

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis illustrates three examples of adaptive use projects developed by AYH over the last twenty-five years. To look only at these examples, one would see evidence of a highly motivated organization that is able to extract enthusiasm and cooperation from other groups (both private and public) in order to meet its goals. This is accurate, yet throughout the process of developing these hostels, AYH struggled. In Sacramento, despite the resolution of the issue in a relatively happy ending, the third move of the Llewellyn Williams mansion cost taxpayers a great deal of money and left city officials with a still-throbbing headache. Litigation became an issue in the ultimate disharmony with the Sybedon Corporation in New York, resulting in the transfer of the New York hostel's title to AYH and the dissolution of the local Metropolitan New York Council. During the development of the lighthouse hostels, AYH pushed the various government entities at every step of the way to help them consider hostels as a public good. In other words, hostel development is hard work, requiring financial and emotional resources.

What, then, is the future of AYH and the preservation of historic structures through adaptive use hostel projects? To answer this question, one must look objectively at the state of the organization now. Nina Janopaul, former hostel developer for the Golden Gate Council and later Director of Hostel Development with the national council, shed light on current issues within AYH. She believes that hostel development is no longer a priority for AYH for three main reasons, summarized here:

1. The current economy has hit the organization very hard. After “9/11”, occupancy rates at the gateway breadwinner hostels dropped dramatically. Operating a large hostel involves high fixed costs (mortgage, utilities, 24-hour staffing) and means that there is little ability to downsize when usage declines, even temporarily. For the next few years, AYH is focused on just surviving.
2. AYH never became adequately good at fundraising. Real estate development on a large scale requires capital, and because of the grassroots nature of the organization and perhaps the nature of hostelling itself, AYH was never able to cultivate the high profile that major funders need for long-term investment. (Short-term fundraising success was achieved in both New York and the later Chicago project, but couldn't be sustained.)
3. The organization has too broad a sense to its mission to focus its resources effectively. Varied activities not stressed in this paper are part of the organization's mission, too: AYH runs biking clubs, operates outreach programs in communities, cultivates travel clubs, sells memberships to travel abroad, etc. Hostel development competes against these other programs, and the focus tends to be cyclic—almost no hostel development happened during the 1960s and 70s, followed by a bloom of development during the 80s and 90s, followed by a dormant period. Janopaul claims, “Development is expensive and scary and tough. I think they need a little rest.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Nina Janopaul, interview by the author.

These three concepts indicate a shift in emphasis away from the development of historic hostels, at least for the time being. There have been other conceptual changes in the hostel development mechanism that have put a halt to further adaptations. All three case studies presented in this paper were successful despite the unlikelihood that they could be repeated in today's economic and political climate. Why and how have the mechanisms changed?

First, laws have changed since the 1970s. On the positive side, the National Historic Preservation Act and other related legislation has made it more difficult for federal and state agencies to demolish historic structures by intent or by neglect. But, although AYH benefited during the years immediately following the new law, Janopaul surmises that these same agencies have grown savvier. As parks started looking for new revenue sources, they found they could lease their historic properties and other inholdings as concession operations and charge rent, as opposed to allowing AYH to develop them without charging a fee. High-end inns are more profitable than hostels, even though they may serve fewer people, and therefore can often do even more with the structures and maintain them better. Today, both government and private enterprise have greater experience in other more lucrative uses for historic properties. (Janopaul notes that "of course, some are less [lucrative], like house museums, which are notorious for needing subsidy...".)

Additional laws were passed, including the Tax Reform Act of 1986, which made it slightly more cumbersome to use historic tax credits on small projects. AYH's personnel costs rose after the 1980s when new labor law interpretations came into effect. Before that, much of AYH's labor force was quasi-volunteer, and a labor law study it commissioned

showed that it would become unfeasible to utilize this force efficiently in the future. Within the organization, AYH and the IYHF grew more stringent in their own standards, changing their requirements regarding operating hours and staffing minimums. Under the new standards, hostels with fewer than forty beds were generally not self-supporting. This reduced the number of historic buildings that AYH could consider developing in the future causing the organization to rethink the way it operated its current holding of small hostels.

As an example, the Pennsylvania State Parks system went through a very “pro-hostel” period under the leadership of Bill Forrey in the 1970s. During this time, the State Parks released many historic properties to AYH to develop as hostels for free, and even paid for major maintenance on the structures. Today, hostels like the one at Tyler State Park are struggling because they accommodate fewer than forty beds and are not self-supporting. This dilemma has caused several of these operations to close (like the Delaware Water Gap hostel, the Poconos hostel, and, temporarily, the hostel at Bowmansville—the oldest continually operated hostel in the country). Recently, AYH commissioned a feasibility study to plan for the future of these smaller “network” hostels, but the general feeling is that “40” is the magic number and any hostel with less than forty beds will not be viable.

In summary, AYH faces the future with a restrained attitude towards the development of historic structures as hostels. If and when the general economy improves and hostel development becomes a goal again, it is likely that the older mission of providing accommodations away from the inner city will be thoroughly eclipsed by a new mission—one of providing accommodations in larger, self-supporting hostels within cities. The author hopes that AYH can find a way to continue the operation of the smaller hostels that have

been so charming, welcoming and educational to generations of travelers. Ironically, AYH is trapped between two organizational modes: it must choose between accepting itself as a low-profile, grassroots group and becoming an economically savvy corporation, developing larger projects while leaving behind, for better or worse, its original mission.

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