

Master-Planned/Mixed Use Development: Models for Success Rental Housing: Encouraging New Production

Fostering the creation of sustainable communities with a mix of market and affordable homes, sound infrastructure, transportation options, and employment opportunities for residents while balancing the needs of the community takes vision, time, commitment and diverse partnerships. When part of a master planning process, results can be impressive and can serve as models for success for others to emulate. Two recently completed developments in Rhode Island respond to local needs, protect community character and provide safe, affordable homes and commercial space as part of ‘big-picture’ plans that included input from municipal officials, community partners, funders and residents. These developments stand as models for sound planning, employment of smart growth principles, and enhancement of the natural and built environments.

Case Studies

Both Sandywoods Farm in Tiverton and Stillwater Mill in Burrillville, Rhode Island are creative responses to the growing need for affordable homes that also reinforce and complement existing and planned efforts within both these rural communities.

Sandywoods Farm: Sandywoods Farms has created a community which combines a healthy environment and smart, sustainable infrastructure with attractive homes and job opportunities with beautiful designs that preserve the character of the town. The plan for this affordable community was inspired by historic examples and regional precedents from rural New England and speaks to the vernacular character of the community and region. Situated on the site of an existing farm in Tiverton, Rhode Island – the project compactly organizes rural housing around the perimeter of a larger agricultural preserve that will be partially utilized by the residents in conjunction with a resident farmer. Adjacent to the site are a new Town Library and ball fields further integrating Sandywoods Farm into the larger community.

The goal was to create compact development, well-designed buildings and landscapes within a highly livable, walkable and intimate neighborhood for residents. The creation of attractive, street-oriented housing types that appeal to renters as well as market-rate buyers, while also meeting the municipality’s commitment to affordable homes, has been achieved through creative allocation of funds and strong partnerships. Additionally, the conservation of undeveloped, agricultural land is in-line with our state’s efforts to reduce sprawl and direct growth away from undeveloped, natural resources.

Stillwater Mill: Stillwater Mill is a rare combination of historic preservation, economic development, environmental remediation, affordable housing, and civic commitment to the concepts of a sustainable community. Stillwater Mill was the heart of Harrisville Village in Burrillville until the 1960s, when it fell the way of many of the textile mills in the Blackstone River Valley—underutilized for marginal uses and a growing blight on its surroundings. The Town of Burrillville Redevelopment Agency purchased the mill site, and found a partner in NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (formerly Woonsocket Neighborhood Development Corporation) to rehabilitate the former mill into 47 rental homes, 36 of which are affordable.

Stillwater Mill is located in complex in a small, rural town in the Village of Harrisville in the Town of Burrillville. This site, a longtime blight on this historic village, compelled the Town to launch its “Stillwater Complex Redevelopment Plan.” With this ambitious Plan the town put into place a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan to rejuvenate its historic village centers.

Community Support and Engagement

Both developments received widespread community support since from conception through to completion. In 2002 the Burrillville Redevelopment Agency adopted a process for identifying and evaluating various areas in the town as potential areas for redevelopment. As a result of the process, the agency selected the Stillwater Mill area as a top priority site for designation as a Redevelopment District. That same year, the Burrillville

Town Council adopted an ordinance amending the Burrillville Mill area as an area of “substandard and blighting conditions.” In 2003, the Agency engaged a local design firm to refine the master plan for the Stillwater Mill area, holding numerous public hearings to solicit public comment.

In Tiverton, Sandywoods benefitted from the collaboration and support of the Town, Rhode Island Housing, residents, planners, architects and developers, community organizations and others. The town planning office played a crucial role in the development and numerous local artists, non-profits, service providers and community residents were integral to the development’s success.

Alignment with Municipal Planning Priorities

These innovative developments preserve the rural character of their respective towns while providing homes that working families can afford, all within a vibrant community. Sandywoods Farm is aligned with Town objectives to expand opportunities and preserve Tiverton’s rural character. As part of the goal to preserve open space and reduce sprawl, the Tiverton Land Trust has acquired approximately 94 acres of the original farm site. Stillwater Mill, which is part of a larger effort to create a village center for the village of Harrisville, has created a mixed-use and mixed income community within a historic mill building. The development is the centerpiece of the Town’s redevelopment plans for the area. The design and redevelopment strategies employed have reestablished Stillwater Mill as the heart of the Village of Harrisville and as a catalyst to reinvigorating other commercial properties that are in close proximity to the redevelopment district.

