

The Historic Structures Report, Project Imperatives and Planning Workshops

In 1998 the state legislature passed and the governor signed the bill to enable the creation of the Utah State Capitol Preservation Board with complete awareness that the Utah State Capitol restoration project was always more than a conscientious renewal of worn or outdated materials. It involved not only the restoration, repair and conservation of the original structure. It entailed the completion of Kletting's unfinished vision and the seamless integration of new systems and technologies. It required the transformation of a building in danger of collapse during a seismic disaster into a stable and stately residence for the government of the Sovereign State of Utah. And finally, it demanded the preservation of largely intangible, ineffable ideas and ideals concerning the state's past and the promise of its future. Consequently, there is a tendency to resort to over-the-top vocabulary in any attempt to adequately describe the accomplishments of the men and women who worked to ultimately preserve and renew Kletting's building. Whatever the form of their involvement with the project, for almost a decade it was nearly impossible for anyone to come into contact with the Capitol without being conscious of two realizations about the undertaking: The first is about the complexity of this historic project. The second concerns a palpable sense of respect for the accomplishments of the original designers, craftsmen and builders.

The Master Plan

Although talk of renovation of the Capitol had been tossed about for years, the Capitol preservation project began in earnest in 1998 when the State Legislature created the Capitol Preservation Board and gave it responsibility for and jurisdiction over the Capitol Hill Complex. The first order of business for the Board was to hire David Harris Hart, AIA, a Salt Lake City architect with more than two decades of experience in urban design and project planning. He was charged with oversight of the entire enterprise beginning with organizing a series of planning workshops designed to develop a report on the condition of the building and the site and to produce a master plan with guidelines and imperatives for the future of the complex.

Although there was consensus on the fact that the Capitol was in critical need of restoration and stabilization, the Board needed to understand the scope of what should be

done. Thus, a team of 19 firms and individual consultants, with the Salt Lake City architectural firm of Cooper/Roberts acting as facilitators, convened to write the team's conclusions and recommendations after conducting an extensive study of the existing buildings on the hill. Among other things, the Historic Structures Report provided a well-researched history of the building, a detailed inventory of the entire site, and lastly, a comprehensive series of recommendations grouped around what the report called three "general areas of importance."

The first area of concerns was fairly easy to determine. There was the need to "enhance life safety" for the building's occupants. The second set of concerns was expressed in the imperative to "improve the functional usefulness" of the entire complex. And the third area was the commitment to "preserve the historical and architectural integrity" of the original 1916 structure.

The Cooper/Roberts study was accepted by the Capitol Preservation Board and a set of inevitable but groundbreaking activities were set in motion.

The Complexity of the Project

David Hart organized a critical series of workshops to develop a Master Plan. Hart in turn asked Paul Brown, a second AIA architect and a member of 3DI International planning firm, to be part of the team.

Hart and Brown began meetings straightaway. Not only were qualified professionals in every imaginable field asked to weigh in but also other important stakeholders, interested citizens, and neighborhood residents. The result was very much like a constitution, a governing, dynamic document that will continue to direct planning and development of the Capitol Hill complex in the coming years.

One of the more inspiring conclusions for the entire group developing the Master Plan came at a moment when Hart and Brown realized the entire Capitol preservation project rested on a combination of plans drawn for the first Capitol. John Olmsted, son of the famous landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and president of the Olmsted Brothers landscape architectural firm, had made a total of fourteen plans for the grounds of the Capitol for the original Capitol Commission organized by the 1909 Legislature. During the contemporary planning meetings Brown and Hart superimposed the Olmsted Brothers landscape plans on Capitol architect Richard Kletting's designs. The result was

an ideal beginning for what would become the 21st Century Utah State Capitol. The way was clear.

More than 20 architectural and engineering workshops ran in tandem with each other. Budgets were prepared. Schedules were developed. At last, the Board published the requests to receive formal bids documents from qualified architects and sub-contractors. The winning architectural designs came from a group formed specifically to accomplish the mammoth project. The first construction team member selected for the project was the general contractor, Jacobsen-Hunt Construction a combination of highly experienced firms headed by Jacobsen Construction Company, Inc. of Salt Lake City; and Hunt Construction Group of Scottsdale, Arizona.

Together with the Board and the executive director, they selected the Capitol Restoration Group (CRG) as the architects. The Capitol Restoration Group is a consortium of architects from several firms including VCBO Architecture, MJSA Architects, and Schooley Caldwell Associates.