

CIVIC WORKPLACES

Designing for Wellness and Good Governance

Meet Our Experts



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DIRECTOR OF INTERIOR DESIGN

Located in our Los Angeles studio, Sergio is HMC's director of interior design. Sergio strives for beautiful interiors that are pragmatic and functional while also contextual and evocative of the client, their values, and the community in which they serve.

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Jennifer Wehling

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Jennifer, HMC's Director of Sustainability, believes buildings should benefit the health of both the environment and people. As a WELL Accredited Professional (WELL AP), she uses this knowledge to implement design strategies that lead to the overall improved health and well-being of our clients and their users.

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Happier employees. Stronger workplace culture. Healthier companies. The link between good workplace design and productivity is unmistakable.

Still, designing—or redesigning—a workplace in the public sector is complex and challenged by entrenched structures resisting change.

Yet, in a post-pandemic era, and in the face of an impending wave of retirements within government agencies, a strategic imperative takes shape—the need to rejuvenate operations and appeal to a younger generation of talent. A pivotal component of this transformation lies in the very spaces where work unfolds.



Daylight and natural ventilation facilitate improved workplace health, productivity, and well-being in this sun-powered building.

SHIFT THE PARADIGM.

Designing a workplace for the public sector comes with challenges. As today's office landscape becomes less hierarchical and younger staff more interested in a collaborative environment, employers must evolve to meet the needs of the next generation. Public optics, safety, many departments, and unique bidding processes must be considered. These challenges make designing for a public space different from privately owned corporate office space.

So, why does workplace design matter in the public realm? Firstly, it's humanistic. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that a person's physical and social environment is responsible for over 50 percent of their health. Secondly, design shapes recruitment and retention; in today's competitive job market, collaborative

environments are favored, unlike the traditional model. In Harvard's COGFX study—which measures the impact of green buildings on cognitive function—researchers found designs incorporating access to fresh air, daylight, and views resulted in a 101 percent improvement in cognitive function and a 27 percent energy savings.

We are leaving behind a workplace that operates like a machine, where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and predictable. Our new future is a workplace that functions like an ecosystem and requires adaptability and unpredictable roles and responsibilities. Organizations operating from old business models, structures, and designs can experience disengagement in the workforce. Updating these models requires a significant change for those in the public sector.



Fifty-six percent of job seekers said a good workplace culture was more important than salary for job satisfaction.

- Forbes magazine



Breathing Life In *Optimal Daylight and Fresh Air for Productive Spaces*

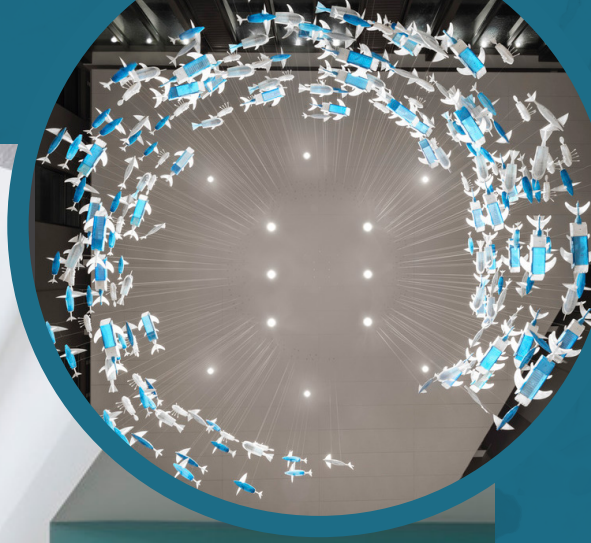


This building is not the bricks and mortar that make it pretty spectacular, and its LEED (certification) and all its accolades of energy efficiency. It's what happens inside and with our community, restoring hope to the lives that need a little extra help."

