

Project Description/Narrative

This project takes a practical, 'Blue-Collar' approach rather than aiming for 'High Design.'

The goal was to create a flexible, functional office environment that meets the client's density and budget needs while balancing modern trends with established workplace traditions in a subtle, aesthetically pleasing way. Achieving this was not an easy feat.

RIT's University Advancement offices were previously scattered across campus, leading to a sense of disconnection. The goal was to consolidate the staff to foster greater collaboration and efficiency. With a limited budget, they envisioned a new office space on the first floor of a newly acquired commercial building, a former 'big-box' bookstore. Our role was to transform this space into an effective work environment.

The challenges included: working within the confines of a small space for a growing department, balancing privacy with openness, and creating an understated design that would endure over time, all while encouraging staff to spend more time in the office.

The solution started with an 'urban grid' layout, organized into quadrants (or neighborhoods) that share a central communal space (like a public park). This high-bay atrium functions as a flexible area for casual work, breaks, training, meetings, and events. The volume of the atrium alleviates the density of the surrounding offices and provides a space for informal gatherings and spontaneous conversations. The existing skylight brings natural light into the center of the office, and the escalators create dynamic circulation, linking the University Advancement team to other departments on the upper level.

This project was an exercise in maximizing every square inch of space, analyzing organizational needs, handling future growth, and accommodating various hybrid work models—ultimately creating a comfortable and intuitive space that feels deceptively simple.

AIA's Framework for Design Excellence

Design for Integration: What is the big idea behind this project and how did sustainability inform the design concept?

Reuse & Efficiency: Consolidation of offices into a centralized and strategically planned space within an existing building that was adaptively re-used for a new purpose.

Design for Economy: How does the project efficiently meet the program and design challenges and provide “more with less”?

Creative Space Usage: Through the use of enclosed, semi-closed, semi-open, and flexible hybrid offices, the space was designed to accommodate the existing and projected staffing needs of this growing department.

Design for Wellness: How does the design promote the health of the occupants?

Light & Materials: The incorporation of natural light via the skylight in the commons, borrowed light via the perimeter storefront, and the use of a biophilic material palette promote wellness in this office space.

AIA Rochester Community Impact Award

This is a modest office project. The primary community impact is putting a vacant commercial 'big-box' retail space back into use.

“...simple, is not easy...”



**ENTRY LOBBY
(COMMONS BEYOND)**



EXISTING CONDITIONS

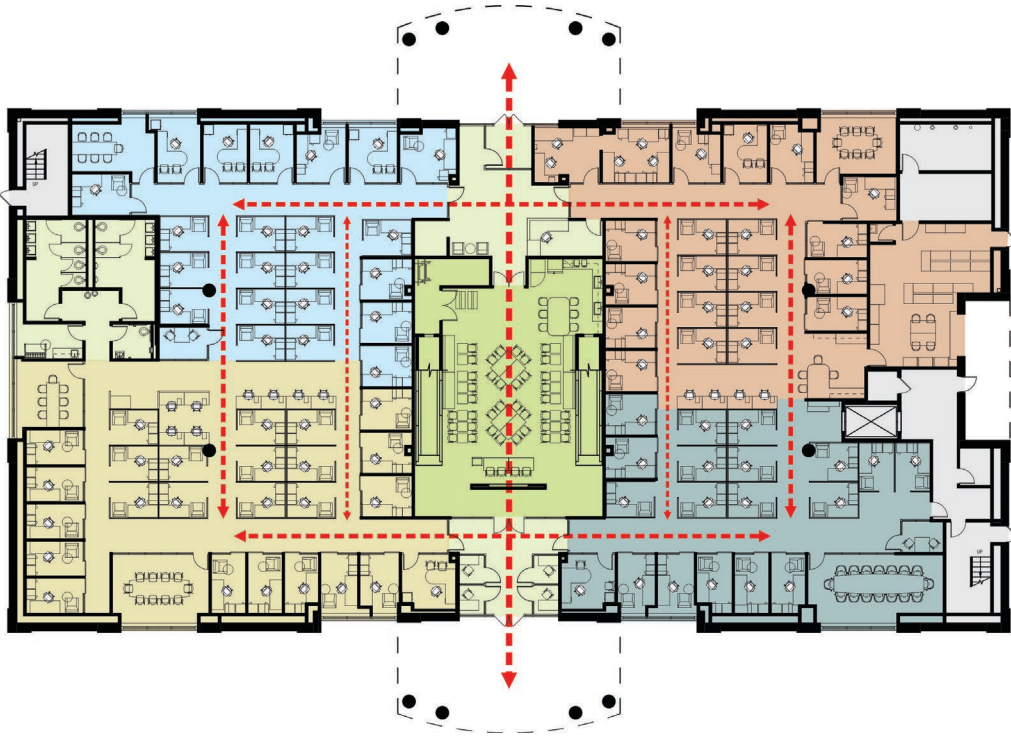
"...RIT envisioned a new space for University Advancement on the first floor of a newly acquired vacant commercial building, a former 'big-box' bookstore..."



