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Award magazine article June Issue 2011

Milton Town Hall

by Dan O'Reilly

The historic Milton Town Hall – a \$24-million project that includes a 50,000-square-foot addition with an underground parking garage and selective renovations – received a prestigious honour late last year from the Ontario Public Works Association.

In bestowing its 2010 Project of the Year in the historic renovation over \$10 million category, the Association recognized the vision and efforts of the designers, builders and civic officials in creating a modern facility that meets the needs of a growing municipality while remaining true to the earlier structure, an 1855 heritage building protected by an Ontario Heritage Trust easement.

Designed by The Ventin Group Ltd. and targeting LEED Silver certification, the two-storey addition is clad with a similar type of limestone that is indigenous to the area.

There are also exterior and interior elements that reflect and pay homage to three principal topographic features that define Milton: its agricultural landscape, the Sixteen Mile Creek that flows through the town on its way to Lake Ontario, and the Niagara Escarpment.

For Ventin partner-in-charge Paul Sapounzi, however, maintaining a delicate balance between the new building and its historic predecessor was a top priority. "Modern architecture should

complement, but never mimic historic architecture," he says.

Achieving that balance was the reason for not structurally marrying the two buildings. Instead, a glass enclosure known as the Walk of Fame extends from the new building's double-sided, double-height structural glass entrance lobby into the older structure which houses the council chambers – a former courtroom – an adjacent room which was renovated to accommodate overflow crowds at public meetings, plus the mayor's and other offices.

The centrepiece of the addition, both visually and functionally, is the glass entrance lobby. It can be transformed

into a hall for civic events and on a regular basis provides convenient access to department offices, explains community services director Jennifer Reynolds.

From a structural design perspective, the lobby was a major challenge for Kitchener-based Truax Engineering Ltd. Apart from the structural glass, it has a cantilevered roof and a second-floor access bridge to the elevators, says company principal Andy Truax.

The walkway was given its title because it houses floor tiles commemorating prominent Milton residents, or well-known people who once lived there. Another feature is a walk-out to a stone-walled courtyard garden which was a prisoners' exercise area when part of the site was used as a jail. "It is a journey connecting current and past civic identity – and community pride is very important here," notes Sapounzi.

Situated next to a large park with a cenotaph honouring the Town's war veterans, the administration complex sits on a large central space between two east-west streets, with the older building following that grid pattern. To maintain a sense of scale, the addition was built at right angles, resulting in a north-south orientation. Both buildings are also the same height so that one doesn't dominate the other, says Sapounzi. (Reynolds notes that the height factor was emphasized by Town officials during the long public consultation process.)

Located on the western end of the Greater Toronto Area, Milton is a town in the midst of rapid transformation. In 2000, its population was 32,500, but by 2009 it had more than doubled, and by 2011 has reached 90,000. With that





growth came pressure on town services and the need to relocate several departments and services to off-site buildings. Not only was that inconvenient for the public, but costly as staff often had to drive back and forth between several buildings in the course of a day. Early in the growth spurt, the Town recognized the need for a new building. The question was where, says Reynolds.

The answer came via a civic facility study that recommended the construction of a cultural facility for the theatre, art gallery and library. It did, however, recommend that an expanded administration complex "should stay where it is in the downtown core."

Nevertheless, during the preliminary design and planning stages residents voiced concerns about the potential compromise of the heritage building, as well as the impact on their own communities. "There were concerns about the height, the size and the traffic flow," says Reynolds. To allay those fears, the Town held four public meetings and conducted several studies before construction started in 2005. With the support of the architect and general contractor, The Atlas Corporation, it followed through on the commitments and promises it made during that process, according to Reynolds.

Measures were also taken to preserve an ancient strand of black walnuts of the east side of the addition. "They're considered to have cultural significance and were kept outside of the hoarding area to protect them," says Reynolds.

Large windows in the adjacent lunchroom offer picture-perfect views of the trees. Those employees eat lunch on the exact spot where the former jail governor's house stood until 2007. It had to be demolished for the expansion, but the sills and lintels were incorporated into the adjacent the Town Hall. The wall also symbolically acknowledges two other houses that had to be relocated within the neighbourhood to allow for a parking lot, says Reynolds.

Another project partner was Jain & Associates Ltd., the mechanical/electrical consultant responsible for the design of an array of environmental features such as water-conserving plumbing

fixtures, a rainwater and cistern collection system, a heat pump system, T5 lighting and occupancy sensors.

For Vaughan, Ontario-based The Atlas Corporation, the project was a complex undertaking, although similar to others in its portfolio, says project manager Michael Whitton. Not only did it involve both new construction and the careful renovation of a building which has been a Milton landmark, the contractor had to be cognizant of the impact of the construction on existing municipal operations and the community at large. "We maintained strict working hours as approved by the Town of Milton and coordinated any work required to be done outside these regular working hours," says Whitton.

As part of a highly organized scheduling sequence, the hoarding was built first to create a separation zone between the old Town Hall and the site of the new building. The addition was built first, followed by the construction of the Walk of Fame and then the old Town Hall was renovated.

Whitton notes that at the peak of construction there was a workforce of between 80 and 100 people on site. ■

Credits and Acknowledgements

The successful submission for the Design-Build method of project delivery was lead by PCL Constructors Canada and included a multi-disciplinary team of designers and engineers who collaborated on preliminary design to provide the winning project. Key sub-consultants include: Halsall Associates, Smith & Andersen and Aldershot Landscape Contractors.

+VG Architects is a full-service architectural firm offering new design, expansions and heritage restorations for cultural, educational, municipal, justice, healthcare, residential and recreational facilities. Our staff of 40 operates in four offices in Ontario, in Brantford, Cambridge, London and Toronto.

See www.plusvg.com for more information.

LOCATION

150 Mary Street
Milton, Ontario

OWNER/DEVELOPER

The Town of Milton

PROJECT MANAGER

MHPM Project Managers Inc.

ARCHITECT

The Ventin Group Ltd.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

The Atlas Corporation

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

Truax Engineering Ltd.

MECHANICAL/ ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

Jain & Associates Ltd.

IT CONSULTANT

Heale Consulting & Management Inc.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Wendy Shearer Landscape Architect

TOTAL BUILDING AREA

32,000 square feet
(renovation to original Town Hall)
50,000 square feet (new construction)

TOTAL PROJECT COST

\$24 million