

Architecture of the Sustainable City: The PNW Athenaeum

Stephen Duff and Michael Zaretsky | Arch 683 | Fall 2024

The ARCH 683 studio addresses integrated design, sustainable design, and urban / civic architecture. We will focus on the integration of structure, passive and active systems, facade development and material detailing in a mass-timber civic building in an urban setting. For fall 2024, we will be designing a medium-scale civic building on a triangular site in Seattle at the south of Lake Union.

We will explore the foundations of sustainable urban architecture – energy, passive design strategies, principles of load and carbon reduction – as well as mass timber design.

The program will be an Athenaeum of the Pacific NorthWest. Athenaea are institutions for the promotion of learning, in this case about sustainable cities, landscapes, architecture, and design. Students will be asked to design both compelling outdoor public space and a civic building of strong character and expressive force. We will emphasize comprehensive design and systems integration in the context of an explicit intention to craft evocative, aesthetically meaningful buildings, while reflecting an ethos of appropriate technology and environmental responsibility. The goal will be to design beautiful space, light, and architectural form using expressive systems of mass timber structure, construction, and high-performance enclosures. We will also address landscape and roof design, storm water, and site engineering.

The project will be an institutional project that supports the design community and the community at large.

Civic architecture isn't only about buildings; it's also about people. By design, civic buildings are intended to be a focal point of a community, places that convey the feeling of place, its history, as well as its people.¹

Project

The project will draw on the rich typology of civic architecture and outdoor public spaces. The site is at the south end of Lake Union in Seattle, close to the water, and part of a neighborhood undergoing significant change. The program will include interior civic space, galleries of NW architecture and urban design, a library, auditoria, various meeting and charrette rooms, a Design Commission hearing room, offices of professional organizations, and innovation and maker spaces.

Process

The full range of media for design development will be required: sketches and small massing models to explore the site; physical and digital models to test ideas about program, space, and form; freehand and measured drawings for developing generative details in the systems of structure and construction.

