

Soldiers Home Phase II: Theater, Chapel, and Mansion Fact Sheet

5000 W National Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53295: Theater (41), Chapel (12), and Mansion (39)

The Milwaukee VA Soldiers Home Historic District (Soldiers Home) on the grounds of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center is a National Historic Landmark, and one of Wisconsin's most important historic assets. In 2021, as part of an Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), The Alexander Company and a team of local organizations celebrated a major victory as veterans were welcomed home to Old Main and five other historic buildings on campus. Building on this success, the focus now shifts to the Ward Memorial Theater, Soldiers Home Chapel, and the Governor's Mansion, and rehabilitating these three additional historic buildings into community space and supportive service offices. Through another strategic partnership with the VA, this initiative extends the continuum of care for veterans residing on the Soldiers Home grounds and in the greater Milwaukee area, demonstrating a continued commitment to those who have served.

What does the rehabilitation include?

- Adaptive reuse of three historic buildings: Ward Memorial Theater, Soldiers Home Chapel, and Governor's Mansion
- Preservation of interior and exterior historic features
- Additional offices for on-site veteran supportive services
- Community space for veterans

Project cost: \$24.6 Million

Public funding sources: State and Federal Historic Tax Credits, PACT ACT Funding, National Park Service Save America's Treasures Grants, New Markets Tax Credits, Philanthropic Funding

Project partners:

[The Alexander Company](#) is the developer and will lead the project, in collaboration with non-profit partner [Center for Veterans Issues](#). A strong group of local organizations are teaming up to make this project a reality. They include:

- General Contractor: [JP Cullen](#)
- Architect: The Alexander Company and [TBD]
- Veteran Service Providers: The Center for Veterans Issues, [the Wisconsin Veterans Network](#), [Journey to the Light Ministries](#), [Feast of Crispian](#)

What community amenities and supportive services will be available to veterans?

The second phase of Soldiers Home will feature a wide array of community amenities and services, including:

- Additional, expanded PTSD and mental healthcare options and counseling
- Social opportunities, including with other veterans and within the broader civilian community
- Easy-to-access veteran resources for information, aid, and opportunity
- Centralization of veteran services
- Aid veterans in job readiness and developing technological skillsets to be competitive in the workforce
- Enhance outreach and awareness in veteran communities
- The development and performance of all-veteran, fully actualized productions at the Theater, developed out of veterans' service and trauma stories
- Provide faith-based services in the Chapel such as counseling, support groups, and bible study, as well as advocacy with hand-selected community resources
- Additional amenities may be identified and incorporated as rehabilitation continues

Project Timeline:

- Construction commencement: Q2 of 2025, 16-month construction period
- Anticipated construction completion: Q3 of 2026

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE:

Ward Memorial Theater: 21,986 square feet

Ward Memorial Theater was constructed in 1881 and named after Horatio Ward, an American banker and patriot who created an endowment fund to construct memorial halls for the Soldiers Homes. The intent was to provide the Homes' residents with cultural activities such as concerts, theatrical performances, and lectures providing them with opportunities to socialize, relax, and enjoy recreation time with one another. It was originally a multi-purpose building with a flat-floored hall, serving as a theater, amusement hall, restaurant, home store, post office, and place of worship. At one point, it even housed veterans when membership exceeded space in the barracks. During an 1898 renovation, the building was altered to its present configuration with balconies, stage, new seats, and an orchestra pit, and was used solely as a theater. Arguably the most spectacular feature of Ward Memorial Theater was the large stained-glass portrait of General Ulysses S. Grant on horseback, a gift from the people of St. Louis and the Grand Army of the Republic following the army's 1887 national encampment. In November 2011, the window was removed from the theater for safekeeping until repairs to the buildings are complete.

Proposed new use:

- Host community theater and musical groups, as well as the showing of movies for veterans living on-site
- Destination venue for conferences and lectures for VA Medical Center staff

Soldiers Home Chapel: 7,316 square feet

The Chapel is a multi-denominational church built in 1889. It was paid for with "Post Funds," which included profits from the operation of the Soldiers home store, the sales of products made or grown at the branch, gifts, bequests, and unpaid pensions of members who died without wills or heirs. This chapel served as a place of prayer, refuge, and true patriotism, and remained in use until 1996.

Proposed new use:

- Nondenominational worship space, conference space for training and mental health sessions
- Destination venue for meetings, small lectures, corporate gathering, banquets

Governor's Mansion: 7,488 square feet

Built in 1868 and remodeled in 1916, the Governor's Mansion was built for the Soldiers Home director, whose position was then referred to as "governor." The oldest building remaining on campus, the Governor's Mansion is located on the main road, separate from the core grouping of buildings, across from Lake Wheeler. The mansion's design is attributed to architect Edward Townsend Mix, the same architect that designed Old Main. The 12-room home still has original windowpanes, stained, and leaded glass windows. Until recently, the Governor's Mansion served as the Medical Center Director's quarters.

Proposed new use:

- Technological training center to provide computer literacy training
- Supportive service provider offices

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