Independence Mall

Market Environment

Independence Mall is a 15-acre greensward in Philadelphia that is part of Independence National Historical Park celebrating the United State’s founding history. The centerpiece of the park is Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were written in the late 18th century. Across the street is the Liberty Bell Center. Several large federal buildings surround the Mall, including the United States Mint and the Federal Reserve Bank, and serve as the transition between the oldest part of the city and a bustling commercial district.

Despite its history, the mall was poorly designed. A Philadelphia Business Journal article in 1997 said, “it has required a lot of imagination to see the mall reach its oft-stated potential as both a comprehensive visitor destination and a launching pad for regional tourism.” Attractions were grouped together creating pedestrian bottlenecks and the area was confusing to navigate. Rather than showcasing the place where a nation was born, areas of the mall were often deserted. In 1997, the National Park Service announced a plan to redesign Independence Mall. Several new public buildings were constructed. The Independence Visitors Center opened in 2001, the National Constitution Center opened in 2003, and the Liberty Bell, which had been housed in a glass pavilion and draws an estimated $1.6 million visitors each year, was moved to the Liberty Bell Center. Millions use the Mall each year and it serves as a focal point for major civic events.

The new design by Rios Clementi Hale Studios features terraced gardens and green space, pathways, an event lawn, additional trees and a small dog run. Even before its completion, the site is emerging as a centerpiece gathering spot, with the restored Arthur J. Will Memorial Fountain as its focal point. The new Civic Park has majestic views extending from the Music Center to City Hall that will provide Angeles of all walks of life a central gathering place where they can celebrate, reflect, and shape the future.

Challenges

- Redesign the mall to improve public uses, accommodate millions of visitors and create continuity between the park and historic sites — make history part of the scenery.

- Improve public spaces for multiple uses from events to relaxation to increase time visitors spend at Philadelphia historic attractions to boost tourism.

- Improve access to more easily, and less obtrusively, set-up and break down major events.

- Adhere to strict requirements by the National Park Service for park usage in the redesign.

- Seamlessly re-design the mall to connect old and new Philadelphia.
Services Delivered

The National Park Service (NPS), noted Landscape Architect Lori Olin (Founder of OLIN) and Karin Bacon Enterprises contracted MJMMG to conduct an analysis to inform the park’s redesign, new programing and management. This process included extensive collaboration with the National Park Service, local public officials and the community. This work included:

- Development of a public use plan.

- Research on highest and best uses adhering to NPS requirements, including analysis of programs and events, users, engineering and design functionality.

- Provide strategic counsel on its re-design to: guide event programs and themes; balance access and security; improve pedestrian circulation in areas of respite and event locations; improve logistics to allow for efficient event set up.

- Recommendations for new landscaping, infrastructure elements, such as stage placement and sound engineering recommendations; event recommendations, logistics for storage, loading zones, cooking areas, vendor sites, chairs, impromptu events; lighting, power and sound; and signage.

Results

- The project adopted several MJMMG recommendations for design and infrastructure improvements to ease facilitation of event programming.

- In 2003, the New York Times wrote about the mall and district redesign, “Philadelphia has been marketing its past, drawing more than 11 million overnight visitors a year, and the National Park Service has undertaken a construction and renovation binge in the historic district. Where tourists used to poke around unleashed, they are plied with new tours and exhibitions.”