Nick Macchione,
County Health and Human
Services Agency Director

At the core of this facility's design is an unwavering commitment to boosting workplace health, productivity, and overall well-being. Shallow floor plates in the building's wings optimize daylight and fresh air within the workspace. Expansive windows with light shelves minimize glare while maximizing natural light penetration. Thoughtfully positioned operable windows encourage cross ventilation, enhancing airflow. Programmed 'office' spaces along the exterior envelope balance privacy with abundant daylight and fresh air. Ergonomic furniture, including sit-to-stand desks, high-performance chairs, and personal

task lighting, cater to computer-intensive work. The open office setup promotes collaboration, defined by dynamic ceiling planes, acoustical materials, lounge, and mobile furniture. This design creates diverse zones, empowering employees to choose spaces that align with their preferences. A dedicated breakroom and outdoor seating in a landscaped courtyard offer relaxation choices. This holistic design underscores the facility's goal to provide functional spaces that invigorate and cater to occupants' diverse needs.





“From reimagining spatial layouts to embracing novel design principles that prioritize holistic well-being, we venture into a realm where the physical environment becomes a strategic asset in achieving civic excellence.”

- Sergio Lechuga, director of interior design, HMC Architects

Warm natural wood tones resembling driftwood and calming wall colors revitalize wellness by telling a coastal story.

EMPOWER PEOPLE TO DO THEIR BEST WORK.

While the corporate world has embraced these transformative shifts—trading once ubiquitous window walls and labyrinthine cubicle configurations for open, airy spaces prioritizing collaboration, comfort, and well-being—civic workspaces are at a crossroads, grappling with the dual challenge of modernization and functionality. This juncture presents challenges and exciting opportunities for reimagining the spaces underpinning good governance and community service.

Amid the sweeping changes touching workplaces globally, civic environments are keystones of societal functioning. The services provided by government employees at state, regional, and local levels are the lifeblood of our communities, often operating behind the scenes, unnoticed by the constituents they tirelessly serve. Rarely do we pause to consider how the physical surroundings influence the efficacy and productivity of these essential functions. Yet, as we navigate a world reshaped by the pandemic, it becomes clear that these public servants' well-being is inseparable from our communities' well-being.

The aftermath of the pandemic has cast a spotlight on the resilience of our government workforce. While early retirements surged in response to unprecedented challenges, a concerning trend emerged that Millennials and Gen Z, the future torchbearers, hesitated to commit to civic service. The allure of tech-savvy corporate campuses replete with open-concept dining, recreational amenities, and unconventional workspaces

presents an appealing alternative, prompting the question: How can civic workplaces compete in this rapidly evolving landscape?

Yet, amidst this allure, we must recognize the unique strengths inherent in civic workspaces. Stability, a commitment to service, and comprehensive employee benefits characterizes these environments, setting them apart from the glitz of the corporate world. The time has come to reassess the foundational tenets that define our workspaces. Our civic workplaces, far from utilitarian structures, serve as nuclei of community progress.

In this context, designing for wellness and good governance has profound significance. The post-pandemic return to the workplace offers a pivotal moment to recalibrate our priorities and harness the resources at our disposal to craft spaces that facilitate efficient governance and cultivate employee well-being. By fashioning cost-effective environments that seamlessly blend flexibility, health, and wellness, we embark on a journey that holds the potential to attract new talent, enhance employee satisfaction, and fortify retention rates.

As we unpack the multifaceted layers of this transformation, we unveil the blueprint for a future where civic workplaces stand not just as functional spaces but as nurturing ecosystems fostering growth, innovation, and service for the greater good.



Tiered seating fosters an amphitheater-style communal experience, enhancing collaboration and providing a comfortable space for employees.

WELLNESS IS GOOD BUSINESS.

Creating workplaces that support occupant health and allow people to thrive in their day-to-day environment is essential for many reasons. Still, it is also critical for these strategies to make sound financial sense. [A study conducted by the Whole Building Design Guide](#) found that when you look at the 30-year cost of a building, the initial design and construction costs account for only two percent of the total cost, maintenance, and operational expenses are six percent, and personnel costs account for a staggering 92 percent of the overall expenses. Investments in the health and well-being of employees have the potential for substantial returns on your investment.

In 2022, the median tenure of a public-sector employee was 6.8 years compared to 3.7 years for private-sector employees (1). Employee tenure considers many factors, but public-sector employees work longer than most major private industries.

When we prioritize employee health and wellness strategies in our workplaces, studies show that employee absenteeism is reduced, productivity increases, and employee turnover is significantly reduced. Employee health and wellness investments make people feel valued and often encourage them to invest in their physical and mental well-being. Healthier employees contribute to a positive work environment that, in turn, benefits both the employee level and the organization.

