

A NEW GENERATION OF HOUSING IN LEDROIT PARK

From Military Housing to University Dorms to Modern Apartments | Washington, DC



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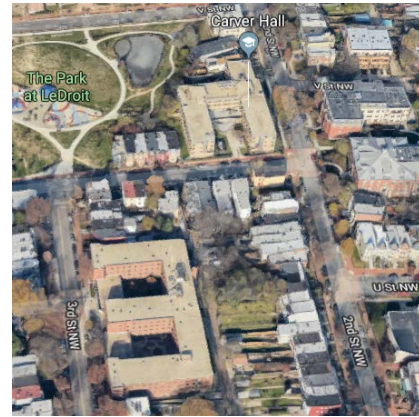
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⊕ Vicinity Map: LeDriot Park, Washington, DC

CARVER HALL
SLOWE HALL
METRO



Introduction

Bonstra | Haresign ARCHITECTS (B|HA) is transforming two historic 75-year-old dormitories, renovations to Carver and Slowe Halls, into modern apartment buildings. Both buildings are located in the historic LeDroit Park neighborhood of Washington, D.C. and for the past 60 years served as dormitories for students from nearby Howard University. The design attitudes about student housing have evolved, with newer dormitories providing more privacy and modern amenities. Traditional dorms like Carver and Slowe with small bedrooms, large communal bathrooms and lounges, and well-worn plumbing, heating and electrical systems have been the last choice for students in recent years. B|HA is re-imagining both buildings as modern apartment buildings and giving them new life with a combined 166 studio, 1- and 2-bedroom apartments. The design improves accessibility, provides all-new plumbing, heating, and electrical systems, repurposes mechanical and lower level spaces for residential occupancy, and transforms common areas into contemporary amenity and support spaces.

Historic Halls

Carver and Slowe Halls are located just a block apart from each other in the low-density community of LeDroit Park, originally established at the start of a housing boom in 1873. The civilian population in D.C. quadrupled to support the war effort, and housing was scarce, especially for African Americans who faced a segregated market. In D.C. alone, the government constructed 18,000 units of permanent housing in the dormitory style to house single workers as efficiently as possible. After being lobbied, they designated some new housing for African American workers, and both dormitories were built in 1942 by the U.S. government during World War II for housing un-married African American civilian workers who were supporting the war effort. The buildings were gender-specific buildings and were named for influential African American figures. George Washington Carver was an inventor and



► Eleanor Roosevelt visiting George Washington Carver Hall, May 1943.



Lucy Diggs Slowe Hall, 1949

botanist who developed techniques to improve soils depleted by cotton growing. Lucy Diggs Slowe was the first female Dean of Women at Howard, and the first African American woman to win a major sports title when she won the American Tennis Association championship. After the war, the Halls were acquired by Howard University, a prestigious historically black university, which retained their names to honor these significant figures in African American history and used them as student dorms for over half a century.

In 2017, Howard University made a strategic decision to focus on bringing students closer to campus and leveraging their outdated assets to fund campus improvements. They requested that Carver and Slowe be removed from the campus boundary by the D.C. Zoning Commission, creating the opportunity for the two Halls to be leased for 99 years to partners **Urban Investment Partners (UIP)** and **Neighborhood Development Corporation (NDC)**.

After six decades of continuous use, the normal wear and tear of dorm life had taken a toll on the buildings and their systems. In addition, student life had changed significantly, and Howard had developed several new dorms closer to campus which better met the needs of their current students. Online reviews unanimously advised new students to avoid both Carver and Slowe Halls, including one entry pertaining to Carver Hall that had “**FLEE!!!!!!**” scrawled beside its name. While the buildings required extensive upgrades and renovation, the fundamental structures and most of the exterior envelopes remain in very serviceable condition, have a meaningful past, and contribute to a beautiful historic residential neighborhood. Their adaptation and upgrades increase market-rate yet moderately-priced housing availability in a central and walkable location in the District.



After 60 years of continuous use, Carver and Slowe Halls were due for building upgrades and renovation.

