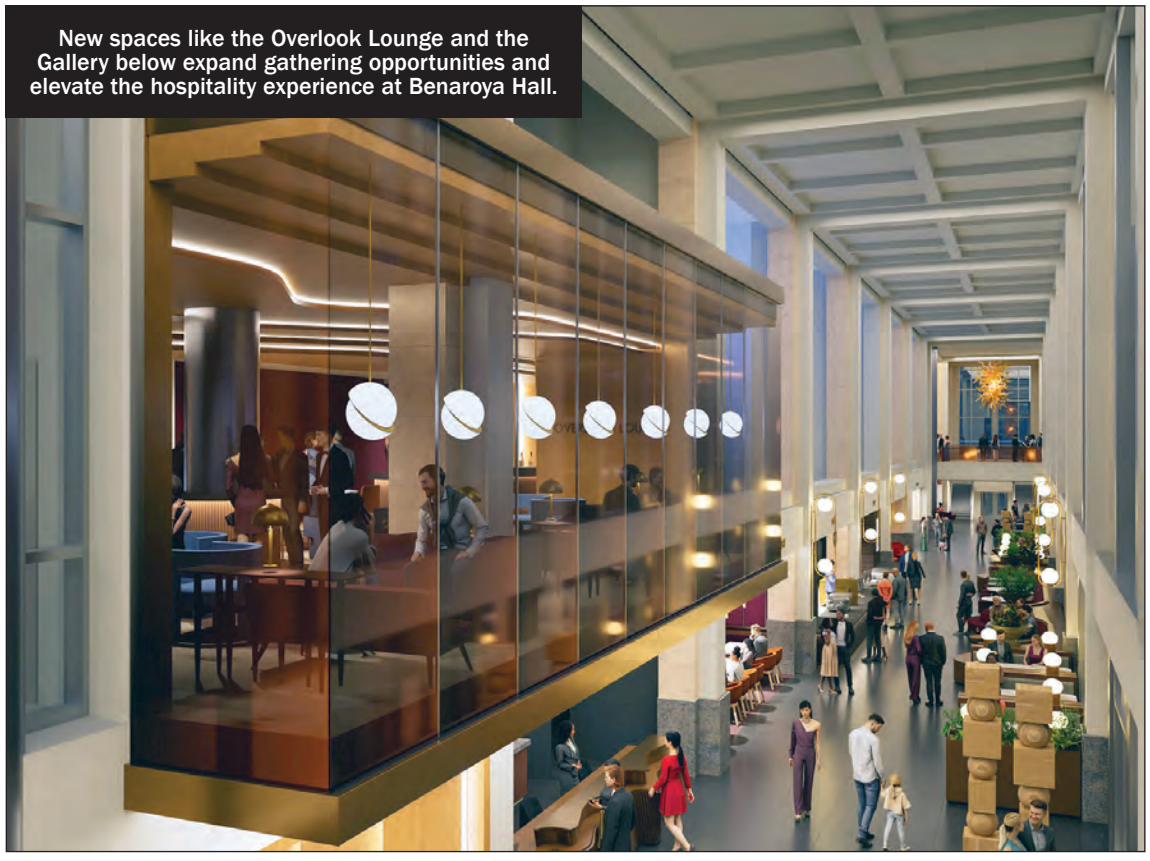
Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce

CIVIC DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

August 28, 2025

CIVIC REVITALIZATION THROUGH THE ARTS

The Seattle Symphony and Mithun join forces to amplify Benaroya Hall's role in Seattle's arts and cultural scene



New spaces like the Overlook Lounge and the Gallery below expand gathering opportunities and elevate the hospitality experience at Benaroya Hall.

IMAGES BY MITHUN

BY MARIA YANG & RICH FRANKO
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The opening of Benaroya Hall in 1998 and the establishment of a dedicated home for the Seattle Symphony fulfilled a long-held dream and marked a turning point for the orchestra, but also for downtown Seattle. Benaroya Hall transformed Seattle's cultural landscape and helped to reshape the downtown neighborhood, which saw significant retail and housing growth, sparking a new era of revitalization in the heart of the city.

Today, as Seattle continues to recover from the lasting impacts of the pandemic, downtown is undergoing another period of renewal, with new investments in the waterfront, expanded light rail and a growing desire for connection.

In May, the Seattle Symphony and Benaroya Hall launched the public phase of Amplify, a capital campaign to invest in Benaroya Hall's public spaces. With a goal of $20 million, Amplify reimagines Benaroya Hall as a destination in Downtown Seattle, including more welcoming spaces and enhanced experiences through a new Café, Welcome Desk, Overlook Lounge and Community Room; refreshed lobby spaces with increased seating and hospitality; improved wayfinding; and public art and programming.

Through the Amplify campaign, the Seattle Symphony community is investing in the future of Benaroya Hall as a vibrant, welcoming space that meets the evolving

Design details in the Grand Lobby celebrate Seattle's arts heritage and create a more welcoming space for connection before, during and after performances.

needs of our dynamic and diverse city. This transformation is about reimagining the visitor experience, elevating our public spaces and deepening Benaroya Hall's role as a beacon for creativity, connection and civic pride for everyone.

A GATHERING PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Throughout the year, Benaroya Hall showcases the richness and diversity of the cultural life of our region, hosting countless community events, including concerts, lectures, graduations, corporate meetings, receptions, comedy shows, conferences, awards shows, celebrations of life, film festivals, weddings and more. Amplify will deepen Benaroya Hall's ability to serve the public, welcome neighbors and uplift the many organizations, artists, students and visitors who share this exceptional civic gathering space.

The vision for Amplify was born of Benaroya Hall's community-focused mission. Prior to its official launch, the revitalization project underwent a comprehensive, community-based fact-finding process led by consulting firm Campbell & Company and multidisciplinary design firm Mithun. This process included interviews, focus groups and facility tours with community leaders and stakeholders.

Mithun used this stakeholder feedback to design the reimagined Benaroya Hall public spaces to ensure that the goal of creating a welcoming space for all would be met by the project.

ENHANCING VISIBILITY AND VISITOR FLOW

Improvements to the visitor experience begin at the exterior with enhanced building entrances, new signage and improved lighting to promote visibility, safety and engagement. New high-definition marquees on the building corners and LED displays at street level will provide engaging and easily modified content about activities at Benaroya Hall. Consolidated entries to the two halls and enhanced lighting at entry canopies will support a safer and clearer entry experience.

The first phase of construction began earlier this summer with exterior improvements along Third Avenue; Benaroya Hall will remain open during this phase of work. Interior renovations will begin in spring 2026.

WELCOMING DIVERSE AUDIENCES

The renovation will transform public spaces in The Boeing Company Gallery along Third Avenue from a transitional zone to a civic living room and community gathering space — a place to linger and connect. At the expanded Café, recessed niches carved into the high-ceiling gallery are redesigned with carpeting, fabric and wood paneling to create a more intimate and quieter series of seating spaces for use during events, and available to the general public between programs. The new concierge-style Welcome Desk provides a hospitality-oriented ticketing experience with improved accessibility.

At the north end of the gallery, a new Community Room repurposes the existing ticketing space to create an inviting new multipurpose venue for meetings, sensory-friendly streaming during events, pre-concert talks and free public programming. This visible space will expand Benaroya Hall's capacity to serve as a meeting place, encouraging social interaction and dialogue among diverse groups, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

CELEBRATING THE ARTS, REGIONAL IDENTITY

Lobby areas will be elevated through public art installations, inviting and varied types of seating, and enhanced lounges and bars to improve flow and create a more welcoming experience. Unifying the space, new carpeting incorporates the full color palette into a large, flowing pattern inspired by sound waves and softened to achieve a biophilic experience that resembles dappled light.

