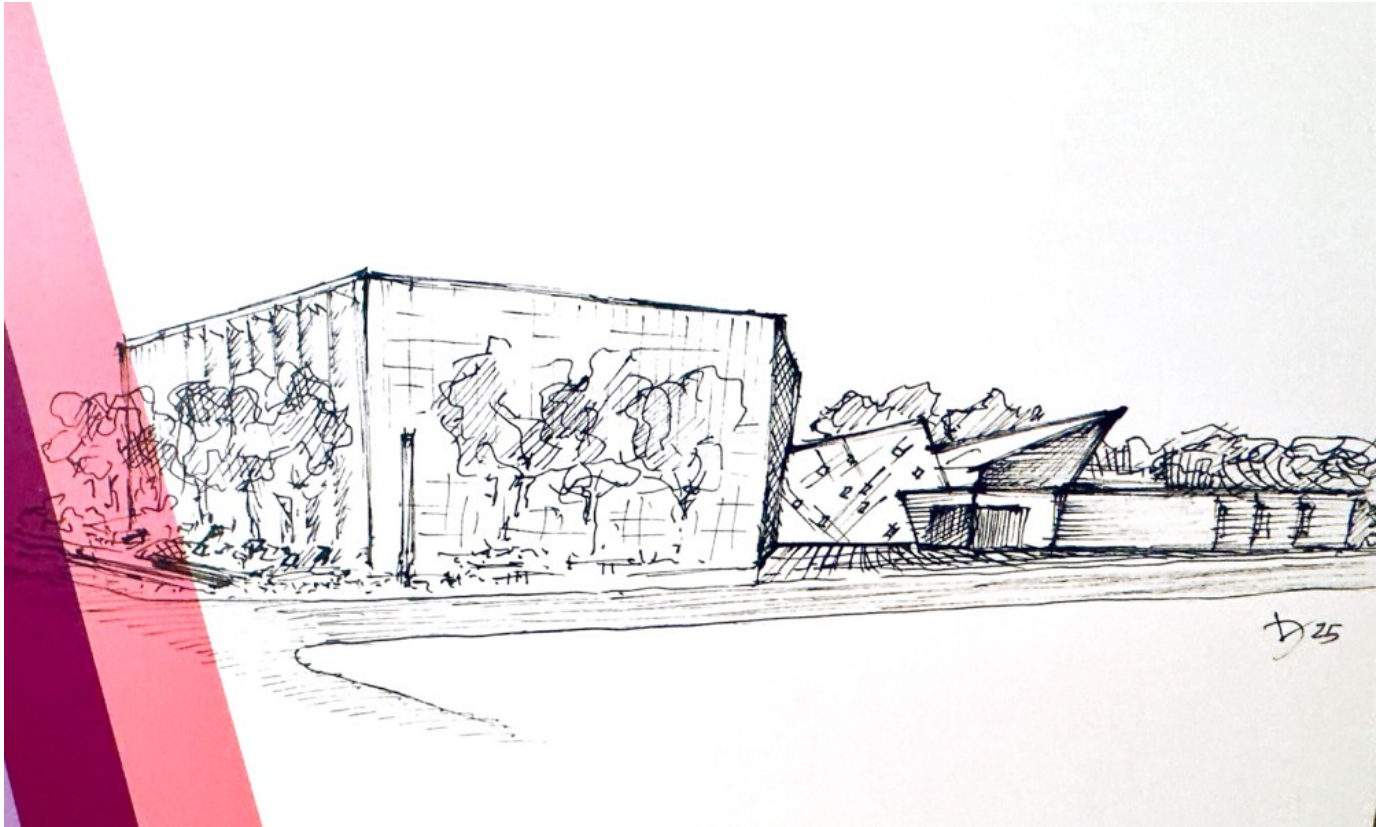


Exhibit offers a peek inside what the new Tree of Life museum, synagogue may look like

by [Kathryn Post](#)

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A Daniel Libeskind sketch of the new design for the Tree of Life museum, educational center, and synagogue building in Pittsburgh. (RNS photo/Kathryn Post)

Featuring a light-filled atrium and slightly scaled-back design, the latest renderings of the new Tree of Life museum, educational center and synagogue building are being unveiled as part of an exhibit opening at the University of Pittsburgh on March 27.

