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Beacon Communities and Prellwitz Chilinski Associates complete Ames Shovel Works reuse project

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The Ames Shovel Works, a 19th Century manufacturing complex previously listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the nation's Most Endangered Historic Landmarks, recently opened as a revived multifamily residential community.

Developed by Beacon Communities and designed by architects Prellwitz Chilinski Associates (PCA), the \$46 million revitalization preserves the original historically-significant fabric of the Ames manufacturing buildings and creates 113 new residences adjacent to a 1.6 acre neighborhood open space. LEED for Homes certification for the buildings is being finalized, with Gold and Silver certifications anticipated. A novel public-private funding partnership between the town and project developer Beacon Communities, combined with an inventive restoration design and open space plan by PCA, propelled the project forward to overcome a series of financial, logistical and reconstruction obstacles presented by a project of this size and complexity.

The Ames Shovel Works manufacturing complex in North Easton played a significant role in the industrial transformation of 19th Century America. Employing over 500 workers at its height of operations, Ames used production-line assembly methods 50 years before Henry Ford. Ames shovels helped build the transcontinental railroad, enabled the California gold rush, and were standard field tools for US Army soldiers from the Civil War to the Korean Conflict.

Prior attempts to redevelop the Shovel Works complex were incompatible with the goals of preserving and reclaiming the existing landmarks. A 2009 plan by a previous development team called for demolishing a significant portion of the complex. Senior leaders from town government approached Beacon Communities seeking an alternative solution. PCA worked closely with Beacon Communities, the Easton Historical Commission, the Friends of the Historic Ames Shovel Works and residents to craft a site and architectural program to benefit the entire community. The Ames program includes:

- * A comprehensive land planning and reuse strategy to repurpose seven historic buildings with 113 rental housing units, and create a new town open space that reconnects Main St. to the Ames site
- * An historic storage building repurposed for the property's maintenance staff, and an historic single-family house renovated and repurposed as office space, gallery space, and studios for the Easton Chamber of Commerce and the Easton Shovel Town Cultural District Art Co-op
- * A strategic design approach to create modern, historically-respectful and light-filled apartment units and added loft bedrooms through creative adaptation of existing trusses and rooflines
- * Contemporary interiors, landscapes, building lighting and signage designed by Beacon's in-house design group, Beacon Concepts, in collaboration with PCA and the design and construction team
- * Publically accessible displays of historic artifacts from the site's industrial past, including a large water wheel once used at the site, the bell that demarcated the work day, the safe from the business

office, historic Ames shovels and interpretive signage describing the original manufacturing processes housed in the buildings

- * Energy efficiency and sustainable design throughout the project including spray insulation, daylighting, low-flow plumbing fixtures, Energy Star appliances and new windows. The project is expected to receive LEED for Home Gold and Silver certifications from the US Green Building Council

- * A new wastewater treatment system built, owned, and operated by the town of Easton to accommodate the existing neighborhood, approximately 200 residents coming into the new Ames residences and future commercial growth for North Easton. Sewer capacity limitation was a major roadblock to any new development in North Easton, including the Main St. commercial area and the Ames Shovel Works site. The façade of the treatment plant's building was designed by PCA (while the building itself was designed and built by the town's engineering firm and contractor) in order to blend harmoniously with the historic buildings on site.

According to David Chilinski of Prellwitz Chilinski Associates, the solution required a new look at the property and its potential. "We saw the same obstacles to reusing these buildings that others encountered. The community wanted to see the architecture and the incredible history it represents preserved and blended back into the town fabric. So we looked for ways to open up and unlock all creative possibilities both inside the structures and on the grounds of the property."

Beacon Communities and PCA worked through these possibilities with a number of engaged stakeholders: the Easton Historical Commission, the Mass. Historical Commission, the National Park Service, the Easton Zoning Board of Appeals, the Easton Board of Selectmen, the Friends of the Ames Shovel Works and members of the Ames family.

"We knew we had to get the right team players on this complex project. Everyone's input and expertise was integral in saving this endangered landmark for the town of North Easton," said Howard Cohen, CEO of Beacon Communities.

Mercedes Farrando, director of design services at Beacon Concepts, explains, "We started by identifying the spirit of this historic place - what textures, colors, and design features define the character of the Shovel Works. Then, we set about crafting a contemporary design that respects and highlights the historic features and maximizes the architectural spaces."