

Conversion in Heidelberg: Turning military areas into new neighborhoods

Five areas, 180 hectares, a once-in-a-century opportunity.

Since the US Army's withdrawal in 2014, the City of Heidelberg, together with many partners, has been working on finding a civilian use for their former military areas. With a total space of around 200 hectares, the five areas open for redevelopment are a once-in-a-century opportunity for Heidelberg. An entirely new city district and several lively and mixed neighborhoods with a lot of affordable living spaces, options for innovative businesses, attractive recreational areas as well as new lighthouse projects in culture and sport will be created on these areas. "Every crisis is an opportunity – a saying that certainly applies to the withdrawal of US troops from Heidelberg. For us, this means that we gain 200 hectares in land," says Mayor Eckart Würzner.

The City has started planning the time "after the Americans" quite early on and has included citizens from the beginning. Today, three out of these five conversion areas are being developed in parallel. Our new Südstadt district is already home to over 2,200 people. Since 2022, the cultural organization Karlstorbahnhof and the OTHER PARK have been attracting large crowds of visitors. The former hospital site in Rohrbach has welcomed its first inhabitants in 2023, more and more offices and labs are choosing Heidelberg Innovation Park (hip) as their location, while the neighboring SNP Dome is turning into a popular hall for sporting events in Heidelberg.

State of affairs in the different areas

Südstadt:

The new Südstadt will attract cultural offers and see the construction of a mixed, sustainable, green neighborhood including 1,500 new or renovated apartments on the conversion areas of the former Mark Twain Village and the Campbell Barracks. Many apartments, two student residence halls as well as one residence hall for trainees are already in use. Two construction sites will provide space for shared housing projects in about 115 apartments. Around 2,200 people already live in the neighborhood, which is about one third of Südstadt district's inhabitants. The positive trend in the development of inhabitants as well as in housing construction continued in the first half of 2023. It'll be a mixed-use neighborhood where social aspects play an important role. 70 percent of housing will be in the affordable price segment or subsidized, while 30 percent will be put on the unregulated market for rent or purchase. Ground floors will integrate commercial units and childcare facilities. These housing policy objectives are implemented by Projektgesellschaft MTV Bauen und Wohnen GmbH & Co. KG (MTV) on the respective spaces. Next to Rheinstraße, we will see the construction of a new city district center with a supermarket, a care facility, medical, commercial as well as gastronomic offers, the Chapel, the OTHER PARK and the Mark Twain Center. Companies of different sizes, the crime and traffic department of the police, offices, gastronomy as well as retail, medical practices and several childcare facilities have found their new home in the former Campbell Barracks. The

former stables will accommodate a new “phase 2” cultural and creative center for startups, small and micro enterprises as well as (solo) entrepreneurs on a space of roughly 3,000 square meters. So far, around 40,000 square meters of commercially used spaces have been developed in the Campbell Barracks.

The headquarters of high-ranking members of the US military was turned into the Mark Twain Center for Transatlantic Relations, the Chapel was turned into a citizen center. “Chapel – Raum für Stadtkultur e. V.” is the organization behind the citizen center and is made up of four non-profit associations. In 2022, Karlstorbahnhof was set up in a location that used to be a hall for carriages. A renowned cultural center, it offers an award-winning program and a diverse range of genres, relying on diversity and participation. In 2017, Julius Springer Vocational School moved into the building that was previously a high school. The gym hall was renovated and is now open to Heidelberg clubs for their training program.

With its roughly seven hectares, the OTHER PARK is the perfect space to turn the district into a lively neighborhood without wiping out the reminders of its previous military use. Spaces of encounter connect cultural and citizen centers, while play landscapes, green islands and squares are open to all. To the north of the school there is a spacious Mark Twain play landscape including a play village, water playscape, skate bowl and green areas. Campbell Barracks mbH (EGC) as municipal development company is in charge of developing the area.

[More information](#)

Heidelberg Innovation Park (hip): In the past, heavy military vehicles used to cross the site, today it is where solutions for our digital future are developed. The premises of the former Patton Barracks connect Bahnstadt with the southern districts Kirchheim, Südstadt and Rohrbach. Here, Heidelberg Innovation Park, a commercial site for cutting-edge digital technology, is growing. Some of the existing buildings in the east of the premises are landmarked and go back to grenadier barracks erected before the First World War.

Up to 5,000 people will find a job at hip. Startups and established companies from AI, IT and the life sciences will advance their projects here, using a cross-sectional and collaborative approach. The hip community is growing: Much has happened since our pioneers Ameria and the Business Development Center moved into Technologiepark in 2019: Apart from exciting developments like IWERKX by Höpfner Stiftung, other companies like Heidelberger Energiegenossenschaft (HEG), ERNW and Onapsis have chosen this location and are step by step filling refurbished existing buildings as well as newly constructed buildings with life. Internationally renowned US shared lab provider Biolabs is set to join them soon.

An open campus atmosphere as well as targeted community management promote a community spirit at hip. Coworking spaces, regular industry and sporting events create an environment that fosters communication, brings forth ideas and lets projects thrive. Mary Somerville Square is set to become the central meeting point and a space for encounters. On the site of the historical stables, we will see gastronomy and open-air seating, inviting people to sit and chat during their lunch breaks or after work.