Inspired by music, sinuous forms in the design evoke melody while repetitive orthogonal forms create a sense of rhythm, complementing and enhancing the existing architecture. This interplay is tuned to create a harmony of elements, heightening the visitor experience, with extensive use of wood and artisanal glass — materials grounded in the history of the Pacific Northwest.

INVESTING IN A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE

For more than 25 years, Benaroya Hall has stood in the heart of downtown Seattle, as a home for the performing arts, a landmark of civic pride, and a gathering place for people from across our region. Amplify reimagines the building's public spaces for everyone, and highlights the vital role that cultural institutions play in weaving a vibrant and inclusive civic fabric. Here's to the next 25 years!

To learn more, visit seattlesymphony.org/amplify.

Project team members include Mithun, architecture and interior design; The Seneca Group, project management; Holmes, structural engineering; PAE, MEP engineering; Luma Lighting Design, lighting; ARUP, audio visual; Sellen Construction, general contractor.

Maria Yang is the Acting CEO and Chief Development & Project Officer of the Seattle Symphony and Benaroya Hall, leading major strategic and fundraising initiatives, including the Amplify capital campaign. Rich Franko is an architect and partner at Mithun specializing in the design of cultural and education facilities.

INSIDE

The Passive House-certified Mount Vernon Library Commons brings together a public library, community center, structured parking, and the largest public EV charging station in the country.

PHOTO BY LESLIE SCHWARTZ PHOTOGRAPHY

DJC TEAM

SECTION EDITOR: SHAWNA GAMACHE • SECTION DESIGN: JEFFREY MILLER
WEB DESIGN: LISA LANNIGAN • ADVERTISING: MATT BROWN

FROM RACETRACK TO RIVERFRONT LANDMARK: TRANSFORMING 50 ACRES IN IDAHO'S FASTEST-GROWING REGION

Ada County is transforming an abandoned horse track into a public space that integrates ecological restoration, destination recreation and resilient design.

BY NICHOLAS JABS & DAVID FULTON
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

As Northwest cities balance explosive growth with the need for public space, a $43 million project in Idaho's Treasure Valley stands as a case study in public space reinvestment. Rather than sell off surplus land, Ada County chose to transform an abandoned horse track into The Park at Expo Idaho — a landmark public space that integrates ecological restoration, destination recreation and resilient design.

PUBLIC LANDSCAPE RECONSIDERED

Les Bois Park, once home to Idaho's horse racing scene, sat dormant after wagering on the sport was banned in 2015. The 88-acre site — adjacent to the Expo Idaho fairgrounds and along the Boise River — faced an uncertain future.

Local planning efforts and public engagement processes laid the groundwork for change, positioning Ada County to act when federal funding became available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in 2021, launching an ambitious design process that prioritized public access, diverse recreational programming, ecological restoration and long-term community benefit.

The design team, led by Philadelphia-based PORT alongside a broad group of experienced national and local consultants, approached the site with care and curiosity.

Archival photos and historic maps revealed the land had once been part of the Boise River floodplain, later filled to support racetrack infrastructure. The team proposed excavating this fill, reconnecting the site to the floodplain, and using the displaced soil to create dramatic new topography. In 18 months, they completed design and secured the necessary federal permits to meet the 2026 ARPA funding deadline.

BALANCING EXPERIENCE AND ECOLOGY

The first 50 acres balance public experience and environmental performance. Fully funded by the ARPA program, Phase 1 construction began in early 2025 and is being delivered through a traditional design-bid-build model. The new park links directly to the Boise Greenbelt and Expo Idaho, opening access to nature, culture, and recreation.

Phase 1 construction started early this year and includes excavating the site to reconnect it to the Boise River floodplain, with displaced soil being used to create dramatic new topography.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CM COMPANY

Features include a 6-acre all-wheel sports garden; two architecturally distinct pavilions designed by Marlon Blackwell Architects (MBA) and Plan North Engineers; and nature-based play areas with large-scale custom elements, including a 40-foot slide tower and one of the largest swing sets in the Mountain West.

The site also includes soft-surface trails, scenic overlooks, and over 600,000 native plants supported by integrated stormwater and irrigation systems that reduce water needs and support long-term resilience.

The Park at Expo Idaho is what the design team often refers to as an "AND" project — not an "OR" project. Rather than forcing choices between ecology and recreation, the park weaves environmental performance and active recreation into a unified public landscape.

DESIGN ROOTED IN PLACE

The Park at Expo Idaho embraces Garden City's mid-century identity, drawing inspiration from local car culture and the visual language of the nearby Western Idaho Fairgrounds. Entry signage borrows from vintage roadside graphics, while site elements echo the bold silhouettes of fairground architecture.

Material choices — concrete, CMU, corrugated metal and weathering steel — nod to the racetrack's historic utilitarian structures. A cantilevered swing set references the angled steel posts that once lined the track, transforming a humble relic into a striking feature of public play. The original racetrack observation tower was preserved, structurally reinforced, and repositioned within the restored floodplain as both a visual anchor and a gesture to the site's past.

Through these layered details, the park fosters a sense of belonging and local character — honoring what was while pointing toward what's possible.

COLLABORATION AT EVERY SCALE

The Park at Expo Idaho reflects collaboration across disciplines and geographies. PORT and MBA brought an outside perspective that helped uncover new potential in the site's landscape and history. This vision was realized through deep partnerships with local firms like Boise-based Plan North Engineers, who helped deliver complex site features within tight funding and permitting timelines.

With more than a dozen consultants contributing across ecological, architectural, and technical disciplines—including Rio ASE, Horrocks, Ecosystem Sciences, and Studio Ludo, the team's success relied on shared goals and an openness to navigate challenges together. The result is a park shaped not just by vision, but by committed coordination at every level.

This commitment to collaboration extended to a range of public agencies whose

involvement was critical to the project's success. Due to the site's proximity to the Boise River and the compressed deadlines required by ARPA funding, the project presented a complex set of jurisdictional and regulatory conditions.

The team adopted an "early and often" approach from the outset—bringing together city, county, state and federal agencies. This established a shared understanding of constraints and opportunities, and fostered a spirit of cooperation that carried through permitting. Ongoing, clear communication at key milestones proved essential to aligning priorities and advancing approvals in parallel with design.

SETTING A REGIONAL PRECEDENT

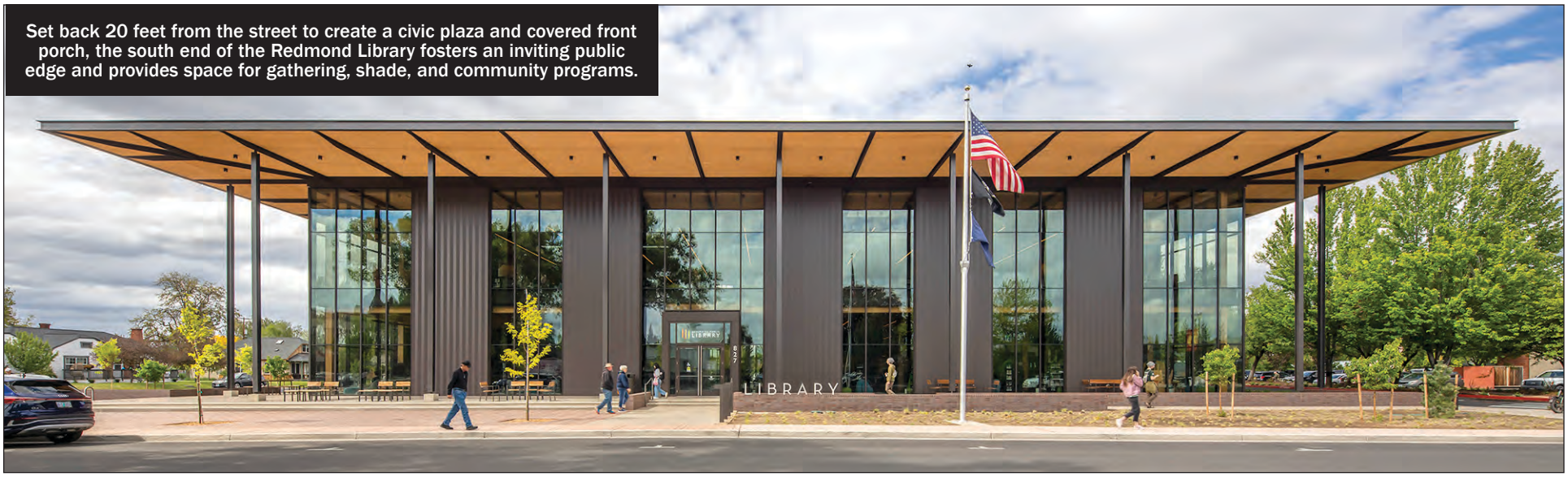
The Park at Expo Idaho offers a modest but meaningful call to cities across the West: reinvest in public land, embrace ecological restoration, and design spaces that support both people and nature. As development pressure grows and public land becomes more contested, the project is a reminder that design can play a powerful role in shaping lasting civic value.

