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National Center for Civil and Human Rights to expand with family-friendly spaces



The National Center for Civil and Human Rights makes way on 28,985 square-foot expansion.
PERKINS&WILL

By Anna Haas – Contributing Writer, Atlanta Business Chronicle
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Editor's note: This is a preview of Atlanta Business Chronicle's Best in Atlanta Real Estate Awards, recognizing the top commercial real estate projects and deals in 2024. The event will be held on April 24. To purchase tickets, visit the Chronicle's events website.

Perkins&Will designed the National Center for Civil and Human Rights' original structure in 2014, and even then, plans for expansion were on the table.

In celebration of the center's 10th anniversary, the idea became reality. Perkins&Will returned to the museum and human rights organization to helm the addition of two new wings.

The wings "almost literally" embrace the original building, said Tara Thompson, senior project architect at Perkins&Will. When selecting a material for the expansion, the architecture and design firm chose one that differs from the main building to complement and maintain the main building's unique identity.

"The new composition is trying to express that the center is expanding," said Renato Tonelli, Perkins&Will's senior project designer. "There's an idea of strength and resilience with the bold forms of the building."

Project name: National Center for Civil and Human Rights Expansion

Address: 100 Ivan Allen Jr Blvd. NW, Atlanta

Project size: 28,985 square-foot expansion

Investment size: $56 million

Began planning: June 2021

Began construction: March 2024

To open: Fall 2025

The center's transformation focuses on creating space for conversation and being a "destination" in the city. Near the World of Coca-Cola and Georgia Aquarium, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights competes for visitors. Aimed to attract first-time guests, the new, one-story east wing will feature flexible meeting spaces for classrooms, training, events and beyond.

"I think [the center] was wrestling with people feeling that it's a heavy place to visit and you would need to be in the right mindset, or maybe you wouldn't have your young children with you," said Thompson. "This expansion opens that up."

The new family gallery for children will feature hands-on experiences aimed to inspire the next generation.

One of the challenges set before their team was revitalizing significant exhibitions, such as the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Collection. Tonelli described the original design of the gallery as "chapel-like," which imbued a feeling of reverence. The changes re-envision the space from one of quiet solitude to a warm place where people can meet, teach and safely share their views, Tonelli continued.

"It's a center for action, so they want people to act on the things they're learning about. If they can influence some people to take action after they leave the building, then they're going to find that successful," said Tonelli.