Building on Community Character

Sandywoods Farm combines farming activities with housing for working families, as well as commercial space to sell farm products and galleries for art exhibitions. The design of the development and individual buildings on the site draws from rural Tiverton’s historic designs, but adds modern building techniques. The site design introduces small-scale walkability while preserving the site’s strong relationship between farmland and living space. Homes are clustered along a series of rural lanes with small community gardens interspersed within the site to reflect the adjacent agricultural pastureland. The rehabilitation of Stillwater Mill (an early 20th-century worsted mill) provides one-, two- and three-family affordable and market-rate homes in rural northern Rhode Island. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the mill serves as a local and prominent landmark for this part of the state. Stillwater Mill has created a mixed-use and mixed income community within a historic mill building.

Environmentally Sensitive Designs

Both developments seek to minimize environmental impact through the use of environmentally sensitive materials and building techniques and by limiting development to a small portion of their overall sites. Sandywoods Farm features high efficiency heat pump systems, energy star appliances and light fixtures and a single wind turbine will be soon installed. The adaptive reuse of the historic Stillwater Mill not only preserves an important piece of the town and state’s history, but it also conserves valuable existing resources. Reusing and repurposing historic properties not only preserves critical pieces of the town’s historic character, but conserves both open space, the town’s rural, undeveloped character and supports preservation goals at the local and state level. Stillwater Mill’s energy delivery system was conceived using a geothermal heating and cooling system drawing water from seven bored wells to be distributed to each of the units using an electric generator.

True ‘Models’ of Development

Both developments have been recognized by various awards programs. Sandywoods Farm has been recognized by both the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) (2007 Annual Award recipient) and the Rhode Island chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) (2009 Annual Award recipient). Additionally, the development has been selected as a finalist in the Affordable Housing Finance Readers’ Choice awards program. Stillwater Mill was recently selected as recipient of the Preservation Award from the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission and PreserveRI. Local media outlets have provided extensive

coverage of the developments and the historic preservation community has featured them in their annual conference.

Affordability

Both developments meet the conservation goals of the town and state and also introduce desperately-needed affordable housing homes in communities with very little family rental housing. Both help these towns meet the 10% threshold established by the State's Low and Moderate Income Housing Act. Sandywoods and Stillwater have transformed their respective communities and positively contributed to ongoing and future planning efforts, in the same way neighborhoods have been revitalized in urban centers.

Maximum income levels for tenants at Sandywoods are: \$41,000 for a family of one; \$46,800 for a family of two; \$52,000 for a family of three; and \$58,000 for a family of four. With rents ranging from \$685 a month for a one-bedroom apartment, \$822 a month for two bedrooms, to \$1,142 a month for a three-bedroom unit, rents are far below the average monthly rents in town. Ten of the rental homes are for households at 60%-80% of AMI; 25 of these homes have Project-Based Section 8.

Stillwater Mill is designed to provide housing opportunities to low and moderate income families. Sixty-one percent of the units are affordable to families earning 50% of the Area Median Income or less, 15% serve families earning from 51%-60% of AMI and the remaining 24% are market rate units, generally serving residents earning up to 120% of the AMI.

In a State where 25% of renters pay more than 50% of their income for housing, these developments provide critically-needed affordable homes within vibrant neighborhoods. For years housing prices have greatly outpaced the incomes of Rhode Islanders. Rising unemployment, stagnant or falling incomes, and the high number of foreclosures continue to have a significant impact on families and individuals in Rhode Island. Combined, these factors highlight the importance of creating and making available a full continuum of affordable choices as part of the state's economic strategy and safety net.

