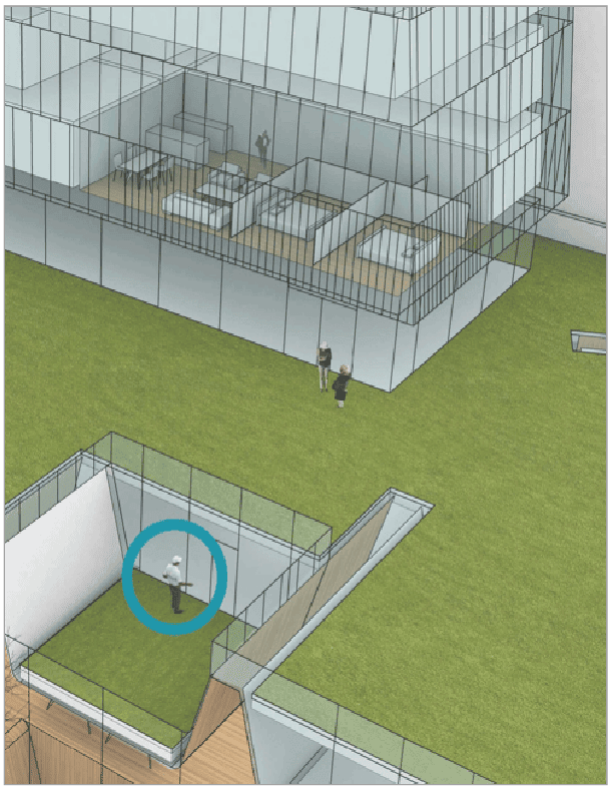

Commentary/Op-Ed - September 2017

Op-Ed: Libraries Can Be More Than Just Books

New York has an opportunity, one shared by cities across the country, to improve library infrastructure while creating badly needed housing. By using aging branches as sites for development, new libraries may rise with affordable apartments on top.

by Matt A.V. Chaban

Demand for New York's public libraries reaches new highs with each passing year (nearly 34 million visits in 2016), while many of New York's branches are woefully outmoded (the average library is 62 years old). Despite their popularity, and because of it, the city's 212 branches face nearly $1.5 billion in capital needs. And that is simply to reach a state of good repair. Chipping away at these needs can seem overwhelming. But New York has an opportunity, one shared by cities across the country, to improve library infrastructure while creating badly needed housing. By using aging branches as sites for development, new libraries may rise with affordable apartments on top.

In this *New York Times* op-ed, Matt A.V. Chaban, CUF's policy director, argues that the administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio should seize the chance at sites citywide to link these crucial needs.

Read the op-ed here.

This op-ed is a continuation of the Center for an Urban Future's extensive research on New York City's public libraries, including the groundbreaking studies *Branches of Opportunity* and *Re-Envisioning New York's Branch Libraries*.

Photo credit: Center for an Urban Future, The Architectural League NY and the Charles H. Revson Foundation

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Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is an independent, nonprofit think tank that generates innovative policies to create jobs, reduce inequality, and help lower income New Yorkers climb into the middle class. For 20 years, CUF has published accessible, data-driven reports on ways to grow and diversify the economy and expand opportunity that are anchored in rigorous research, not preconceived notions about outcome. Our work has been a powerful catalyst for policy change in New York City and serves as an invaluable resource for government officials, community groups, nonprofit practitioners and business leaders as they advocate for and implement policies to address some of New York's biggest challenges and opportunities.

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