



Key Tech

2026 ULI Baltimore Wavemaker Awards

**QUINN
EVANS**

Key Tech

40 E Cross St, Baltimore, MD 21230

PROJECT INFORMATION

Completion Date: 8/27/2025

Construction Cost: \$3,750,000

Project Size in Square Feet: 15,000 sf

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Key Tech, a multidisciplinary product design and development firm, had long occupied Baltimore's historic McHenry Theater. The acquisition of an adjacent nineteenth century schoolhouse presented an opportunity to transform two distinct buildings into a unified workplace shaped by history, creativity, and collective making. Rather than a singular architectural expression, the project embraces the character of each structure, cultivating an open culture through the three-dimensional spatial experience of the theater's mezzanines. Layered views, open sightlines, and amplified daylight reinforce visual connection, and guided by the client's playful spirit, the design balances focused work with experimentation and social engagement.

Applicant Information:

QUINN EVANS

On behalf of the entire project team shown below.

Point of Contact:

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PROJECT TEAM

Key Tech Inc.

Client

ALEXIS MCKENZIE

Quinn Evans

Architect

Ethan Marchant, AIA, LEED
AP BD+C

J C Porter Construction

General Contractor

Skarda & Associates

Structural Engineer

Tourgee & Associates

Mechanical, Electrical, and
Plumbing Engineer

Photographer

Patrick Ross Photography



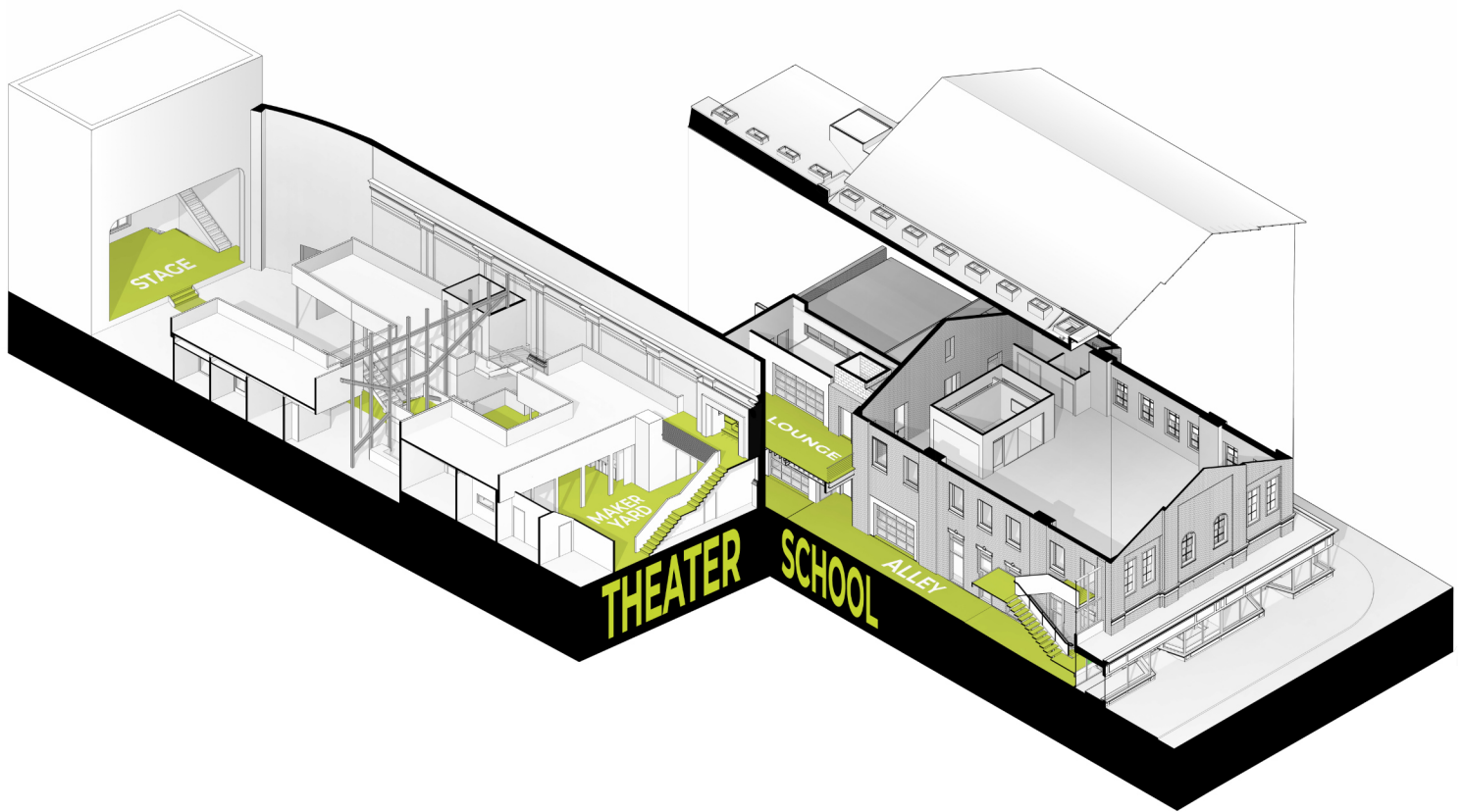
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



- | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1 Primary Entry | 6 Kichenette | 11 Wet Lab | 16 Roof Deck |
| 2 Open Office | 7 Cafe/Lounge | 12 Alley | 17 Lounge |
| 3 Office | 8 Conference Room | 13 Clean Room | |
| 4 Stage/Lounge | 9 Project Room | 14 Secondary Entry | |
| 5 Wellness Room | 10 Maker Yard | 15 Focus Room | |



COMPLETENESS

The project represents a completed investment strategy that enabled a growing company to remain in Baltimore while expanding its capacity for creative practice. Funded entirely through private investment, it reflects a long-term commitment to organizational growth and confidence in Baltimore as a place to cultivate and sustain a creative enterprise. Rather than pursuing new construction, the client chose to adaptively reuse two historic buildings, leveraging existing assets to create a workplace designed to support future growth while reinforcing the character of its urban context.

Design interventions enhanced the functionality, flexibility, and long-term value of both buildings while celebrating the distinct architectural identity of each. Instead of diminishing their differences, the design embraces the unique qualities of the McHenry Theater and 1024 Light Street, organizing them into a cohesive workplace that balances preservation with transformation. Together, these interventions transformed two independent buildings into an integrated workplace environment where connection emerges through movement, visibility, and shared experience rather than prescribed organizational boundaries. Existing architectural character remains legible throughout, allowing each building to retain its identity while contributing to a larger whole.

Since completion, the workplace has become a physical expression of the Key Tech's culture and design process. Employees move between quiet focus areas, collaborative studios, project rooms, informal lounges, and the Maker Yard, selecting environments that best support their work. Clients and visitors experience the firm's process firsthand through visible making, open collaboration, and shared gathering spaces, reinforcing the firm's identity as a multidisciplinary design practice.

Beyond serving as a headquarters, the space functions as a visible demonstration of Baltimore's creative economy by showing how engineering, design, fabrication, and innovation can be embedded into the city's historic urban fabric. The completed project has strengthened the firm's long-term commitment to Baltimore, expanded its capacity for future growth, and positioned both buildings to support the firm's continued evolution. More broadly, it demonstrates that adaptive reuse can simultaneously generate organizational resilience, architectural stewardship, and lasting economic value while preserving the character and vitality of the city it serves.



A SENSE OF PLACE & QUALITY

Baltimore has long been defined by its capacity for reinvention, and this project extends that legacy by transforming two historic buildings into a contemporary workplace rooted in history, culture, and place. Together, the McHenry Theater and 1024 Light Street represent more than 170 years of continuous urban evolution. Constructed in 1917 as a 1,200-seat neighborhood theater designed by Oliver Birkhead Wight, the McHenry Theater served as a cultural destination before adapting to retail, recreation, and office uses. The adjacent 1024 Light Street, built in 1854 as Primary School No. 15, evolved through successive commercial lives that included manufacturing, retail, restaurants, and artist studios. Rather than treating these buildings as static artifacts, the project extends their legacy by allowing them to continue evolving as active contributors to Baltimore's future.

