

### **Lecture 8: Adaptive Reuse: The Charles Street Jail Redevelopment**

This week's class involved a visit to the former Charles Street Jail in Boston. Over the past several years the building and its site have undergone an unusual transformation. The project has combined partial demolition, historic rehabilitation, and new construction to create a new luxury hotel adjacent to the Massachusetts General Hospital complex. The two building complex, which includes the rehabilitated jail building and a new tower, will be known as the Liberty Hotel, with an expected opening in late summer 2007.

The class met at 77 Massachusetts Avenue and students walked to the project site. The afternoon's tour and discussion began with a presentation from a rehabilitation architect with the firm AnnBeha Architects. The project manager and construction manager were also present. The preservation architect showed historic images of the site over time as well as architectural renderings illustrating the many changes made in the conversion process. She also stated that the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and that the project qualified for the federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit.

Next, the class took a guided tour of the historic building on the site: the former jail. The project team provided details on the retention of historic materials in the rehabilitation, the architectural changes made to accommodate hotel use, and the process of working with the National Park Service (which administers the federal tax credit program). Students asked a variety of questions about the former uses of various parts of the building, the location of jail cells, interpretation plans, the number of rooms in the new hotel, and the use of specific materials in certain building locations. The class learned that materials from the jail cells, after being removed and cleaned, have been reinstalled in their original locations as part of the historic rehabilitation process. The team also described how in some locations, such as

Following the tour, the class visited a full-scale model of a new hotel room. Project managers explained that the room, constructed in a closed-off section of an adjacent parking structure, was designed to provide the owner(s) with a detailed example of the new furnishings.

The day's activities concluded with a brief on-site discussion among students and the professor. Several students commented on the location of the new tower, which effectively obscures views of the Massachusetts Eye and Ear building. Standing at the street edge of the site, the class discussed the relationship between the two buildings which comprise the project: the compatibility of exterior building materials (especially the color and texture of brick used to clad the tower), the siting of the tower in relation to the historic building, the areas of site that will remain open (to be developed as landscape elements and/or driveways), and the allocation of uses between the two buildings. The relationship of the historic building to its surroundings also attracted the attention of the class: the contemporary appearance (especially the use of glass) and close proximity of buildings in the hospital complex, the presence of the T station (currently under construction), and proximity to Beacon Hill.

For more information on the Charles Street Jail project, see:

<http://www.annbeha.com/portfolio-project-details.html?category=historic%20preservation&id=23>