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The New York Public Library's Central Library Plan Takes Next Step With Release of Schematic Designs

Renowned Architects Foster + Partners Merge Innovation and Tradition in a Modern, New Circulating Library Within Historic 42nd Street Library

DECEMBER 19, 2012 — The New York Public Library today unveiled the first schematic designs of its historic Central Library Plan (CLP), which will bring a new lending library to its iconic 42nd Street location, the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building.

The project—designed by world-renowned architect Norman Foster and his award-winning firm Foster + Partners—more than doubles the amount of public space within the iconic building, better preserves its research materials, and creates a truly integrated central library in the heart of New York City serving all people, from scholars and students to toddlers and teens.

The designs show a modern, light-filled lending library with views of Bryant Park—the first circulating library in the building in two generations. The building was always meant to have both research collections and a browsable circulating collection, as it in fact did on opening day in 1911. The new library will offer the services and materials currently provided in the deteriorating Mid-Manhattan Library and the innovative Science, Industry and Business Library, both of which will be merged into the 42nd Street building.

At the same time, the designs call for the preservation of the landmark building's awe-inspiring public spaces—such as the Rose Main Reading Room, which will not be touched—and the reopening of historic rooms long closed to the public. In addition, portions of the 101-year-old steel bookshelves that currently hold the core of the Library's research collections—the obsolete “stacks,” which will be removed as part of the plan—will be incorporated into the new lending library, to be seen and enjoyed by the public for the first time.

Research services will also be enhanced under the plan, with vastly improved storage conditions for core collections and expanded spaces for scholars, writers, and researchers.

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With this mix of innovation and tradition, Carrère and Hastings's Beaux-Arts masterpiece will enhance its role as "The People's Palace," with about 66 percent of the now underutilized building open to the public and offering services for all.

In one building open seven days a week, 12 hours a day most days, the public will enjoy free access to:

- Books, DVDs, and more to browse and check out (circulating collections for adults are not currently available in the Library's flagship building)
- More public space than is currently available in all three of our Midtown libraries combined
- New spaces for children and teens
- Job Search resources
- Computers and Internet access
- Classrooms
- Programming spaces
- Quiet study zones
- A permanent display of treasures from the Library's collections in an enhanced Gottesman Exhibition Hall
- Research materials housed in new state-of-the-art, climate-controlled storage, better preserving the collections for future generations of researchers
- More dedicated spaces for scholars, writers, and researchers
- Much, much more

By combining three buildings and their services and collections into one central location, the CLP will also result in up to \$15 million more to spend annually, which the Library can use to hire more librarians and curators and to buy more books.

"The New York Public Library is creating the single most exciting library in the world, a center of knowledge, information, and scholarship in the heart of New York City," said NYPL President Tony Marx. "With the Central Library Plan, we will open up more of our landmark building to the public, offering both circulating and research collections in



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one place, as well as the programs, classes, materials, and services needed by our patrons. All this, while better protecting our research collections, and enhancing the research experience. The Central Library Plan is truly a vision for the future for the Library and the people of New York City.”

“For more than a century, The New York Public Library on 42nd Street has been an iconic landmark, celebrated for its outstanding beauty and exceptional collections,” said Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. “Together with the incredible restoration of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building facade, the new Central Library Plan will preserve this historic institution and transform it into the world’s largest combined research and circulating library.”

“We are reasserting the Library’s main axis and its very special sequence of spaces, from the main Fifth Avenue entrance and the Astor Hall, through the Gottesman Hall, into the dramatic volume of the new circulating library, with views through to the park,” said Norman Foster. “Our design does not seek to alter the character of the building, which will remain unmistakably a library in its feel, in its details, materials, and lighting. It will remain a wonderful place to study. The parts that are currently inaccessible will be opened up, inviting the whole of the community—it is a strategy that reflects the principles of a free institution upon which the library was first founded.”