Material and technical decisions further strengthen the dialogue between historic fabric and contemporary performance. Historic masonry, exposed timber trusses, and original structural systems remain legible, preserving the craftsmanship and history embedded within both buildings. New interventions are intentionally restrained, relying on light, transparency, color, and precision detailing to clarify the architecture rather than compete with it. Modern building systems are thoughtfully integrated to improve comfort, functionality, and long-term performance while respecting the integrity of the original structures. The result is an environment where historic character is not simply preserved but activated, creating a workplace that is both distinctly Baltimore and unmistakably contemporary.







SUSTAINABILITY

The project's greatest environmental contribution is its commitment to adaptive reuse. By reinvesting in the existing building stock, the design preserves embodied carbon, minimizes material consumption, avoids demolition waste, and demonstrates the long-term value of existing urban infrastructure. The McHenry Theater and 1024 Light Street have each evolved through more than a century of changing uses; this project extends their useful life and adapts them for contemporary work. By remaining within an established Baltimore neighborhood, the project also supports walkability, strengthens neighborhood connections, reduces demand for new infrastructure, and reinforces continued investment in the surrounding community.

Historic elements were thoughtfully adapted to improve environmental performance while preserving the integrity of the original architecture. Former ventilation openings were reglazed to improve daylight performance, and the interior

connector carries natural light deep into the workplace, reducing reliance on artificial lighting throughout the day. Expanded sightlines through existing openings and new transparent connections strengthen visual relationships between interior spaces and the surrounding neighborhood, while bright interior finishes amplify available daylight.

Building systems were upgraded to improve efficiency while remaining visually unobtrusive. High-efficiency HVAC systems with zoned controls respond to varying occupancy patterns, improving occupant comfort while reducing unnecessary energy use. Energy-efficient LED lighting provides adaptable illumination that complements the architectural character of the historic interiors. Low-flow plumbing fixtures and bottle-filling stations reduce potable water consumption, while a strategically located wet lab consolidates water infrastructure and supports efficient workplace operations.

Performance is achieved through precision rather than intervention. The historic building envelope was carefully maintained, preserving existing masonry while transforming former exterior walls within the enclosed connector into interior architectural features that celebrate the buildings' layered history. New insertions are intentionally limited and meticulously detailed, allowing contemporary systems and workplace requirements to integrate seamlessly with the existing architecture rather than compete with it. This approach reinforces a broader sustainability principle: the most responsible building is often one that extends the life and use of what already exists.

Equally important, the project was designed for long-term adaptability. Flexible studios, maker spaces, project rooms, and collaborative environments enable the workplace to respond as organizational needs, technology, and methods of working evolve. Existing spaces are repurposed to maximize their long-term value, demonstrating that sustainability is measured by both operational performance and a building's capacity to remain useful, resilient, and relevant over time. This long-term investment enables a growing Baltimore-based company to expand its workforce while reinforcing the role of creative industries in the city's economic future.





VISIONARY AND EMULATION

The project's greatest innovation is not the physical connection between buildings but the organizational framework it creates. By challenging conventional workplace planning, the design establishes a new approach in which existing buildings are not viewed as constraints to overcome but as assets capable of shaping organizational culture, creativity, and long-term growth. In an era when cities are confronting aging building stock, changing expectations for the workplace, and the need to reinvigorate existing neighborhoods, this project demonstrates how historic structures can become platforms for innovation rather than barriers to progress.

Rather than organizing the workplace around departments or hierarchy, the design is structured around movement, interaction, and choice. A sequence of interconnected spaces encourages employees to transition naturally between environments that support collaboration, making, focused work, and informal exchange. Project rooms serve as shared destinations where disciplines converge, while studios, maker spaces, lounges, and quiet work areas create a spectrum of settings that respond to the changing rhythms of the workday. This spatial organization supports collaboration without prescribing it, allowing teams to assemble organically around the needs of each project.