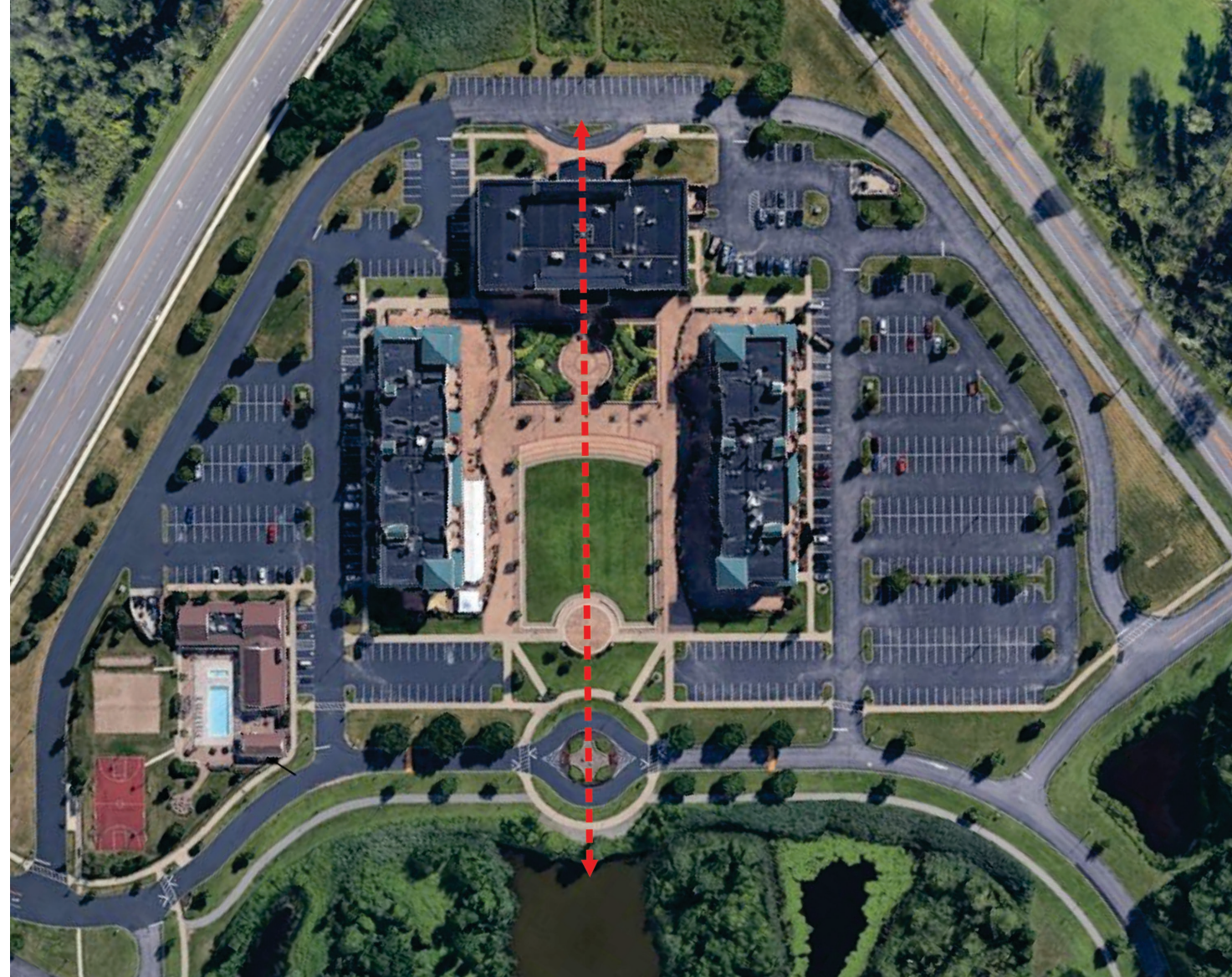
*“...the commons,
a high-bay atrium,
serves multiple purposes
including casual workplace,
break area, training room,
large meeting room and
event space...”*

SITE PLAN KEY

1. UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT
(FORMER BIG-BOX COMMERCIAL BUILDING)
2. MIXED-USE BUILDING
3. COURTYARD
4. GREEN

