

TAKE WHAT YOU NEED, LEAVE WHAT YOU CAN

A LITTLE FREE PANTRY FOR THE BRIGHTWOOD – FOREST MANOR COMMUNITY CENTER

ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

Along East 34th Street, beneath the trees, against the limestone facade and bold blue doors of Brightwood Community Center, a small pop of pink signals something larger: care is close by.

The Little Free Pantry at Brightwood–Forest Manor Community Center provides 24/7 access to shelf-stable food and basic goods through a simple neighbor-to-neighbor exchange: take what you need, leave what you can. But the project was never just about storage. It was about creating a visible, welcoming, and dignified resource that reflects the identity of the Forest Manor neighborhood and supports the mission of Brightwood Community Center.

The design team responded with a small piece of civic infrastructure: a durable pantry and bench that make generosity visible. The bright pink color helps neighbors find the resource quickly and confidently, while its accessible configuration allows people to use it with ease and dignity. Paired with a bench beneath the trees, the pantry becomes more than a service object. It becomes a small public place — somewhere to pause, rest, and feel welcome.

The project began with clear practical requirements: enclosed storage, weather and pest protection, latching doors, accessible reach ranges, and permanent anchoring. Yet the larger design challenge was more emotional. The pantry needed to remove hesitation, feel approachable, and transform a simple act of giving into a public expression of care.

Its visibility is central to that purpose. The bright pink pantry is joyful and unmistakably present. It offers access without an appointment, paperwork, eligibility review, or formal threshold to cross. A neighbor can take what they need; a donor can leave what they have to share.

The final form emerged through a studio-wide process of exploration and collaboration. Three internal design teams developed initial concepts, each examining how a Little Free Pantry could address visibility, accessibility, durability, material expression, and neighborhood storytelling. Through critique and synthesis, the strongest ideas came together into one clear direction: a simple structure, a bold color, a human-scaled bench, and a design that carries a larger civic message.

The project's impact also extends into its making. Fabricated in partnership with a local non-profit, the pantry connects community care with craftsmanship, job training, stability, and second chances. That alignment gives the project meaning at multiple scales: for the neighbor who needs food, the donor who wants to help, the community center that stewards the pantry, and the people whose hands brought it to life.

The entire structure — including design time, materials, fabrication, and installation support — was donated through mission-aligned partnerships.

This is architecture at the scale of everyday life: a few cans of food, a place to sit, and a structure that tells a neighborhood, you are seen, you are welcome, and care is close by.

SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

The Brightwood–Forest Manor Community Center Little Free Pantry approaches sustainability through durability, usefulness, and social impact.

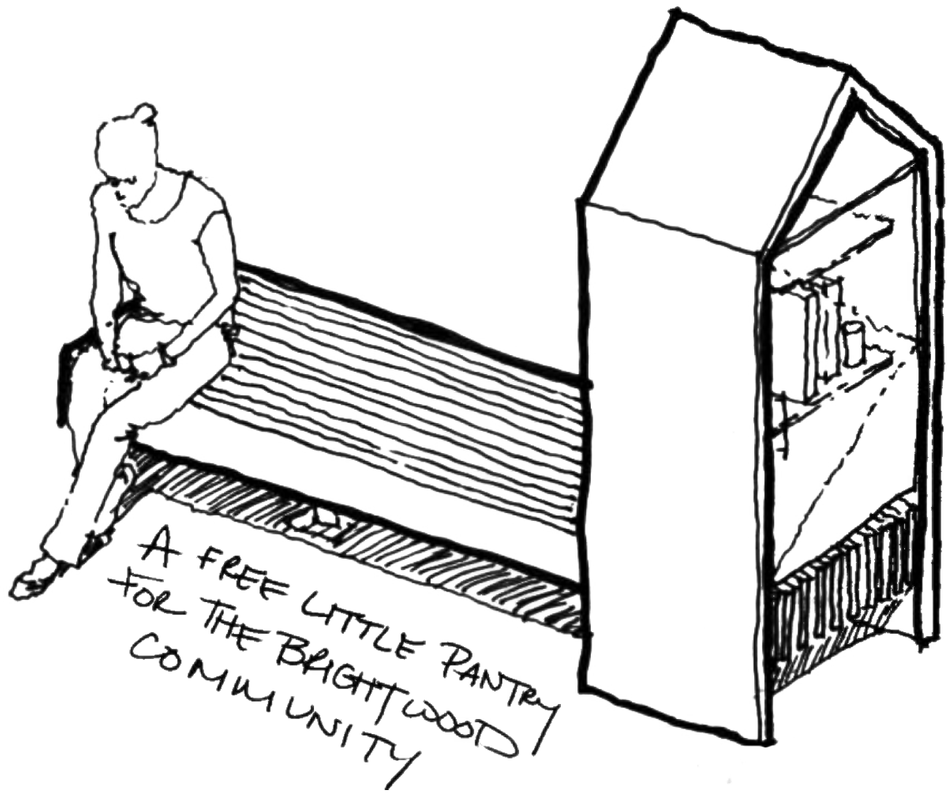
The structure is intentionally modest in scale, using only what is needed to create a visible, functional, and long-lasting community resource. Its durable construction, weather protection, permanent anchoring, and simple operable components are designed to extend the life of the project and reduce the need for frequent replacement or repair.