"It's going to be the equivalent of Central Park," said Ada County Commissioner Tom Daly at the groundbreaking ceremony. "A transformative part of this community not only now, but for 100 years from now."

Plans include preserving the original racetrack observation tower, and a landscape including soft-surface trails connecting to a regional trail system, scenic overlooks, and over 600,000 native plants.

RENDERING BY PORT

Nicholas Jabs is a senior associate at PORT, specializing in public space design and urban planning and will teach landscape architecture at Utah State University for the upcoming academic year. David Fulton is founder and principal of Plan North Engineers, a Boise-based structural engineering firm working nationally across commercial, public and residential sectors.



Set back 20 feet from the street to create a civic plaza and covered front porch, the south end of the Redmond Library fosters an inviting public edge and provides space for gathering, shade, and community programs.

PHOTOS BY LARA SWIMMER

OREGON'S REDMOND LIBRARY BALANCES LOCAL CHARACTER WITH SYSTEM-WIDE EFFICIENCY

How Miller Hull's new mass timber library reimagines public space for a growing community and a broader network.

BY RUTH BALEIKO & MATHEW ALBORES
MILLER HULL

The new Redmond Library in Central Oregon is more than a replacement for an aging civic asset. Designed by The Miller Hull Partnership with local partner Steele Associates for Deschutes Public Library (DPL), the two-story, 40,000-square-foot facility represents a new model for 21st-century libraries: deeply rooted in place while systemically coordinated across a growing regional network.

One of six libraries modernized, reconstructed, or newly built under a countywide bond measure, Redmond's library offers a compelling case study in how civic buildings can simultaneously reflect the unique values of a local community and leverage system-wide efficiencies. It asks, and answers, the question: how do you design for one place while designing for many?

A CIVIC HUB SHAPED BY LOCAL VOICES

Redmond is one of the fastest-growing cities in the state, with a changing population that includes families, outdoor recreationists, Spanish-speaking communities, LGBTQ+ youth and many others. DPL engaged in an extensive public outreach effort before design even began, conducting targeted conversations with community groups to understand what people needed from their library, and how those needs could evolve in the future.

The result is a building defined by flexibility, inclusivity and a strong civic identity. The design includes a vibrant children's discovery space, a dedicated teen lounge, a creative maker space, reservable meeting rooms and co-working rooms.

These decisions weren't arbitrary, but were directly informed by the community. Spanish-speaking families, for instance, often use the library as a multigenerational group, so the Spanish-language collection was intentionally located adjacent to the children's area to keep families connected. Additional features support everyday ease and accessibility. A drive-through book drop and staff service window allows patrons to pick up holds and return materials without leaving their vehicles, a convenience especially appreciated by families and older adults, or during Central Oregon's colder months.

Outside, the library introduces a broad civic plaza and a deep, covered porch that serves as an extension of the library's programmatic heart. Positioned adjacent to both the children's and maker spaces, the porch allows activities to spill outdoors in warmer months. Whether it's a storytime, craft fair, or casual gathering, the porch functions as a community living room, a threshold between civic infrastructure and everyday life.

Exposed acoustic dowel-laminated timber (DLT) ceilings and wood columns bring natural warmth and refined acoustics, and a site-specific sculpture by Pacific Northwest artist John Grade is suspended above the central stair.

A MODERN TAKE ON CONTEXT

The building's design carefully balances a forward-looking approach with respect for Redmond's historic downtown. A dark red Iron Stone brick volume to the north references neighboring civic buildings, including City Hall, and ties the new library into its urban context.

Installed in a crisp stacked bond pattern with areas of textured relief around windows, the brick adds depth and shadow while giving the facade a clean, modern character.

To the south, a glass- and metal-clad volume brings daylight deep into the open library spaces. These two volumes are unified beneath a wide, overhanging roof that offers shade and allows for an extensive photovoltaic array, sized to meet 100% of the building's energy needs, making it a net-zero energy designed building.

Inside, exposed acoustic dowel-laminated timber (DLT) ceilings and wood columns bring natural warmth and refined acoustics to the space. Libraries require significant acoustic mitigation, which can obscure exposed

