



THE
WRITER'S
CENTER
Bethesda MD
Institutional



Before



The Bethesda Youth Center, located just off Wisconsin Avenue in downtown Bethesda, was designed in the 1960's by the young firm of Keyes Lethbridge & Condon, who would go on to play a major role in the modern development of the Washington area. The Montgomery County-owned venue provided the local teenage community (including the architect of this renovation) with classes, dances, and other social activities.

The youth center closed in 1970, and the building spiraled downward, serving a variety of uses but chronically uncared for and poorly maintained.

Present day, and this midcentury modern

building is now leased from the County is the home of the Writer's Center. The community-centered nonprofit is dedicated to the creation of an independent home for the literary arts, nurturing writing talent and celebrating writers through classes, workshops, publications, and readings

The 1st phase of the renovation reorganized the lower level, basically a basement except for one line of high windows above a service ramp. Largely uninhabitable spaces were recaptured, asbestos abated, and offices and classrooms reconfigured, brightened, and rejuvenated.

Restrooms and other

spaces were made ADA compliant in preparation for the 2nd phase, which would make the building fully accessible.

The now-efficient lower plan allowed space for additional classrooms, a lounge/coffee area, and the creation of a Writer's Studio. Here, local writers can come and work at private work stations, on their own schedules; lockers in the lounge area are available to rent.

Removal of a dropped ceiling revealed the main floor structural system, a cast-in-place concrete waffle slab, now exposed and painted white. Daylight is maximized throughout by taking advantage of the windows along the original service ramp; glass walls in the classrooms extend the natural light into the formerly windowless spaces. Douglas fir woodwork and punches of vivid color further enliven what still is, but no longer feels like, a basement level.

The 2nd phase involved renovating the front of

the house and the front of the building. From the sidewalk, the site and building were made accessible and welcoming in equal measure. A porch/ramp/stair assembly was layered on to the existing facade to accomplish both goals, playing off the original structure and rhythms in a lighter and more delicate vocabulary.

Within, a new lift gives access to the lower level, the entry is opened up, with the reception and office areas reconfigured.

Sustainability & Community
For generations, this place has provided

community. As Bethesda has grown up around it, the little building has seen it all—as the youth center of a low-rise exurban community, to a player in the physical and cultural expansion of Bethesda, to, now, part of an urban center.

The preservation of this quality midcentury work, the commitment to accessibility, and the projection of a new cultural role in the community assures a continued life and sustainable future for this fine building.

"The greenest building is the one that is already there."





The lower level, renovated as the first phase, now houses a Writer's Studio and new classrooms and offices. Glass walls in Douglas fir frames maximize the available natural light.



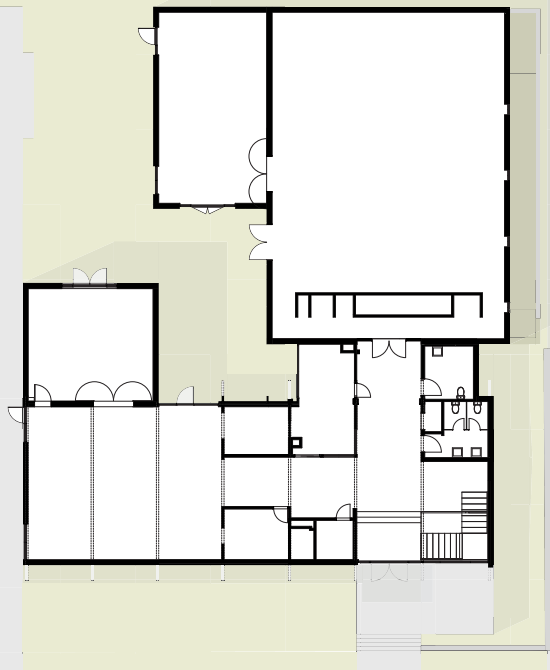


The new lower level classrooms with frosted glass walls borrow natural light from the high windows of the Writer's Studio.