In an era of depleting resources and rising costs, local government real estate assets account for a significant amount of the annual budget. Some local governments seek opportunities to generate revenue by selling or leasing their real estate assets. This means they must act as asset managers, involving the inventory, restructuring, and consolidation of their operations while simultaneously delivering the critical services their constituents depend on. Densifying existing government workplace buildings to be more efficiently planned to consolidate public services, reduce overhead, and maintain costs while providing public value greatly benefits local governments.





Office Harmony

Balancing Privacy and Collaboration

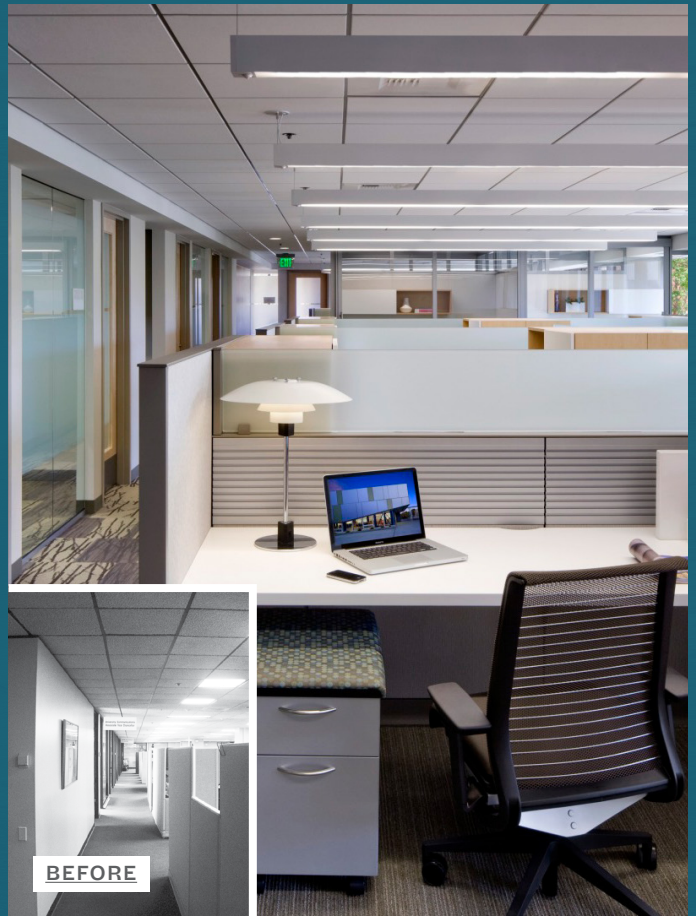


This project is a great example of what a team approach can achieve in a cost-effective transformation of existing space. I appreciate the collective input and energy that brought this concept to reality.

Gary Matthews,
Vice Chancellor, Resource
Management & Planning,
UC San Diego

The core design philosophy revolves around cultivating an expansive and collaborative work environment along the periphery, integrating privacy through innovative workstations and private office designs utilizing a versatile, movable wall system. Tailoring solutions to the distinct privacy requirements of various departments, interior offices blend glass panels, partially frosted or solid, with clerestory windows, striking the optimal balance between visual seclusion and the infusion of natural light. The synergy between low-panel furniture systems fosters collaboration while dividing individual workspaces.

Ergonomic furniture graces the workstations, accompanied by mobile storage units featuring seating cushions that double as collaborative hubs. The synergy intensifies as open workspaces converge around collaborative nodes, nurturing impromptu meetings and small group exchanges, while unobstructed ocean views via expansive windows invigorate the staff. To facilitate communication, readily accessible connections and equipment cater to seamless phone and video interactions in these spaces.





Biophilic curvilinear desk forms create warm and welcoming space for visitors to lounge and mingle.

CREATING HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENTS.

It is easy to get wrapped up in big ideas when implementing wellness strategies, which could result in significant renovations with a hefty price tag. Many organizations are looking at their office space from a new perspective post-pandemic. Creating a healthier work environment does not have to mean relocation or a complete revamp of your existing space. Whether you have an unutilized floor area because you have

a more robust hybrid work policy or are looking for ways to encourage people to spend more time in the office, there are cost-effective changes that can have significant impacts. Incorporating small, cost-effective changes can significantly enhance the well-being of your staff and employees.





