

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. What local issues did this project address? How has it affected the local community?

The project addresses the deterioration of the neighborhood and the deterioration of the spirit that comes with blight. As the hulking ruins began taking on the form of the Victorian grandeur of the early 1900s, the confidence of neighborhood residents grew. They formed a community committee to push for improvements outside the Parkview reconstruction area, calling for more recreational facilities, safer streets and better trash pickup. The enthusiasm continues to grow.

The project also addresses the need for high-quality housing to serve a diverse population already in the neighborhood, from the elderly to the children to those with special needs, from women needing subsidies to workers able to pay market rates. The restoration, done to exacting specifications, allows lower-income residents to enjoy apartments usually found only in a city's wealthy neighborhoods.

With the project came sorely needed jobs. During the course of the project, 50 neighborhood residents have found work with the construction crews. The tenant of one mansion, the Philadelphia Health Management Corp., has brought 20 permanent jobs into the neighborhood.

2. Describe the design concept, materials used, and visual impact of the project. How was the design shaped and influenced by its intended use? Its urban context?

The design concept encompasses two goals: faithful restoration of the Victorian facades, down to the bas-relief, and a complete overhaul of the interiors to accommodate a variety of tenants. To restore the homes, craftsmen developed techniques to reproduce the bas-relief in fiberglass, and they reproduced the elaborate copper work in wood, using light green paint to imitate a copper patina. The goal of accommodating a variety of tenants produced a different set of problems. The first two floors of the 43-unit Brentwood were designed essentially as townhouses for families. The top three floors house apartments for the elderly. In another situation, an apartment house was designed for the physically handicapped.

3. Describe the underlying values of the project. What, if any, significant tradeoffs were required to implement the project?

Arresting the neighborhood's deterioration stands as the most obvious impetus for the project. But Parkside Historic Preservation Corp. wanted to turn around the area with methods and materials used in the finest restorations in the country's oldest cities, giving low-income residents the type of homes rarely available to them. Doing this meant ignoring conventional wisdom about the foolishness of tackling expensive historical restoration in low-income areas, and it meant selling the vision to private investors and city officials.

Above all, the corporation did not want to change the socioeconomic or ethnic composition of the area. The project was designed for young and old and those with special needs, many already living within the district. Residents range from those on subsidies to those able to pay market rates.

The corporation never employed any tradeoffs, not even when three mansions burned and part of one collapsed during renovation into an apartment house.

4. Describe key elements of the development process, including community participation, where appropriate.

The first step in the development — and financial — process involved forming the nonprofit, minority-run Parkside Historic Preservation Corp. and receiving the designation of a national historic district for the area. City officials expressed eagerness to see the area reborn and sold the corporation two mansions for \$1. As the development began, a need for a neighborhood presence on the board became clear, and the district residents gained a voice that continues to shape the rehabilitation project today. The corporation serves as developer and manager, working toward making the investment self-sustaining.

5. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources, and square foot costs where applicable.

The project developer, James L. Brown IV, knew from the beginning the expense of restoring the elaborate Victorian mansions at \$140 a square foot would be too great to rely heavily on public subsidies. Winning a national historic designation for the area gave Parkside Preservation an attractive tax incentive to add to the deductions available for financing low-income housing, allowing the group to draw two-thirds of the financing from corporate investors that included National Equity Fund, Edison Capital, Duquesne Power and Light and Pennrose Property Inc. To make the investment even more attractive, the corporation devised a plan to buy out investors when the asset no longer carried any paper value, allowing them to donate the property to the corporation for an attractive tax deduction. The board just approved the first buyout, and it will allow Parkside Preservation to refinance the property and to capitalize the project. The ultimate goal is for the buildings to become self-sustaining and in the nonprofit organization's hands.

A small portion of the financing came from outright grants. The remainder came from community development block grants. In one case, the elaborate restoration of apartments that had burned, the city extended the maximum on subsidies by 30 percent, giving Parkside \$2 million in CDB grants.

6. Describe what is unique about the project. Is it adaptable to other urban settings?

The project is unusual in a physical sense and in an emotional sense. Few developers have ever attempted, let alone succeeded, in complicated historical rehabilitation for lower-income housing in a distressed neighborhood littered with abandoned houses. But the remarkable aspect of the project goes far beyond the restoration of mansions to their Victorian grandeur. It lies in rebuilding an entire urban neighborhood, repairing its historic fabric while providing opportunity for the residents. Just seeing the faith needed to attempt the project imbued the area with a sense of hope, and that sense has built as the project has progressed.

Developers with perseverance and a sense of mission can adapt the lessons learned in Parkside to other urban settings with crumbling historical homes in low-income neighborhoods.

ABSTRACT

Project Name: Parkside Preservation

Location: Currently the blocks fronted by 4100 and 4200 Parkside Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa.

1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major goals.

