

# A Community Grove

The New Joplin Public Library, Joplin, Missouri

Landscape Architecture by Design Workshop, Inc.



Above: On the grounds of the Joplin Public Library in Joplin, Mo., Design Workshop created contemplative reading spaces and communal event spaces, designed not only for informal or private functions but scaled to accommodate larger community events or youth programs. New programs for all ages being held by the library utilize the lawn and the entire site, during the day or at night. Recessed uplights help to provide sure footing on paths through the grass in the evenings.

PHOTO CREDIT: 12 EIGHTY-ONE PHOTOGRAPHY

On May 22, 2011, an EF-5 tornado (the highest intensity rating on the Enhanced Fujita Scale) struck the town of Joplin, Mo., putting a direct hit on the corridor that would be the future site of a library in the area. It reached a maximum width of one mile. The tornado was the deadliest to strike the U.S. since 1947 and the seventh-deadliest in U.S. history, killing 158 people and injuring 1,150. It caused \$2.8 billion in damage—the costliest single tornado in U.S. history.

## A Catalyst Site

Commercial, residential and public properties were left in various degrees of destruction, and the southern part of the city was decimated along

the 20th street corridor. The new Joplin Public Library is the catalyst site for the 20th Street redevelopment corridor as envisioned in Joplin's 2012 "Moving Forward Community Masterplan." Aspen, Colo.-based landscape architecture firm Design Workshop, Inc. was chosen to design and plan a landscape for the important new development in the community. The site represents a starting point for redevelopment directly adjacent to future mixed-use development. The new library establishes an integrated community center and basis of design for the broader community.

The city leadership wanted to emulate a model for outdoor space that is synonymous with



community, free flow of ideas, teaching and learning. This encapsulates the city's motto: "A thriving community of great neighbors." Joplin Public Library has become the symbol – the cornerstone – of Joplin's resilience, renewal and vitality for future generations. The innovative lighting concept is meant to provide a brightness to the redevelopment, a playful outdoor atmosphere for the community and a statement of the heart and soul of the people of Joplin that overcame such tragedy.

### **Goals of the Community and Design Teams**

With the library, the design team aimed to introduce a new community symbol that would

re-invigorate and inspire a community spirit of development, overcoming a process long fraught with setbacks, four years after the initial disaster took place.

The community hoped to integrate the Joplin Public Library with a rigorous community outreach process. They wanted the site to not only be a library building, but also serve as a place for gathering, public events, art and outdoor engagement and learning.

With the project, the town could establish a connected vision and standard of iconic stature, ecological character and timeless materiality as

Above: On the site, traditional forms and patterns take inspiration from the books and shelving of libraries, providing a timeless rhythm and unity to the space. These custom benches, made of ipe wood and fabricated acrylic panels lit with LED strip lights, glow at night, resembling stacks of books on a shelf with their bar codes in full display.

Right: The Joplin Public Library's main sign, brightly backlit with LEDs, contributes to the sense of community pride ingrained in the project.

Below: A tornado that ripped through Joplin in 2011 left destruction in its wake. A total of 14 private properties were destroyed.

PHOTO CREDITS: 12 EIGHTY-ONE PHOTOGRAPHY



the catalyst site for a new mixed-use development district along Joplin's visionary 20th Street Corridor Recovery Zone.

### Inspiring and Framing the Vision

As part of a collaborative design team, the landscape architects spearheaded a public engagement process and led site master planning, building envelope and detailed landscape design efforts consistent with a conceptually inquisitive path and a rigorous environmental framework. The engagement approach included stakeholders, clients and community meetings where design concepts were shared, and feedback was sought and welcomed.

During stakeholder presentations, live voting programs using smart phones were employed for immediate and anonymous feedback, creating an engaging process for everybody involved. Meetings resulted in a clear understanding of site program needs and aesthetic preferences that were then integrated into site concepts. These meetings solidified in the minds of the designers

the community's need for innovative and functional lighting design for the site, as it would be used in the evenings as a community gathering place.

### Turning on the Light

One of the most prominent ways that Design Workshop used the Joplin Public Library to inspire and unite the community was through its use of lighting design. The team wanted to send a comforting message with light, and this was displayed through both area lighting and artistic lighting.

The lighting takes on the forms and patterns of the landscape architecture inspired by the books and shelving in traditional libraries. Linear and rectangular sources are used in unexpected ways. Integrated lighting is used within a custom bench detail as a spirited replica of books stacked on their sides. A custom set of light poles that seem to sparkle with blue light are meant to resemble a magic forest, with glowing trees that children can weave through to



discover new knowledge. This light pole forest was designed as a feature in the event lawn to symbolize the project as a beacon of hope for the redevelopment, a sign of a new beginning.

