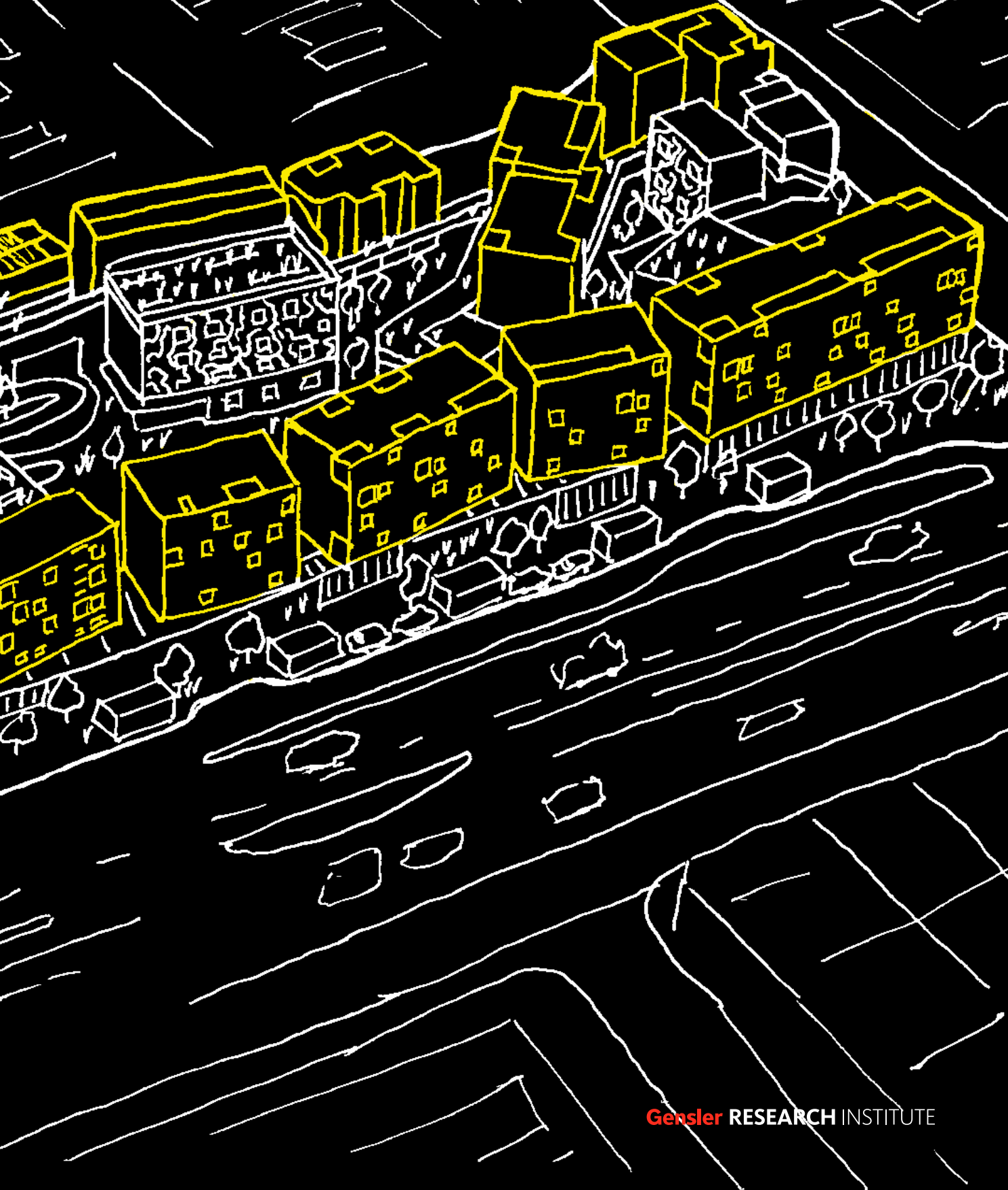


Designing Innovative Solutions for Homelessness



Designing Innovative Solutions for Homelessness

How do we create Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for the homeless quickly and inexpensively?

WHAT WE DID

We developed a plan to design, develop, and oversee a prefabricated, modular approach to house Los Angeles' homeless population. Our team met and discussed our ideas with stakeholders including permanent supportive housing (PSH) developers, the city, the county, for-profit developers, real estate brokers, PSH operators, non-profit groups focused on homelessness, other architects, and pre-fabrication manufacturers.