In the late 1800s, the elite of Philadelphia's nouveau riche lived in magnificent mansions and townhouses facing the nation's largest urban park. With Pompeian brick, relief sculptures, copper trim, granite pillars and sweeping porches, the buildings offered Victorian grandeur unequalled in this city of remarkable architecture. Eighty years later, after a demographic shift from the white wealthy to the African-American poor, the buildings lay in waste, boarded up, home to only the homeless, crack addicts and scavengers, just part of blocks and blocks of urban decay. In 1983, James L. Brown IV, a neighborhood resident for decades, formed the nonprofit Parkside Historic Preservation Corp., obtained a national historical designation for the area, took over property from the city and began the laborious process of obtaining funding to rehabilitate two blocks. Now the buildings, restored to their former splendor, house a neighborhood cross-section that ranges from the poverty stricken to the lower-middle class, from the elderly to the very young. The apartments also serve those with special needs.

The restoration phase began with a 19-unit apartment building, moved on to two neighboring houses and then branched out to the mansions overlooking the site of the first World's Fair. The first mansion became home to 18 female substance abusers and their children under the care of the Philadelphia Health Management Corp. The next stage, the Brentwood Apartments — three twin mansions joined by a common porch — became home to 43 tenants, more than half of them elderly and many of the others with children. As the nonprofit corporation began restoring a third mansion, the scope of the project broadened to include more than two dozen homes on two smaller streets. So far, 13 buildings have been rehabilitated and a 14th will be finished next year. The project, encompassing 198 apartment units and an award-winning garden, has cost \$21 million. The next major stage will involve construction of a seven-lot building designed to meet the health agency's growing needs and to provide a day-care center for the entire community. After completion of the two-square-block area, Parkside Historic Preservation will move farther into the historic district, razing whole blocks of dilapidated row houses with little historic value and building homes for sale.

One goal we share with many urban developers — to arrest a neighborhood's deterioration. But our goals go further. We want to provide a standard of housing not normally available to the poor, and we want to bring historic preservation into an area not ordinarily desirable to developers. Above all, we do not want to change the socioeconomic or ethnic composition of the area. The project has won awards from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*?

Unlike many restoration projects of this quality and scale, the Parkside restoration was not designed to "gentrify" an area but to give low- and middle-income residents homes normally out of their reach, homes equivalent to apartments in the city's finest areas. Not a single person was displaced during any renovation. The project was designed to accommodate single mothers needing child care, the elderly needing security and the handicapped needing accessibility. The formation of a nonprofit organization, Parkside Historic Preservation, allowed the community to become involved through board representatives in the entire process, from helping to plan the restoration to approving tenants. The community participation and the developer's longtime residency in the area lend legitimacy to the project in the neighbors' eyes, building a respect seen in big ways and small — men keep an eye on the buildings at night, neighbors hail the developer as a beloved brother, and graffiti writers keep their looping letters off Parkside buildings. In this area of high unemployment and deep poverty, construction crews have employed about 50 neighborhood residents and many summer interns from city high schools. One tenant, Philadelphia Health Management Corp., brought 20 permanent jobs to the area. Another agency undertook the first new construction in the neighborhood in four decades, building a 20-unit building for mentally handicapped tenants on land provided by Parkside Historic Preservation.

None of this could have been possible without financial innovations, innovations that gave the preservation corporation enough capital to undertake a restoration true to even the most minute detail of the elaborate Victorian facades. The first step was formation of Parkside Historic Preservation Corp., a minority-run nonprofit organization that serves both as developer and property manager. Next came declaration of the area as a national historic district, providing key tax incentives for private investors. The next part of the "double-whammy" tax incentive came from the use of the low-income housing credit. The corporation also devised a way to buy out investors when their assets no longer have any paper value. With these incentives, the organization has been able to attract two-thirds of the projects' costs from private sources. The remainder has come from outright grants and community development block grants administered by the city, which has allowed the developer far more flexibility than normal. For one project, the Brentwood Apartments, city officials had such confidence and belief in the project that they waived the usual grant limit of \$1.5 million, giving the developer \$2 million.

PROJECT DATA

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided.

Project Name Parkside Preservation **Location** Parkside Historic District Philadelphia, PA

Owner Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation **with special needs.**

Project Use(s) Residence and recreation for low-moderate income individuals & families and persons

Project Size Phase II 198 units; Phase III undetermined **Total Development Cost** 21 Million so far.

Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate) _____

Date Initiated 1983 **Percent Completed, December 1, 1998** 90%

Project Completion Date (if appropriate) _____

Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates The Lansdowne, Dec., 1985 The Brantwood, June, 1993
4200 block Parkside, Mar., 1991 4234 Parkside, Dec. 1994
The Brentwood, July, 1996

Application submitted by:

Name James L. Brown, IV **Title** Executive Director

Organization Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation

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Key Participants (Attach an additional sheet if needed)

Organization	Key Person	Telephone
Public Agencies	Office of Housing and Community Development John Kromer	(215) 686-9750

Architect/Designer Campbell Thomas & Co. Robert Thomas (215)985-4354

Developer Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation James L. Brown, IV (215)473-4900

Professional Consultant Edmund Bacon Former city planner, City of Philadelphia (215) 567-0693

Other _____

Community Group Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation

Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. (Circle all that apply).

<input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mailing	<input type="checkbox"/> Magazine Announcement (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> Previous RBA entrant or Selection Committee member	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
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Signature James L. Brown, IV Executive Director