To create the space for the approximately 100,000-square-foot circulating library, seven floors of outdated bookshelves under the Rose Main Reading Room will be removed. The stack area—built in 1911, facing Bryant Park, and always closed to the public—currently holds a portion of the Library’s core research collections, but does not have proper climate controls to preserve these precious materials. The books are deteriorating at approximately five times the rate of books kept in appropriate storage. As part of the plan, most of these materials—about 3 million volumes—will be housed in modern storage under Bryant Park, where they will be easily requested by the public, and safely preserved for future generations of researchers and scholars.

“Our books will get proper preservation underground, the public will get the light and the spectacular views of Bryant Park,” said Marx. “It’s a good trade.”

“This visionary project by the New York Public Library, embodied in this beautiful building by Norman Foster, is central to this great institution’s evolution as a vital part of our city, as it has been for over a century,” said City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn. “I applaud NYPL for listening and heeding the concerns of the stakeholders, and for crafting a project that sensitively addresses its dual mission as a great center of scholarship—and as the people’s library for all New Yorkers—for the next century.”

The original estimate for the plan was \$300 million, but as a result of enhancements and changes made following the public feedback process, we expect the actual budget to be somewhat higher. The budget has not yet been finalized.



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The Library expects construction to begin in 2013, and to be completed in 2018, pending various approvals. All three buildings involved will remain open throughout construction.

The Library will submit designs to the Landmarks Preservation Commission to seek approvals for proposed modifications. The Central Library Plan calls for relatively minor work to the outside of the building, including a new emergency exit door, an updated loading dock, and replica windows. Hearings on just the changes in the application are expected to be held at Community Board 5 throughout January, and then at the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

“The New York Public Library’s main branch has always been a center of intellectual life—and a symbol of democracy—in the heart of our City,” said Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. “I am pleased that the new designs unveiled today will create a lending library at the facility’s historic 42nd Street site, and a publicly accessible home for some three millions books in a storage facility under Bryant Park. With this bold step forward, our public library will continue to play a vibrant role in the life of New York for decades to come.”

“Fusing innovation and tradition, the finished project—in the heart of New York City—will result in more services to the public and better preservation of scholarship materials,” said Kenneth Adams, Empire State Development (ESD) President and CEO. “The State has an important role to play in preserving cultural institutions for generations to come. On behalf of Governor Cuomo, we were proud to partner with The New York Public Library to help turn its Central Library Plan into a reality.”

Updates on the Central Library Plan can be found at www.nypl.org/clp.

The Central Library Plan is a unique public-private partnership made possible with generous support from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, the New York City Council, the Empire State Development Corporation, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Stephen A. Schwarzman, Abby S. Milstein and Howard P. Milstein, and an anonymous donor.

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About The New York Public Library

The New York Public Library is a free provider of education and information for the people of New York and beyond. With 90 locations—including research and branch libraries—throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library offers free materials, computer access, classes, exhibitions, programming, and more to everyone from toddlers to scholars, and has seen record numbers of attendance and circulation in recent years. The New York Public Library serves more than 18 million patrons who come through its doors annually and millions more around the globe who use its resources at www.nypl.org. To offer this wide array of free programming, The New York Public Library relies on both public and private funding. Learn more about how to support the Library at nypl.org/support.

About Foster + Partners

Foster + Partners, one of the most innovative architectural practices in the world today, led by Founder and Chairman Norman Foster, is based in London with project offices worldwide. Over the past four decades the practice has pioneered a sustainable approach to architecture and ecology through a strikingly wide range of work, from urban master plans, public infrastructure, airports, civic and cultural buildings, offices and workplaces to private houses and product design. The studio has established an international reputation with buildings such as the world's largest airport terminal at Beijing, Swiss Re's London Headquarters, Hearst Headquarters in New York, Millau Viaduct in France, the German Parliament in the Reichstag, Berlin, The Great Court at London's British Museum, Headquarters for HSBC in Hong Kong and London, and Commerzbank Headquarters in Frankfurt. There is also a strong interest in city planning and infrastructure. The practice has received over 620 awards for excellence and won over 100 national and international competitions since its inception in 1967.