

'Municipal Restored' to celebrate re-opening of historic Madison Municipal Building

- [By Abigail Becker](#)



The city will celebrate the re-opening of the Madison Municipal Building, 215 Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd., Saturday at an event called Municipal Restored.

PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

After two years of renovation work, the landmark Madison Municipal Building is open once again to city employees and the public.

The redeveloped building at 215 Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd. demonstrates a skillful balance of historic and contemporary features and a conscious focus on collaboration between the city and its residents. Jeanne Hoffman, the city's facilities and sustainability manager, said it is important that the building is welcoming and easy to navigate.

“Civic infrastructure is so important to lifting people up,” Hoffman said.

Formerly a federal courthouse, the building was built in 1929 in the ornate neo-classical revival style. The city expanded its use of the building when the courthouse moved in the 1970s, Hoffman said.

The approximately \$30 million renovation project did away with false ceilings that closed in the building, removed bricks from original factory windows and removed black paint that covered some fixtures. Now, the building feels expansive and warmed by natural light streaming through the restored windows.

“When we approached this project we wanted to bring back elements, a nod toward the original design of the building,” Hoffman said.

Stone on the exterior was restored, and the doors and windows were given a fresh coat of their original green paint color. A new lighting system was also installed outside that can project different color lights onto the building.

On the first floor, almost all original tile and marble line a hallway that runs the length of the building. The building was originally designed to feature a long entryway.

“It’s a gracious entrance,” Hoffman said. “It invites people to take in the space because it is quite beautiful, and it allows for great orientation of where you want to go next.”



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

The renovation restored the original design of the entrance hallway.

The floor also features conference rooms, some with the old wood tables used prior to the renovation, that are installed with new technology.

“We’re really hoping that the building is really seen as a community asset that the community can use for all sorts of gatherings,” Hoffman said.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

A conference room on the first floor makes use of a sturdy, wood table from before the renovation.

Signs on the first floor point the way to the city’s Planning, Community and Economic Development office and the Department of Transportation and Traffic Engineering, Parking Utility and Community Development Authority Housing divisions. The renovation added a central stairwell to the ground floor where these offices, which are often accessed by the public, are located.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

Paintings by Derrick Buisch line the wall near a central stairwell that was added as part of the municipal building's renovation.

City zoning administrator Matt Tucker said the stairwell is an improvement to the previous entrance and a “maze” that comprised the lower level.

“That space was quite aesthetically and functionally dated and did not include accommodations for our customers or visitors,” Tucker said. “We were crowded and did not have good meeting or customer service spaces.”

Tucker said the new space is modern, inviting and functional and and receptive to staff and city residents. He said staff can easily pull up and display sites, plans, maps and information for meetings and that the space offers a greater level of security, which was lacking prior to the renovation.

“The environment is not too fancy, but a nice balance of practical and professional, taking into consideration the needs of the staff and the customers we serve,” Tucker said.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

The lower level is more accessible to the public with a central stairwell.

Many may remember Room 260 on the building's second floor for its uncomfortable wooden benches and City Channel's television studio rigging in the back. With the renovation work, the room is now a highlight of the building's original, historic space.

The room, which was used as Judge James Doyle's courtroom, is much brighter due to the black paint removed from the windows and the modern, circular light fixtures. City Channel's office is now located in the City-County Building, but producers can record meetings in the Municipal Building remotely.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

Modern lighting in Room 260 accentuates the former courtroom's historic features.

Refurbished acoustic panels line the walls, and more useful furniture fills Room 260. The space could also be used for special functions as it connects to a catering kitchen through a door behind the dais that formerly connected to judge's chambers.

The second floor also features an airy, well-lit art gallery space with re-purposed benches from Room 260 for visitors. Works by University of Wisconsin-Madison associate professor Faisal Abdu'Allah are currently displayed.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

The second floor features an art gallery.

The Community Development and Economic Development divisions are located on the third floor and are accessible by a gleaming, restored staircase.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

The restored Wilson Street stairwell leads up to the third floor.

Also as a part of the renovation project, a loading dock and entrance at the back of the building were removed and replaced with large, factory-style windows. The project also replaced the heating, ventilation, air conditioning, electrical and plumbing systems.

Municipal Restored

Madison residents will be able to tour the building, check out performances and take in the newly installed artwork Dec. 8 at the grand opening event called Municipal Restored. The event recalls the one-day, pop-up art experience called Municipal that capped the building's closure in Dec. 2016.

“This building renovation is the result of years of study and planning and investing in our future while preserving history,” Mayor Paul Soglin said in a statement. “Community members are invited to walk through halls steeped in history and see how this beautiful facility has been restored and prepared for the future.”

Soglin will dedicate the building at noon.

Artwork is on display throughout the building. Some, like Aris Georgiades' upside-down furniture installation and Pete Hodapp's wheat paste mural, will be familiar to those who attended the 2016 event.

Arts program administrator Karin Wolf, who was in charge of installation, described how the art pieces pulled the building together.

"It added a warmth and depth and human story to this building," Wolf said.

Saturday's event will showcase works of art on all three floors as well as performances in Room 260 and the Wilson Street stairwell. The first floor conference rooms will showcase video art on several monitors.

In addition, attendees can try "little bites" of food from five featured caterers starting at 11 a.m. and order from the Caracas Empanadas, Caracas Arepas and Bulgogi Korean Burrito food carts that will be parked outside the building.