Creative Conversion

Transforming dorms into apartments poses several challenges, one of the most significant being the reallocation of space and the potential for that space to generate revenue. Building footprints are relatively narrow by today's apartment standards. In a dormitory setting, the space is divided between small private spaces and large shared amenity spaces such as lounge or study areas, kitchens and bathrooms. These spaces are designed to accommodate single people, who rent by the bed and utilize the amenity spaces in groups for cooking, dining, and socializing with floormates. In contrast, apartment buildings are rented by the unit whose economic pro-forma is based on square footage that maximizes the private individual unit space for single occupants, partners or families, and provide appropriate common area amenity space. In apartment buildings tenants are more likely to entertain guests in both their homes and in sophisticated amenity spaces rather than the large communal groups in the dorms, thus requiring significantly more private space. BJHA transformed the dorms' under-utilized common space into rentable units, adding essentially the entire terrace level in Carver, and the entire ground floor in Slowe as private units. In re-imagining the buildings, BJHA created modern, accessible amenities, connected the buildings to their surrounding environments, and maximized the rentable square-footage.

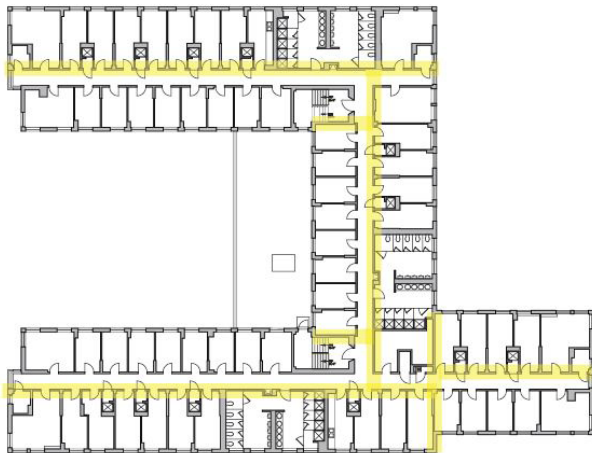
While Carver and Slowe Halls posed some of the same overarching challenges in being reinvented, they each required individually-designed interventions for many of their more unique challenges.



Carver Hall rendering of updated exterior: new floor-to-ceiling glass bays replace translucent glass block towers, new courtyard landscaping by Studio 39

Carver Hall

Carver Hall is a U-Shaped building, with a single row of columns down the middle of each of the narrow wings. The 35-foot width – compared to a traditional 56 to 62 foot width in a typical modern apartment building – and the centered column grid are appropriate for old-style single-room dorms. Typical apartments require more depth to accommodate utility and storage spaces, such as kitchens, bathrooms, closets, and internal circulation.



⊕ *Carver Hall **existing** typical floor plan
Double-loaded corridor plan (one dorm room on each side)*



*Carver Hall **new** typical floor plan
Shifting the corridors to either side of the beamline
allowed for additional space within each apartment.*

The narrow wings forced an alternative arrangement of space, including a transition in the corridor from one side of the column line to the other halfway down each wing, that created sufficient space in each unit for circulation and the other requisite features.



Carver Hall - Terrace level loft unit rendering

Terrace Level Lofts

The terrace level had a double-height ceiling with clerestory windows above grade, creating a unique opportunity that the design team capitalized on. Where storage and basement lounge spaces previously existed, BJHA designed 14 terrace-level loft apartments with bedrooms above grade and overlooking expansive two-story living and dining areas below. Coordinating the new structural and mechanical systems within the existing clear height was solved with very careful coordination and efficient design. This arrangement takes advantage of the existing clerestory, and in combination with new window wells, increases the penetration of direct sunlight into the units, creating bright, open, and unique living spaces.



