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**January 29, 2015**

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**NYBC: Cultural Venues Invested \$1.3B in Construction**

By Rayna Katz



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NEW YORK CITY—One of the city's key underpinnings—its large network of iconic cultural institutions, initiated \$1.3 billion in new construction, renovation and alteration projects from 2010 to 2014. In addition to restoring and improving existing facilities, these investments also added nearly 700,000 square feet of new cultural space within the five boroughs, according to a New York Building Congress analysis of construction data.

Cultural construction starts reached \$208 million in value in 2014, up from \$142 million in 2013. The best year of the past half-decade was 2011, when projects totaling \$491 million in value were initiated. The start of the Whitney's new museum project largely accounts for that total. Construction starts reached \$218 million in 2010 and \$215 million in 2012.

The data used in this report encompass all project starts by cultural institutions between 2010 and 2014, including new construction as well as alterations and renovations to existing structures.

“New York City's cultural institutions are investing heavily in the facilities that house their programs, many of which are located in the city's most historic and iconic venues,” says New York Building Congress President Richard Anderson. “These investments are producing thousands of design and construction jobs, stimulating the overall economy and further strengthening the city's world-renowned cultural assets.”

Approximately 55% of the cultural projects over the past five years were initiated by cultural institutions located in Manhattan. Brooklyn was next with 30%, followed by Queens at 9%, Staten Island with 4% and 2% in the Bronx.

Museums and historic houses accounted for \$584 million (approximately 46%) of cultural construction starts between 2010 and 2014. In addition to the Whitney's new home, some of the more notable investments during the five-year period included the **Queens Museum of Art** expansion in 2011, the **Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum** upgrade in 2010, and the plaza renovation of the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** in 2012.

Public and private theaters, a category that excludes those located within educational institutions, ranked second with \$220 million in construction starts. According to the data, Brooklyn was home to four of the top five theater projects, highlighted by the 2013 renovation and expansion of the former **Loew's Kings Theatre** in Brooklyn and construction of a new home for the **Theatre for a New Audience** in the **Brooklyn Academy of Music** cultural district.

Centers of culture and performing arts initiated approximately \$218 million in construction starts over the past five years. Highlights include major renovations to **Carnegie Hall**, the redevelopment of the **Park Avenue Armory**, and multiple projects at the **Snug Harbor Cultural Center** on Staten Island.

Botanical gardens/zoos/aquariums generated \$180 million in construction starts, largely due to the start of construction for the New York Aquarium's \$157 million shark exhibit early in 2014. One area where investment seems lacking is the city's library system, which has more than 200 branches throughout the five boroughs. For the five-year period, just \$52 million in construction projects were initiated, and about half of that total was devoted to one project: construction of a new public library in Elmhurst, Queens, which is expected to open later this year.

An additional \$21.4 million in investments were made by owners and operators of a range of art studios and galleries, as well as dance and music studios.

The outlook is bright for continued investment by cultural institutions in New York City. Major upcoming projects include a \$500 million renovation of **Avery Fisher Hall**, the **American Museum of Natural History's** \$325 million addition, and the **New York Public Library's** \$300 million renovation of its main branch. In addition, both the **Frick Collection** and the **Museum of Modern Art** are in the planning stages for additions. Upgrades also are planned for the historic

music hall at Snug Harbor on Staten Island, the **Bronx River Art Center**, and the **Brooklyn Museum**.

In addition, work is slated to begin later this year on the \$360 million Culture Shed at **Hudson Yards** and an architect is in the process of being selected for a World Trade Center performing arts center.

“New York City's vast trove of cultural resources is a key component of New York's attractiveness to businesses, visitors, students and potential residents from around the world,” Anderson adds.