



Weather



60° F, Scattered
Clouds
5 Day Forecast
Radar
Pollen forecast
Traffic & Trains

Search:

Search input field with Site, Google, and Advanced Search options.

Site Contents

Classifieds

- Find a Mortgage
- Personals
- Coupons
- Shopping

Opinions

- Editorial
- Columnists
- Letters from readers

News

- Local
- National & World
- New York City
- Around the State
- Obituaries

Your Health

Business

- Your Money
- National Business
- Computer &

Workers keep the water running at Old Town Hall to clean out the grime

By **Angela Carella**
Assistant City Editor

September 14, 2004

STAMFORD – Anyone walking by Old Town Hall in the past few days would have thought the worst – water dripping down the side meant a pipe had burst.

But the century-old building was just getting a bath.

The side of Old Town Hall that faces Main Street rises above a busy bus stop. Over the years, grime spewed from the exhaust pipes of idling buses floated up and was caught beneath the cornice shelf, accumulating in the decorative molding.

Old Town Hall is made of limestone, a rock created mostly from the remains of sea animals, and is absorbent – so much so that it became "encrusted with hard, black carbon-based material that came from the bus fumes," said Jeff Pardo, construction manager with the city engineering department who oversees the restoration of Old Town Hall.

Usually rain can wash limestone clean, Pardo said, but water never reaches the wall beneath the cornice.

"We power-washed it to no avail. We tried scraping it, but just a little came off. We used chemicals, but that didn't really work," Pardo said. "Then I learned that the best thing to do is soak it, the way you would soak a dirty pan in the sink."

So, on Thursday, he had work crews install beneath the cornice a flat hose with holes poked into the length of it. The hose was hooked to the spigot and the water ran for 22 hours.

"It didn't get off as much as I'd hoped, so I said, 'Let's let it go the whole weekend,'" Pardo said.

On Saturday and Sunday, water dripped and splashed down the side of Old Town Hall, prompting a couple of calls to the 911 dispatcher reporting a leak.

"We couldn't get it all off, but it's a lot better than it was," Pardo said.

The gracious building at Bank, Atlantic and Main streets stands at the city's historic center, on the spot where nearly all the town halls have stood since Stamford was founded in 1641. It was constructed at the intersection of ancient

Email this story
Printer friendly format

Photos



Tim Lambert yesterday installs wood blocking for . . . (Kerry Sherck/Staff photo)



Technology
• Investing

Indian paths and the site of the Colonists' first meeting house.

Sports

- Scoreboard
- Mets
- Yankees
- Jets
- Giants
- Tennis
- Golf
- College

Inside, it has soaring ceilings, stately columns, floor-to-ceiling windows, marble and terrazzo floors and an elegant staircase with an intricate wrought-iron railing. The crown molding is hand-carved, the center ceiling is made of Czechoslovakian glass, and the clock tower now is stored in pieces in the attic.

Built in 1906, Old Town Hall has been empty for nearly 20 years and neglected for much longer. Restoration is being paid for with \$6.3 million in state grants and \$1.4 million in city capital money.

But that is only half what it will cost to get the building ready for tenants, said Michael Freimuth, director of the Stamford Office of Economic Development.

Features

- Movies
- TV
- Restaurants
- Lottery
- Travel
- Entertainment
- Astrology

"It will come to about \$14 million. . . . The trick is, how do we gap the rest?" Freimuth said.

There are three ways – by using federal tax credits for historic restorations, by finding a development partner and by assigning more city money to the project, "which is difficult right now with the budget being tight," Freimuth said.

Community

- Directions
- Maps
- Schools & Kids
- Seniors

The city is assessing what construction will cost, what it will cost to operate the building, how to overcome restrictions such as a lack of parking, and how it can be split between public and private uses, he said.

"We have to strike a balance between a private revenue stream and public access. It's tough but do-able," Freimuth said. "We hope to present an operational plan to the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives at the end of this calendar year. There will be some creative economic development components that probably will stir debate, but they will give us avenues the city heretofore hasn't tried."

Services

- Contact Us
- Home Delivery
- To Subscribe
- Advertise With Us
- Register
- FAQ/Help
- Newspapers In Education

Old Town Hall "is a landmark that has immense meaning to the community and it will be a delicate balance," he said.

In the meantime, the city and the contractors it hired will continue cleaning and patching the limestone face, repointing the decorative work, replacing the windows, rebuilding the front plaza and adding lighting, Pardo said.

Inside, asbestos tiles and lead paint must be removed, concrete slabs in the basement must be replaced and a culvert that runs beneath the building must be rerouted, he said. Once he knows what the needs of the tenants will be, he can replace the electrical, heating, air-conditioning and lighting systems, said Pardo, who also was a project manager on the restoration of Grand Central Terminal.

As the face of Old Town Hall is cleaned, he said he can see the fossils of shells and other sea animals in the limestone. And workers made an odd discovery – fake rubber snakes glued to pieces of wood and cemented to the limestone below the cornice shelf.

"They did that to try to scare away the pigeons," Pardo said. "I'm sure it worked for a while, but after a couple of years the pigeons figured out it wasn't real."

Today and tomorrow, workers will set up scaffolding on the Atlantic Street side of the building, and soon passers-by may hear the sound of water again. It's bath time.

"I think we're going to soak it every night for the rest of the week," Pardo said.