For its innovative urban business area concept, hip has won the Brownfield Award in spring 2022. The network Brownfield24 honors projects that have revitalized and developed brownfields in a particularly sustainable and responsible manner. Hip is managed by the development company Patton Barracks (EGP), a company of the City of Heidelberg and Sparkasse Heidelberg. [More information](#)

Patrick Henry Village: The PHV is located near the highway A5 in the south-west of Heidelberg and at the heart of the Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region. It is about 6 km to the old town of Heidelberg, and just under 5 km to Heidelberg's main station (about 20 minutes by bike). Thanks to its proximity to the highway, you can reach Mannheim in about 25 min, Frankfurt in about one hour and Stuttgart in about one and a half hours.

Spanning roughly 100 hectares, it is the largest of five conversion areas. The PHV was set up in the 1950s as a residential area for the US Military and their families who lived there autonomously for the most part until the US Army withdrew in 2014. Currently these spaces are still owned by the German Institute for Federal Real Estate (Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben, BImA). An important partner of the City of Heidelberg, the institute is also developing affordable housing in the PHV itself but the City of Heidelberg is set to purchase the first spaces from BImA soon and start its own development of the city district. Current talks are close to conclusion.

The PHV will become a district offering a diverse range of possibilities for housing, work and day-to-day life, with open spaces for recreation and coming together, spaces for education, science, culture, businesses and sport. Connecting all 19 neighborhoods, the Parkway runs around them as a circle road. A newly constructed building in the north will house the arrival center for refugees of the state of Baden-Württemberg. Parts of the original ribbon developments from the 1950s will remain. New buildings as well as reconstructions, additions and superstructures are dedicated among others to new shared and individual forms of living. We are experimenting with affordable, sustainable building materials and ways of building that require less space.

A large, extensive park including a lake as well as spaces to play and work out will be at the center of the PHV. Running from east to west, green spaces with a diameter of 50 meters spread out from a green spine that is parallel to the highway. These so-called "green fingers" are set to become natural oases. The green periphery then merges into the surrounding cultivated landscape. This new climate-friendly city district relies on multiple use and cradle-to-cradle approaches. Roofs and building facades are used for photovoltaic systems and planting. As part of a "best energy neighborhood", the PHV will strive for climate neutrality. Every construction project has to fulfill the best possible energy standard.

Low-car-zone and no-parking-space zone: Cars will be allowed into the PHV but parking will be provided in neighborhood parking garages. Apart from public transport, bikes will play an important role. Mobility stations will offer car sharing, bikes and cargo bikes for rent as well as other means of environmentally friendly transport.

[More information](#)

US Hospital: Located in the south of Heidelberg-Rohrbach, the conversion area "Hospital" used to be home to intelligence barracks of the Wehrmacht and was constructed in the 1930s. The US Army rebuilt the estates completely and operated a hospital there.

A new neighborhood with about 600 apartment units grouped around a large park is being developed there under the aegis of the municipal housing company GGH. In 2020, most of the existing buildings were torn down to make room for new buildings. The former theater and a gym hall are landmarked. Several distinctive constructions in the east of the area still remain.

Spanning 10 hectares, the hospital area in Rohrbach will be turned into 16 construction sites in the coming years, which are then set to become a modern neighborhood with around 600 apartments for different target groups.

GGH Heidelberg is in charge of developing the area and will be responsible for turning it into serviced land. It will build the subsidized apartments as well as the multi-story neighborhood parking garage. The municipal housing company has sold the open construction sites to private property developers and demised them for further development in 2022/2023. These companies have formed the “Working Community Hospital” (ARGE) together with GGH. Their joint neighborhood concept as well as a standard development guidebook are the foundation for developing the neighborhood. Concepts for target groups, mobility, energy and urban planning form the building blocks. The objective is to effectively balance out all social, ecological and economical requirements, while striving to create a residential area where people enjoy living and that adheres to high standards in urban planning. Development works were concluded in mid-2023 and the traffic systems as well as the infrastructure were demised to the City of Heidelberg. The companies of ARGE started construction works in the same year.

40 percent of planned apartments are designed for households in the low to medium income segment. They only have to pay a maximum of 30 percent of their available income for rent including utilities. The numerous green areas and open spaces that are planned ensure a high recreational quality, a natural environment, and are a cordial invitation to the surrounding city districts. With its central lawn area for playing and sunbathing, the 7,000 square meter park is at the heart of this neighborhood. The square at Freiburger Straße will be the gates into this urban center. Small stores on the ground floor will turn the district into a busy area. There will be different play areas for all ages where you can while away the hours.

The landmarked gym hall and theater, as well as the former chapel are not just witnesses of their time but will also be open to the public: The gym hall becomes a beach hall, the theater will continue to serve as stage for concerts and performances and the chapel will become a place for people from the neighborhood to meet and house the offices of the Quartiersmanagement Hasenleiser.

[More information here](#) and on www.hospital-heidelberg.de

Airfield: Located between Kirchheim and Pfaffengrund, the airfield of around 15 hectares was not only used as special landing area by the US Army but was also home to the US Fire Department. Only a fraction of the premises, around 1.8 hectares, are actual properties and have airport buildings like the tower and the hangars on them. The airfield premises are currently still owned by the German Institute for Federal Real Estate (Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben, BImA). This includes the former runway of the US Military Airfield, which runs parallel to Baumschulenweg in Pfaffengrund. So far, there is no decision on a potential longterm use in the future. Civil society actors as well as Heidelberg citizens are invited to discuss future uses of the airfield in several events and to propose their own ideas. A concept on the future use of the airfield is set to be passed in the City Council in 2025. First intermediary uses, like the German-American Friendship Festival, have attracted a large crowd.

[More information](#)