



21st

CENTURY

CARE

Design excellence in service of public
health in New York City

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The city of New York is using design excellence as part of its plan to address the most challenging urban public health issues of the 21st century. As part of Take Care New York, the city's first comprehensive public health strategy, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is updating a number of historic architecturally significant public health clinics to increase use of the free health education, screening and treatment services and reduce the incidence of chronic diseases and health disparities citywide.



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1. An interlocking "L" of white epoxy walls, indirect lighting and natural materials express state-of-the-art care in a warm and reassuring environment at the Central Harlem Health Center. 2. At the Chelsea Health Center undulating wood ceilings and natural finish floors will be combined with hi-tech materials to evoke a 21st century "medical pavilion in a park." 3. A luminous central building lobby welcomes patients at the Central Harlem Health Center.



In the early decades of the 20th century, the department was recognized as a leader in the global public health movement and was known for innovation in successfully addressing the most challenging urban health problems of that time, including tuberculosis, syphilis and infant mortality. As part of this effort, some of the most esteemed architects of the time were engaged in the 1930s through the New Deal Work Progress Administration to design nine neighborhood public health clinics that would serve medically underserved neighborhoods throughout the city. These landmark quality buildings have been in use by the department ever since.

Now outdated and in substantial disrepair, the clinics are not inviting to the community or appropriate for delivering state-of-the-art medical care.

"These clinics perform an important role in treating people with communicable diseases," said Scottie Owens-Leaks, former deputy commissioner of health who was responsible for the oversight and maintenance of these facilities. "But when the infected person is embarrassed by an STD or other infection or is reluctant to seek help, it doesn't help if the clinic feels unwelcoming and is difficult to navigate."



4. The main light-filled waiting and education space links the counseling and treatment areas at the Central Harlem Health Center. 5. Plan of the Harlem Center with existing central core.

LIGHTHOUSES TO THE COMMUNITY

Design excellence is once again integral to New York City's public health strategies. After completing an evaluation of its real estate holdings, the department decided to renovate a number of the historic clinics to create 21st century "lighthouses to the community." In other words, open, welcoming and highly functional medical facilities that will have stronger presences in medically underserved neighborhoods and more valuable to the department's initiatives to reduce the incidence of infectious and chronic diseases, especially HIV and AIDS. The design challenge was to create larger, state-of-the-art 21st century medical facilities within the fixed

footprints of historic early 20th century buildings with centrally located cores and shafts and low floor-to-floor heights.

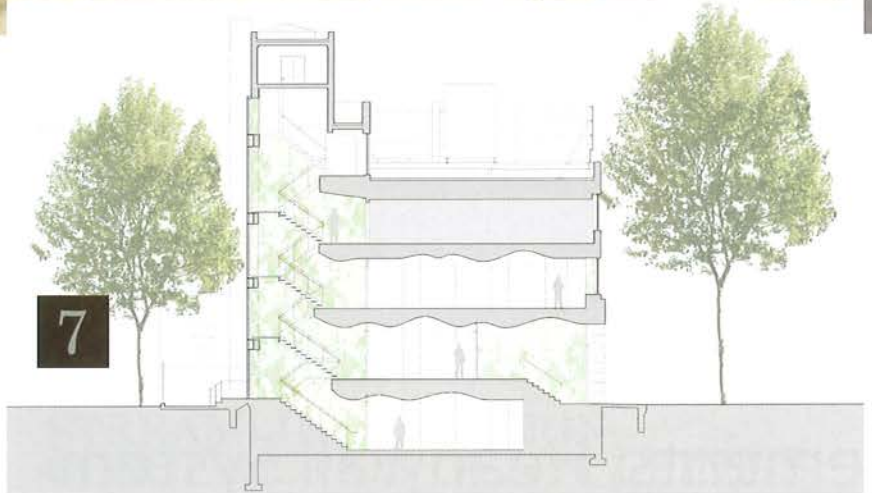
Architectural design was commissioned through Mayor Michael Bloomberg's new Design Excellence Initiative. Similar to the Federal GSA's Design Excellence Program, the NYC Department of Design and Construction selected a small group of architectural firms based solely upon design quality. The pre-selected firms now compete among themselves solely upon design approach for new projects for municipal agencies, such as libraries, firehouses, cultural facilities and healthcare facilities. Through this program, Stephen Yablon Architect, or SYA, was selected to renovate a number of the historic public health clinics.



ADDRESSING URBAN HEALTH CHALLENGES

The first project was the exterior restoration and interior gut renovation of the landmark-quality McKim, Mead and White Central Harlem Health Center, built in a Federal Reserve style in 1935. Community use of the existing facility had declined substantially in recent years due to its outdated, dilapidated and uninviting appearance. The department's goal for the first phase of the project was to create a new Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic on the first floor that would be welcoming and reassuring to the community. The program included waiting and health education spaces, evaluation and counseling offices, exam rooms, labs and a new central building lobby.