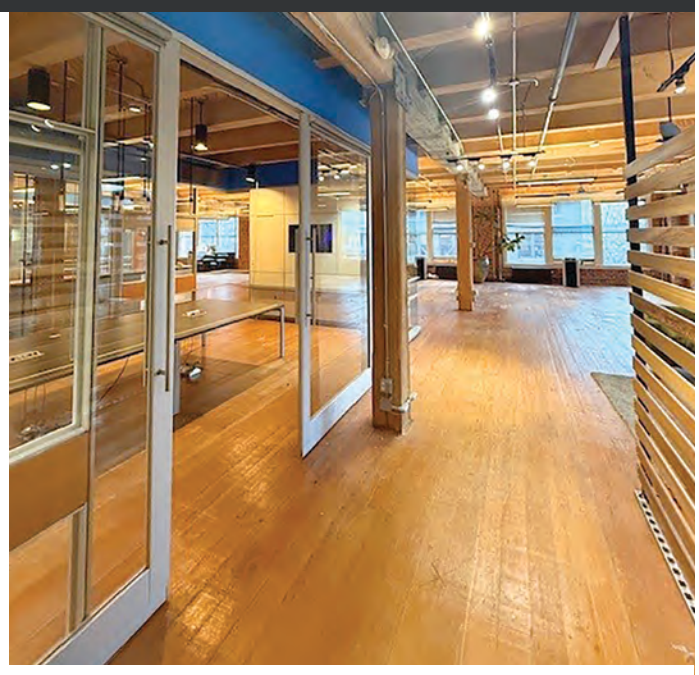
REDMOND LIBRARY — PAGE 20

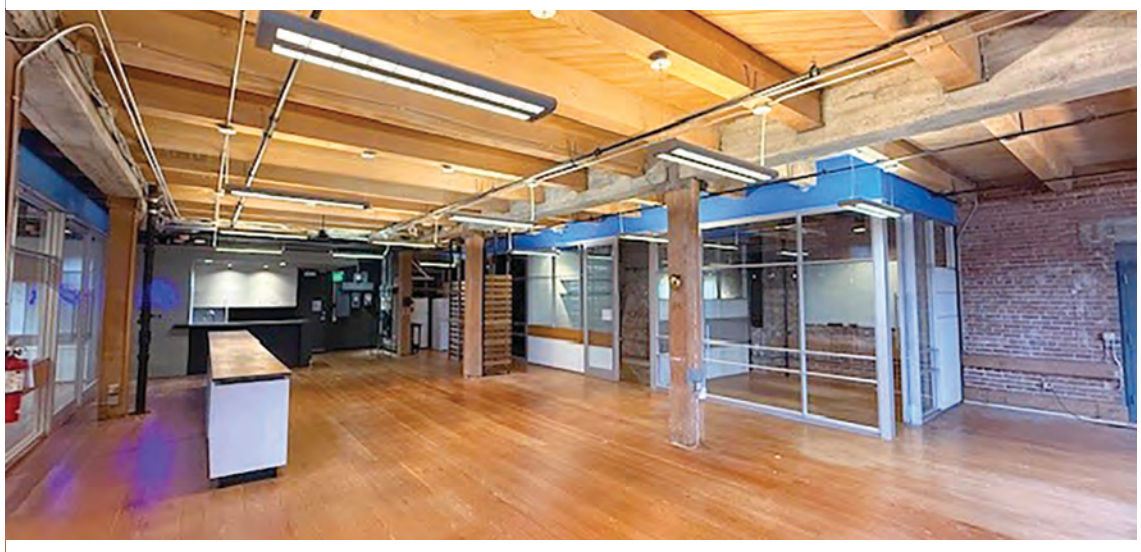
FOR LEASE

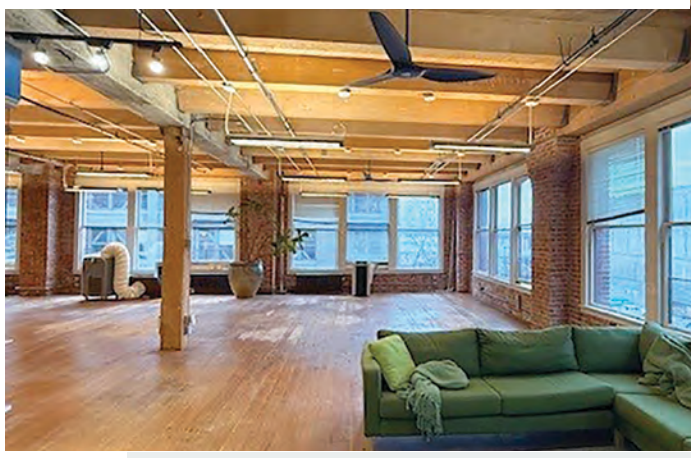
Located across from downtown ferry terminal

Journal of Commerce Building

83 COLUMBIA STREET, SEATTLE, WA







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The new Mary Bridge Children's Hospital welcomes patients and families with a warm, community-facing plaza — a "front porch" designed to connect the hospital to the heart of Tacoma.

RENDERING BY ESA ARCHITECTS

WHERE DESIGN MEETS CARE: THE NEW MARY BRIDGE

From barrier-free play areas that feel like home, to public plazas and pathways that invite connection, the new seven-story hospital is designed to support its young patients as well as their caregivers and community.

After 30 years of sharing space with Tacoma General, Mary Bridge Children's Hospital is stepping into a new home: a purpose-built, seven-story facility that brings inpatient and outpatient care together under one roof. At 320,000 square feet, it's the only Level II Pediatric Trauma Center in Western Washington, and it's designed to serve not just patients, but the families and caregivers who support them.

BY MADDIE OLSON
AHBL

From the beginning, the design team, including AHBL's civil and structural engineers, planners, landscape architects and land surveyors, approached the project with a focus on how infrastructure could support healing.

"We wanted to reflect the place, the care provided and the community the hospital serves," said Sarah Singleton Schroedel, senior landscape architect at AHBL. "We thought of it as expanding areas of care — from quiet, reflective spaces close to the hospital, to more public areas that connect to the broader community."

Separate circulation routes for emergency and main entry traffic were designed to ensure smooth access to care.

XXXX

DESIGNING FOR PEDIATRIC NEEDS

Unlike adult hospitals, pediatric facilities must consider not only the medical needs of children, but also their emotional and developmental experiences. At Mary Bridge, that meant designing spaces that feel safe, familiar and even playful, without compromising on function.

"We wanted it to feel like your backyard, but a really elevated, familiar feeling," said Schroedel. "We used synthetic turf instead of grass for maintenance, but also to bring in that familiarity of home and comfort."

The design also includes quiet seating areas slightly screened from view, giving caregivers and family members a moment of privacy.

"It's not necessarily a chapel," she said, "but just a place where someone can step outside, feel protected, and be with their experience."

CIRCLES OF CARE

The landscape design was grounded in a concept called "Reflections of Care," which envisioned the site in concentric rings. Closest to the hospital are peaceful, semi-private spaces like a rose garden and rooftop garden, designed to be visible from patient rooms and reduce stress.

Further out are flexible areas for families and care-

MARY BRIDGE — PAGE 16

A new garden on the waterfront

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MOUNT VERNON LIBRARY COMMONS SHOWS WHAT'S POSSIBLE FOR SUSTAINABLE CIVIC DESIGN IN SMALL CITIES

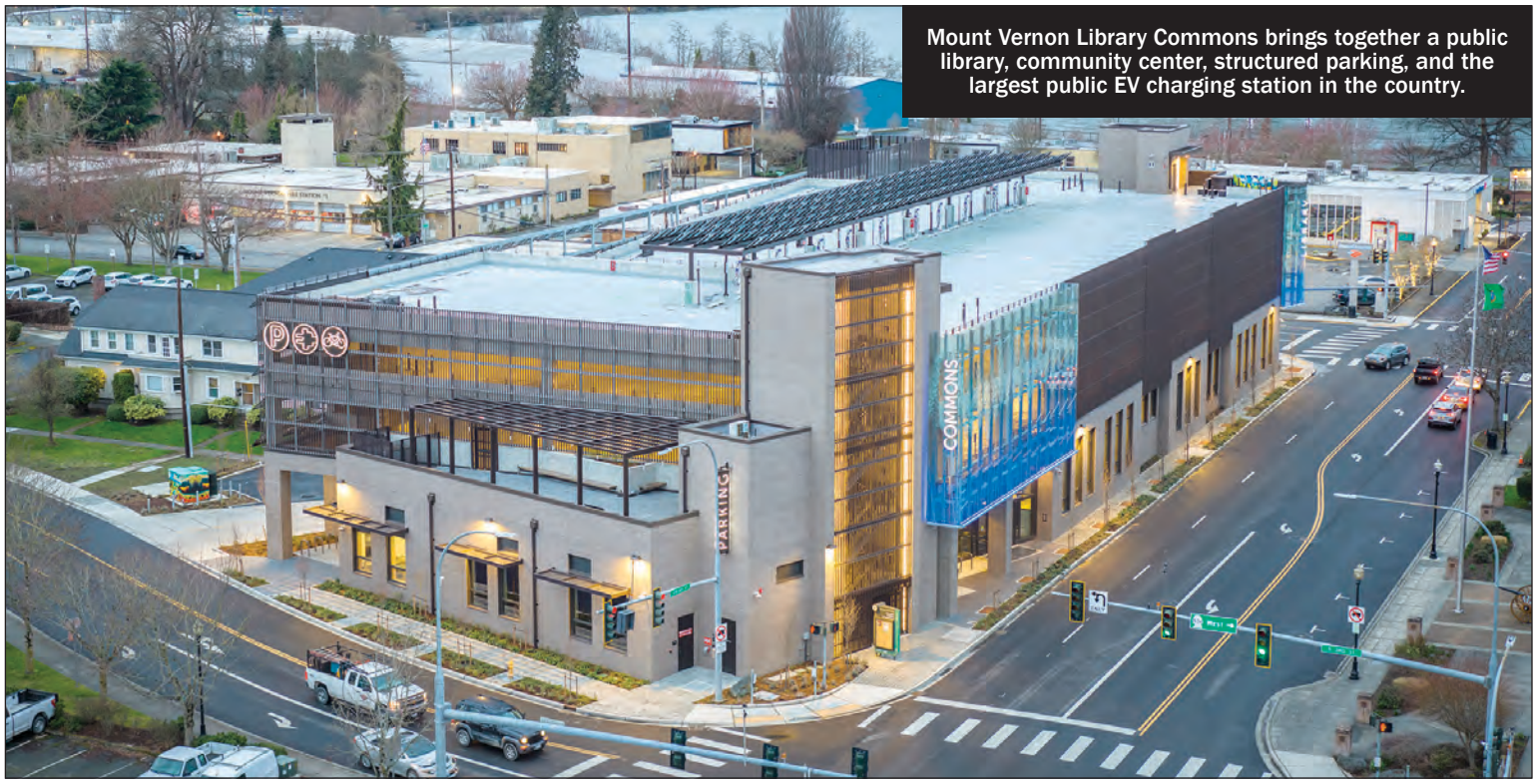
The all-electric, Passive House-certified commons proved high-performance standards can be integrated into the traditional public procurement process.