Existing terrace level dorm resident lounge & storage space with drop ceilings at clerestory windows



Terrace level lofts under construction; ceiling opened to capture all existing height at clerestory. Loft bedroom inserted within the available height

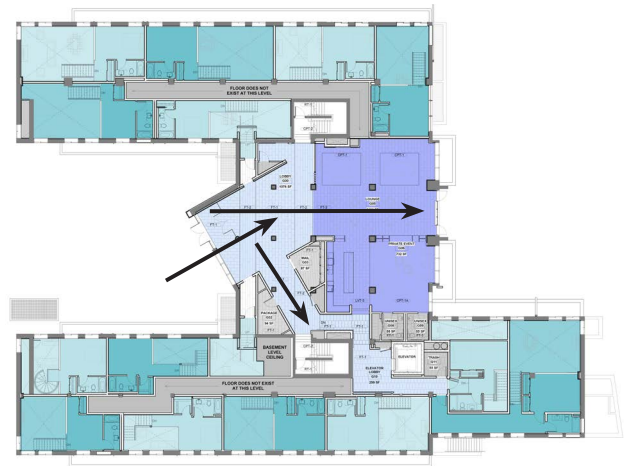


Terrace level lofts under construction; new window wells created to increase daylight access to lower level

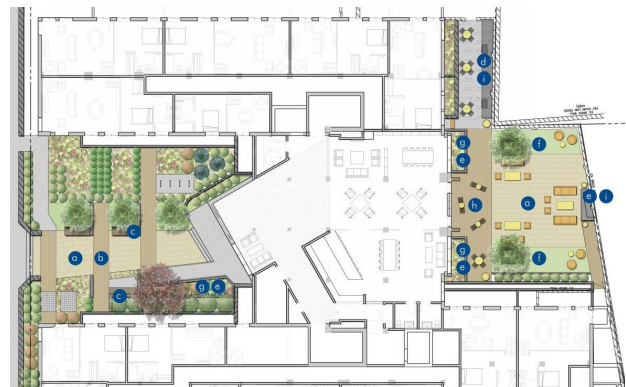
Visual Connections

These buildings were originally purposed to house people on a temporary basis while they worked for the war effort or attended school. BJHA understands that modern apartment residents will have higher expectations of the aesthetics of each building and the impression upon entrance, which is reflected in the thoughtful, innovative design of the new entry spaces that utilizes the existing conditions while improving the visual connections of the space.

In Carver Hall, the entry geometry was expanded through the removal of a built-in desk that was previously walled in with security glass, and removal of the mail sorting area. BJHA took advantage of the existing condition created by a double-story lounge illuminated by south facing clerestory windows, which lay beyond the 9' ceilings in the entrance lobby. This creates a powerful contrast between lobby and lounge, with the bright common area pulling visitors into the space, connecting front and back courtyards.



Carver Hall ground floor and lobby plan



Carver Hall front and back courtyard landscape plan



Carver Hall entry rendering

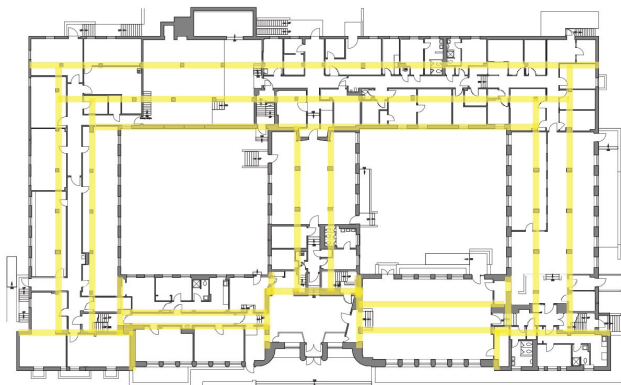
B|HA enhanced this effect by opening the common spaces as much as possible, taking down walls to increase the visual connection through the building and across both courtyards. This allows the bright common room to be experienced immediately upon entering the building, and the lounge area to be delineated by volume and hidden sources of daylight instead of walls. These changes open the space, facilitate improved circulation, increase daylight, and highlight the existing angled entry, all while providing visual connections to the new landscaped courtyard.



