development Corporation (Spring Garden CDC). It was the second phase of a neighborhood wide program to upgrade and rehabilitate historic PHA owned properties in the Spring Garden neighborhood. The rehabilitated buildings contribute to the revitalization of a historic neighborhood while retaining an important housing resource for existing public housing-eligible low-income residents.

In the late 1990's, the Spring Garden CDC began working with PHA to develop a plan to fully rehabilitate the PHA scattered-site buildings to historic standards and provide improved living conditions for residents. Goals of the plan included:

- Retaining a high quality affordable housing resource in the neighborhood in the face of rising property values and gentrification
- Improving PHA-owned properties to historic standards, consistent with the appearance of privately owned properties, so that they were not visually stigmatized as public housing

In December 2005, PHA issued a Request for Qualifications seeking a Development Partner to gather community input to develop a Master Plan for neighborhood improvement. Spring Garden Community Development Corporation (the "CDC"), which has been active in the neighborhood for 15 years, was selected as the Development Partner. The actual Master Plan was drawn by KSK/Architects, Planners, Historians who also served as the architect of record.

The project proposed by the CDC and developed in coordination with PHA residents and other neighborhood stakeholders involved the rehabilitation of 22 PHA buildings and new construction on CDC-owned properties into a 58-unit rental development financed with 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits and Historic Tax Credits. 32 of the units receive public housing subsidies, and all units are affordable to residents earning 60% of area median income or less.

The CDC worked with existing PHA residents to permit most of them to remain in the Spring Garden neighborhood during construction by rehabilitating vacant PHA and CDC-owned buildings and building new construction on the CDC-owned vacant lots first. When the first sub-group of units was completed, PHA households moved into those units. Once vacated, the units from which the PHA households moved were then rehabilitated, and then reoccupied.

Over the years, the facades of these historical Victorian buildings had fallen into significant disrepair. The rehabilitation was carried out under the jurisdiction of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, to strict historical standards. The design details for restoration of the exteriors were carefully developed by KSK historic preservation and architectural staff, in conjunction with the commission and State Historic Preservation Office staff.

The rehabilitation of existing buildings included the following elements:

- Complete reconfiguration and rehabilitation of the interiors to create residential units that meet contemporary market expectations in terms of space and amenities.
- Reduction in the number of units per building, and number of bedrooms per unit, to create larger, more livable apartment layouts.
- Provision of amenities such as central air conditioning, and washers and dryers in each unit.
- Restoration of the exterior facades of all the buildings in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Historic Rehabilitation.

Three new row structures were constructed on vacant lots in the historic district to help complete contiguous block faces including:

- A new 6-unit elevator apartment building, targeted to elderly residents that allows them to remain in the community as they age.
- A new 3-story building on a formerly vacant corner lot that contains office space for the Spring Garden CDC (the social service provider for the development) and space for programs to improve the quality of life for residents.
- A 2 unit infill row structure on another vacant lot to complete the handsome block where it's located.

Through the successful application of multiple funding sources, including Low Income and Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, the project has resulted in the historic rehabilitation of a significant number of deteriorated properties in the Spring Garden national and local historic district, as well as sympathetic new infill construction that enhances the district as an asset for the city.

The improvements to the Spring Garden II area have helped promote blight elimination on nearby streets, and the active drug trade has also diminished on the surrounding blocks.

As on the streets containing Spring Garden II units, the surrounding corridor has seen a dramatic increase in values and development, attracting the most popular Philadelphia restaurants to this once blighted area.

The construction project itself created many jobs, including employment and training for local residents. During the construction period, local businesses saw a large increase in patronage and large amounts of construction materials were also purchased for the project.

The completion of the Phase II project has also given the entire area a face lift, and made it far more attractive to would-be investors and entrepreneurs.

The social services office building employs several individuals in the office itself, including Spanish speaking personnel from the community, and a number of additional community personnel on the street, keeping the neighborhood clean and tidy. The office works closely with area residents on jobs and job placement, among a host of other social services it provides.

The success of an ambitious development such as Spring Garden II depends upon an agency having the faith of the lending community and a good track record as a developer or having a noted developer of affordable housing such as Michaels Development. The agency also must have the organizational/technical capacity to do the research for grants and tax credits, and manage them based upon the requirements those funding sources impose.