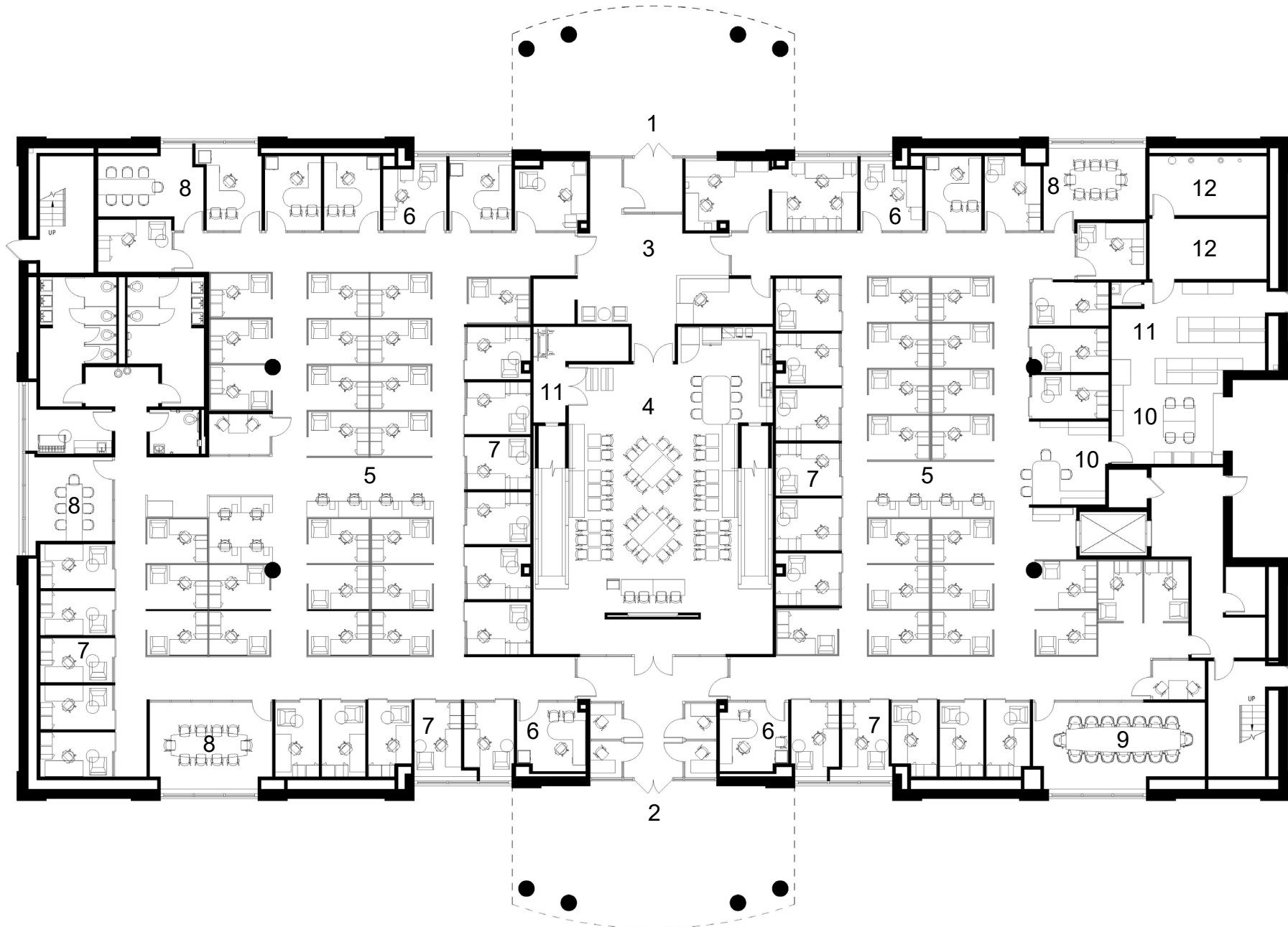


FLOOR PLAN DIAGRAM



“...an ‘urban grid’ floor plan organized by quadrants (or neighborhoods) share a central common space (like a public park)...”

...the interior layout reflects the formality of its surrounding exterior context...”



FLOOR PLAN KEY

1. MAIN ENTRANCE
2. COURTYARD ENTRANCE
3. RECEPTION
4. COMMONS
5. OPEN OFFICE
6. ENCLOSED OFFICES
7. SEMI-ENCLOSED OFFICES
8. MEETING ROOMS
9. BOARDROOM
10. EVENT PREP
11. STORAGE
12. UTILITY

“...the volume provides relief to the density of the flanking offices and offers a gathering space that promotes staff interaction and impromptu conversation....”

COMMONS





**BOARDROOM (LEFT)
COURTYARD (BEYOND)
OPEN OFFICES (RIGHT)**

“...perimeter offices and meeting rooms are lined with tall, transparent storefront to offer borrowed light into the central workstations, and provide views out to the exterior courtyard...”

"...the furniture is universally designed as individual components, adaptable to all types of workstations and offices, creating an equitable and consistent office atmosphere for all staff members..."



“...neutral and natural finishes were selected to be modest and trend-resistant, while still producing a warm, rich, and comfortable environment...”

**SEMI-ENCLOSED
OFFICES (LEFT)
COURTYARD
(BEYOND)**





OFFICES NEIGHBORHOOD

“...the solution started with an ‘urban grid’ floor plan organized by quadrants (or neighborhoods)...”

“...this was an exercise in maximizing every square inch of space, analyzing organizational needs, addressing future growth, and accommodating various hybrid work models...”

**NEIGHBORHOOD
CROSS-STREET
(TOUCHDOWN WORKSPACES)**





“...the material palette is rooted in biophilic design... preserved moss walls serve as a central focal elements while providing sound absorption...”