Slowe Hall rendering of front entry

Slowe Hall

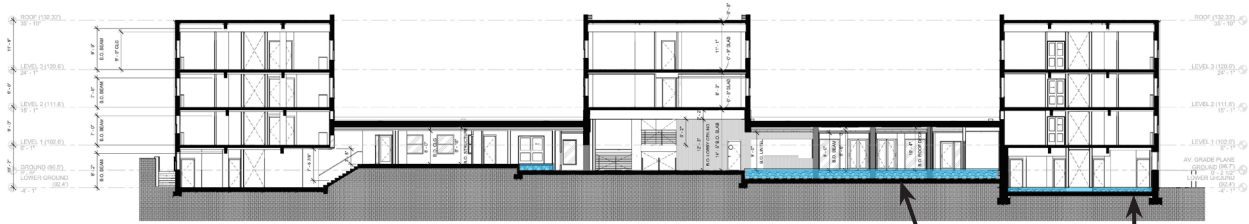
Slowe Hall has a figure-eight plan with two courtyards, and the original plan had nine different floor elevations on the first floor. These buildings were built long before accessibility was a requirement and navigating the first floor required the use of expensive and cumbersome mechanical lifts. B|HA designed an improved access strategy replacing five of the six mechanical lifts with ramps and infill. We regularized and simplified the elevation changes with infill that leveled the flooring, improved accessibility, and accommodated new drainage and plumbing lines.



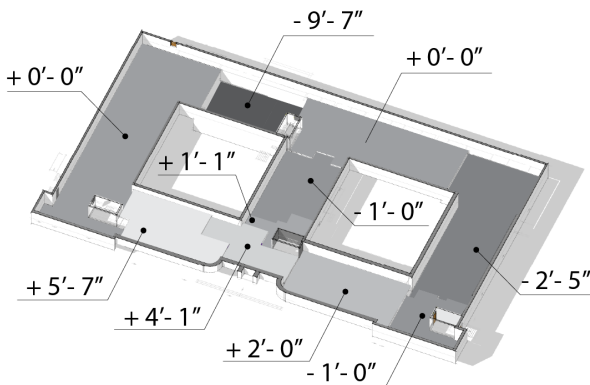
⊕ *Slowe Hall **existing** ground floor plan*



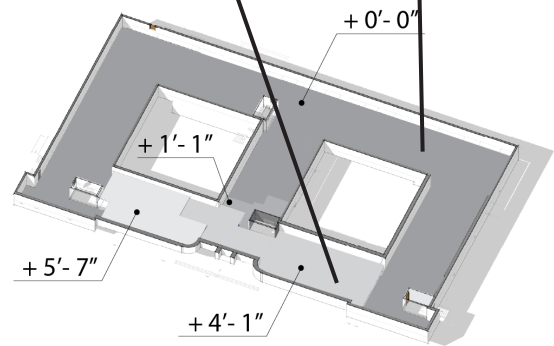
*Slowe Hall **new** ground floor plan*



Slowe Hall building section



Ground floor level transitions **before**



Ground floor level transitions **after**



Underslab plumbing before slab infill

In addition, the new mechanical equipment installed required much less vertical space in the terrace level below. BJHA built an intermediate floor over the existing double-height boiler room, bridging two dead ends of circulation and creating new rentable floor area. These changes, plus the addition of one new mechanical lift and one new building elevator, created more accessible floors and an improved circulation experience.

Like Carver Hall, Slowe's entry also posed a challenge. In addition to the small elevation changes, an enclosed stair tower blocked the view to the existing courtyards, an asset the team wanted to highlight. BJHA embraced the opaque mass of stairwell by building onto it to create a larger gesture within the space. The curved face of the wall containing the stair tower continues on one side into one of the lounge areas and becomes a coffee bar, and on the other side becomes the walls of the concierge desk. This curved wall becomes a focal point which ties the separate rooms together and anchors views on both sides to the improved courtyards beyond.