It was important the outdoor spaces allowed for continued use into the night time hours not only for events but also for outdoor reading during those events. The continued redevelopment of the area was taken into consideration knowing that this building was the first of many along the corridor so the area lighting should not only be uniform, but the illuminance should allow for safe use of the site as the redevelopment continued.

Area lighting in the form of illuminated bollards and in-ground fixtures casts a gentle

glow around the entire site, demonstrating the safety of the environment and allowing for evening activities on the grounds. This lighting helps to establish the library as a safe place for children and adults alike. These innovative uses of lighting help to both illuminate the site and create a spark of wonder in the minds of young and old readers alike.

### Blending Form and Function

Design forms and patterns take inspiration from books and shelving in traditional libraries, providing rhythm and unity to the site's spaces. The formerly barren site was enriched with a variety of native planting areas, including urban bioswales, meadows and woodland groves. Lighted custom signage

Top: Functional and aesthetic lighting provided on the library grounds comes from eleven glowing poles meant to represent a forest of futuristic trees. This installation is entitled "Illumination Grove." The designers at Design Workshop hoped to inspire the community with the lighted structures. PHOTO CREDIT: GAYLE BABCOCK - ARCHITECTURAL IMAGEWORKS

Bottom: This rendering displays an example of evening event lighting at the library. The eleven 132-inch-tall lighted poles that create the "Illumination Grove" sit on a concrete platform. PHOTO CREDIT: DESIGN WORKSHOP, INC.



Left: This rendering shows the custom lighted benches and uplit trees as they would appear during the evening, either after checking out books as it gets dark or during a library event. The lighting features create a safe environment for families. PHOTO CREDIT: DESIGN WORKSHOP, INC.

micro-climates on the site to establish both habitable spaces for the library, but also as an illustration for the character of the redeveloping neighborhoods and surrounding future re-development.

The landscape architect faced great challenges in overcoming the perception of site's value to deliver a quality landscape with lighting that will help to inspire a community to continue redevelopment in the face of adversity. The landscape became a facilitator of public art, economic development, ecological stewardship and community growth and development in the public realm. 🌿

offers educational opportunities to learn about the different areas, and the backlit Joplin Public Library sign acts as a beacon that promises community growth and learning.

These areas provide a backdrop for lighted arts installations and dynamic spaces that change throughout their time of day, season and program use. This was critical to the stakeholder's vision for the new library to represent diverse social and economic goals of the community. The contemplative reading spaces, communal gathering places and event areas are designed not only for informal or private functions but are scaled to accommodate larger community events or youth programs and lit to include evening hours in their use.

### Connecting a Community

In subtle memory of the tornado's impacts, 14 evergreen trees pay homage to the 14 private properties that were destroyed on the property. The trees are lit with inground uplights that illuminate the trunks and lower branches but leave the upper leaves and branches in shadow. This lighting design lends a magical, almost mysterious effect to the trees. Tree selection and scale were critical in creating a variety of

#### Team List

- Owner – City of Joplin
- Landscape Architect + Master planning – Design Workshop Inc.
- Principal In-Charge – Mike Albert, ASLA, Partner
- Advisory Principal – Kurt Culbertson, FASLA, Chairman + CEO
- Project Manager – Adam Mekies, ASLA, Associate
- Project Designers – Colten McDermott, Margaret Plumb, Travis Klondike
- Civil Engineer – Tri-State Engineering – Now Olson Associates
- Architect – Sapp Design Associates + OPN Architects
- Site Structural Engineering – JS Smith Consulting
- Irrigation Consultant – Hines Irrigation, Inc.
- Site Lighting Consultant – Lacroux Streeb – LS Group
- Mep Engineer – Colvin, Jones, Davis
- Building Structural Engineer – Toth & Associates, Inc.
- General Contractor – R.E. Smith Construction Co.
- Landscape + Irrigation Sub-Contractor – Wickman Gardens, Inc.

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Right & Inset: A linear plaza wide enough for tents and tables during local events is serviced with power and highlighted by the native meadow plantings along the entry to the library. The transect plaza is oriented to the center of the future mixed-use and adjacent development beyond, providing a meaningful pedestrian threshold. Bollards lit with LEDs provide sight and a sense of safety for visitors walking along the path in the evening. PHOTO CREDIT: 12 EIGHTY-ONE PHOTOGRAPHY