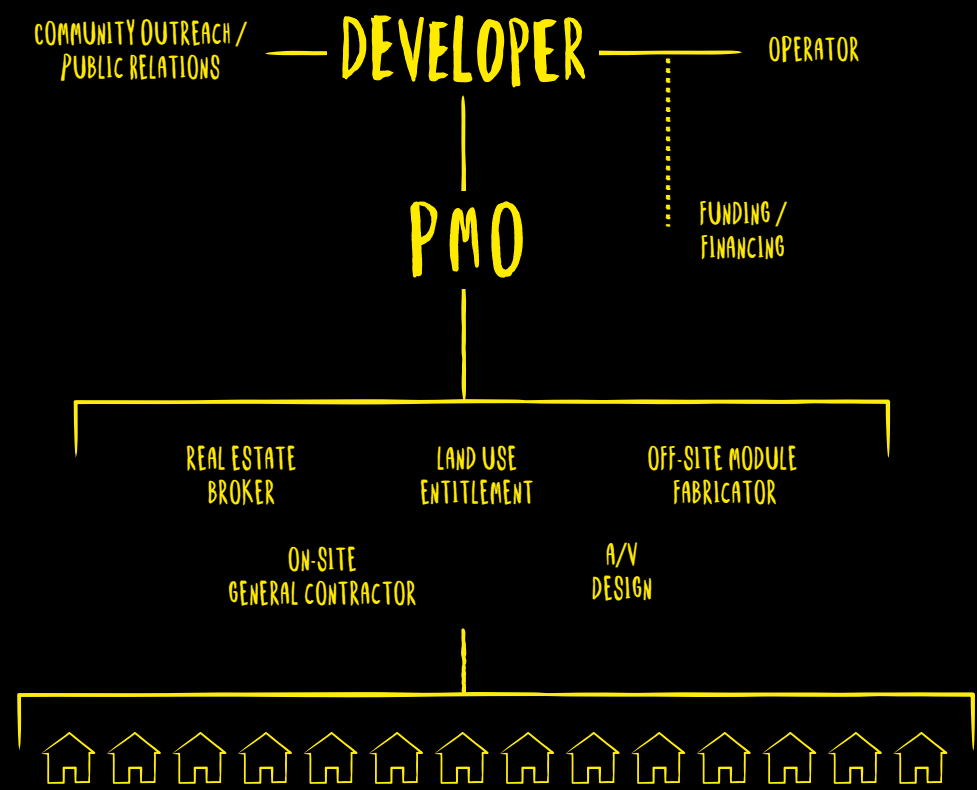
We started by focusing on four sites in Lincoln Heights that the City identified for PSH. Our design solution involved pre-fabricated modular units to make the construction of the four buildings faster and more cost effective. The idea of prefabrication for multi-family housing was not new, but it catalyzed our thinking for how to house Los Angeles' 10,000 chronically homeless people.

We knew a one-project-at-a-time approach was inadequate, so we looked to the retail industry for inspiration: in retail architecture no retailer ever wants just one store, they want hundreds. To solve homelessness, we need hundreds of PSH projects. So we conceptualized a PSH approach that would resemble a retail roll-out. Essentially, our system procures all materials in high volumes to realize the cost benefits of economies of scale.

THE CONTEXT

There is a lack of permanent supporting housing in the market, leaving chronic homeless people without shelter and on the streets—and the problem is particularly dire in Los Angeles. In November 2016, 76 percent of L.A. voters passed the \$1.2 billion bond measure, Proposition HHH, to fund the construction of 10,000 units of PSH. However, recent efforts to leverage funds for constructing projects have dragged with delays and have not gained the scaled momentum necessary to combat the epidemic of homelessness and all the resultant effects.

THERE ARE
53,000 PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS
IN LOS ANGELES
COUNTY



THE RESULTS

We proposed a holistic approach to engage an umbrella organization that works on a program level to coordinate, track, and manage the entire real estate process to support the mass construction of hundreds of permanent supportive housing buildings throughout LA. PSH has funding available, but without a sustainable approach, that funding is going untapped. Our framework responsibly accounts for all resources.

Our focus pivoted from a single, PMO-based operation to the PMO team managing the execution of a pre-fab solution through the manufacturing industry. Projects will realize economies of scale and time savings at an exponential pace. This will reduce the cost, the construction timeline, and the risk to developers.