The project also advances a broader definition of sustainability: one rooted in community resilience. By supporting the redistribution of shelf-stable food and basic goods, the neighbor-to-neighbor care is strengthened.

At its core, the pantry demonstrates that sustainable design can be small, practical, and deeply human. It conserves resources, supports long-term use, and gives lasting form to a community's capacity to care for itself.

100%
PRO BONO

100%
DONATED MATERIALS



Category: **Non-Traditional Project**

Type: **Non-Profit**

Address: **4062 E. 34th Street**
Indianapolis, IN 46218

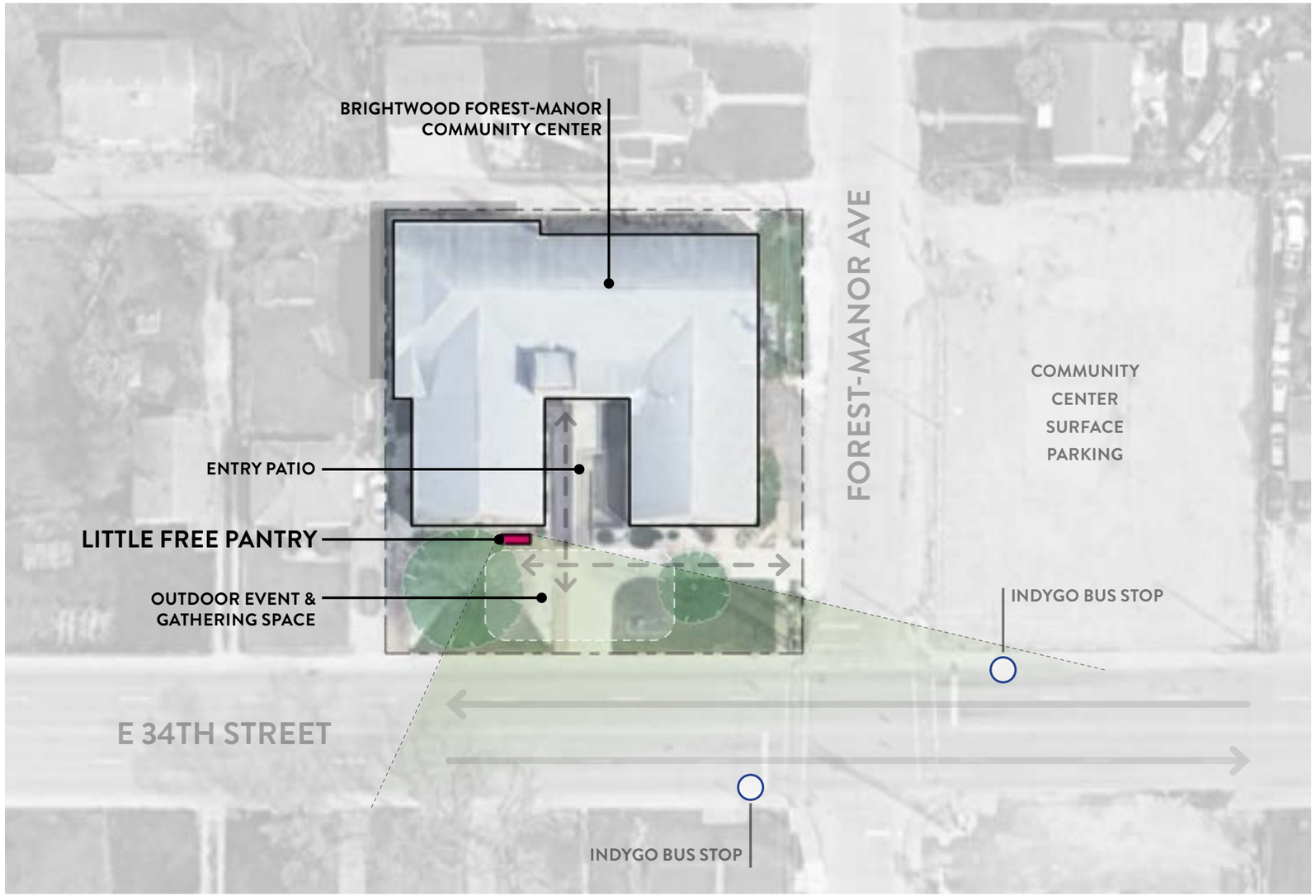
Substantial Completion: **April 2026**

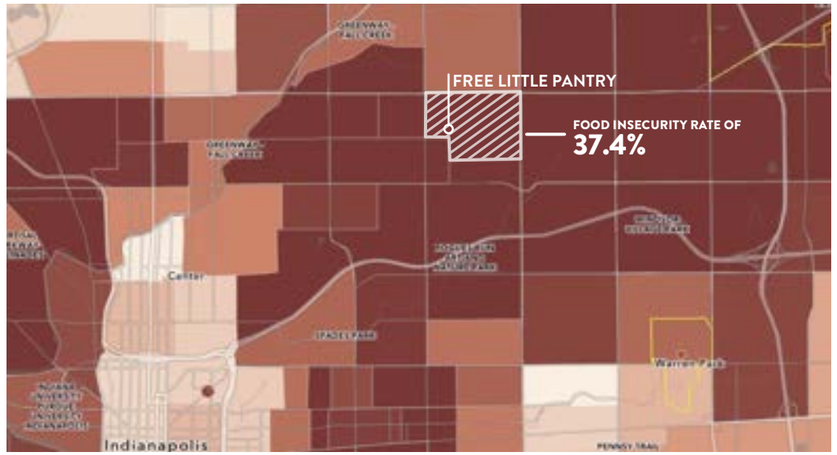
DESIGN FOR **EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES**

A Community Resource without Barriers

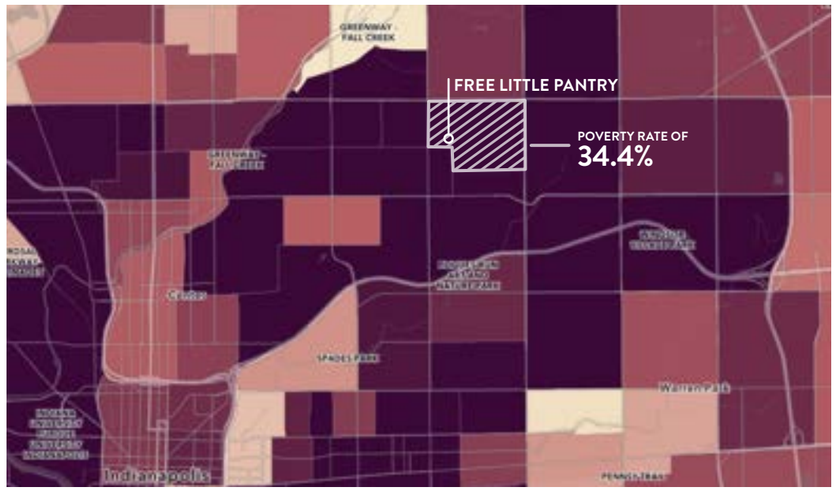
Located along the 34th Street corridor northeast of downtown Indianapolis, the community center and pantry occupy a prominent site at the intersection of the Brightwood and Forest Manor neighborhoods, extending their reach into two historically underserved communities. The surrounding area experiences food insecurity and poverty rates that are more than twice the national average.

Positioned along a highly visible corridor, adjacent to public transit, and integrated with the community center's primary entry and outdoor gathering space, the pantry is intentionally woven into everyday community life. It supports a simple yet powerful model: take what you need, leave what you can. Open to everyone, the pantry provides barrier-free access to food without paperwork, appointments, eligibility requirements, or the need to enter a building—prioritizing dignity, trust, and ease of access.





2020 FOOD INSECURITY MAP`



2024 POVERTY STATUS MAP

Sources: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) + US Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS) 2020-2024