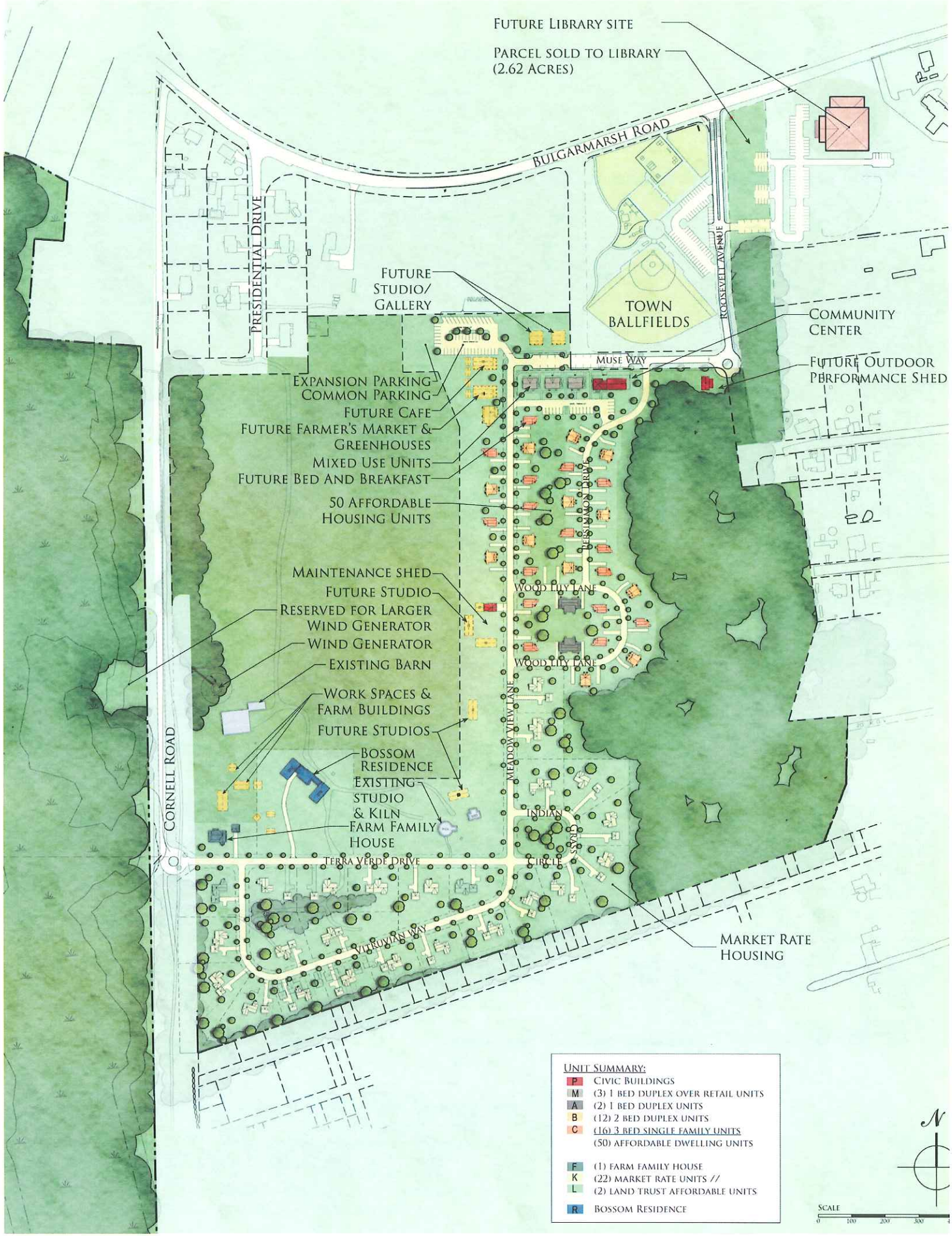
Record high foreclosures have also added to the housing shortage, leaving many tenants and owners of rental properties without a home. Exacerbating the shrinking stock of affordable housing and high prices are stagnant wages and record-high unemployment rates in Rhode Island.

The Result

The concept – that housing is more than four walls and a roof, it is the people within and community outside – comes to life through this model for development. Safe, healthy homes are increasingly beyond the reach of many Rhode Islanders, especially those with low to moderate incomes. These mixed-use developments not only provide four walls and a roof, but comprehensive, sustainable communities where people can live, work and play. The developments are welcome and creative responses to an affordable housing crisis that has been exacerbated by the economic and housing downturns of the past several years. Both illustrate the concept that successful housing policy must focus on building an entire community and not just individual structures.

As a result of the big picture planning and vision for these developments, Sandywoods Farm and Stillwater Mill not only provide a place to live, but additional opportunities for the people who call it home. Both developments are located near a bike/walking paths, bus routes, recreational opportunities and are fully integrated and incorporated into municipal planning efforts.

These developments stand as models for sound planning, employment of smart growth principles, and enhancement of the natural and built environments. The resulting communities have greatly improved both the physical and social fabric of the towns, providing the essential ingredients of a sustainable community and serving as models for other initiatives to follow.



FUTURE LIBRARY SITE

PARCEL SOLD TO LIBRARY
(2.62 ACRES)

BULGARMARSH ROAD

PRESIDENTIAL DRIVE

ROSEVILLE AVENUE

TOWN BALLFIELDS

COMMUNITY CENTER

FUTURE OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE SHED

MUSE WAY

FUTURE STUDIO/GALLERY

EXPANSION PARKING
COMMON PARKING

FUTURE CAFE
FUTURE FARMER'S MARKET &
GREENHOUSES

MIXED USE UNITS

FUTURE BED AND BREAKFAST

50 AFFORDABLE
HOUSING UNITS

MAINTENANCE SHED

FUTURE STUDIO
RESERVED FOR LARGER
WIND GENERATOR

WIND GENERATOR

EXISTING BARN

WORK SPACES &
FARM BUILDINGS

FUTURE STUDIOS

BOSSOM RESIDENCE

EXISTING
STUDIO & KILN

FARM FAMILY
HOUSE

TERRA VERDE DRIVE

WOOD LILY LANE

WOOD LILY LANE

INDIAN

CIRCLE

CORNELL ROAD

MARKET RATE
HOUSING

UNIT SUMMARY:

