Design of a Civic Buiding

Greenpoint Library

Team: Building designed by Marble Fairbanks Architects, landscape designed by SCAPE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DPC
Location: 107 Norman Ave, Brooklyn
Type: Civic building, community facility
Year: 2020

Public buildings offer opportunities to represent the pride, history, and ambition of the city's diverse communities. Through thoughtful design, public buildings aim to enhance the lives of those who use and benefit from the services they offer. Moreover, these facilities can bolster social integration, celebrate design innovation, amplify local arts and culture, and help address social challenges. The revamped Greenpoint Library and Environmental Education Center is a hallmark example of New York City's commitment to good urban design.

Greenpoint Library has been a community anchor for more than 100 years. The original classical revival building was replaced with a one-story building in 1973. The current library was reconstructed once again in 2020 and doubled the size of the previous building on the site, bringing it to a total of 15,000 sf. This new design includes a thoughtful relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces, which supports diverse programming throughout the day and night.

Photo © Michael Moran/OTTO

Photo © Michael Moran/OTTO

Photo © Michael Moran/OTTO

↖ (Upper) Building Entry (Lower) Library reading room

↑ Corner location of the library

Principle 1
Enhance People's Daily Lives

→ The entrance and plaza space is designed with clear sightlines, well-distributed seating, and lighting, which makes the facility feel safe and welcoming during all times of day.

→ Landscape is weaved throughout all floors and designated space included on roof terraces for family-friendly programming.

→ Ample bike parking, a Citi Bike docking station and an attractive sidewalk experience encourage people to walk or bike to the library.

→ The Norman Avenue frontage incorporates seating at the base of the facade to activate the sidewalk and beyond, large floor-to-ceiling windows bring natural light into the reading rooms.

Principle 2
Care for a Neighborhood's History, Culture, and Identity

→ The landscape supports substantial community space for indoor/outdoor programming around library and ecology-centered programs, including night stargazing, community gardening, and beneficial insect surveys.

→ Community-based environmental organizations were partners throughout the design process.

→ The landscape design honors Brooklyn's geological history through a creative reinterpretation within the entry plaza using bands of granite outcroppings to trace the Laurentide Ice Sheet across Brooklyn present 18,000 years ago.

→ Outdoor spaces are provided at three different levels, and each is planted with a customized palette to increase biodiversity and invite pollinators.

Principle 3
Embrace the City's Dynamism

→ Building materials were made in collaboration with local artists and artisans.

→ New solar technologies were used to maximize natural light in the winter and minimize light in peak summer.

→ Each open space is designed for a distinct experience and set of potential user groups throughout the day.

→ A creative funding mechanism called the Greenpoint Community Environment Fund was used to expand the budget and implement such an advanced public facility.

→ Natural and durable materials such as outcroppings of granite and native vegetation are used throughout the landscape to create an attractive public space that promotes a healthier and more enjoyable environment.

Principle 4
Confront Society's Greatest Challenges

→ Throughout the interior and exterior spaces there are ample opportunities to learn about local and historic environmental issues and goals.

→ The building goes well beyond code requirements, achieving LEED Gold certification due to its environmentally conscious design.

→ Solor panels and efficient building systems (lighting, heating and cooling, and plumbing) minimize energy consumption and improve indoor comfort.

→ Rainwater is captured in a rooftop cistern, used for lab experiments, and excess stormwater is diverted to planted areas for treatment.