Nestled in the heart of Skagit Valley, the city of Mount Vernon is home to just over 36,000 people. Known more for its tulip fields and agricultural roots than high-performance design, this small city recently delivered a civic building that sets a new local benchmark for sustainability and performance: the Mount Vernon Library Commons (MVLC).

BY JULIE BLAZEK
HKP

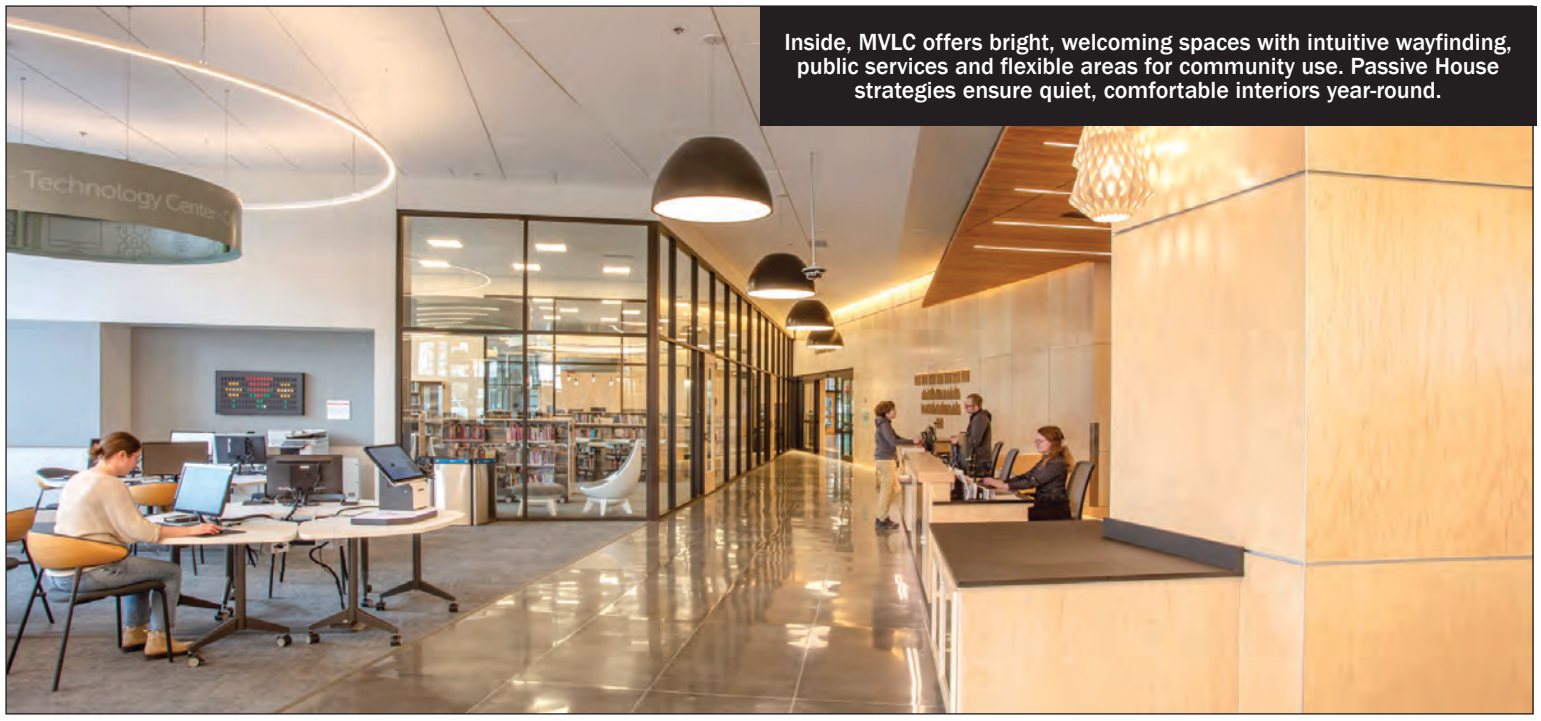
This all-electric facility combines a public library, community center, structured parking and the largest public electric vehicle (EV) charging station in the United States, all while pursuing Passive House certification, a rigorous standard for energy efficiency. Remarkably, the project was completed through a public bidding process and funded by about 20 sources, all without increasing local property taxes.

For architects, engineers, and public-sector leaders, Mount Vernon offers a powerful lesson: size, budget and location don't have to limit what's possible in civic architecture.



Mount Vernon Library Commons brings together a public library, community center, structured parking, and the largest public EV charging station in the country.

PHOTO BY DPDRONES



Inside, MVLC offers bright, welcoming spaces with intuitive wayfinding, public services and flexible areas for community use. Passive House strategies ensure quiet, comfortable interiors year-round.

PHOTO BY LESLIE SCHWARTZ PHOTOGRAPHY

A MULTI-PURPOSE CIVIC BUILDING

MVLC is more than a library. The building includes a community center, flexible event spaces, youth services and a commercial kitchen that supports local food entrepreneurs. Above, three levels of parking provide 268 stalls and 76 EV charging stations, with infrastructure ready for 200, making it the largest public EV charging facility in the nation.

Its location near Skagit Station, a regional transit hub, ties the project into a larger effort to encourage clean, multimodal transportation.

CHALLENGES AND SURPRISES OF PASSIVE HOUSE

Passive House certification requires meticulous attention to detail. The standard focuses on slashing energy demand through airtight construction, thick insulation, high-performance windows and efficient mechanical systems. While gaining traction in the private sector, it remains rare in public projects, especially those built through traditional low-bid processes.

Achieving Passive House on a publicly bid civic building meant working with construction crews unfamiliar with the standard. There was a learning curve, but with well-prepared contract documents, clear communication, and consistent site coordination, the team met the challenge. Once the crews understood the importance of eliminating thermal bridges, fully sealing penetrations, and following the insulation strategy, they became fully engaged and committed to getting it right.

The result is an extremely energy-efficient envelope that not only reduces energy costs year after year but also creates comfortable spaces throughout, even right next to windows. It also delivers clean, filtered air and exceptional acoustic performance that quiets the nearby street and train noise.

The results speak for themselves: the building's energy use intensity (EUI) is about 12 — far below Washington

MOUNT VERNON — PAGE 19

BAYLEY

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Renton Central Maintenance Facility Renton, WA
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Monroe Civic Center Monroe, WA
RENOVATION | $14 MILLION | 22,000 SF

Kent East Hill Operations Center Kent, WA
NEW CONSTRUCTION | $28 MILLION | 83,400 SF

RECONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

How Snohomish County revived a coastal park through engineering, ecology and civic vision.

