

Old Town Hall to open in fall 2009

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STAMFORD — For almost 20 years, it has stood silent, a monument to the city's past, aching to be reborn.

And after more than a decade of discussing, planning, appropriating and designing, the day to reopen the doors of the Old Town Hall is finally in sight.

"We start demolition on the basement (this week) along with excavation work outside...the end date for the project is September 2009," said Jeff Pardo, a city engineer who has been involved in the restoration project since 2001.

Pardo said that with Mayor Dannel Malloy's \$2.7 million capital budget allocation for the 2008-2009 fiscal year, along with a \$1.5 million city loan (a total of \$4.2 million), the finishing stages of the restoration can be begin.

"I'm pretty excited about it and I know a lot of people are excited about it (being finished)," Pardo said. "I think it's going to bring this building back to life. I really felt the building needed something to kick it in the pants and I really think the design (we have in place) is going to do it."

Over the next year and half, Kronenberger & Sons Restoration Inc. of Middletown, will work to restore the old building to its original look and feel. Roughly 25 percent of the more than 20,000 square foot building is being designated for public exhibition space, which has always been part of buildings plan, Pardo said.

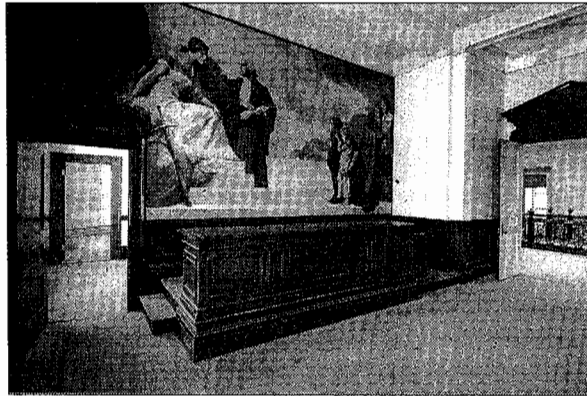


Photo by Alex von Kleydorff

A mural graces the wall in the Old Town Hall in Stamford.

"We felt very fortunate to get them (Kronenberger)," Pardo said. "When we reviewed their qualifications, we knew these were the guys we wanted on the job."

The rest of the OTH space is going to be leased to the National Reality and Development Corporation, a Westchester County, N.Y. firm that also owns the Lord & Taylor building on High Ridge Road.

"They are very excited to move into the space; they're a good solid tenant, someone who has a presence in our area," Pardo said.

In addition to restoring the buildings interior, there will also be the construction of two-and-a-half story glass enclosure that will face Heritage Park known as

the sail. The glass sail will house a staircase and an elevator, making the building handicap accessible. This addition is just one of many improvements that must be made in order to bring the building up to code, Pardo said.

The OTH was completed in 1906 after the original town hall burned to the ground in 1904. It was designed by Edgar Josselyn and Nathan Mellen who designed the structure in the richly ornate style known as beaux arts. Other well-known beaux art structures of the times include the New York and Boston Public Libraries and Grand Central Terminal.

The grandiose building includes floor-to-ceiling windows, a grand divided staircase with iron-rod railings, a Czechoslovakian glass ceiling above the staircase, terrazzo tile flooring and scagliola plaster — an architectural element that resembles marble — on the lobby walls and columns. Its exterior is lined with Corinthian columns along its limestone facade.

For the first 57 years of its existence, the building was home to all of Stamford's government functions including a probate court, a basement-level jail, record storage and the Mayor's office. It was also home to the Chamber of Common Council.

In 1961 the city purchased a building from Hartford Electric Light Company at 429 Atlantic St. and moved most of its operations to that location. By 1963, the only city operations still left at the OTH were the town clerk, probate court and voter registration.

In 1972, the building was added to the National Register of Historic places and after Stamford relocat-



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ed all of its operations to the government center building at 888 Washington Blvd. in 1985, the OTH became virtually unused.

Over the years, many of the city's leaders have earmarked public funds to restore the old build-

UNDER CONSTRUCTION The interior staircase in Old Town Hall shows that work is underway.

Photo by Alex von Kleydorff

ing. In 1996, Malloy appointed a 23-member steering committee to explore possible uses for the OTH, and since then other committees have been formed to forge a direction for the building (include the Old Town Hall Redevelopment Agency).

In 2003, \$3 million worth of state aid was designated for restorations and since then the state's commitment has grown to \$6.3 million.

Pardo said the final cost for the project is going to be close to \$16 million. Funding has been a blend of both public and private dollars, he said.

According to Mike Freimuth, director of the

office of economic development, the city is still working to secure federal historic and new market tax credits, which will be used to fund the city's \$2.7 million allocation for the upcoming year. He said its a competitive process, but the city is confident it will secure the funds.

Tax credits aside, Freimuth along with the rest of the city administrators who have been involved in the OTH restoration project grow excited as they see the finish line approaching, a splendid end to years of hard work.

"I think people are not only going to be surprised by the building but amazed once it's all done," he said.