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Patience Goes a Long Way with Adaptive Reuse Projects

Diamonds in the Rough: Make the most of hidden opportunities.

By Rachel Z. Azoff

A mix of architects and developers shared the ins and outs of turning office buildings, old subway terminals, warehouses, and even hospitals into dynamic apartment and condo communities.

Lesson No. 1: Have a bottle of Tylenol on hand for the unavoidable headaches. Turning these diamonds in the rough into sparkling jewels is extremely time-consuming and challenging. But well worth the effort, say the panelists, whose work is transforming neighborhoods and downtowns nationwide.

"In the Midwest, including downtown St. Louis and Kansas City, these projects have brought life back to the streets," said Jarrett Cooper, principal in charge at the architecture firm Rosemann & Associates. "The projects are really making a huge difference in downtown areas." One highlighted project—1100 Wilshire in downtown Los Angeles—even garnered a spot as contestant housing on the recent reality show *The Age of Love*.

Cooper, along with Daniel Gehman, a principal at Thomas P. Cox: Architects, and Curtis Kemeny, president and CEO of Boston Residential Group, stressed the importance of due diligence when acquiring assets ripe for adaptive reuse.

Among the horror stories: When Forest City Enterprises and Thomas P. Cox: Architects began the excavation process for Metro 417, the former hub of L.A.'s Hollywood Subway line, the team discovered an abandoned-and uncapped-oil well. The find added six months to the project—and close to \$2 million. Developers and architects also need to be prepared to design on the fly. Gehman kept finding new opportunities at Metro 417 and literally redesigned elements of the project a day before construction began.

Parking is another huge challenge with urban adaptive reuse projects. The panelists offered an array of creative solutions for providing parking where options are limited. At one of its properties, Boston Residential Group purchased a long-term lease on spots at a nearby lot, which the developer then sold to residents.