A contemporary glass lobby illuminates the street corner like a lantern at night. By day, it has views through the building, creating a neighborhood gateway.

THE ROLE OF FURNITURE AND LIGHTING

In the pursuit of cultivating a healthy and productive workplace within civic environments, strategic adjustments to furniture and lighting hold transformative potential. Recognizing the impact of these elements on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and efficiency, a holistic approach emerges that integrates simple yet impactful changes. Government agencies can foster an environment conducive to employee flourishing by prioritizing ergonomic furniture solutions and optimizing lighting configurations.

FURNITURE

- **Embracing Natural Light and Views:** In civic workplaces, positioning private offices and conference rooms along the perimeter often restricts access to natural light and outdoor vistas for staff cubicles. A survey of North American employees indicated that access to natural light and outdoor views ranked as a top attribute for a positive work environment. Reconfiguring layouts to grant more employees access to daylight and views can alleviate stress, enhance mood, and facilitate mental restoration.
- **Openness and Flexibility:** Replacing tall cubicle partitions with lower or semi-translucent options allows natural light to permeate the workspace. Introducing ergonomic and height-adjustable furniture promotes movement and better blood circulation and reduces the discomfort associated with prolonged sitting. Offer diverse users a choice of furniture that accommodates varied needs and boosts satisfaction.
- **Enhancing Comfort:** Providing comfortable task chairs with adjustable features tailors to individual preferences and reduces fatigue. By furnishing employees with flexible and adaptable options, civic workplaces can promote a happier, healthier, and more efficient workforce.

LIGHTING

- **Mitigating Eye Fatigue:** Civic workplaces often use inadequate natural and outdated fluorescent lighting. While a complete lighting overhaul may pose financial challenges, simple tweaks to ambient lighting, such as adjusting color temperatures during ballast replacements, can alleviate eye strain and enhance overall well-being.
- **Temperature and Mood Enhancement:** Lighting temperature influences mood and productivity. Warm tones foster comfort and relaxation, while cooler tones heighten alertness and efficiency. Providing LED task lights with multi-level switching empowers individuals to tailor their lighting to specific tasks, reducing eye strain during focused work and easing stress during relaxation.
- **Personalized Task Lighting:** Pairing task lighting with reduced overall ambient lighting caters to individual needs and conserves energy. Customizable task lighting levels support optimal illumination for various tasks, diminishing stress levels and minimizing migraine triggers for susceptible individuals.



Bringing the Outside In

A Serene Interior Inspired by Nature

From a former dim storage space for medical records emerges a luminous neurosurgery and anesthesia clinic designed to elevate staff and patient experiences, enhance wellness, and foster collaboration. Our strategy hinged on LED lighting and artificial nature views to evoke biophilia. Color-shifting LEDs cycle through calming hues in the waiting and recovery areas, alleviating the windowless atmosphere's monotony. Nature 'views' are crafted using custom LED panels merging light with nature imagery, from sky-mimicking clouds in the waiting room to forest canopies outside

doctors' offices. The waiting room's versatile seating accommodates up to 48 patients, offering private individual seats, family-oriented group arrangements, and a refreshment zone. Standing stations with power outlets support work or reading. Doctors' offices, intentionally compact, prioritize the adjacent doctor refresh/collaboration area for enhanced teamwork. Ergonomic furniture, soundproof private offices, and high partitions protect patient confidentiality. This clinic epitomizes transformative space utilization to cultivate well-being, connectivity, and productive engagement.





Terrazzo floors sparkle with recycled glass chips, and concrete walls contrast against the warmth of detailed cabinetry and FSC-certified wood grille ceilings.

