

Cube 3 Studio

How this New England-based architectural firm creates cost-savvy and sustainable design solutions for healthcare providers with a simplistic and practical approach.

Diligent Design



As costs in the healthcare industry continue to rise, many of its organizations and providers are putting most if not all of their development projects on hold. But Cube 3 Studio's Adam Wagner said that isn't necessary. In fact, his architectural firm is proving there are ways to bend a development budget without breaking it.

"We approach all of our projects with a developer's mentality when it comes to evaluating the cost implications," said Wagner, senior project architect. "We recognize that every development dollar needs to count, especially in light of the healthcare industry's current economic challenges. So we think that healthcare providers can appreciate our cost-conscious and flexible approach to design."

Cube 3's distinct design perspective was first created back in 2003, when founders Nicholas Middleton and Brian O'Connor opened the architecture/design firm just North of Boston, Mass. Today, the firm takes on a wide range of local and national projects in a variety of industry sectors.



Adam Wagner

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Initially, the company's primary focus was on corporate, multi-family residential and academic projects, but it slowly evolved to take on projects in the retail, hospitality, and healthcare industries. In fact, healthcare projects now dominate a third of the company's business, and Wagner said he expects that trend to continue since Cube 3 has taken on some large and impressive projects over the last few years.

The design firm first carved out a niche in the market several years back when it won a bid on a project for Elliot Health System (EHS), a nonprofit health organization in New Hampshire. Wagner said it was Cube 3's fiscally responsible and attentive approach to the project that earned the company its first big break in healthcare development.

Elliot Hospital's master plan was developed to steer renovation and growth at EHS's acute care hospital. Proposed enhancements to the facility included upgrades to the radiology suite, operating rooms, medical/surgical beds, and a complete renovation of both its patient and employee common areas.

That project set the tone for the next project for EHS, which was the development of a \$65 million ambulatory care center designed to alleviate the traffic at Elliot Hospital's ED by moving ambulatory uses off of the acute care campus. Having worked with the healthcare provider on its previous project, Wagner said that taking on this new and challenging venture was the natural next step for Cube 3.

After bidding and receiving approval to design the project known as Elliot at River's Edge, the company embarked on its most fiscally challenging healthcare development project yet. "We had to keep the purse strings as tight as possible to make sure we could keep this project moving forward," Wagner explained. "That required substantial planning and consideration to ensure we were meeting the quality standards of our design while respecting our client's budget at the same time."

The end result

To accomplish that task, Cube 3 conducted more than 300 user-group meetings to ensure that the hospital was on board



with the firm's medical space planning, and Wagner said it worked closely with the project's developer, Dick Anagnost, and the general contractor, Suffolk/Eckman, to keep costs at a minimum. Additionally, a lot of research and discussion went into selecting the appropriate sustainable materials for the project, said Wagner.

"The process was in-depth but really demonstrates what we do as a design firm," he said. "We worked diligently both with our client and developer to make sure we were serving the needs of the project from every angle so that time and money wouldn't be wasted going back to the drawing board."

All Cube 3's careful planning certainly looks like it's going to pay off big for EHS.

The 259,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art ambulatory care center opened in April and now provides preventative and proactive healthcare to a community that was previously underserved. Furthermore, what was once the site of a Brown-field industrial plant is now a beautiful yet simply designed

facility capable of seeing more than 40,000 patients per year for non-life threatening accidents and illness, which is expected to drastically reduce ED waiting times at Elliot Hospital.

Other features of the building include six Class C operating rooms, six endoscopy procedure rooms, 32 treatment rooms, and 130 exam rooms. The simple yet aesthetically pleasing layout, as well as signage by GDS Signs, makes navigation through the facility easy for patients and efficient for medical employees. In terms of sustainability, it's one of the first four healthcare facilities in the country to be registered under the LEED-HC rating system and is 16.2% more energy efficient

than the baseline standard, one of many feats that make this project an impressive accomplishment for Cube 3, said Wagner.

"There were a lot of successes with this project, but we're extremely proud of our ability to deliver a beautiful building that benefitted EHS as well as the community of Manchester for around \$220 per square foot," he said. "Furthermore, we are always looking at ways to incorporate sustainability into our design, and this project is a great representation of that principle."



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Now that Cube 3 has taken more than 750,000 square feet of healthcare design projects from the drawing board to development for Elliot Hospital, Wagner said he feels the company has gathered the insight and experience needed to take on other healthcare projects of equal caliber and challenge. However, Wagner stressed that the company will keep its project portfolio diverse to stay abreast of the market needs and attuned to new design ideas and developments.

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“We learn something new with every project we take on,” said Wagner. “We don’t want to limit ourselves when it comes to realizing what we can achieve for our clients, but working with healthcare providers has proven to be a rewarding experience for us. After all, one of the most gratifying things an architect can do is create a space that has a positive impact on people’s lives. That’s what we’ve been able to do at Elliot at River’s Edge, and I am really proud of that.” +

—Erica Garvin

Congratulations to Cube 3 Studio, Engleberth Construction and Suffolk Construction on a job well done: The Elliot at River’s Edge.

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