BY ANNA SPOONER & TRACY DRURY
ANCHOR QEA

The first stream mouth restoration along Puget Sound, Meadowdale Beach Park sets a precedent for balancing public access with salmon habitat, infrastructure and safety.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANCHOR QEA

Located in a steep ravine on the north end of Edmonds in Snohomish County, Meadowdale Beach Park has long been a popular public access point to Puget Sound.

But for decades, visitors could only reach the beach by ducking through a narrow six-foot box culvert beneath the BNSF Railway, a route that was often flooded, choked with sediment and seasonally impassable. Some park-goers began crossing the rails, raising serious safety concerns for the public and the railroad.

This same culvert also blocked fish passage, cutting off juvenile salmon from a critical estuarine transition zone.

Today, Meadowdale Beach Park is a very different place.

Completed in 2023, the Meadowdale Beach Park and Estuary Restoration project replaced the culvert with a 130-foot railroad bridge, restored a pocket estuary and introduced a fully ADA-compliant trail leading to the beach. The result is a civic and ecological success that is influencing shoreline infrastructure thinking across the region.

A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND CIVIC RESTORATION

Led by Snohomish County Parks and Recreation—in collaboration with the Tulalip Tribes, BNSF railroad and other project partners—this is the first pocket estuary restoration along BNSF's 46-mile shoreline corridor between Everett and Seattle. It removed a section of railroad embankment and replaced it with a five-span bridge, reconnecting Lunds Gulch Creek with Puget Sound and reintroducing tidal and sediment processes vital to estuarine function.

It is also Puget Sound's first full restoration completed beneath an active railway line. While other projects adjacent to existing trestles have enhanced shoreline and fish habitat, Meadowdale is unique in restoring a tidal estuary by removing a constrained culvert and constructing a new bridge along the active railroad's mainline.

By pairing infrastructure upgrades with habitat restoration and public access, Meadowdale provides a replicable model of civic-minded ecological engineering. This integrated thinking among engineers, landscape architects, biologists and planners was central to the project's success.

POCKET ESTUARIES: TINY HAVENS, BIG IMPACT

While the estuary at Meadowdale covers just 1.3 acres, it provides tremendous value to the threatened Chinook salmon, the preferred prey of Southern Resident orcas. Chinook need safe, brackish water areas to transition physiologically from freshwater to saltwater, and pocket estuaries like Meadowdale serve as vital rearing and resting zones along their journey to the ocean.

Prior to the restoration, the constrained channel upstream of the culvert concentrated flows and offered no refuge for fish migrating up Lunds Gulch Creek. During rain events, high-velocity water pooled at the culvert outlet, creating a steeply graded channel that was difficult for fish to ascend.

An ADA-compliant pathway under the new railway bridge provides safer access to the beach, free of the deposited sediments and flood waters that previously impacted the constricted underpass.

The urgency of restoring these habitats became especially clear in the wake of findings that confirm that not all juvenile salmonids reside in their native estuaries; some travel long distances and pop in and out of these small pocket estuaries.

This underscores the conclusion that restoring large river mouths alone is not enough. A network of smaller pocket estuaries is needed along Puget Sound to increase salmon survivability.

Meadowdale is now one of those essential waypoints, and as a result, projects of similar scope and size are in discussion and design along Puget Sound's eastern shoreline.

ENGINEERING AND ECOLOGY IN CONCERT

The Meadowdale site presented an array of technical challenges. Situated in a steep ravine, the park lies within a designated landslide hazard area. The old access road was too narrow and

A new bridge spanning Lunds Gulch Creek connects visitors to the salmon-bearing creek and pocket estuary.

unstable for heavy equipment, and the park's natural constraints and surrounding neighborhood limited staging space. The project also took shape as live-track railroad operations continued, with as many as 50 trains passing daily.

To maintain railroad operations during construction, the team drove bridge foundation piles through the old embankment with minimal disruption, resulting in only two 24-hour closures during bridge installation. Track monitoring measures, including the use of prisms, provided rail safety throughout construction.

At the park entrance, a pile wall now stabilizes the access road, with lightweight foamed glass aggregate used as backfill to reduce loading on the slope. Diamond Pier foundations support the timber boardwalk to minimize wetland impacts, while salvaged large wood helped restore complexity to the creek and estuary.

These elements allowed the new design to reestablish natural sediment transport and ecosystem processes that had been constrained since the railroad was built over a century ago. Historical maps combined with hydrodynamic modeling of existing and proposed conditions informed the channel's realignment to promote long-term resilience under changing tidal and stream flow conditions.

Delivered more than $1 million under budget, the approximately $15.4 million project earned strong community support through intentional, multilingual engagement that began early and continued through construction.

PUBLIC ACCESS REIMAGINED

Meadowdale Beach Park is now one of the most inclusive natural shorelines in the region. The gently sloped ADA pathway winds through forested areas, across a new pedestrian bridge and under the trestle. It concludes at a beachfront plaza with environmental signage and seasonal beach mats that extend wheelchair access onto the sand.

The restored park preserves a portion of the existing lawn, improves stormwater drainage and adds a picnic shelter, while upgrading and enclosing portable toilets. A long-standing county master plan, which seeks to balance ecological goals with civic amenities, guided these enhancements.

The project also considered long-term operations and safety. Replacing the culvert with a bridge eliminates the need for frequent sediment removal, a costly and habitat-disrupting effort. In addition, the underpass design and enhanced security fencing discourages trespassing across the railway, significantly improving public safety.

The park now serves as a living classroom. Volunteer groups, including students and staff from the Meadowdale School District, are participating in salmon monitoring efforts alongside the Tulalip Tribes as part of Snohomish County's long-term restoration monitoring plan. The site invites the public to witness tidal processes, observe fish migration and engage in environmental education, experiences rarely available in such an accessible, urban-adjacent setting.

A CIVIC MODEL WITH STAYING POWER

As Puget Sound communities grapple with urban growth, climate adaptation and declining fish populations, Meadowdale demonstrates that infrastructure doesn't always have to come at the expense of ecology or public use. When designed thoughtfully, it can serve all three.

Salmon returned to the site immediately after the culvert was removed and the trestle completed, and a ten-year post-project monitoring program is now underway to track sediment movement, habitat evolution and fish use. Continued data collec-

RECONNECTING — PAGE 16

FROM INDUSTRIAL PAST TO CIVIC FUTURE: SPOKANE COUNTY'S NEW OPERATIONS CENTER

How a collaborative design-build effort transformed a polluted site and unified scattered departments – ahead of schedule, under budget, and built to last.

BY STEVEN CLARK, ROB DECKER AND KYLE TWOHIG
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

In Spokane County, a once environmentally burdened industrial site now features a consolidated county operations center offering a model for civic transformation. The county's first progressive design-build project, its success demonstrates a 'proof of concept' for efficient use of public resources.

For decades, county operations were scattered across several locations with outdated facilities. This included a site cluttered with obsolete structures, inefficient layouts, and the presence of asbestos from a previous industrial enterprise. But abandoning the site wasn't an option, and the county pursued a sustainable redevelopment option.

Now, a new purpose-built, environmentally responsible, and future-ready operations center on 2.8 acres of remediated land provides a clean, efficient and well-coordinated county asset. Through the Progressive Design-Build (PDB) approach, a new campus of buildings was delivered two months ahead of schedule and $250,000 under budget — representing outstanding success in delivery and setting a benchmark for strategic, collaborative public works projects.