P	CIVIC BUILDINGS
M	(3) 1 BED DUPLEX OVER RETAIL UNITS
A	(2) 1 BED DUPLEX UNITS
B	(12) 2 BED DUPLEX UNITS
C	(16) 3 BED SINGLE FAMILY UNITS (50) AFFORDABLE DWELLING UNITS
F	(1) FARM FAMILY HOUSE
K	(22) MARKET RATE UNITS //
L	(2) LAND TRUST AFFORDABLE UNITS
R	BOSSOM RESIDENCE

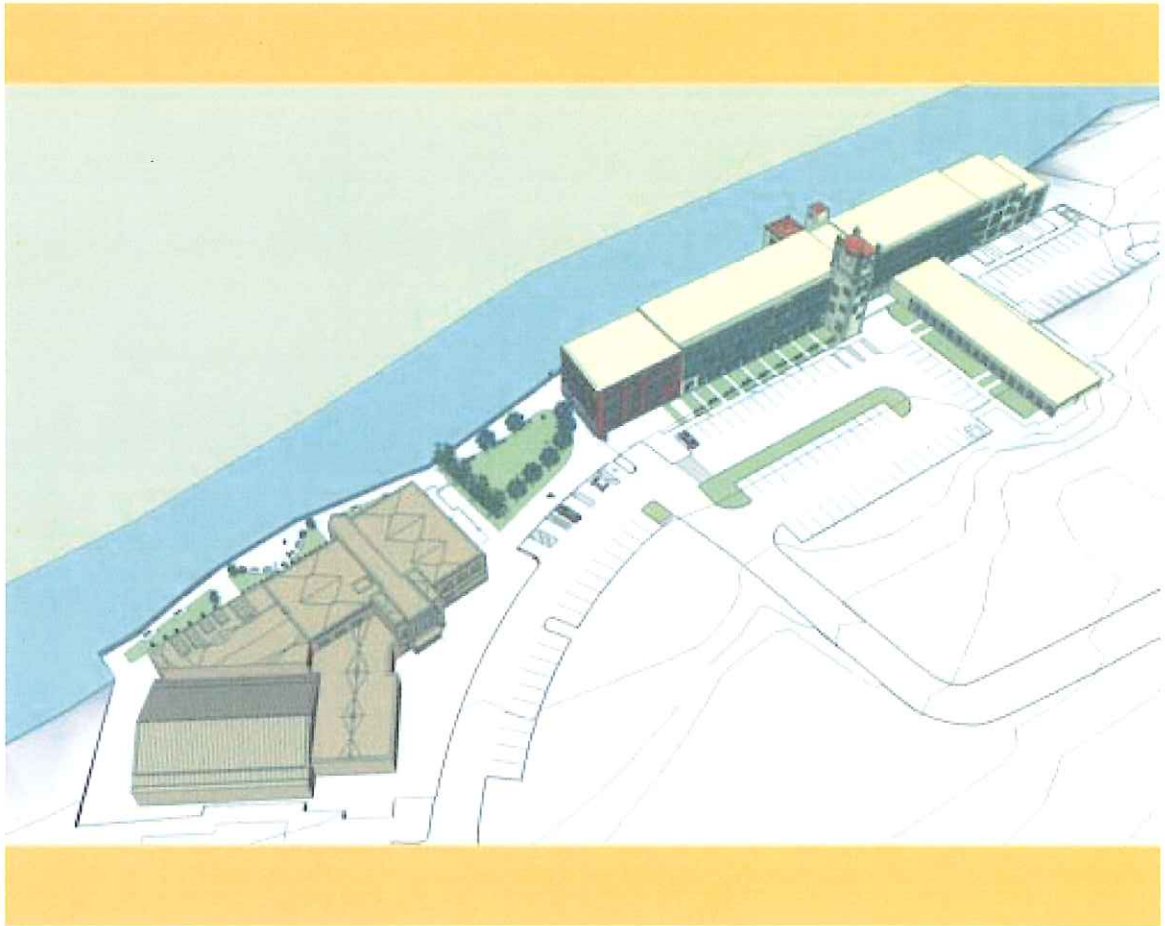








The Main Street area surrounding Stillwater Mill site - including a new town library, a new town common, a new riverwalk, mixed-use buildings, new parking, market rate housing, new access roads and infrastructure, and a new community center.



Rendering of rehabilitated mill showing adjacent community buildings.

Image courtesy of Durkee Brown Viveiros and Werenfels Architects



100 TUCKERMAN LANE