Before: closed corridor at lobby under first floor



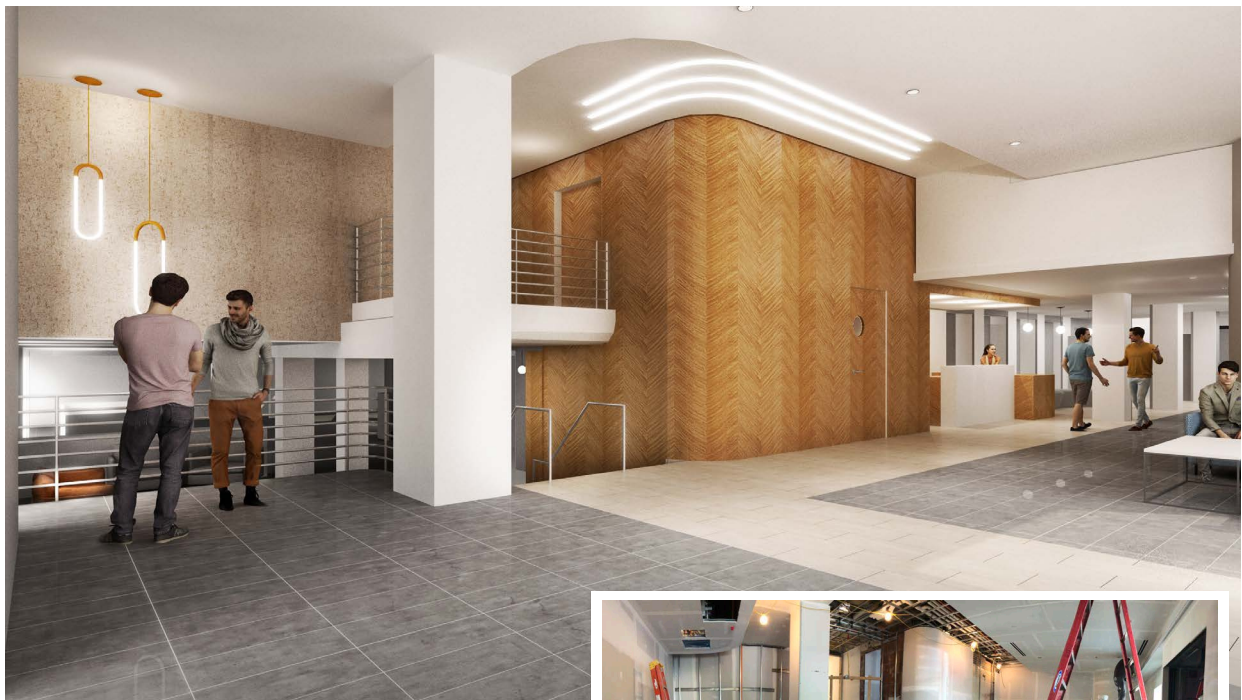
Demolition: first floor balcony and lower level opened to lobby



Demolition: first floor balcony and lower level opened to lobby

Modern Living

The narrow width allows new individual units in both Carver and Slowe Halls to be flooded with natural light, with new, large punched-opening windows in most rooms, including bathrooms. Unit entries are equipped with keyless smart door locks. All living and sleeping spaces are unified with luxury vinyl tile (LVT) flooring. Kitchens include open upper box cabinets or open display shelving, solid surface counters, tiled backsplash, stainless Blomberg appliances, and a combination washer-dryer in each unit. Lighting in the units, the common areas, and the amenity spaces are lamped with high-efficiency LED luminaires.



Slowe Hall lobby rendering shows opening to lower lounge and first floor balcony overlook



Achieving Results

Carver and Slowe Halls served as worker- and student-housing for an impressive 75-year span, but each had reached the end its useful life as this specific dormitory design. BJHA leveraged creativity, innovation, and experience to each a new life. This was achieved through the design of new units within the existing structure, updating the systems, modernizing the amenities, and improving accessibility, all while enhancing the resident experience and increasing the rentable square footage. Carver and Slowe Halls, retaining unique character and history, are now well-equipped to serve their next chapters as outstanding modern residences.



PROJECT TEAM

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