Before the transformation, Spokane County's essential departments — such as the Bridge Crew, Signal Shop, Construction Inspection and the Materials Lab — worked out of deteriorating buildings that had outlived their mechanical and structural lifespans. Daily operations were hampered by gaps in communication and logistical inefficiencies, with improvements limited by poor environmental conditions. Recognizing the limitations, the county partnered with Garco Construction and Integrus Architecture through a Progressive Design-Build (PDB) model. This approach enabled the team to work closely from day one to align goals, solve problems collaboratively, and prioritize continuity of service throughout project execution to creation of something remarkable and built to last.

Equipment bays are sited for easy access and safety.

IMAGES COURTESY OF INTEGRUS

PHASED SOLUTIONS AND SMART DESIGN

Following initial discussions and research, the collaborative design-build team developed three conceptual directions for consideration: the baseline "do nothing" reuse scenario, a monolithic structure, and the ultimately selected hybrid solution thoughtfully combining new construction in context of existing structures. It placed a new 16,000-square-foot shop and office building on the site along with an 11,500-square-foot pre-engineered storage facility. These structures combined previously dispersed departments into a centralized, flexible campus designed for operations, training, logistics, and equipment storage.

Phased demolition and infrastructure installations allowed construction to proceed while county services remained active elsewhere on the site. Buildings were only decommissioned once their replacements were ready. The county never stopped working — even as its workplace evolved around it.

ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION WITHOUT DISRUPTION

The Spokane County Operations Center isn't just about consolidation and modernization — it represents a successful example of environmental reclamation. It also provides additional security and operational enhancements for both the Ops and Fleet complexes. Once home to an early 20th-century asbestos manufacturing plant, the land and buildings held environmental risks that weren't visible — but that could not be ignored.

While the site had remained in active use by county departments for years, construction risked disturbing those materials unless handled with precision. Rather than opting for costly and disruptive full-scale soil removal, the county and its design-build team chose to contain the hazard while reclaiming the land with a remediation strategy focused on encapsulation. Through a carefully phased approach, known areas of concern were addressed directly, while the broader site was shaped to shield and stabilize what lay beneath.

Buildings flagged with asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) were selectively abated and demolished under strict environmental protocols. In zones with contaminated soils, the team adjusted grading to avoid deep cuts and ensured utility work remained shallow enough to avoid disturbing contaminated layers. Surfaces were then sealed under new asphalt, concrete, or fill soil in landscaped areas. The contaminated soils remain safely buried and inert— no longer a threat or a barrier to progress.

A detailed level of coordination helped the team avoid surprises and maintain a tight timeline. The team ensured that safety, sequencing, and regulatory compliance remained central throughout — meeting the standards of Washington's Department of Ecology while keeping the project on track. This precision engineering turned a once-dangerous industrial parcel into a safe and usable civic resource.

OPERATIONAL SYNERGY BY DESIGN

Relocating critical departments in close proximity with adjacencies, refined through design workshops and site logistics studies, dramatically improved operational coordination.

An added advantage came

from what didn't move: Spokane County's fleet maintenance facility remained across the street. For the first time, departments that collaborated frequently were working in physical proximity, facilitating seamless daily interactions between field crews, dispatch, and equipment managers.

"Every element of the site layout was reviewed through the lens of operations," said Kyle Twohig, Senior Director of Public Works, Spokane County Operations. "While change for staff is always disruptive and challenging, ultimate buy-in and satisfaction with the completed project came from being engaged in the process and driving decisions up from the crews to the project management team."

This intentional planning — supported by Building Information Modeling (BIM) and continuous design workshops — allowed for effective adjacencies, functional workflow zoning, and space that can evolve as department needs change. Building finishes and materials were chosen not just for durability, but for long-term adaptability.

MEASURABLE RESULTS, TANGIBLE BENEFITS

The Spokane County Operations Center project achieved several impressive outcomes:

- **Delivery:** Completed two months ahead of schedule
- **Budget**: Finished project $250,000 under the original cost with all owner betterments taken
- **Continuity**: No interruption to county services during construction
- **Environmental**: Contaminated soils contained and rendered inert
- **Functionality**: Previously scattered teams now consolidated into a single, efficient hub

These results came from rigorous planning, collaboration and a commitment to public value at every step.

LESSONS IN CIVIC INNOVATION

The Spokane County Operations Center project offers several key takeaways for future public infrastructure initiatives:

- **Design-build results grow with experience**

This wasn't the county's first vertical D/B project — but it was one of the most complex. It showcased the evolving sophistication of Spokane County's capital project strategy and a willingness to fully engage as design partners for real-time problem-solving, improving both outcomes and relationships.

- **Phased construction protects continuity**

Smart sequencing of demolition, utility cutovers, and new construction allowed staff to remain onsite throughout the project, avoiding expensive relocation costs and ensuring continuity of critical operations and services.

- **Design supports more than space**

From acoustics to adjacencies, and from daylighting to durable finishes, the team designed for workflow, workforce comfort and long-term adaptability. "Soft walls" and generalized zones make future reconfiguration simple and cost-effective.

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RECONNECTING

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tion will help drive similar efforts in the region and refine future pocket estuary designs.

Projects like this are difficult. They require substantial coordination across agencies, including funding from state, local and federal grants, as well as a shared commitment to working within the constraints of both landscape and infrastructure. But they are certainly worth the effort.

The Meadowdale Beach Park and Estuary Restoration project illustrates that integrating public access, environmental restoration and infrastructure resilience is not just possible—it's imperative. Meadowdale reconnects more than just a creek to the Sound; it reconnects people to place, engineering to ecology, and civic design to long-term public good.

The project's blend of ecological restoration, civic infrastructure and public engagement earned it the prestigious National Recreation and Park Association Innovation in Conservation Award, the first Washington state project to claim this honor. It also won the VISION 2050 Award from the Puget Sound Regional Council, and was recognized by the American Council of Engineering Companies, Washington Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, American Society of Civil Engineers and Construction Management Association of America.

Anna Spooner is a principal landscape architect and Tracy Drury is a principal engineer at Anchor QEA, the project's prime engineering, restoration, and construction management lead.

MARY BRIDGE

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givers including places to sit, reflect or let children play. And at the outer edge, the design opens to the public with plazas and pathways that invite community connection.

"We know that even a view of green space can improve overall health outcomes," said Schroedel. "So, we were thinking of both the child, the patient and their support networks."

CIVIL DESIGN THAT BALANCES COMPLEXITY, COMFORT

On the civil side, the challenges were significant.

"Probably the biggest complexity is that a hospital campus has a lot of existing and new utilities and infrastructure," said David Nason, a civil principal at AHBL. "In addition to the typical utilities such as water and sewer, we also had to accommodate medical gases and emergency power lines. So, there was a lot of utility coordination required."

Site circulation was another key focus.

"The emergency department drop-off is located off Division Street, and the main front entry is off Martin Luther King Jr. Way," Nason explained. "We kept those two traffic streams from conflicting by separating them."

KEEPING IT LOCAL

The project also includes two new precast concrete parking garages, a much-needed addition to a campus where parking has long been a challenge. The garages were fabricated locally at Concrete Tech in Tacoma, using precast double tees, columns, beams and non-structural wall panels. This approach was not only more cost-effective and efficient than conventional cast-in-place construction, but also supported the local economy.

"Parking over in that area is terrible," said Drew McEachern, the structural engineer on the project. "So, adding more capacity to support the staff and visitors is the main goal."

PERMITTING, PHASING AND PARTNERSHIP

Building a new hospital in the middle of an active medical campus while keeping existing facilities operating required careful planning.

"We needed to keep Tacoma General, the existing Mary Bridge and the CHC West building active and operating," said Nason. "That meant creating a complex phasing plan with more detail than usual."