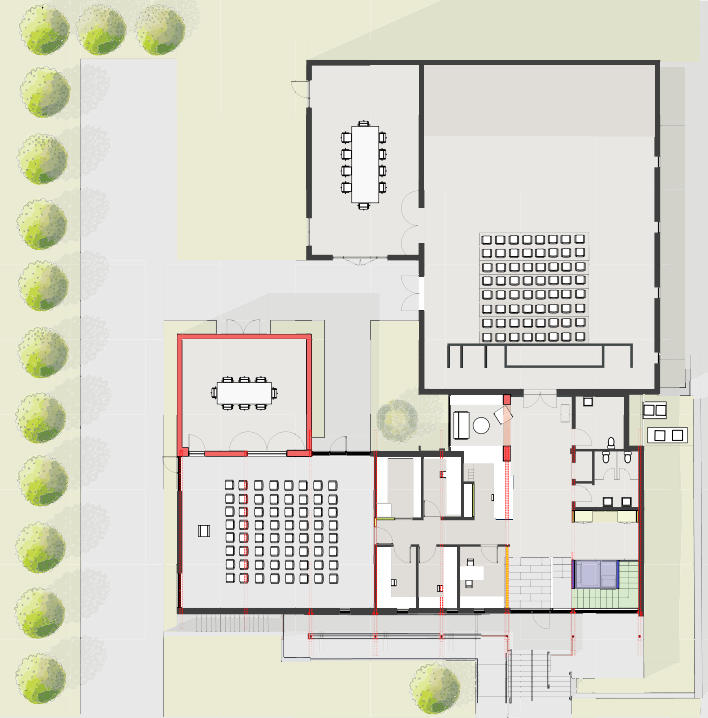


The carrels of the lower level Writer's Studio provide local writers with quiet workspace.

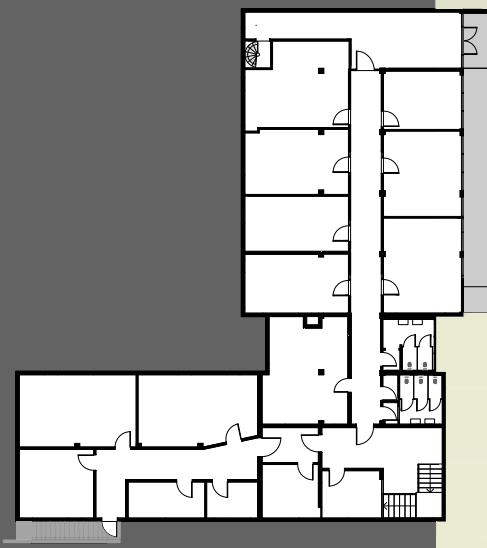




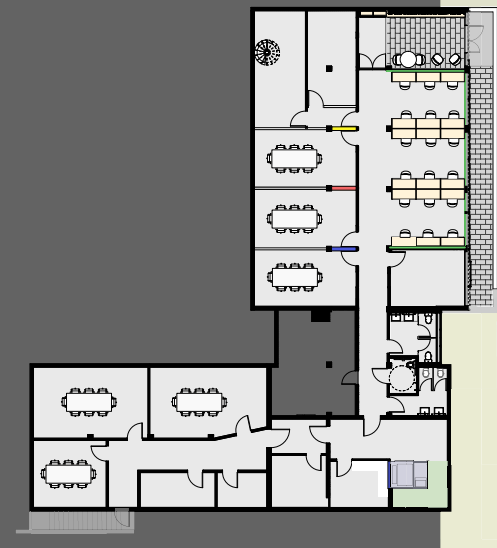
1st Floor Plan - Before



1st Floor Plan - After



Lower Level Plan - Before & Demo



Lower Level Plan - After



Main Level Walsh Street entry to the Writers Center
Phase 2 renovates the entry & lobby, and completes full ADA compliance.







Above - Reception desk of main level entry to the Writers Center, with a book nook featuring local writers and the entry to the theater beyond..

Left - The stair is reconfigured to allow the inclusion of an ADA compliant lift, creating a fully accessible structure





Far left - Main level reception desk and entry to the Reading Room, the primary location for readings and events.