PRIORITIZE THERMAL COMFORT

Thermal comfort, a cornerstone of a productive and content work environment, holds significant implications for civic workplace design. Ensuring employees feel comfortable regarding temperature can significantly enhance their focus, well-being, and productivity. Here's why it matters:

- 1. Widespread Concern:** Studies reveal that thermal comfort is a common concern in workplaces. A 20-year study conducted by the Center for the Built Environment found that nearly 40 percent of individuals express dissatisfaction with the temperature in their workspace.
- 2. Temperature Challenges:** Fixed year-round temperature setpoints often leave a portion of the workforce feeling too hot or cold. This constant discomfort can hinder concentration, diverting attention from tasks and hampering productivity.
- 3. Personalized Control:** Providing individuals control over their thermal comfort doesn't necessitate significant investments. Implementing seasonal temperature setpoints that align with outdoor conditions and clothing requirements can help balance the temperature spectrum.
- 4. Localized Solutions:** Simple measures like offering desk fans for air movement can make a significant difference. A task light with an in-unit fan serves a dual purpose, ensuring thermal comfort while maintaining a productive atmosphere.
- 5. Flexibility with Clothing:** Allowing employees to adjust their clothing based on personal preferences can create a more comfortable workplace. Easy access to sweaters or lighter clothing options gives individuals the autonomy to manage their comfort.
- 6. Benefits Beyond Comfort:** A workplace prioritizing thermal comfort can reap rewards beyond employee satisfaction. Harmonizing temperature setpoints with seasonal changes and granting local control options can save energy and increase productivity.





Collaboration simmers over shared meals, fostering a vibrant workplace community that fuels productivity and camaraderie.

NURTURING WELLNESS THROUGH NUTRITION

Incorporating sound nutritional practices within civic workplace design holds the potential to amplify employee health and vitality. By focusing on food and nutrition, workplaces can foster an environment where well-being thrives.

- **Holistic Wellness:** Prioritizing nutrition aligns to support employees' overall well-being.
- **Healthy Choices:** Offering high-protein, low-fat, and low-calorie snacks promotes better eating habits and sustained energy levels.
- **Energy Boost:** Nutritious snacks revitalize employees, enhancing focus and productivity.
- **Productivity:** Nutrient-rich snacks empower employees to manage tasks effectively and collaborate more efficiently.
- **Promoting Health:** Health-conscious snacks encourage better food choices, benefiting long-term well-being.

Central to this evolution is the strategic recalibration of workplace amenities. Forward-thinking employers are meticulously redefining their office spaces, ensuring an optimal balance between efficient spatial utilization and meaningful employee-centric provisions. This commitment extends to promoting health and wellness through a variety of thoughtful amenities, encompassing:

Fitness Centers: Integrating fitness centers within the workplace allows employees to prioritize their physical health and well-being. Access to these facilities encourages regular exercise, linked to enhanced energy levels, stress reduction, and holistic wellness.

Private Respite Rooms: Private respite rooms provide sanctuaries for brief moments of respite while catering to diverse employee needs. These spaces acknowledge the significance of spiritual health by offering quiet areas for prayer and reflection and accommodating various religious requirements. Additionally, they provide nursing mothers with a discreet and comfortable setting for breastfeeding or pumping, fostering an environment that champions working parents and a family-friendly culture.

Outdoor Recreation Areas: Incorporating outdoor recreational spaces featuring green zones, seating alcoves, and walking paths establishes a vital connection between employees and the natural environment. These spaces facilitate relaxation, rejuvenation, and enhanced mental well-being, contributing to higher job satisfaction.

Investing in these purposeful amenities underscores a resolute commitment to cultivating a work environment that is supportive and engaging. Such an environment reflects a genuine concern for the welfare of employees, translating into heightened productivity and employee retention rates. This strategic evolution of workplaces aligns with the shifting nature of work and positions organizations as beacons of progressive and empathetic corporate culture.



Nurturing Nexus

Elevating Collaboration and Comfort to Inspire Success

In response to pressing spatial needs, this cutting-edge facility addresses the scarcity of office and collaborative spaces. The ground floor is a nexus of communal engagement, with a bustling café catering to staff and the wider public, nurturing connections through shared experiences. An interplay between indoor and outdoor seating options under the sun ensures patrons can relish moments of reprieve or opt for quick refueling. The artfully arranged soft seating, featuring couches and lounge chairs, adorns the lobby and corridors, harmonized by pull-up and side tables that encourage work and relaxation for staff and visitors alike. The fusion of private

offices and open-plan workstations on the upper level showcases ergonomic furniture and task-oriented lighting, amplifying comfort and productivity. At the heart of this facility's design lies an expansive conference room with mobile, data-enabled furniture, seamlessly adaptable for one-on-one collaborations, breakout sessions, or sizeable presentations. Overhead glass and sliding doors unveil a terrace that extends the conference space to an inviting outdoor area, commanding panoramic views of the neighboring landscape.



