

SERA Architects designs Blanchet House of Hospitality

by Angela Webber

Published: July 26th, 2011

In the next week, crews from Fortis Construction are expected to start demolishing the former Dirty Duck building, in Portland at Northwest Glisan Street and Third Avenue, to make way for a new home for Blanchet House of Hospitality.

Blanchet House serves meals to the hungry and provides no-cost transitional housing at its existing location, adjacent to the site. The new building will be designed for longevity.

"The current building is very old and crumbling," said **Bill Reilly**, a Blanchet House board member. "An analysis showed that it didn't make financial sense to update it. What we're looking for is a building that will last us 50 to 100 years and not cost a lot to operate."



Rendering by SERA Architects

The new building is expected to have the same utility costs as the existing one – a noteworthy feat because it will be three times the size, said **Joe Pinzone**, [SERA Architects](#) principal-in-charge for the project. A highly efficient building envelope and other features are expected to help the project achieve [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design](#) gold certification.

Also, the structure will allow Blanchet House to serve more meals, and let clients line up inside instead of along the sidewalk. The number of spaces for transitional housing will eventually double from the present maximum of 30 to 60.

Warm touches such as upgraded carpeting and wood finishes will make the new building feel less institutional. The design team spent a lot of time to ensure that housing areas feel like individual, personal

spaces.

"We want to help invite the public to see what the Blanchet mission is," Pinzone said. "On the current building, there is one door and no windows on the main floor. The new design has a lot of transparency on the main floor. You can see in and out."

A different approach is required to design for an organization like Blanchet House, rather than a "normal" commercial project, Pinzone said.

"One thing you consider is the number of air changes you provide. People may be sick, so you have to find what is an appropriate level," he said. "That's a consideration you don't often enter into in a normal commercial project."

The finishes on the main floor, where meals are served, are especially sturdy because of the harsh cleaning materials used there.

"Blanchet does quite a bit of bleach mopping. Materials have to be able to stand up to those cleaning products," Pinzone said.

One of the most deceptive challenges was to design the building's systems for simplicity, Pinzone said.

"All systems are maintained by residents, who may not have the specific skills to maintain these systems and who rotate out every three to five months," he said. "The challenge was to make the systems very straightforward and very intuitive. It takes attention to detail to pull that off."

The building's exterior has its own story. The team initially planned to keep it simple, to respect the limited budget, Pinzone said. But that design received pushback from the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission and staffers because they felt it didn't fit into the character of the Old Town Chinatown neighborhood.

The final design has more touches to make it "look historic," Pinzone said. SERA team members also worked with the nearby Portland Classical Chinese Garden to add some Chinese architectural influences, such as ornamental hand railings.

The final result will be "comfortable, but not ostentatious," Pinzone said. "We accounted for a broad spectrum of competing interests."

General Contractor Fortis Construction next week will start demolition of the site's existing building. Crews expect to break ground for the new building in early fall.

The total project cost is \$11.9 million. Blanchet House will trade its existing land and building to obtain the PDC lot for the new facility.

In addition to SERA Architects, project team members include: developer Melvin Mark; PAE, mechanical and electrical engineering; KPFF, structural engineering; MGH, civil engineering; Welsh Commissioning, commissioning; PRC, envelope consulting; and RSA Inc., kitchen design.

The SERA design team includes: Paul Jeffreys, project designer; John Smith, project manager; Josh Lupkin, job captain; and Carissa Mylin, interiors.

"On the Boards" is a weekly feature that spotlights local firms' best design work. Submissions from architectural and engineering firms are encouraged. Please email onthboards@djcoregon.com or call 503-802-7240.

Complete URL: <http://djcoregon.com/news/2011/07/26/sera-architects-designs-blanchet-house-of-hospitality/>