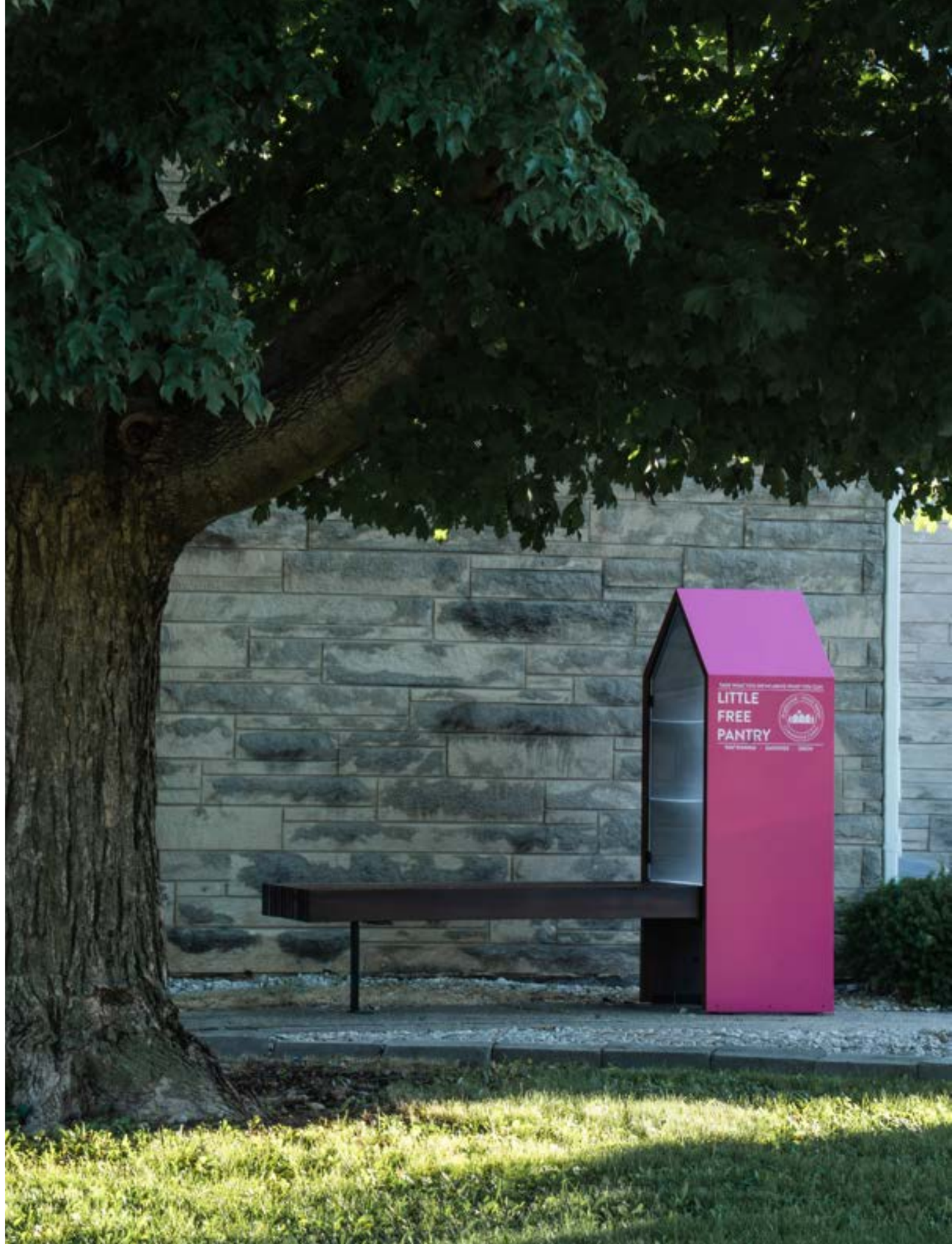
DESIGN FOR **EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES**

A Bold Community Beacon

The pantry's bright pink color makes the resource easy to locate and difficult to miss. Set against the limestone facade and bold blue doors of Brightwood – Forest Manor Community Center, the pantry acts as a beacon of care along East 34th Street. It does not hide need or make generosity feel institutional. Instead, it communicates openness, warmth, and belonging. The design helps a neighbor know, from a distance, that this resource is meant to be used.

A Platform For Community Exchange

The Little Free Pantry works because it depends on a living network of participation. One neighbor stocks it. Another takes what is needed. A volunteer checks on it. A donor sees the need and returns later. The design creates a simple, repeatable place for these exchanges to happen. Its placement beneath the trees, paired with a bench and visible street presence, turns a small site condition into an active social ecosystem. The architecture does not control the outcome; it creates the conditions for care to continue.



