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Bruner/Cott Architects completes “The Speedway” - alongside Architectural Heritage Foundation

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Brighton, MA Bruner/Cott Architects completed The Speedway, a mixed-use transformation of a 19th century trotting horse stable and metropolitan park police station and jail on the Charles River. A Boston Historic Landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the firm worked alongside the not-for-profit developer, Architectural Heritage Foundation (AHF), to preserve and revitalize the renowned but endangered complex to stimulate community growth and economic development.

Constructed in 1899 by the Metropolitan Park Commission as a headquarters to support a new parkway along the river, the development turned a stretch of tidal mudflats into an interconnected

series of public parks. The stables and park offices supported a race track beside the river for bicycle and trotting races. The picturesque overall composition is characteristic of its architect William D. Austin's work for the Metropolitan Parks Commission. An irregular roofline connects six shingle-style buildings, creating a single-story courtyard, highlighted by arched gable entrances, porches, double hung windows, and elaborate wood trim. The mile-long racetrack became one of the city's most popular gathering areas. Now, as a new gateway to the Allston-Brighton neighborhood, the complex supports a diverse tenant mix including small retail shops and soon-to-open food vendors, a publicly-accessible community courtyard, a flexible event space at Garage B, and anchor tenant Notch Brewing's biergarten and brewery.

Following the Park Commission's tenancy, the facility housed the now-defunct Metropolitan District Commission Police. During this time, many of its original horse stables were extended and converted into vehicular garages to support the agency. Beginning in 2005, the facility was largely abandoned. Portions of the buildings were beginning to decay, and one section suffered a serious fire. The Bruner/Cott and AHF Speedway project has preserved a local recreational treasure and given the park a new life for generations to come. Bruner/Cott's design approach to preservation included removal of piecemeal garage extensions at historic stable frontages and the reconstruction of lost features including wooden carriage access, sliding barn doors, and an extensive series of carefully restored and replicated windows.

Original building entrances within the sloping site placed doors at different levels, and a new raised platform for performers united these via an unobtrusive wooden ramp. Interior plaster was so damaged by fire and rain that it was removed entirely to add insulation. Fieldstone foundations were reinforced with concrete and repointed.

Stables and a 1940 concrete garage were fitted with recessive glazed fronts and overhead doors to make strong connections to outdoor gathering spaces, especially the tranquil interior of the upper courtyard.

Long-considered too complicated and limited in square footage for an economically sustainable rehabilitation, AHF pioneered new approaches to retail tenancy, events space management, and adjacencies among occupants to reintroduce life into the Allston-Brighton community via long abandoned stables, jail, basement cow barn, and garages. The buildings look like they did in 1899, 1904, 1920, and 1920. The new occupants do not.