The exhibit, "Lessons from the Tree of Life: Lighting the Path Forward," features information about the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting that killed 11 worshippers, items gifted to Pittsburgh's Jewish community in its aftermath and an overview of the history of antisemitism in the United States. And, it gives a snapshot of what to

expect when the building is completed.

“The exhibit is our first opportunity to really show what we’re building in response to the deadliest antisemitic attack (in American history),” said Michael Bernstein, board chair of The Tree of Life, an organization formed by community and Tree of Life congregation leaders in the wake of the attack and the entity behind the exhibit.

The Tree of Life building will include an education center and museum on the grounds of the synagogue where the attack was perpetrated on October 27, 2018. The new building will also continue to be the spiritual home of the Tree of Life Synagogue, one of the three congregations attacked in 2018, and house the Tree of Life Institute for Countering Hate and Antisemitism.

From renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, who has designed Holocaust memorials and the master plan for the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site after 9/11, the new building design is intended to invoke a theme of bringing light into darkness. It will preserve the Tree of Life’s limestone sanctuary, as well as the building’s original, iconic stained-glass windows.

The latest renderings show updates from the [initial design](#) debuted in 2022 and adapt a dramatic, large skylight into a glass atrium. Inside the complex in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood, the atrium will serve as “a central multi-purpose space at the heart of the project that links the historic sanctuary structure and the new additional programmatic spaces,” according to the exhibit.

“We’ve listened quite a bit to the community and recognized that the scale of what was originally proposed may not have fit the best in our community, so we’ve reduced the scale so it’s better within the community,” Bernstein said, calling the building’s design an “architectural gem.”

Tree of Life CEO Carole Zawatsky noted the updated design is tailored for the specific programmatic needs of the community. Along with the new building, an outdoor memorial is being designed by an independent committee with representatives from the nine families who lost loved ones in the synagogue shooting.

“As visitors enter the memorial, they will encounter 11 sculptural open books that represent the Book of Life, where, within Jewish tradition, the righteous are named,” the exhibit noted. “Each book represents one of the victims with personal text and

imagery.”

Zawatsky [told the Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle](#) The Tree of Life nonprofit has so far raised “just under \$41 million” for the campaign, which is [aiming](#) to raise \$60 million. Construction is expected to begin in August or September, after breaking ground last year.

The nonprofit, which according to its website will “work to uproot antisemitism and identity-based hate through an interdisciplinary model of remembrance, education, bridging and celebration,” will also offer public programming—starting before the building is finished.

On April 3, it is hosting its [first public program](#) at the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, featuring Jewish musicians, including Tree of Life Rabbi Jeffrey Myers, a survivor of the shooting. They will perform Jewish music in “a concert of hope and remembrance” for victims of the synagogue attack.

The Tree of Life building holds personal significance for Amy Mallinger, granddaughter of Rose Mallinger, who was killed in the attack.

“I step into this room and I see the stages of the journey that we’ve been on,” Mallinger said about the exhibit. “I remember that day very, very vividly.”

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Mallinger, who celebrated her bat mitzvah in Tree of Life’s Pervin Chapel, said seeing the design for the new building represents a broader rebuilding process and a commitment to not giving up. And for her, seeing the about 20 displayed gifts supporters created and sent to the families impacted by the attack was one of the most meaningful parts of the exhibit.

For example, a handmade challah cover, heart pillows, and the now-viral drawing depicting the late Fred Rogers grieving the shooting are included in the display. Eric Lidji, director of the Rauh Jewish History Program & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center, noted these were just some of the roughly 10,000 items left outside the Tree of Life building or mailed to Pittsburgh in the months after October 27, 2018.

The exhibit will run through April 25, after which it will travel to other cities and states. Mallinger said she hopes those who interact with it will remember real people

are impacted by antisemitism.

“It’s really important for people to understand that it’s a real family,” Mallinger said. “My grandma, she was just a regular grandma, a regular bubbe who was going to synagogue that day. And this is something that happened to our family, so we feel very passionate about telling her story, about making sure that people remember who these people were.” —Religion News Service