DESIGN FOR **EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES**

A Public Map Turns Access Into Discovery

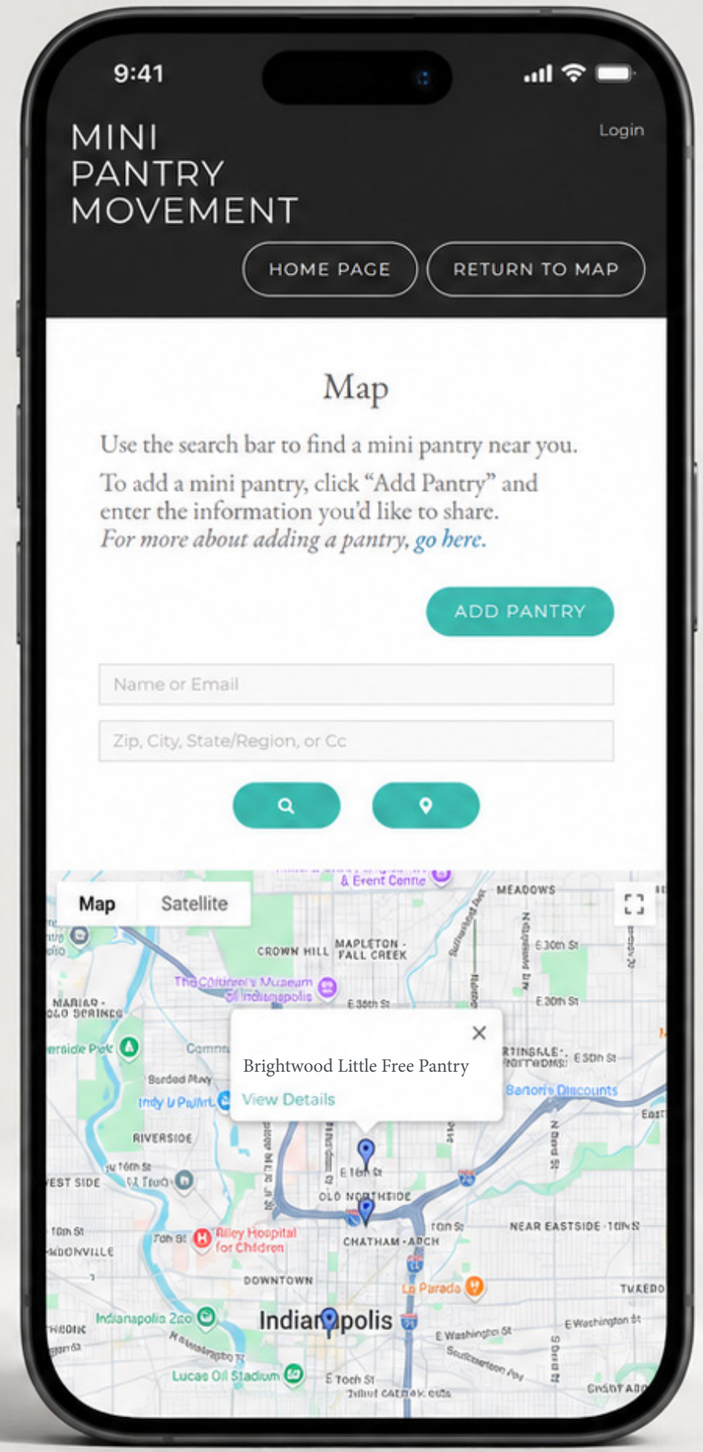
Adding the project to the Little Free Pantry public map extends the project beyond its physical site. The map helps neighbors locate the pantry, helps donors know where to contribute, and connects Brightwood's local effort to a national movement of no-barrier food access. This act of mapping makes the project discoverable, shareable, and part of a larger ecosystem of neighbor-to-neighbor care.

A Mission-Aligned Partnership

By partnering with local non-profit fabricator, the project integrated another layer of impact into the act of making. The pantry was built by a mission-driven organization whose work connects craftsmanship with job training, stability, and second chances. The result is care expressed at multiple scales: user, donor, steward, maker, and neighborhood.



Source: https://pdindy.com/



DESIGN FOR **INTEGRATION**

Dignity, Craft, and Neighborhood Care Converge

The Little Free Pantry brings together practical need and civic meaning at a small but powerful scale. What could have been a simple storage box became an integrated design response: enclosed pantry, protective roof, accessible reach, permanent installation, and a bench beneath the trees. Each element works together to support the same purpose: making food access visible, welcoming, and dignified.

Extending Mission Beyond the Walls

The pantry is not an isolated object. It belongs to a larger ecosystem of care anchored by Brightwood – Forest Manor Community Center. By placing a food-access resource along the public edge of the site, the project extends the center's mission into the everyday life of the street. Neighbors do not need to attend a program or enter the building to experience support. The pantry allows care to happen continuously, informally, and visibly, strengthening the relationship between the community center, its neighbors, volunteers, donors, and the broader Forest Manor neighborhood.



