

CAST Architecture and Interbay P-Patch Garden Hub

Overview

Project Name: Interbay P-Patch Garden Hub

Location: Seattle, WA

Duration: Community Shed and Shelter, 2002; Kiosk, 2004;
Gateway and Signage, 2008

Date Completed: Ongoing

Project Type: Facilities Needs Assessment, Design and Construction

Architecture Firm: CAST Architecture, led by Nathan Walker, former principal of
CAST Design/Build

Location: Seattle, WA

Primary Contact: Matt Hutchins & Stefan Hampden, Architects

Nonprofit Organization: Interbay P-Patch

Location: Seattle, WA

Primary Contacts: Bruce Swee, Facilities Coordinator; Ray Schutte, Chair, Interbay P-Patch Leadership Team

Awards & Recognition: "The Pro Bono Client" *Architecture Boston*, November 2007

Project Summary/Abstract

Interbay P-Patch, a community garden in Seattle, needed to replace their small, dilapidated garden shed in order to facilitate the growth of their community. Nathan Walker, a gardener at the P-Patch, and a principal of CAST Architecture volunteered to design and coordinate the construction of the new shed. Donating their design skills and labor, CAST Architecture proposed a solution that radically improved the shed's program. The resulting design provides a place for community gatherings, attracts newcomers to the garden, and serves as a central element of the garden's role as a "laboratory" for urban sustainability.



Design

Walker initiated the project by meeting with interested gardeners and developing a wish list for the new shed. Going beyond the basic program, CAST Architecture developed a preliminary design based on this input, and Walker's own observation of the gardeners' habits and needs. The proposed shed was divided into two sections, separated by a breezeway. One section contained gardening tools and supplies, while the other hosted kitchen, office, and library materials. As many food-based gatherings are hosted at the garden, the design team integrated a stovetop and a large serving area. The shed has wide doors to accommodate disabled gardeners, and contains a rear entrance enabling gardeners to use the shed without disrupting ongoing events.

The designers placed the shed at the edge of the concrete pad that was at the center of the garden, freeing up a central area for garden gatherings. One of the most popular features of the shed is its roof, made of transparent sheeting; it sweeps up and out, framing a wide portico around the shed. Providing a protected space for outdoor gatherings in all weather, the roof also minimizes the need for electric interior illumination and provides a place for a solar panel, which powers a nearby fountain that circulates and retains storm water.

The design team presented the scheme to a garden-wide review meeting where they solicited feedback. While the conversation was ultimately productive, they struggled with a small number of gardeners who took exception to the proposed design and process. “Communicate really clearly and make sure that you have a defined process, and follow that process” advises Ray Schutte, chair of the garden’s leadership committee.

The shed was funded through a \$10,000 grant from the City of Seattle, and was matched by volunteer construction labor and donated materials and funds provided by Blackstock Lumber and Starbucks, among others. “Almost like a barn raising,” the structure was built in a series of work parties by garden volunteers. All of the principals and lead carpenters at CAST Architecture helped procure the shed materials and directed the volunteers in demolition, concrete, framing, and finishing the structure.

Impact/Analysis

CAST Architecture, originally tasked to rebuild a simple storage shed, went beyond the initial scope to transform the garden into a community destination and hub. The firm redefined the project to encompass what the community really wanted and needed. In addition to larger and more effective storage spaces, the community now has a courtyard area for social gatherings, both framed and protected by the shed’s striking roof. “Because we have protection from wind and rain, we have greater turnout for functions. This involves more people in making decisions for the garden,” notes the garden’s Facilities Coordinator Bruce Swee. Their larger kitchen and storage area allows them to store dishes and cookware on site, facilitating social events around food, and allowing them to “take pride in being sustainable, and not having to use paper plates.”

The shed and its iconic roof have also given the garden a new visual identity. “As you enter the garden now, the shed just kind of envelopes you. It is very difficult to walk through this courtyard and not feel like you are part of this space,” says Swee. In addition, the shed has increased the number of newcomers attracted to the garden, helping the P-Patch achieve its goal of decreasing urban isolation. “As you drive by along the street and you happen to look over toward the garden space, the shed sweeps up and out and has a very nice appeal. The design attracts attention to the garden.”

The community design and construction process, despite some difficulties, energized and brought the community together. More than 60 people were involved in the shed’s construction, and, as Schutte notes, “Over half the garden got to know each other and a common goal.” CAST Architecture and the Interbay P-Patch have since collaborated on a kiosk, and plan to work on a signage project. The signage will promote the garden as a “laboratory” for urban sustainability, highlighting the sustainable practices and features of the shed and the garden itself. The gardeners and the designers maintain a personal relationship as well with the designers and their families attending Interbay P-Patch events, and the garden continually expressing their thanks to the firm through gifts of fresh organic honey and produce.

Perspective – Architecture Firm

Established in 1999 as a design/build firm, CAST Architecture has recently transitioned into a full-service architecture firm. Over the past eight years, CAST Architecture has worked on over 60 innovative homes, additions, and remodels throughout the Puget Sound area. These design/build roots have taught the firm the value of an integrated team approach and grounds their designs in the realities of construction.

Since Walker brought the P-Patch project into the office, CAST Architecture has tried to work on at least one pro bono project a year, including plaza design and restoration for Seattle’s miniature Statue of Liberty. The firm actively searches local nonprofit news, community newspapers, and government sources for new pro bono opportunities.

“Our pro bono work has exposed us to a number of new clients and created opportunities to work on larger community based projects. These projects give us a broader experience in other types of work, and are a springboard to more civic work. We’ve looked at these projects not only as a chance to serve the city, but also as an opportunity to experiment with different technologies, materials, and systems.”

Visit www.castarchitecture.com to learn more about CAST Architecture.

Perspective – Nonprofit Organization

The Interbay P-Patch is an organic community garden where Seattle families can grow vegetables and flowers as well as come together as a community to improve the urban landscape. Over 30 years old, the Interbay P-Patch is a model of resourcefulness and sustainability. As a community center, the garden regularly supplies local food banks with produce.

“I don’t think anyone anticipated how well our needs could be met and in such a creative fashion.... Nathan Walker designed the new shed at Interbay P-Patch, including features we hadn’t known how much we needed.”

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Interbay P-Patch.