CAMPUS GARAGES CHANGE PERCEPTIONS

By Ian Nestler, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

With growing scarcities of both capital funding and vacant land, colleges and universities have begun tucking additional uses into campus parking garages, either by expanding footprints or adding floors. The benefits are as diverse as the potential uses.

Adding a street-level retail component such as food vendors or service providers, for example, can generate fresh revenue through leased space or profit sharing. Incorporating administrative offices, classrooms, lecture halls, or student services can deliver needed facilities at a cost far less than developing those projects from scratch and attract extra funds from such sources as grants. Non-parking uses also significantly animate the pedestrian experience, breaking up the sometimes faceless façade of a single-use "house of cars." Though more costly per space to develop, the mixed-use garage has a much higher return on investment.

Mixed Use

With six distinct non-parking uses, the new Market Station garage at Florida International University, Miami, is a highly diversified campus garage. This $55 million, seven-story, 773,000 square-foot complex accommodates 2,000 parking spaces and more than 50,000 square feet of mixed-use space, including a campus police station, commercial food court, social hub with cyber café, three classrooms, health clinic, and university parking/transportation offices.

Market Station addresses a series of challenges that are characteristic of mixed-use campus garages, which are generally large and often serve as landmark features.

Market Station includes layering architectural precast panels, reveals, and raised architectural banding, and an extensive 12-foot-wide canopy over a serpentine terrace for outdoor dining that's connected to the social hub. Stair and elevator cores, visible from outside, have decorative mesh and glass enclosures.

To give each use a distinct entry and identity while maintaining design consistency and respecting established campus architectural themes, stainless steel channel letters were used for the university logo and offices. Illuminated signs on the canopy identify retail users.

To enhance off-campus access to retail components, adjacent roadways were reconfigured.

Features such as open stairwells, glass-backed elevators, greater floor-to-floor heights (improving field of vision), CCTV, increased lighting, and security call boxes recognize that safety and security are top priorities.

Acoustic separation was maintained between the garage and other uses.

The parking deck above the mixed-use space was waterproofed. Design issues were addressed to account for movement of the deck.

Interior circulation systems take advantage of the constant flow of pedestrian traffic.

Sustainability

Another example—the Southwest Parking Garage at the University of Florida, Gainesville—became one of the country's first LEED Gold Certified campus parking garages. Unfortunately, it was also one of the last, as the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) has since stopped certifying garages. (The Green Parking Council, an affiliate of the International Parking Institute, has developed new certification criteria, and Green Globes also certifies garages.)

Certified or not, colleges and universities want sustainable buildings, both to reduce operating costs and to use their garages as teaching tools. Popular features include daylighting, sustainable materials, bicycle racks, showers, reflective roofing, connectivity to public transportation, integrally-colored precast panels, low-mercury fluorescent or LED lighting, low-spillage roof lighting, stained cement flooring, and television monitors that share the buildings' stories with visitors.

Not surprisingly, colleges and universities are at the forefront of changing the face and function of the traditional parking garage.

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