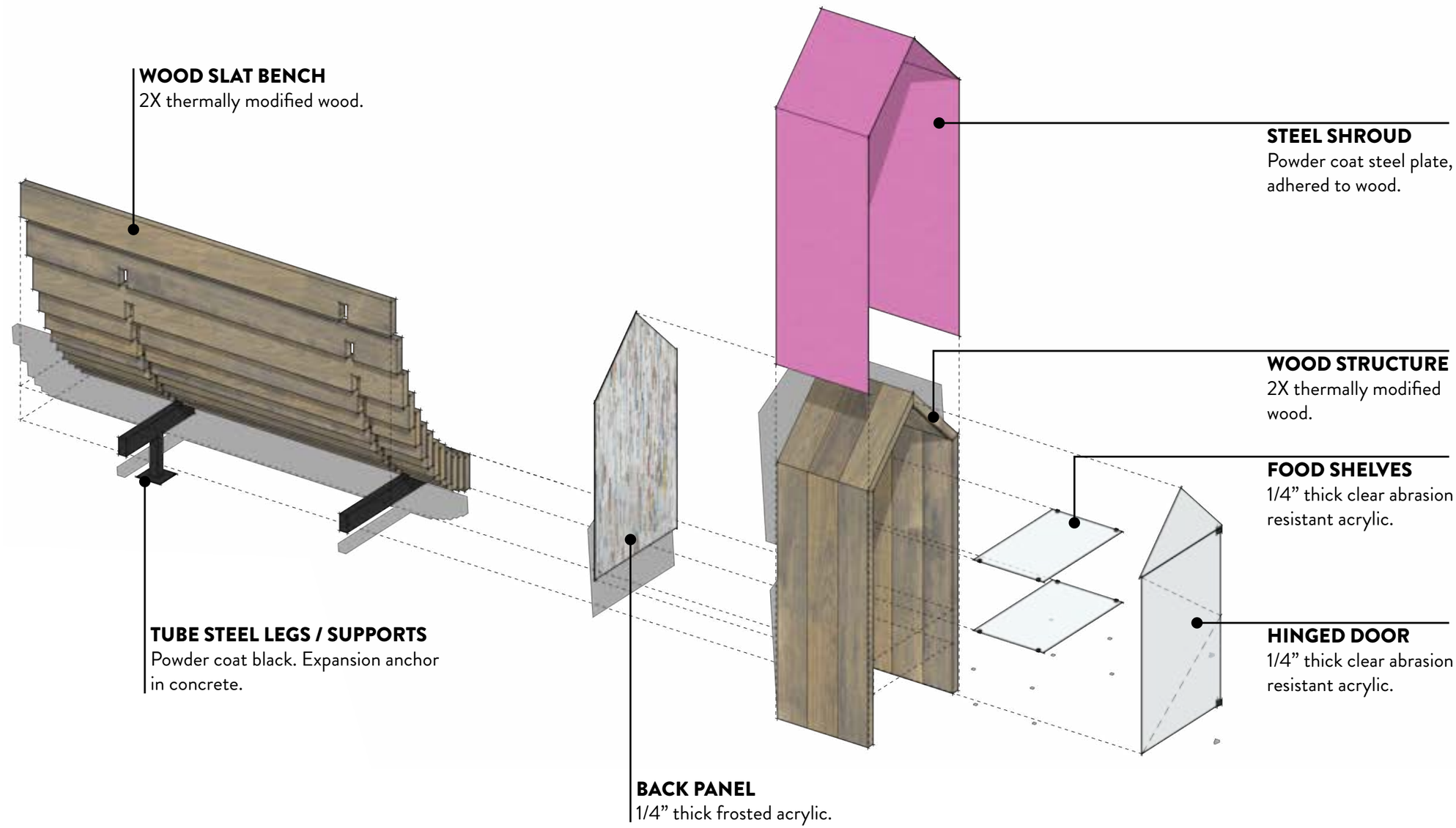
Source: www.brightwoodcc.org



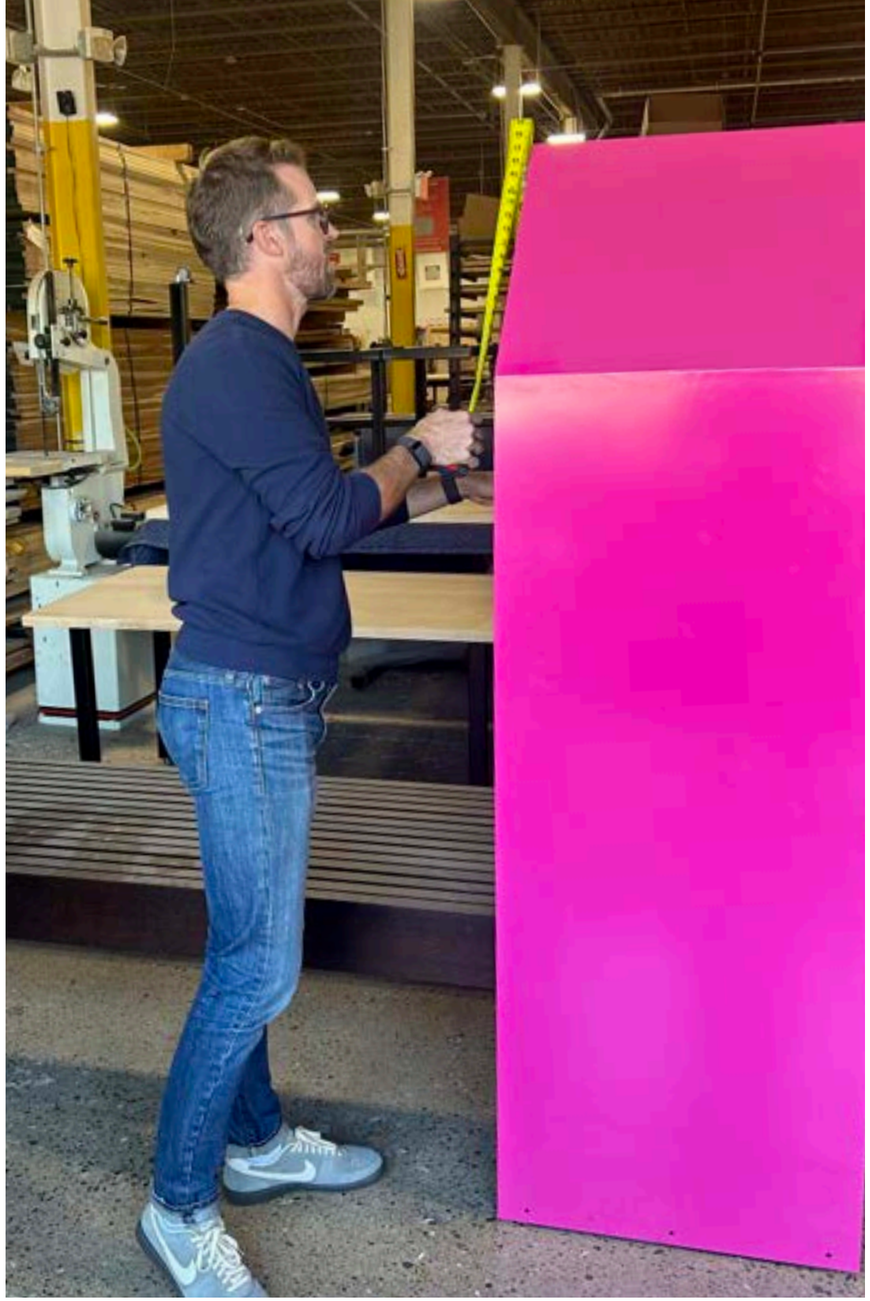
DESIGN FOR **ECONOMY**

Beyond Utility: Elevating Identity and Experience

In a project this small, there is no room for excess. Each element carries multiple responsibilities. The bright color serves as way-finding, identity, and emotional invitation. The roof protects food while giving the structure a recognizable silhouette. The bench creates rest, welcome, and a human-scale extension of the pantry. The latching enclosure protects donations while preserving easy access. This layered efficiency makes the project economical not only in cost, but in design intelligence: every part contributes to use, meaning, and care.









DESIGN FOR **ECONOMY**

Generosity Through Design and Doing

The pantry demonstrates economy through generosity, restraint, and purpose. With a compact footprint and focused material scope, the project creates ongoing civic value without requiring a large building, staff expansion, or complex infrastructure. The entire structure — including design time, materials, fabrication, and installation support — was donated through mission-aligned partnerships, allowing a modest project to achieve a meaningful public role.

DESIGN FOR **WELLBEING**

A Bench That Makes Space to Pause

The bench is essential to the project's well-being strategy. It transforms the pantry from a transactional object into a small place of rest, reflection, and belonging. Someone might stop by for a few cans of food and sit for a moment beneath the trees, listening to the birds overhead. That pause matters. It softens the experience of need and acknowledges the whole person, not just the immediate problem. The design suggests that care is not only what is provided, but how it feels to receive it.

Supporting Emotional Comfort

The pantry was designed to reduce stigma, hesitation, and uncertainty. Its scale is approachable. Its color is joyful. Its use is intuitive. Its location makes support visible without forcing a person into a formal process. These choices contribute directly to well-being. Food access is not only a logistical issue; it is an emotional one. By allowing neighbors to receive support quietly, immediately, and without explanation, the design treats dignity as a measurable outcome of architecture.