A manufacturing
site for modular
housing units

DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

Our initiative is based on the following core principles:

WORK DIRECTLY WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS TO IDENTIFY SITES NEAR EXISTING HOMELESS COMMUNITIES, MASS TRANSIT, AND HOMELESS SERVICES.

Through the PSH Ordinance, the entitlement process can either be by-passed or become a more expedient approval for these sites. The PSH Ordinance was passed in May 2018, but was almost immediately challenged in court. As such, its status remains in limbo. If this ordinance is not upheld, we would propose to do a mass entitlement of the selected sites. This will produce a pipeline of land ready to have PSH built on it.

STREAMLINE THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS.

For individual projects, developers are responsible for sitework and building the ground floor to contain supportive services for the formerly homeless and desired amenities for the community, such as a grocery store or laundromat. They will then install the modular units in any configuration and quantity that works for the site. Building can then be finished with a façade that fits in the visual fabric of the surrounding community.

CENTRALIZE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT.

A new holistic view of the overall process is needed to properly coordinate, track, communicate, and deliver finished developments to meet the demand. A PMO is needed to establish the goals, success factors, metrics, and management routines around the program as a whole and into each of the key phases of the delivery cycle. The phases of the delivery cycle are property acquisition, entitlement, funding and developer selection, design, fabrication, construction, and operations.

DESIGN PREFABRICATED MODULAR UNITS IN COLLABORATION WITH A RESIDENTIAL FABRICATION MANUFACTURER.

The use of modular construction provides the ability to manufacture high-quality and lower-cost residential dwellings with quicker speed to market. By going with this delivery method, costs can be reduced by 20 to 30 percent and schedules can be reduced by around 6 months vs. a traditional “stick built” delivery. Additionally, in a controlled assembly line type manufacturing environment, the quality and efficiency improves dramatically. Other benefits include a significantly reduced impact to the neighborhood surrounding the construction site as there is a shorter site construction duration, and a streamlined permitting and inspection process.



A rendering of the Skid Row Housing Trust Ambrosia project.

WHAT'S NEXT

Our work is ongoing. We are meeting with several pre-fab manufacturers to understand the path toward opening a factory in Los Angeles. This will help develop an inventory of affordable PSH units for purchase/use by a multitude of developers. Concurrently, we are working with Skid Row Housing Trust, a leading PSH developer, to design and construct four projects that will provide proof of concept for our roll-out solution. Each of these projects will house approximately 70-100 formerly homeless residents. Looking forward, we will be attuned to how our strategies are adopted, the industry changes, and what new innovative approaches communities employ to combat homelessness.

Homelessness is not an LA phenomenon; we next look to other areas for application and inspiration. With this unified strategy and a single point of oversight, we can implement an innovative solution to address chronic homelessness in major U.S. cities. The success of pre-fab manufactured projects will be game-changing for the residential industry—an industry that has been stagnant for decades as the supply and subsequent cost of units has skyrocketed.



THE GENSLER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Gensler Research Institute is a collaborative network of researchers focused on a common goal: to generate new knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the connection between design, business, and the human experience. Through a combination of global and local research grants, and external partnerships, we seek insights focused on solving the world's most pressing challenges. We are committed to unlocking new solutions and strategies that will define the future of design.

RESEARCH TEAM

Rob Jernigan, Audrey Handelman, Christopher Gray, Mina Noorkbakhsh, David O'Brien, Brandon Larcom, Eric Stultz, Allison McElroy, Roger Sherman, Nancy Foster, Russell Baker, Aaron Gensler

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Marcellino, E. (2019). "LA County Approves \$460 Million in Homeless Initiatives." NBC Los Angeles. Retrieved from <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/LA-County-Set-to-Approve-460-Million-in-Homeless-Initiatives-509914871.html>

Smith, D. (2016). "Proposition HHH would raise funds to build homeless housing in L.A." Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-ln-prop-hhh-qa-20161017-snap-story.html>

Smith, D. (2019). "How close is L.A. to building 10,000 houses for homeless people?" Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-hhh-spending-commitments-20190421-story.html>

IMAGE CREDITS

All images credited to Gensler unless otherwise noted.

© 2019 Gensler. All rights reserved. The information contained within this document is and shall remain the property of Gensler. This document may not be reproduced without prior consent from Gensler.

www.gensler.com/research