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Finegold Alexander Architects' Lowell Justice Ctr. wins BSA award

March 18, 2022 - Construction Design & Engineering



Lowell, MA According to Finegold Alexander Architects, the design for the Lowell Justice Center received the 2021 Boston Society of Architecture (BSA) Design Award for Accessible Design. The Lowell Justice Center is a 265,000 s/f, \$146 million new construction building that opened its doors in March 2020. The modern courthouse is located on a 3.2-acre site at the northern edge of the Hamilton Canal District, within the Lowell National Historic Park.

With the project client's (Division of Capital Asset Management and Office of Court Management)

commitment to accessibility, Finegold Alexander and the entire project team delivered on these criteria designing a universally accessible building with all points accessible via the same path. Based on the site topography, this required working with landscape architects Copley Wolff Design Group to design sloped walks traversing a 22-foot grade change across the site leading to a fully accessible plaza and entry. This universally accessible concept continues throughout the building with ample circulation space, multiple elevators, accessible raised judge's benches and witness stands, accessible detention areas, abundant wheelchair spaces with shoulder-to-shoulder companion seating in the courtrooms, jury pool and public lobbies, and audio and visual technology. Working with Coco Raynes Associates, wayfinding signs throughout the building feature multiple languages – English, Spanish, Portuguese, Khmer, and Braille – to reflect the diverse community of the city. Construction was led by Dimeo Construction Company, whose attention to detail made each feature possible within the courthouse.

The BSA jury selected the Lowell Justice Center as a recipient of the Accessible Design Award due to Finegold Alexander's clear attention to physical and sensory comfort execution. The jury found the use of daylighting throughout the building, even in the highest stress-inducing areas, as an attractive feature. The material selection, public transportation hubs, and cultural gestures made in the welcoming two-story art glass installation that references the diverse communities of Lowell demonstrate Finegold Alexander's commitment to accessibility while designing the courthouse. The jury noticed a strong effort for inclusivity, giving the impression that it is every visitor's right to use this space.

The final push to award The Lowell Justice Center the BSA Accessibility Design Award came from the building's LEED Platinum status. The Lowell Justice Center is the first LEED Platinum certified courthouse in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as the first state courthouse to achieve this certification in the United States.

"We are excited to see Finegold Alexander, our entire project team and Lowell Justice Center be recognized for its tremendous effort in providing an accessible civic space for all," said Jeffrey J. Garriga, Principal at Finegold Alexander. "We worked to balance functionality, maintainability, accessibility, security, and sustainability while executing this project to deliver an elegant and sustainable addition to the City of Lowell. Finegold Alexander is proud to accept this award."

The Lowell Justice Center courthouse contains office space for court staff, a Court Service Center, Law Library, Registry of Deeds, Office of the District Attorney, Grand Jury Room, and a total of 17 courtrooms and associated detainee holding cells. It also includes the operations of the Superior, District, Housing, Juvenile, Probate and Family Courts.