

School of Architecture + Planning  
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<<Architect Firm>>  
<<Address>>  
<<Address>>

Dear <<Contact Name>>:

As co-chair of the Architect Selection Committee, I am very pleased to inform you that your firm has been chosen as one of four finalists for the Metropolitan Warehouse Rehabilitation Project at MIT. The attached package contains information about the next stage in the selection process.

On behalf of the community of the School of Architecture and Planning, I look forward to welcoming you to campus soon, to discuss the project and the opportunities it presents to us all, and to hear your ideas.

This project has a long history and many aspirations. It will be transformative, not just for the oldest and most innovative School of Architecture and Planning in the United States, but for the entire MIT campus, for it will elevate design and urbanism within the life and culture of the Institute.

Throughout its history at MIT, and from a spatial point of view, the School of Architecture and Planning has always been either far behind or far ahead of the rest of the campus. When Architecture was introduced as a course of study at the Institute 150 years ago, it was squeezed under the roof of one of the original buildings in Boston. When MIT decided to cross the river to Cambridge during World War I, Architecture stayed behind and joined the Main Group in Cambridge only when a new gateway building to Massachusetts Avenue was built in 1932.

Over the years, the department has grown into a School that now houses five degree-granting units: Architecture; Urban Studies and Planning; Media Arts and Sciences; Art, Culture and Technology; and the Center for Real Estate, in addition to several labs and research and outreach programs. Although the School continues to occupy a prime symbolic space at the entrance to the Main Group, its operation is actually sprinkled all over the campus and fragmented in a way that has negatively reflected on its culture and activities. Being landlocked between Engineering and Engineering has also inhibited our growth. We do not own the ground floor anywhere on campus except at the Media Lab. This makes us invisible to anyone navigating through MIT, and almost impossible to find.

Despite remarkable efforts by my predecessors and by the current heads of departments to consolidate and improve spaces, the reality remains that we have very little visibility on campus. We also are without room to expand our educational and research spaces. We lack social spaces, adequate lecture rooms, pin-up spaces, and galleries, and we crave the possibility to freely imagine the future of our education and research.

Admitted students who choose not to come to MIT say that inadequate space is one of the key reasons for their decision. We also hear from visiting committee after visiting committee that the superior quality of our education and our excellent rankings will ultimately be negatively affected if we do not address the pressing issue of space. We are the oldest department of architecture in the country, but we want to remain the most vigorous. We consistently rank among the top schools in various assessments of programs in architecture, planning, and art and design, but we need the space that allows us to retain and enhance our academic standing.

When the Metropolitan Warehouse became available two years ago, the heads of the departments encouraged me to make a proposal to the Institute for the building. The Institute has generously endorsed this move and so have many donors, and we are working together to plan it carefully and boldly and to raise funds to support the aspirations of the community. The speed at which we have managed to raise a significant amount of support proves that this is an exciting and important project.

The Met will solve many of the problems in one big, bold move. No doubt, it will also create a few challenges.

The Met will allow us to consolidate the School; to create shared programs with the Media Lab; to host the rest of the Institute and the world; to grow particularly in the areas of research and in the exciting new fields of Urban Science and Art and Design; and to gain visibility.

For MIT, this is not just a real estate move. It is a recentering of the whole campus around this key site at the intersection of two main axes, Mass. Ave. and Vassar Street, which has been dormant for the longest time. As the Campus grows north and west, the Met will provide a gateway and bridge to these new frontiers. And with this move, the School will come closer to the innovation districts of Kendall and Central Square. With this move, we will be the only school housed on the West Campus, closer to the student residential areas and part of the growing cultural activities on that side of campus. Our relocation to the Met will make arts and culture more visible on campus and to the outside world, and closer to the students.

Paradoxically, the move away from the Main Group and across the street to the Met will provide us with the opportunity to connect better with the rest of the campus, especially in terms of hosting collaborative programs and activities in the domains of urbanism, design, and art. These domains, which are the basis of our strength, have become increasingly attractive to students from other fields such as Engineering and Management. The Met will enable us to amplify our impact as a School on the rest of MIT.

One big challenge is to turn an inward-looking building into an extroverted and inviting space while respecting its historic status. We believe very strongly in the idea that one of the most forward-looking and technologically inspired schools of architecture and planning in the world has chosen a historic building as its home for the 21st century. We will employ these progressive views and advanced technologies to help adapt this historic building to an ever-renewed and strongly sustainable future. We want it to be a lesson in architecture and urbanism for generations to come.

The move offers immense opportunities to rethink our pedagogies as they confront major challenges: online education that will no doubt impact residential learning; the global outlook of our faculty and students and how it relates to the local setting; the studio space as both strengthened by new technologies and challenged by the growing space of research, by the laboratory; the space of the individual office researcher versus that of the interdisciplinary group; and the diverse and competing cultures of making and research. We would like to ask these important questions in your presence and through your collaboration. We believe in the mediating and enabling power of space to inspire and to support change, hopefully for the better.

The move also positions us to think and project together and to exercise our collective imaginary as a community through space and about space, but also through community and about community. For that, we hope to discuss with you how you imagine engaging this large community of individuals who have a variety of experiences and expertise that can help and inspire you, but who will likely also make your undertaking more challenging.

The move allows us to reinforce connections with MIT, through the new joint programs in Urban Science and in Design, through the increasing interest on the campus in design and in cities, and through the

interdisciplinary research and facilities that this building will host. The presence of Project Manus Maker Spaces will strengthen the School's connection with the larger MIT maker culture and with students from across the campus.

The move enables us to build bridges to Cambridge, Boston, and the world. With a state-of-the-art auditorium and galleries and performance spaces, through our cities arena, we will be able to host events and interface directly and powerfully with busy Mass. Ave. MIT has always been an open campus and community, and our School has always been invested in elevating social consciousness among our students. We would like the spaces of the Met to facilitate and express our deep social engagement, in thought and action.

The move also provides us with an opportunity to build intellectual, social, and spatial commons among our different units and address one of the most recurring and urgent requests of our students and faculty: providing spaces that inspire interaction and interdisciplinarity.

And finally, the move makes it possible for us to grow our spaces significantly in the immediate and long-term future. We do not foresee ourselves expanding in numbers, but we do see ourselves growing in research capacities and in our abilities to host, interact, make, and display.

These aspirations may change, and we need to remain generously open to change. During the discussions that resulted in the attached white papers, one faculty member proposed that by adaptive reuse, we should mean making a building that can adapt the past to the needs of the present while also being constantly adaptable to the aspirations of future generations.

We will need your talents and skills to help us think through these opportunities and challenges and to come up with designs that are at once bold, inspiring, modest, engaging, inviting, collaborative, worldly, resilient, geeky, and exhilarating—in short, reflective of the spirit of MIT at its best and of the future of our fields at their best. Anything less will not be worth the move.

Sincerely,

Hashim Sarkis  
Dean  
Professor of Architecture and Planning