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Axiom Architects Announces Completion of Historic James Library Accessibility Upgrades Project

HANOVER and NORWELL, MA, ISSUED SEPTEMBER 9, 2019...Axiom Architects (www.axiomarchitects.com), a Hanover-based architectural firm that has developed a reputation for superior design work throughout New England and especially along the South Shore for more than 40 years, recently announced completion of accessibility upgrades to the James Library & Center for the Arts, located at 24 West Street in Norwell, Massachusetts.

The James Library & Center for the Arts is a non-profit organization offering programs in music, art and literature. The James Library is housed in a landmark 1874 Italianate-style building and served as Norwell's only public library from the 1930s until 1970. In 1991, the James was recast as a community arts center, and today it offers concerts, music lessons, art exhibits, a community meeting space, and a range of cultural events. The James Library & Center for the Arts was recently included on the Massachusetts Historic Register.

In March 2016, the James Library & Center for the Arts took a proactive attitude toward accessibility, and submitted an Application for Variance to the Architectural Access Board (AAB) in Boston, the state agency that oversees accessibility compliance. One variance requested was to maintain the existing front historic façade, and instead create a new accessible entrance on the side of the building. The alterations proposed also included a three-story elevator in the back of the building, a handicapped-accessible bathroom on the main floor, and many other alterations throughout the building to allow patrons full access to all three floor, making the historic three-story building fully accessible to the disabled. The AAB later granted the James Library the variances with some added conditions, including new railings for the front entryway.

Given the firm's experience with historic renovations, Axiom Architects was selected by the James Library & Center for the Arts to design the changes needed to bring the building into compliance with the regulations for accessibility. Axiom Architects began working with the building committee in 2015. As a contribution to the local community, Axiom elected to contribute schematic design services free of charge as a donation to the library. (The remainder of the architectural services were provided at a reduced rate.)

The scope of the project included new interior stair rails and door hardware, reconfigured stairs and improved exit ways for safety, adjusted door width and check-out desk, revised plumbing, and new emergency lighting.

“The building is beautiful Italianate style on the exterior and going inside is like stepping back in time – it still appears as it did in the early 1900s,” said James M. Kelliher, principal of Axiom Architects. “The building is now fully accessible without sacrificing any of the historic features inside or outside that make it so unique. It was a challenge to make the many alterations without compromising the historic character, and it’s the first job I’ve ever done as an architect in which my success was that you cannot notice the alterations that were made.

“The James Library & Center for the Arts is a treasure for the town of Norwell and the South Shore region,” Kelliher added. “It was an honor to work on this project.”

About Axiom Architects

Since 1978, Axiom Architects (www.axiomarchitects.com) has gained a reputation for superior design work throughout New England. Axiom has completed a variety of building types, but custom homes and multi-family condominiums are the backbone of the practice. New construction, additions, and renovations in a fresh interpretation of the vernacular identify Axiom projects. Known for their design strength, Axiom designs smart buildings, buildings that make sense in their markets, and buildings that are comfortable for and responsive to their clients’ needs.

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