Michigan City Police Station

2018 AIA INDIANA DESIGN AWARDS
DESIGNED TO SERVE

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The Michigan City Police Station is a long-term public safety solution for officers that improves quality of life for the surrounding community. The old police station was designed for maximum security; however, it represented a social barrier between the officers and the community they are sworn to protect and to serve. To combat sourcing police/community relationships nationwide, the new facility strives for a balance between the highest level of safety for the officers and social connectedness to the community.

The new site was strategically selected for its prominent location along Michigan Boulevard, a primary city artery, and for the quick response time to high-crime neighborhoods. The site is also adjacent to Cleveland Park. The park once hosted summer baseball games and boasted of a legendary sledding hill. However, with the closure of Eastport Elementary School, the building fell into disrepair and the property became a breeding ground for crime.

Representing a $13 million investment, the 42,000-square-foot building is a gateway to the city and a landmark for revitalization in Michigan City. A gateway aperture along Michigan Boulevard glows within its cantilevered frame, inviting the community to the public entrance. Wood and brick elements wrap into the public lobby, and a picture frame view blurs the line between interior and exterior spaces. The lobby is also home to a custom display of surrendered and disabled guns—a symbol to the community’s shared commitment to reduce gun violence.

The courtyard provides a semi-private environment for officer training and K-9 kennels with a strategically designed, custom fence to visually obscure lines of sight from the public street. A metal shell rests atop a protective brick base emerging from the hillside. Like stratified scratches into the landscape, large areas of brick banding contrast against the smooth, reflective shell. At the center of the shell, apertures open to the central courtyard, providing ample views to greenspace. To further promote the connection between indoor and outdoor spaces, all regularly occupied spaces have natural daylight, even spaces like the sally port and locker room.

Sensitive spaces have embrasure windows with security film, and the splayed openings wash the facade with ambient light to exaggerate the size of the opening. The community room is connected to a shared vestibule, limiting access to secure portions of the building while providing convenient access to public portions of the building. The community room and fitness center lend a protective gaze toward the park below and spill out to a shaded terrace. Woodgrain, powder-coated sunshades protect occupants from excessive heat gain and glare, and horizontal fins shade the southern exposure while vertical fins shade the eastern exposure. Additional energy-reducing strategies include LED lighting, variable refrigerant flow (VRF) systems with heat-recovery technology, and solar panels on the roof that generate 40 kWh per year.

Central booking has a view to each holding cell from one position and a digital interface provides commanders audio/visual capabilities to the entire campus. Group holding and a padded cell provide flexibility with seasonal surges in the number of arrests. Evidence storage was consolidated into a high-density storage system with room to grow.

The project also includes improvements to Cleveland Park, and community members were invited to a brainstorming session to offer equipment and layout suggestions for the park. Many of their recommendations incorporated into the design are already enhancing the quality of life in the neighborhood. Neighbors feel more comfortable taking their dogs on a walk around a newly completed walking path. The legendary sledding hill was preserved and cleared of obstacles. Children play on a new police-themed playground while caretakers watch from a covered shelter. And an old basketball court was restored. Neighborhood youth are invited to check out basketballs from the front desk or even request a friendly game with the officers.

Michigan City high school student Leslie Reyes wrote in an Exchange Club essay about the tremendous impact the new police station and the improved park has made on the neighborhood. She said that the City’s significant community commitment has resulted in a much more positive, empowered, interconnected neighborhood by increasing connections and interactions among police department personnel and community members. She further commented that the area has developed a much stronger sense of a neighborhood where there previously was none at all.

Police Chief Mark Swistek believes the new police station has made much positive community impact. “Almost daily, neighborhood children stop by to use the lobby restroom, visit with our officers, get candy from the Records Division personnel, take time to stop our staff in the parking lots to ask questions, and ask to see the police K9s. We also are only one of two dog-friendly parks in the city.”
1. PROGRAM ORGANIZATION

First floor public access & booking isolating 24/7 operations on one floor to minimize energy use

Second floor office space (offices, conference/war rooms, collaboration space) organized to allow for closure after normal business hours

Back of house (storage, virtual range, restrooms, detention/booking, garage) moved into hillside - does not require sunlight

2. COURTYARD & NATURAL DAYLIGHT

Courtyard provides private green space for training officers & K-9 runs

Narrow footprint to maximize natural daylight into office space

Sun shades vertical to control eastern sunlight & horizontal to mitigate southern sunlight

3. GATEWAY INTO CITY

Main entrance & public parking oriented to first major view of the site from Michigan City Boulevard (a main artery into Michigan City)

Secure entrance & officer parking on second floor Separate from public entrance and parking

4. PARK RELATIONSHIP

Garage entrance extended south to create outdoor terrace that overlooks park/cleveland park

This provides sight lines directly from the community center and fitness center towards the basketball court & playground
The lobby is home to a custom display of surrendered and disabled guns—a symbol to the community’s shared commitment to reduce gun violence.