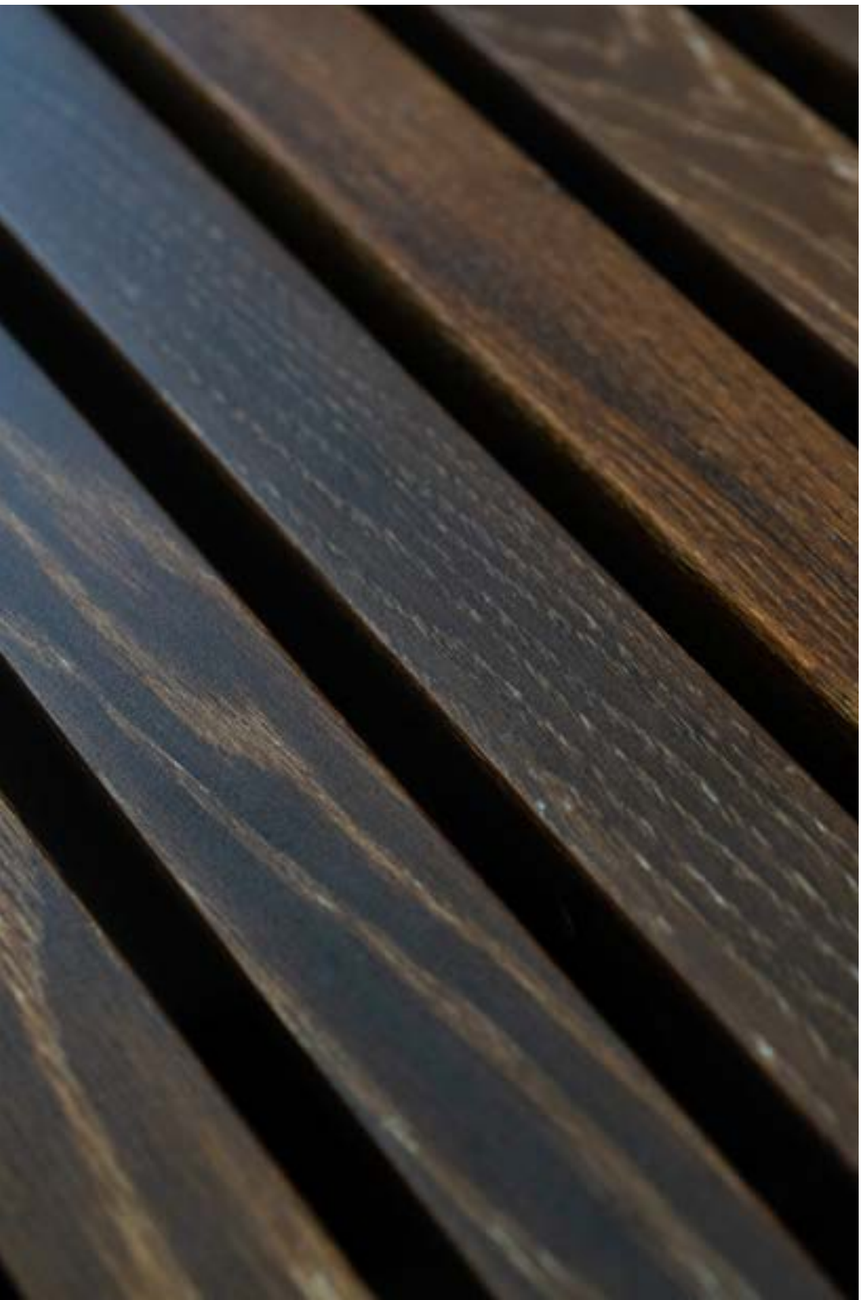




DESIGN FOR **RESOURCES**

Materials Ensure Lasting Community Value

Every material and finish was selected to be durable, low-maintenance, and welcoming over time. Thermally modified wood resists rot, powder-coated steel provides strength and weather resistance, and abrasion-resistant acrylic maintains clarity without yellowing. The result is a small, resource-conscious structure designed to look cared for, perform well, and continue enabling neighborhood generosity for years to come.



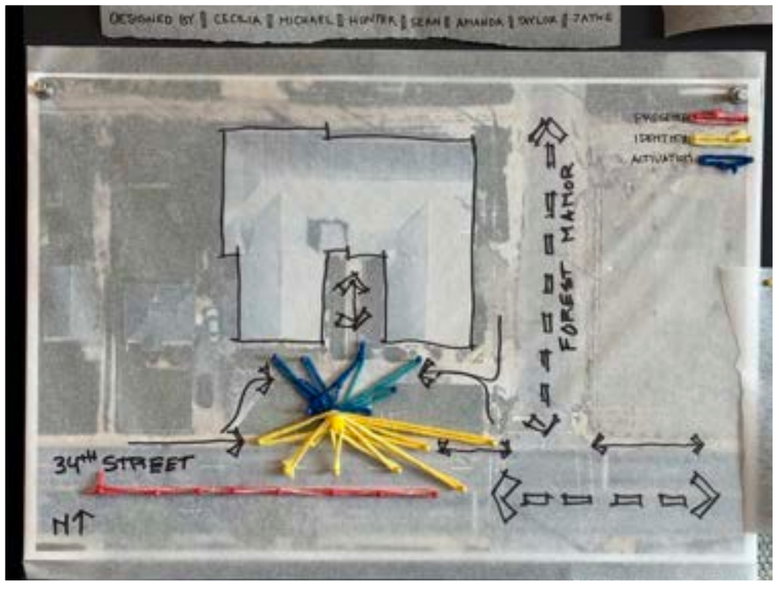




DESIGN FOR **DISCOVERY**

Collaboration Turns Ideas into Impact

The Little Free Pantry began as a studio-wide design challenge, with three internal teams developing distinct concepts in response to a shared brief. Each team explored how a small structure could address access, visibility, dignity, neighborhood identity, durability, and care. The final design emerged not as a single winning idea, but as a synthesis of the strongest thinking from each proposal. Through critique, collaboration, and refinement with project partners, the team converged on one bright, welcoming pantry and bench shaped by many voices.



SMALL SCALE.
SHARED CARE.
LASTING IMPACT.

+ Transforms a simple food pantry into micro-civic infrastructure, integrating access, visibility, rest, weather protection, accessibility, durable materials, and permanent installation along East 34th Street.
+ Provides 24/7, no-barrier access to food and essential goods through the “take what you need, leave what you can” model, preserving dignity by removing paperwork, appointments, and stigma.
+ Extends Brightwood – Forest Manor Community Center’s mission beyond its walls, creating an ongoing neighborhood exchange between users, donors, volunteers, and community stewards.
+ Expands impact through a fully donated project — design, materials, fabrication, and construction — with a mission-aligned local nonprofit partner supporting craftsmanship, job training, stability, and second chances.
+ Demonstrates that architecture does not need to be large to be meaningful: a bright pink pantry, a bench beneath the trees, and a community that shows up.




LITTLE
FREE
PANTRY