



Local Projects, FXCollaborative to restore and reimagine Children's Museum of Manhattan

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Manhattan, NY The Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) unveiled details about the next phase of planning for its new home, located in the historic former church at 361 Central Park West. Following the unanimous approval by the Landmarks Preservation Commission of the design by FXCollaborative to restore and reimagine the historic building, CMOM has engaged Local Projects to bring to life its installations and exhibitions in its new home. Acclaimed for creating interactive and immersive designs for museums and cultural institutions, the multidisciplinary design studio will work with museum leadership and FXCollaborative to craft innovative, family-friendly experiences that draw upon the key pillars of CMOM's program, including art and creativity, wellness and the environment, science, and world cultures.

"CMOM's expansion reflects the institutional transformation that the museum has undergone over the past decades and growing role that we play within the changing cultural, educational, and social fabric of our city. Our expansion responds directly to the increasing demand for the experiences we foster and resources we provide to all New York families, a public need that has grown more urgent

over the past year with the resounding impact of the pandemic,” said Aileen Hefferren, CMOM’s CEO and director.

“We look forward to partnering with Local Projects and to continuing our work with FXCollaborative, to create a museum experience that respects our COVID and post-COVID realities as it inspires and engages all New York City children to learn through play.”

Added Matt Messinger, Co-Chair of CMOM’s Board of Directors, “Our new building project will bring an iconic landmark back to life in service of the community and New York City children. It is exciting to be moving into this next phase of planning for our new home, with the addition of Local Projects to our project team.”

A steward of early childhood development, CMOM sparks a love of learning through its engaging and immersive educational exhibitions and programs. Need for CMOM’s programs has grown exponentially since its founding in 1973, even as the museum has expanded its offerings online and offsite at learning hubs in community centers and shelters throughout the five boroughs.

Marking the first time CMOM will be expanding in 40 years, the new building enables the museum to meet increasing public demand for its programs and triples its existing programmatic space, with approximately 41,300 feet dedicated to exhibitions and programs. With its proximity to the American Museum of Natural History and New-York Historical Society, the new museum helps anchor a key family destination in New York City and will enhance an extended “museum mile” on Manhattan’s West Side.

FXCollaborative’s Design of CMOM’s Future Home

Developed in conjunction with CMOM’s Board and staff, and with input from the local Community Board, FXCollaborative’s design for CMOM’s new home at 361 Central Park West creates a welcoming and accessible space for the museum’s program and the diverse audiences it serves. The landmarked building was originally designed by the Beaux-Arts firm Carrère and Hastings as The First Church of Christ, Scientist and was heralded when it opened in 1903 for its forward-thinking design, which prioritized congregational needs over ecclesiastical traditions. The new museum will be equally innovative in the repurposing of its interior space and preserving the sculptural volume of the main vault, while adding four interconnected floors of exhibitions and a roof terrace with dramatic views of the building, Central Park, and the cityscape beyond.

“I have always loved 361 Central Park West and used to sketch it during my wanderings around the city. Its innovations in construction and use of grand barrel vaults and steel trusses foster gracious and welcoming interior spaces,” said Sylvia Smith, FAIA, Senior Partner at FXCollaborative, who is leading the design of the project. “We seek to maintain the architectural integrity and holistic character of this historic structure, both inside and out, and transform a once trend-setting building into a forward-looking, vibrant center for the community.”

The adaptive reuse project will preserve and restore the stately granite exterior of the former church

and create a more inviting threshold, with accessible entries. New wood and glass doors with decorative screen transoms will be added to make the entrances more transparent, and the historic walnut doors will be relocated to the interior of the entry vestibule. Upon entering the 86,000-square-foot museum building, visitors will have glimpses of the giant barrel vault above as well as of the exhibition spaces interspersed throughout the museum's four floors. Increased amenities will welcome children, their caretakers, and families on the ground floor and facilitate their museum visit.

The interior will be designed as an interweaving of the old and new, with a layout that takes advantage of building's window placement to maximize light and views. FXCollaborative will enhance the structure's

original innovative use of light by activating concealed skylights and introducing new roof apertures. The design will also restore the stained-glass windows of the former church, replacing religious iconography with clear glass while preserving the original decorative borders on each.

A unique central stair will connect the visitor's journey through four floors of exhibition space conceived by Local Projects together with CMOM's professional staff. Elevators bring visitors up to a new workshop space, located within the reimagined attic at the top of the building, created for specialized programming, classes, and performances. The modern addition, clad in copper to reference the original monitor, connects visitors to outdoor terraces that frame the dramatic stone lantern and steeple.

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