



PROJECT PROFILE

Saint Elizabeths Hospital

Historic Structure Report and Preservation Plan | Washington, D.C.



CLIENT

U.S. General Services Administration

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1852, Saint Elizabeths Hospital was the nation's first mental institution, pioneering therapeutic psychiatric treatments for thousands of patients and doubling as a military hospital for wounded soldiers during the Civil War. Overlooking the Potomac River from a high bluff in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C., the sixty-nine-building complex is both historically and geographically prominent. Despite its inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and its designation as a National Historic Landmark, the now vacant West Campus has been noted as one of the most endangered historic sites in the country.

Years of disuse and neglect resulted in pervasive deterioration of the historic structures that comprise the Saint Elizabeths campus. In a dual effort to preserve a piece of Washington's history and to utilize the spacious grounds, the site was slated in 2007 as the new headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Coast Guard. To achieve this end, the U.S. General Services Administration sought expert assessment of the hospital's structural conditions as well as recommendations for its rehabilitation and functional adaptation.

SOLUTION

To develop Historic Structure Reports and preservation plans for Saint Elizabeths' West Campus, WJE historic preservationists performed extensive archival research to compile all available information on the hospital's original construction, structural development, and previous repairs. The architects then conducted a condition assessment of the exterior walls, roofs, windows, interior elements, and significant features of each building. Additionally, to supplement the visual evaluation, WJE technicians analyzed brick, stone, and mortar samples to determine composition and level of deterioration.

From their findings, WJE offered the client a thorough record of Saint Elizabeths' history; detailed analyses of the structural and cosmetic conditions of the buildings; and specific recommendations regarding safety, accessibility, energy performance, and structural stabilization to ensure the successful rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the historic site.