Permitting was another major effort.

"There was a lot of coordination with the city of Tacoma," Nason said. "There was open conversation and discussion. The project required multiple land use, site and building permits.

A SPACE THAT FEELS LIKE HOME

For Schroedel, the most meaningful part of the project was designing spaces that feel personal.

"As a kid growing up, my brother had leukemia and we were in hospitals a lot," she said. "I asked my mom what she would have needed, and she said, 'A place to cry that wasn't behind the dumpsters.'"

That memory shaped the design. From barrier-free play areas that feel like home, to quiet corners where family members can step away and breathe, the landscape is built to support the full emotional spectrum of pediatric care.

ROOTED IN TACOMA, BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

Mary Bridge's new home is deeply connected to its city. The design team worked with the Family Advisory Committee, explored partnerships for farmers markets and therapy animal programs, and created a public-facing plaza along MLK Jr. Way that acts as a "front porch" to the hospital.

"The broader community is really deeply involved in Mary Bridge," said Schroedel. "From the beginning, leadership shared how involved the community already was through programs, partnerships and support."

And while the building is new, the mission is not.

"We're just proud to be a part of the Mary Bridge Hospital project team," said Nason. "It provides such an important service to the community. To know that's where our friends and neighbors are taking their children when they're very ill or hurt — it just feels amazing to be a part of the team that is providing a place for healing and treatment."

Maddie Olson is a marketing coordinator at AHBL, where she specializes in A/E content development and proposal coordination.

Lynnwood Community Justice Center and Crisis Care Center, Lynnwood, WA

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MOUNT VERNON

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state's code maximum of 47 — and it passed blower door testing at four times better than code.

CUTTING CARBON FROM THE GROUND UP

The building's size and program meant concrete was the best structural material, but concrete's production is a major source of carbon emissions worldwide. The team made it a priority to reduce this impact.

Working closely with suppliers, the project team developed concrete mixes that replaced a portion of the cement content with lower-carbon alternatives such as fly ash, slag, and limestone, and by increasing the cure time. Concrete made up 55% of the building's volume, and the team set an ambitious goal to reduce its Global Warming Potential (GWP) by 30–35%.

In the end, the project achieved a 41% reduction in GWP for the concrete work compared to typical construction. Just as importantly, the process helped raise awareness among trades and suppliers about the critical role materials play in reducing carbon emissions.

FUNDING WITHOUT RAISING TAXES

Financing a project of this scale and sustainability standard can be a hurdle for small cities, but Mount Vernon found a way. The $61 million project was funded through approximately 20 sources, including a $12.5 million grant from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan, the first transit-oriented development in the country to receive such a loan.

Importantly, the city achieved all this without raising local property taxes, easing concerns about community affordability while making a long-term investment in resilience and equity.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OTHER PUBLIC PROJECTS

Mount Vernon shows that rural and smaller communities can lead on sustainability. The key was education, coordination and a willingness to push boundaries, even when that means more upfront effort.

By targeting Passive House certification through public bidding, the project demonstrated that these high-performance standards can be integrated into the traditional public procurement process. This creates a roadmap for other public agencies that want to build better buildings without relying on private developers or design-build approaches.

The project also highlights the importance of long-term thinking. While upfront costs increased by only about 3%, the resulting operational savings, improved comfort, and resilience to climate impacts make the investment worthwhile over the building's lifetime.

A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY AND CLIMATE

Today, Mount Vernon Library Commons is already a vital community hub. It offers spaces where people can learn, gather, and access services in a healthy and inviting environment. The commercial kitchen hosts community classes and supports local entrepreneurs, while the parking garage and EV infrastructure encourage sustainable transportation.

The building's Passive House features also increase resilience during extreme weather and wildfire smoke events, ensuring the facility remains a safe haven when the community needs it most.

Julie Blazek is a Partner at HKP whose design work has received numerous awards from AIA Northwest Washington and national recognition from the National Association of Home Builders.

REDMOND LIBRARY

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timber. By selecting acoustic DLT, the design team preserved the mass timber aesthetic while meeting the library's specific sound performance needs.

A SYSTEM-WIDE STRATEGY

While the new Redmond Library is tailored to its local context, it is also part of a broader, county-wide initiative to modernize Deschutes Public Library's entire network. Miller Hull, in partnership with Steele Associates, has led the design of six library projects across Deschutes County — including renovations, a replacement, and one entirely new library—under a once-in-a-generation bond measure.

Managing multiple concurrent projects across the system allowed the design team to implement a consistent approach to building controls and specifications. This shared protocol allows maintenance staff to work efficiently across branches and manage systems from a centralized platform.

At Redmond, this system-level thinking is most visible in the automated materials handling system used to sort and process returned items. While such equipment is often hidden from public view, here it is intentionally exposed near the book return, offering visitors a peek into how the library operates. It's both a functional element and an engaging design moment, bringing transparency and curiosity into the patron experience. Staff areas were also designed with consistency in mind, creating shared protocols and layouts that ease transitions for employees who may rotate between branches. This standardized approach improves flexibility and reduces training time, helping the system function more like a connected network than a collection of disparate buildings.

DESIGNED TO GROW WITH ITS COMMUNITY

The Redmond Library reflects a broader transformation in how libraries serve their communities. Gone are the days of single-purpose rooms and fixed shelving. Today's library must be able to host a robotics workshop one day and a civic planning meeting the next. Miller Hull responded to this need by designing large, unobstructed interior volumes with mobile shelving and reconfigurable furniture.

The maker space supports a wide range of programs—from sewing and craft projects to 3D printing—while the adjacent creative labs offer quieter, tech-ready environments suitable for podcasting or focused study.

Designed in collaboration with Plus and Greater Than, the children's discovery space invites curiosity and belonging through interactive elements, playful forms and imaginative portals to other worlds.

PHOTOS BY LARA SWIMMER

Public art also plays a central role in shaping the visitor experience. Suspended above the central stair is a site-specific sculpture by Pacific Northwest artist John Grade.

Inspired by the cellular structure of local sagebrush and the obsidian flows of the nearby Newberry Caldera, the piece links Redmond's natural landscape and complements the flow of the library's interior. Positioned above the main staircase leading to the adult collection, the sculpture provides a thoughtful focal point for visitors as they move through the space.

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

The Redmond Library goes beyond replacing a building; it redefines civic space for a growing community and balances local character with system-wide efficiency, combining tailored experiences with standardized infrastructure.

As communities invest in public facilities, Redmond serves as a practical example of how libraries can function, the diverse communities they serve, and how they adapt over time.

Ruth Baleiko is a partner at The Miller Hull Partnership. Mathew Albores is a principal at The Miller Hull Partnership.

OPERATIONS CENTER

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• Hazmat doesn't mean halt

Even with a complex environmental history, a tailored remediation plan made full redevelopment not only possible, but responsible and resilient. With the right strategy, even contaminated sites can be safely reused and transformed into community assets.

A BLUEPRINT FOR PUBLIC PROJECTS

The Spokane County Operations Center represents civic reinvestment, strategic coordination, and that progressive project delivery facilitates significant transformation when design and construction teams work together as collaborators from the start. The county has now used this model for numerous projects.

More than a replacement facility, it's a symbol that with collaborative planning, smart design, and a willingness to engage with complexity, even the most daunting legacy public infrastructure sites can be reclaimed to provide communities with safer, more efficient futures through successful public investment and environmental renewal.

Steven Clark is an associate principal and design manager focused on civic projects at Integrus Architecture in Spokane. Rob Decker is vice president of Commercial projects at Garco Construction. Kyle Twohig is senior director of Spokane County's Public Works Department.

Oversize enclosed spaces allow for large equipment.

IMAGES COURTESY OF INTEGRUS