

Smart Design For All:

The New Look of Affordable and Supportive Housing

by Ronald O'Rourke



Courtyard of the Jordan, by Bonstra | Haresign Architects.

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Although shelter magazines often highlight spectacular high-end residences, architects are also designing new projects for affordable and supportive housing that feature market-rate looks, well-planned living units, and sustainable design features. This article highlights seven recently built or on-the-boards affordable and supportive housing projects in Arlington and the District that build on the architectural profession's century-long tradition of socially conscious design and overturn stereotyped images of such housing. Several of them have received design awards, including awards in AIA | DC's competition for unbuilt designs.

Bonstra | Haresign Architects recently worked with developers, planners, citizens, and local and state officials to create three smart-looking buildings in Arlington that boost the county's stock of affordable rental units while enhancing the urban fabric. The

buildings employ setbacks and changes in material on their façades to reduce their apparent mass and create a rhythm of building segments compatible with surrounding single-family homes. Two of the buildings offer nicely landscaped interior courtyards, and all three incorporate numerous sustainability features. The projects take advantage of subsidies and incentives from the Virginia Housing Development Authority and Arlington County.

The Jordan, located on Wilson Boulevard at a site formerly occupied by an auto dealer and a parking lot, includes 90 one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments. "Commercial developers were ready to build several high-rise office buildings on the site," says **David Haresign, FAIA**, a firm principal. "Arlington County, however, wanted to promote affordable housing, and was concerned about how 100-foot-tall office buildings would appear adjacent to a neighborhood of single-family homes. The Jordan was created



Exterior of the Jordan, by Bonstra | Haresign Architects.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography



The Macedonian, by Bonstra | Haresign Architects.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography



The Macedonian's green roof.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography

to provide additional affordable housing and serve as a bridge between the area's two very different scales and densities."

"The building's long façades are divided by recessed slots that bring light deep into the units and provide a place for small private balconies and porches," Haresign adds. "A mix of brick colors and cast stone banding animates the design. Metal bay elements that help define the townhouse concept are taller on the side facing Wilson Boulevard, and step down on the side facing the residential street."

The Macedonian, located on Shirlington Road across the street from the Macedonia Baptist Church, includes 36 affordable one- and two-bedroom apartments and underground parking. The building has a 26-foot setback at the fifth floor that reduces the project's apparent height and creates a space for a paved and planted roof terrace that tenants can enjoy and which also absorbs excess rain water.



The Shelton, by Bonstra | Haresign Architects.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography



Rendering of the proposed building at 16th Street & Constitution Avenue, NE, by Hickok Cole Architects.

Courtesy of Hickok Cole Architects

"The building nestles into its sloped site, hiding the ground floor at the rear, further reducing its overall height so as to better integrate it with the single-family houses beyond," Haresign says. "The building's entrance and commercial spaces, combined with other site improvements, help transform this part of Shirlington Road into a pedestrian-friendly main street."

The Shelton, also located on Shirlington Road, about a block south of the Macedonian, includes 94 apartments and underground parking on a site previously occupied by an aging and rather uninspiring 22-unit brick apartment building. "The Shelton provides a full range of affordable apartments, from efficiencies to three-bedroom units with dens," Haresign says. "All the units are designed to meet universal design standards for accessibility."

"The building's primary entrance and corner store face onto a future town square, while tree-lined streets and patterned sidewalks differentiate activity zones," Haresign adds. "Multiple entrances, Juliet balconies, and shallow terraces engage and enliven the streets, reinforcing vertical elements and horizontal scale." The building's rear courtyard includes a playground, angled walkways, and a community room.

Hickok Cole Architects has designed an equally smart-looking 140-unit affordable rental building that would replace an older and somewhat institutional-looking apartment structure located at the northeast corner of 16th Street and Constitution Avenue, NE, in the District. Like the Bonstra | Haresign buildings, Hickok Cole's design employs a segmented façade to better match the scale and rhythm of nearby rowhouses.

"The design adapts traditional courtyard apartment typologies to create a modern, sustainable, residential building," Hickok Cole says. "The courtyard plan facilitates cross ventilation and ensures abundant natural light in all the units. The design captures rainwater in barrels or directs it to splash boxes that drain into the garden. The building is designed around modular living units to reduce construction time and cost."

Cunningham | Quill Architects has designed a project to convert the vacant Margaret Murray Washington School, located at 27 O Street, NW, in the District, into 82 affordable apartments for independent seniors, plus recreation and community meeting spaces. The project will restore the exterior of the historic part of the complex, which was built between 1912 and 1938, and retain its basic floor plan and many of its interior features and trim. The school's 1971 gym building, which presents a harsh and windowless face to the neighborhood, "will undergo substantial modifications to its mass and skin to introduce a more residential scale and create a more sympathetic partner" for the historic part of the complex, the firm says. The result, to be called the House of Lebanon, will be a welcoming, E-shaped complex with an accessible entry court.

CORE Architecture + Design is designing a new women's transitional and permanent supportive housing facility to replace the current such facility at 611 N Street, NW. The existing building—a one-story, windowless brick structure originally built in the 1970s as a police station—must surely rank as one of the least attractive residential structures in the country.



Current view of the site
for the House of Lebanon.

Courtesy of Cunningham|Quill Architects

Courtesy of Cunningham|Quill Architects



Rendering of the House of Lebanon,
by Cunningham|Quill Architects.



Rendering of 611 N Street, by CORE Architecture + Design.

Courtesy of CORE Architecture + Design

Core's design uses the interior structural system of the existing building as the foundation for a new two-level building clad in colored vertical panels and ample expanses of glass. The new building, CORE says, "will provide a home-like feeling for women to heal and grow." The project is being designed to achieve LEED Gold certification.

Studio Twenty Seven Architecture, in conjunction with joint venture partner **Leo A Daly**, is developing a design for La Casa, a new supportive housing facility for men. The building would replace the now-demolished La Casa shelter on Irving Street near 14th Street, NW, in the District. The design as currently developed would include 40 units and support spaces on seven above-grade levels plus a basement, with an exterior that would be aesthetically comparable to those of the most modern of high-end condominium buildings.

The project "is a new prototype for care of the homeless population in the city," says **Todd Ray, AIA, LEE-AP**, a principal at Studio Twenty Seven. "Rather than function as a shelter providing temporary housing, it will provide permanent, supportive housing for 40 men. Each living unit is designed as a single-person efficiency that will provide stability and predictability for the men as they re-immers themselves in day-to-day living."

"The building's two-story glass lobby," Ray adds, "engages the pedestrian nature of Irving, while its height mediates between the taller commercial development along 14th Street and the lower-height residential development along Irving. The second-floor community room opens out to a court that provides natural daylight to the living units at the building's rear." This project, too, is being designed for LEED Gold certification. 🏡

The Shelton won a Merit Award for Architecture and a Presidential Citation for Sustainable Design in the 2009 Chapter Awards program, and was featured in the Winter 2009 issue of ARCHITECTUREDC.



Rendering of La Casa, by Studio Twenty Seven Architecture and Leo A Daly.

Courtesy of Studio Twenty Seven Architecture



Rendering of a unit interior for the La Casa project, by Studio Twenty Seven Architecture and Leo A Daly.

Courtesy of Studio Twenty Seven Architecture