Planning a patient-friendly yet efficient STD clinic, with a multi-step visit protocol for screening, counseling and treatment, was complicated by a central building lobby and core that almost completely divided the floor, and, the clinic's requirement for a simple plan that would permit self-directed patient wayfinding. Other project challenges included limited access to natural light and a non-ADA compliant grand original main building entrance.



6. Public circulation and space at the Chelsea District Health Center will have tiled perimeter "park walls" that evoke the surrounding sycamore trees. 7. Section showing the new glass-enclosed stair for the Chelsea Center that will create expansive park views and activate the building.

Counseling and treatment areas were placed on either side of the lobby with a main connecting waiting/education, triage and main public circulation spine along the back. Materials and lighting were used to create a welcoming and reassuring environment for patients.

"The design was intended to convey that the city of New York provides state-of-the-art medical care and warm personalized service to all patients regardless of income," said Stephen Yablon, AIA, principal of Stephen Yablon Architect. "These two qualities were evoked by a section of interlocking "Ls" of high tech and warm materials, including epoxy

walls, bamboo wall panels and porcelain floors. This section, extruded throughout the public circulation, is indirectly lit and aids in patient orientation."

Orientation is further enhanced by backlit resin panels along the rear connecting spine. The resin incorporates colorful beaded mesh made by African women who have been affected by HIV and AIDS. The new main building lobby includes a skylight-like luminous ceiling. The entire project complies with NYC's High Performance Guidelines, with sustainable materials used throughout.

The high level of design and attention to light and materials is a source

of staff and community pride and has increased its use by the community. In 2010, the project won the annual Contract Magazine Healthcare Environment Award in the Health and Fitness category, a Boston Society of Architects Healthcare Facilities Design Excellence Award and an IES Illumination Award of Merit.

SYA is currently assisting the department with the \$14M gut renovation of the three-story, 28,000- square-foot Chelsea District Health Center. Designed in a restrained Art Deco style in 1938 by Carl F. Grieshaber, the landmark-quality clinic building is located in Chelsea Park in Manhattan and includes STD, chest, dental and general health clinics. When originally built, the facility was named the Leona Baumgartner Health Center after the city's first female health commissioner who, at that time, called the new public health clinics the "world's largest outpatient department." Subsequent renovations included replacement of the original windows, lackluster interior renovations and installation of a massive amount of highly visible HVAC equipment on the roof.

The project scope includes exterior restoration, gut renovation of the interior, a dramatic new stair and a perforated Corian roof screen that will hide the HVAC equipment from street views. The department will operate the nation's largest STD clinic as well as general health, chest and immunization clinics in the building when it is completed in 2012. As with the first project, the renovation of this historic building involved successfully accommodating larger new clinics and infrastructure on small floor plates with low floor-to-floor heights and centrally located vertical circulation and shafts.

Undulating curved wood ceilings and natural finish floors will be combined with



8. Elevation of the restored and renovated Chelsea District Health Center.

hi-tech materials to evoke a 21st century "medical pavilion in a park." Circulation and waiting areas will be located along the perimeter and have "park walls" clad in a tile pattern evocative of the bark of the surrounding sycamore trees. A new glass-walled stair will create expansive park views and activate the building. This project is targeted for LEED Gold.

These updated 20th century historic facilities will once again be valuable

public assets for successfully addressing urban health challenges in New York City. The facilities will be welcoming and open to the communities they serve, and support the city's commitment to reduce health disparities and assure a better quality of life for all New Yorkers.

"These are now very service-oriented, inviting facilities," said David Burney, FAIA, the NYC commissioner of the Department of Design and Construction. "The clinic staff has been very enthusiastic, and people feel comfortable coming to them. We've accomplished a complete turnaround." ■

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STREAMLINING DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION OF NYC CLINICS

Stephen Yablon Architect was also commissioned by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to create its new Design Guidelines for Ambulatory Health Care Clinics. Developed in collaboration with James C. Snyder, AIA, Medical Planning LLC and the Department's clinical staff, the guidelines are intended to standardize the design of clinics

citywide, while still allowing for architectural creativity. In addition, the guidelines result in a more streamlined, faster and less-costly design and construction process. The guidelines include prototypical programs, patient flow and adjacency requirements, space standards for all room types, and materials and systems standards for the department's chest, dental,

general health, immunization and sexually transmitted disease clinics. The guidelines assure all NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene clinics will be welcoming and well-used by the communities, conducive to delivering the highest quality of care, more efficient to build and operate and in compliance with extensive applicable regulations.