Rendering courtesy of HMC Architects

Barren to Bliss

Wellness Garden Redefines Workplace Experience

Nearly three acres of barren and underutilized landscape were converted into a private wellness garden to encourage Los Angeles County staff to remain on campus and make their time at the office more enjoyable. The new outdoor space features a quarter-mile fitness circuit with exercise nodes, an outdoor yoga area, and a community garden. Outdoor spaces for work, leisure, or a combination

include a sunken courtyard and a centrally located amphitheater featuring a raised seating area with ribbons of seat walls for employee events or informal use during lunch and break times. The landscaping palette draws from local San Gabriel Valley ecoregions and includes native California plant life with educational signage to help connect staff to their local biome.

CASE STUDY **06**

MAMMOTH LAKES CIVIC CENTER



City Hub Redefined

Fostering Connections and Streamlining Functionality

This community center unites all civic functions within a single cohesive space. It houses the city council chamber and accommodates essential departments such as public works, economic development and planning, and parks and recreation. The facility is further enriched by including an emergency operation center, which serves as the nerve center for planning, training, response, and recovery during wintry city emergencies. Notably, a discreet private staff entry known as the ‘mud room’ graces the north end, equipped with lockers, changing areas, and single-occupant toilet and shower facilities. This thoughtful feature caters to Mammoth’s active lifestyle and encourages sustainable commuting via bicycles. Strategically oriented for

optimal north-south solar exposure, the center bathes most staff workspaces in abundant daylight and breathtaking views of the majestic Sherwin Mountain Range. Inside, a dynamic office layout has been orchestrated to foster interdepartmental collaboration, with private offices lining the north wall to amplify the open expanse for modular workstations. The adaptable ergonomic furniture can be effortlessly reconfigured, mirroring the evolving nature of work styles. Anchoring the first floor is a centralized breakroom that accommodates up to 40 individuals, providing a serene space for relaxation, shared meals, or moments spent on the adjoining private patio that offers views of the mountains.

CASE STUDY **07**

ONTARIO CITY HALL ANNEX




Performance and Serenity

Ontario’s Dynamic Office Oasis

This contemporary facility is a haven of additional office space in response to Ontario, California’s civil operations demand. Its design is a testament to the essence of employee well-being and performance, poised to evolve gracefully with ever-changing needs. Along the building’s periphery, open-office ergonomic workstations bask in daylight and offer glimpses of the outdoors, facilitated by intelligent sun control mechanisms that subdue glare. Internal offices are adorned with generous glazing to harness the flood of natural light cascading within. The site design honors

the region’s agricultural legacy, providing abundant outdoor spaces for staff’s daily use. A site-encompassing walking loop seamlessly joins an adjacent community park, championing staff wellness within the broader civic center context. Indoor spaces extend this connectivity with a third-floor deck adjoining staff break and meeting rooms, inviting easy, frequent engagement with the outdoors. This facility addresses Ontario’s operational needs and is a testament to holistic employee engagement and harmonious integration with its surroundings.



In the wake of a transformative pandemic, our return to physical workplaces is an opportune moment for reevaluation and renewal. Prioritizing employee health and well-being, spanning the realms of mental, emotional, social, and physical wellness, not only lays a solid foundation for their holistic flourishing but also shapes a culture where every individual feels respected. [A study by the American Psychological Association](#) shows that the empirical link between feeling valued and enhanced employee well-being and performance amplifies the case for a wellness-centric workplace. As businesses navigate the currents of talent attraction and retention, promoting wellness emerges as a strategic advantage, elevating morale and productivity. In this juncture of transformation, we possess the blueprint to craft workplaces that transcend functional utility and metamorphose into nurturing hubs of growth, connectedness, and mutual success.

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Founded with the purpose of anticipating community needs, HMC aims to create designs that have a positive impact, now and into the future.

We focus primarily on opportunities to have the most direct contribution to communities — through healthcare, education, and civic spaces.

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