

Old Town Hall: A timeline

1904: The original Town Hall, at Atlantic and Main Streets, is destroyed in a fire believed to be caused by a gaslight. Inadequate firefighting equipment allows the blaze to consume the entire building in a couple of hours.

1905: Edgar Josselyn and Nathan Mellen design the new building, and the cornerstone of Old Town Hall is laid in September. In the next year, the limestone structure is completed and topped with a massive clock tower. It has space for town government and a jail.

1933: Trolleys are discontinued and replaced by a bus system. The last car pulls out of Atlantic Square for Norwalk at 11:35 p.m. Nov. 11.

1961: City acquires the Municipal Office Building at 429 Atlantic St. from Hartford Electric Light Co. It is used to supplement Old Town Hall and the growing city government. Mayor J. Walter Kennedy, elected in 1959, is the last mayor in the building.

1976: The beaux-arts building gets 5-ton bell tower, constructed of fiberglass and aluminum. The original tower is

removed for restoration.

1987: Building is vacated, and all offices move to the new Stamford Government Center, a 10-story glass and steel office building.

1988: Paul Pacter, then commissioner of finance, proposes a museum for Old Town Hall.

1990: Mayor Thom Serrani requests \$4 million for restoration. Planning Board cuts request to \$75,000, and the museum dies.

1996: Mayor Dannel Malloy appoints a committee to recommend ways to reuse the building, focuses on keeping it a public facility. Proposals a year later included a brew pub and a five-star hotel, which were rejected.

2004: A new task force selects a developer. Total cost of restoration project is estimated at \$14.5 million.

2005: Such predevelopment work as completing designs, identifying potential tenants and preparing construction estimates and schedules continues. Phase I of renovations of the front plaza and streetscape begins.

Landmark anniversary

Former Stamford Town Hall turns 100

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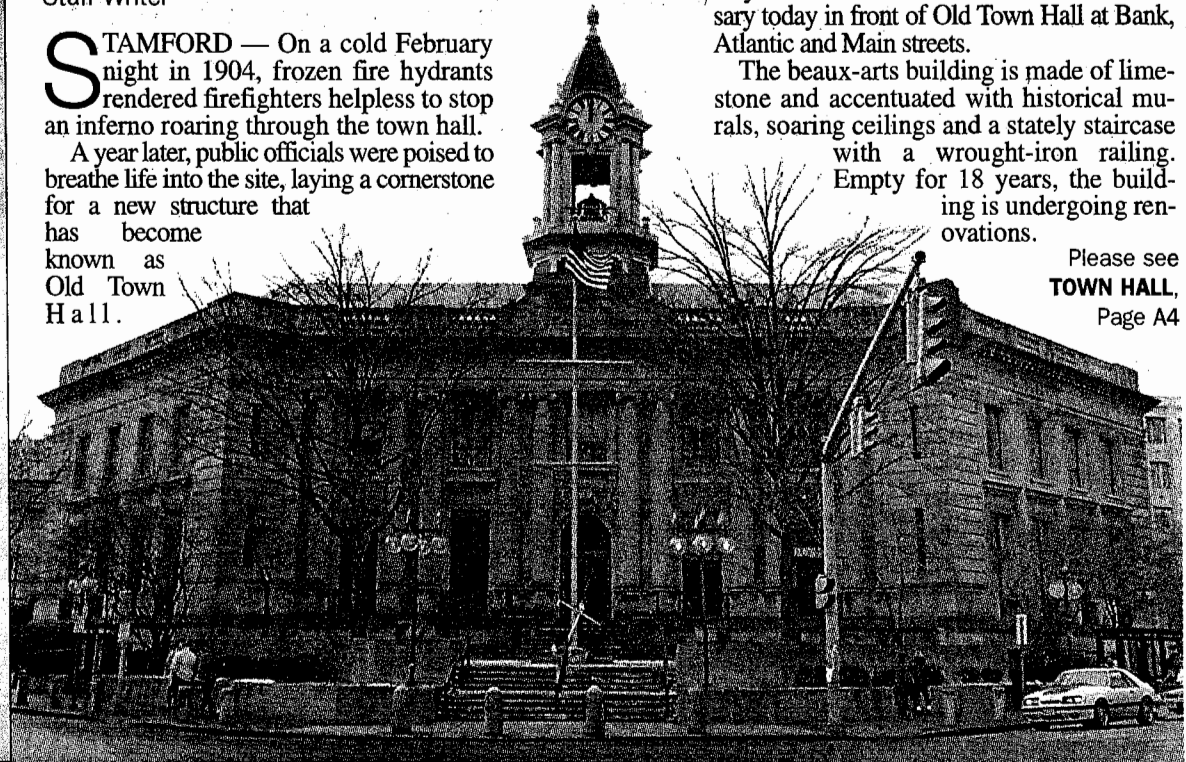
STAMFORD — On a cold February night in 1904, frozen fire hydrants rendered firefighters helpless to stop an inferno roaring through the town hall.

A year later, public officials were poised to breathe life into the site, laying a cornerstone for a new structure that has become known as Old Town Hall.

Tomorrow, the beloved building turns 100. City officials will commemorate the anniversary today in front of Old Town Hall at Bank, Atlantic and Main streets.

The beaux-arts building is made of limestone and accentuated with historical murals, soaring ceilings and a stately staircase with a wrought-iron railing. Empty for 18 years, the building is undergoing renovations.

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Renee Kahn, director of the Historic Neighborhood Preservation Program Inc., is hoping for an art house. The building harbors personal connections and is key to revitalization, she said.

"When that gets put into place, I think the whole downtown will flourish," Kahn said. "It's doing very well now, but I think it will be even better."

Many city leaders have tried and failed to bring the building back to life. A new Old Town Hall committee believes it will be successful.

The board seems focused on bringing public use back to the building and having it generate revenue with commercial tenants. The committee is determining the ratio of public and private use.

"We don't really have the figures yet, but we keep refining our vision and working toward getting something creative," said city Rep. Maria Nakian, D-20, who is on the committee. "I think we are very close to that."

City Rep. Harry Day, R-13, another committee member, said the building would be a beautiful museum.

"What we don't want is some commercial tenant to take over the entire space, and, you know, keep the doors locked," Day said.

Michael Freimuth, the city's economic planner, said discussions have been held with interested tenants. The committee expects to begin a public outreach campaign late next month.

Mounds of concrete rubble sit in front of the building. In this phase of the renovation, the front plaza will be replaced

with a historically similar design, and the streetscape will have new lights, trees and sidewalks.

Meanwhile, the committee is finalizing construction estimates, working on securing tenants and gearing up for fall meetings at which city representatives may approve a governing body that will allow for financing to begin.

A second phase of construction will include renovating Heritage Park, which is behind the building, and restoring monuments. The committee is working with the National Development Council, a New York nonprofit developer.

The project will cost \$14.5 million, and state grants will cover \$6.4 million. City bonding will pay for \$1.4 million. The city expects to qualify for \$4.3 million in federal tax credits for historic preservation.