The design recognizes that creativity cannot be confined to a single type of space but emerges through relationships between different modes of working. Individual concentration, interdisciplinary exchange, prototyping, fabrication, and spontaneous interaction are woven into a workplace experience rather than separated into isolated zones. Visibility between these environments reinforces a culture of shared learning, allowing ideas, processes, and making to become part of everyday life in the office. This approach challenges the traditional separation between "office" and "workshop," replacing it with an integrated environment where experimentation, production, collaboration, and communication are visible parts of daily work. The resulting workplace demonstrates how design can shape organizational culture rather than simply accommodate it.

Playfulness is employed as a deliberate architectural strategy that strengthens identity and encourages discovery. Color-changing lighting recalls the theatrical history of the McHenry Theater, moments of vibrant brand color mark transitions between spaces, and informal gathering areas encourage conversation, exploration, and connection. These interventions are purposeful, reinforcing the Key Tech's identity while creating memorable spatial experiences for curiosity and engagement.

The success of this approach is evident in the daily life of the workplace. The workplace reflects a culture of openness, inviting clients and visitors to engage with the firm's creative process from the moment they arrive. Employees have embraced the freedom to choose where and how they work, moving seamlessly between spaces that support different tasks throughout the workday. Clients and visitors immediately encounter an environment where design, engineering, and fabrication are visible rather than concealed, allowing the architecture itself to communicate the firm's multidisciplinary practice before a conversation begins.

Beyond its immediate impact, the project offers a transferable model for adaptive reuse that can inform future workplace design for organizations and communities seeking to transform historic assets into contemporary workplaces while preserving the character that makes each place unique. It demonstrates that preserving differences, rather than pursuing uniformity, can strengthen organizational culture, increase flexibility, and create more meaningful architectural experiences. By treating existing buildings as active participants in the design process instead of obstacles to modernization, the project challenges conventional assumptions about workplace planning and historic preservation.





A NEED

The project responds to the intersecting needs of a growing company, an evolving workforce, and a city committed to reinvesting in its historic urban fabric. Building upon its long-standing presence in Baltimore, the client chose to expand its existing workplace by transforming the McHenry Theater and 1024 Light Street into a unified environment that reflects the firm's future while reinforcing the identity of the surrounding neighborhood. Rather than relocating to a new development elsewhere, the project represents a deliberate investment in Baltimore by retaining creative-sector employment, strengthening an existing urban district, and demonstrating how private enterprise can contribute to the continued revitalization of the city.

The project began with a fundamental question: how can a workplace support the diverse ways a multidisciplinary product design firm works, collaborates, and creates? Extensive engagement with engineers, industrial designers, software

developers, marketing professionals, and administrative staff informed a workplace that accommodates focused individual work, hands-on experimentation, interdisciplinary exchange, and informal interaction. The design provides a spectrum of environments that support concentration, making, problem-solving, and collective creativity.

Project rooms anchor the workplace by connecting focused work with shared project spaces. Positioned between individual work areas and communal spaces, they create a seamless transition between concentrated effort and collaborative engagement. Teams can gather around evolving projects while remaining visually and physically connected to the broader workplace. Surrounding these shared spaces, studios, quiet work areas, informal lounges, the Commons, and the Maker Yard offer employees the flexibility to select environments that best support their work, recognizing that effective design depends on both individual focus and collective exchange.

For clients and visitors, the architecture makes the firm's culture immediately legible. Design, engineering, prototyping, and fabrication are integrated into the daily experience rather than concealed behind dedicated production spaces. The café, Commons, maker environments, project rooms, and collaborative studios reveal the firm's creative process, allowing visitors to experience the interdisciplinary nature of the practice firsthand. The workplace becomes more than an office; it serves as a living demonstration of how ideas are developed, tested, refined, and brought to life.

Ultimately, the project demonstrates that preservation and progress are mutually reinforcing. By recognizing the enduring value of Baltimore's historic buildings and adapting them to meet contemporary needs, the design creates a workplace prepared for future growth while strengthening the identity, economy, and character of the city. It illustrates how thoughtful adaptive reuse can generate architectural, organizational, and civic value simultaneously while allowing existing buildings to continue contributing to the future.



