

Housing Continuum  
in the Gateway

**30–50%  
AMI**

This project serves the  
needs of residents in the  
Very Low Income (VLI)  
category.



# Office Building Restored as Affordable Family Housing

## Santa Ana Arts Collective

### Key Stakeholders

- City of Santa Ana
- Architect: Studio One Eleven
- Developer: Meta Housing Corporation
- Structural: DK Engineering Group
- Landscape: Studio One Eleven

### Project Timeline

With efforts beginning in 2015, the project began construction in Spring of 2018 and opened to its first tenants in June 2020.

### Project Budget

To realize this vision, the City of Santa Ana invested almost \$8 million in the project, and a tax-exempt bond of \$10 million was issued in 2017 to help finance the project.

## Project Background

The Santa Ana Arts Collective (SAAC) is Santa Ana's first project under the City's **adaptive reuse** ordinance, containing residential, live/work, and community spaces, and is Meta Housing's first working artist community in Orange County. SAAC is the positive result of two City initiatives adopted in 2014. First, at the urging of United Artists of Santa Ana, the City established its first Arts & Culture Commission and shortly thereafter its Arts & Culture Master Plan. The Commission and Master Plan's primary goal is to create a robust arts infrastructure, giving artists the support (including **affordable housing**) they need to sustain their work and to remain rooted in their City, and engaging all the city's residents beyond the Downtown Santa Ana area, which already contains a thriving arts community.

The project provides dignified, **permanent supportive housing** to low-income artists and their families, as well as a handful of previously-homeless residents from Santa Ana. Because SAAC is specifically for low-

### Key Terms:

**Affordable Housing** – In the United States, "affordable housing" refers to housing, rent or a mortgage plus utility payments, totaling 30% or less of a household's gross income. Affordable housing developments are often subject to a covenants or deed restrictions that preserve the property as affordable by creating rent limits and qualifying standards for residents, and restrictions on selling the property.

**Adaptive Reuse** – The process of reusing an existing building for a purpose other than its original intent.

**Permanent Supportive Housing:** Supportive housing links decent, safe, affordable, community-based housing with flexible, voluntary support services designed to help the individual or family stay housed and live a more productive life in the community.

income artists, their housing security is not threatened by economic change and redevelopment of surrounding properties.

## Objectives/Goals

The Santa Ana Arts Collective was envisioned to be a catalyst that would reactivate a once-thriving retail destination into an arts corridor. Synergistic elements along the corridor include as the Bowers Museum, the Wooden Floor and the Orange County School of the Arts. As the first project of its kind, it required extensive review and approvals from the City's planning department, as well as housing development, public works, building and safety, and the fire and police departments. In addition, a parking study was prepared to request a reduced parking requirement. Alongside the goal of creating inspiring living spaces, the project sought to implement environmentally, economic, and socially conscious design efforts.

## Challenges

**Overview:** This adaptive reuse project was tasked with the challenge of activating a previously underperforming building while also enhancing community connections.

- 1 Design for Integration:** Intended as an artist-supportive infrastructure, the project needed to engage and connect people to place.

- 2 Underutilized Space:** With existing underground parking, the building had a surplus of surface parking.

- 3 Environmental Impacts:** Materials and products needed to be selected and designed to reduce embodied carbon and environmental impacts while enhancing building performance.

## Solutions

**Overview:** Santa Ana Arts Collective achieved its main goals by creatively optimizing the building's existing conditions and vetting construction technologies.

- 1 Art Focused Amenities:** Collaborating with the City helped spark the renewal of the artist corridor by providing space for low-income working artists households in permanent, affordable housing, and a free gallery, woodshop, studios, music room, and onsite arts staffing.

- 2 Repurposing Features:** Rethinking excess surface parking and reducing the parking requirement created room for 10 units of additional housing. Similarly, an elevator was removed to provide space for larger gurney compliant elevators and accommodate a trash chute.

- 3 Local Sourcing:** The general contractor and affiliated subcontractors were all local. The material selection was based off LEED equivalent sustainable materials with the vast majority acquired within 100 miles of the site.





# 150% MORE LANDSCAPE AREA

The project increased the amount of landscape planter area by 150% over the existing condition. In addition, 27 new trees were planted on site along with nine new street trees in the public right of way - helping to increase carbon sequestration.

# 25% GREATER EFFICIENCY

The preservation of the structure minimized the amount of materials demolished and sent to landfills and thereby avoided significant GHG emission contribution. The new construction portion of the development exceeded the code energy requirements by 25%.

# 90 WALK SCORE

Townhomes and units along the ground floor have created an activated street level and a safer urban environment with “eyes on the street”, streetscape improvements have further supported a Walk Score of 90.



## Results

The adaptive reuse of an existing underperforming commercial building to an affordable housing community preserves the original intent of the building’s mid-century design and provides extensive amenities and connectivity to local city life. Located near Santa Ana’s arts institutions, shopping and employment centers, the pedestrian-oriented site has an excellent Walk Score of 90. The project supports the City’s mission of developing Main Street into an arts corridor, bringing exceptionally high-quality affordable homes to a community that will benefit from an infusion of resident artists. The redevelopment includes 6,000 square feet of amenities for both building tenants and the public, including art studio spaces, a dance studio, an art gallery, and two music studios. The design team uncovered 13-foot, exposed-concrete, waffle-slab ceilings and polished the existing concrete floors. Restored ribbon windows wrap the building on all four sides providing ample natural light for resident artists.







## Key Takeaways

Santa Ana Arts Collective serves as a model for best practices in adaptive reuse. As the first project under the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance in Santa Ana, the team worked in close collaboration with city. In doing so, the project addresses the shifting population demographic, a declining demand for traditional office space and a need for affordable housing in Santa Ana by converting an underused commercial property into a highly desirable place to live and a community asset.

The units are designed for living and working, with built-in digital infrastructure, abundant natural light and communal resources. Ground floor units with direct access from the street create additional flexibility by making those spaces commercially viable where customers can park immediately outside and enter without coming through the lobby.

As a testament to the benefits of providing dignified, equitable housing, the building owners report inquiries from potential renters who are unaware of the building's affordable status; they are simply people that express a desire to live in such a beautiful place and be part of a flourishing community.

