The Old Student Union Building (Old SUB) at the heart of the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus has been given a new lease of life with a $29-million renovation. It makes sense then that the building should be renamed UBC Life Building.

“UBC Life Building is an engaging social space, informal learning areas, and user groups as they await renovation and upgrades of their spaces. ‘Interior fit-outs of high-turnover spaces generate a significant amount of construction waste. An important consideration for the design was to minimize construction waste throughout future iterations of the swing space.’

A flexible plywood wall system with exposed fasteners allow the partitions to be reconfigured with minimal waste and a continuous structural header makes it easy to cut new openings into the partitions.

As the original building was often described as ‘dark, dreary, and depressing,’ priority was given to student access to daylight and views through the creation of a new central core that features gender-neutral washrooms and other back-of-house areas. White walls, a new polished concrete floor, the removal of the lower ceiling to expose the waffle slab of the second level, and the clever use of glass also helped brighten up the space.

The electrical systems, including power distribution, lighting, security, and data were almost completely renewed through the course of the project. “A new outdoor unit substation was provided to increase the capacity to the building and to replace the aging main distribution equipment. All the lighting in the building was replaced with energy-efficient LED lighting and occupancy controls added resulting in over 16 percent lighting power density reduction over the already stringent ASHRAE 90.1-2010 standard. WSP coordinated with UBC IT services and UBC Secure access to modernize the communications and security infrastructure for the facility,” says Andy Tashiro, senior project manager from WSP who worked alongside Kit Mun Chan, the lead electrical engineer.

As with any renovation of this kind, there were some unknown challenges, including more asbestos in the building than had originally been anticipated and lead paint on some of the roof joists, however, the team was able to remove the hazardous material safely. “The asbestos was definitely the largest surprise we encountered. The crews worked tirelessly to ensure the building was clean and safe,” says Steve Penner, project manager, Bird Construction.

Metras says he is extremely happy with the result, and that the project on the whole went smoothly. “It’s a wonderful improvement on the Old SUB building,” he says, to which Tashiro adds, “This project has literally managed to breathe new life into this building. With myself and Kit Mun both being UBC alumni who had frequented the Old SUB building many times during our university days, it is great to not only see this change but be a part of this project.”

UBC, with help from a fabulous team of Perkins+Will, Bird Construction Company, RJC Engineers, Integral Group, and WSP, has once again created an innovative space to help maintain an excellent learning environment.

**LOCATION**
6138 Student Union Boulevard, Vancouver, B.C.

**OWNER/DEVELOPER**
UBC - Infrastructure Development

**PROJECT MANAGER**
UBC Properties Trust

**ARCHITECT**
Perkins+Will

**CONSTRUCTION MANAGER**
Bird Construction Company

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**
RJC Engineers

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**
Integral Group

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**
WSP

**TOTAL SIZE**
205,000 square feet

**TOTAL COST**
$29 million (Phase 1)