



# Hamilton City Hall Revitalization Project



HEATHER SEFTEL-KIRK – The Ontario Construction Report Special Feature

Constructed in 1960, Hamilton City Hall was desperately in need of upgrade and repair but, too modern to automatically be considered a traditional heritage site, sides were divided about whether to renovate or start anew. After twenty-two months of work, the results show the building was indeed worthy of saving.

Scott Hunter is with Ellis Don and acted as project director for the ABE joint venture. "The contractual agreement on this project was very unique and my job was to keep all sides of the venture focused.

Comprised of both an integrated team (ITA) delivery model and a design build, Hunter says the project, from the start, was conducted under an at-risk form of construction management. "We took a base design about 30% complete, under an extremely compressed schedule, added in the realities of a heritage site, and all the scrutiny such a public project brings, and suddenly, there was a lot going on."

Hunter says though that such a sensitive heritage site, considered such an integral part of the community, couldn't have been renovated in any other way. "The City was involved in every decision and at the most base level of communication. They supported us throughout and we couldn't have finished it as well as we did without that support."

Part of that support involved the processing of the 14 separate heritage permits procured by +VG Architects, heritage consultants on the project, which kept the project moving steadily ahead. As heritage architect Paul Sapounzi points out, "Hamilton City Hall doesn't meet the average person's notion of heritage, but everything in the building, from the elevators and doorknobs to the oak paneling and terrazzo floors, date from a bygone era where they did things differently."

Ross Hanham is a partner with Garwood-Jones & Hanham Architects. Hanham says, in respecting the Ontario Heritage Act, as much of the original as possible was kept and anything new added intended to be sympathetic to what was in place originally. Some of the items pulled from the original building, restored and returned were the mosaic tile spandrel panels, hardwood and panelling in the lobbies and other key areas, and the clocks on either end of the building. "As much as we could, we kept and where things had to be changed for accessibility and to meet higher codes, there was a commitment to honor what was there before. A number of doors had to be replaced for instance to provide barrier free accessibility, but these were done in a style very similar to the doors we were able to maintain."

Sapounzi adds, "Some key heritage features include the International style of the City Hall, the Italian glass mosaic tiles found throughout the interior and the extensive use of marble finishes. The restoration comes at a time of growing interest in modernism, a style which creates remarkable spaces rather than just architectural artifacts. Hamilton City Hall is both a public space and a civic landmark. It connects physically and symbolically to the city centre and exemplifies the relationship of Canadian heritage architecture to the culture of the community it serves."

Just as building codes change over the years so does the nature of doing business and that, Hanham says, is reflected in the new design. "The business of city hall with respect to customer service has changed so there was an effort to relocate these services to the main floor to provide greater ease of access. The main floor contains a lot more public space than before and intends to provide a more accessible user-friendly business experience."

## Hamilton City Hall

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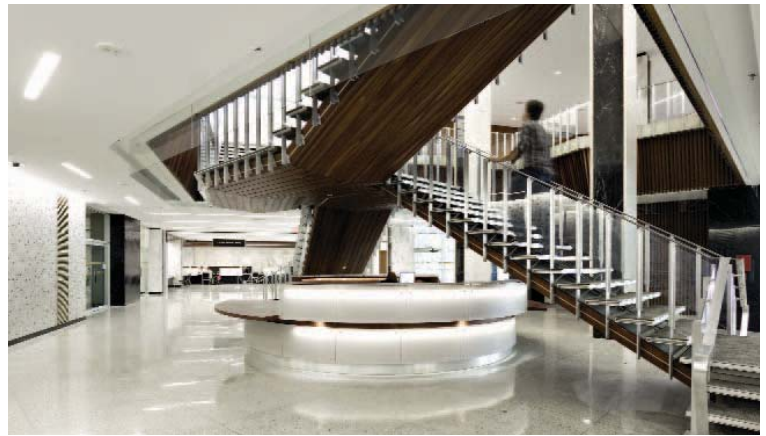
Greg Sather of McCallum Sather Architects says his company was responsible for ensuring the heritage aspects were respected throughout the interior. “The bottom floor contained a lot of marble and represented a modernistic look. The second floor was a two-storey volume space with black and white marble and a stunning mosaic. Our work had to balance meeting current standards while respecting history.”



The new customer service approach to the facility called for multiple service counters on the main floor and one on the second. To balance what was originally there, Sather says white and black marble was sourced for use on the new counters. Among the major changes was a redesign of the main entrance that had evolved over time. “The main entrance was originally the second floor entrance and early documents actually showed a processional bridge dignitaries were supposed to cross to enter into the grand two-storey entrance. Over time though, the main floor entrance became the prime for business use and thus, the most used. Essentially a main entrance had developed from this boring sort of back entrance. We pulled down interior walls, moved an engraved marble wall and opened the space to make it a more impressive first impression for the public.”

On the second floor councillor’s offices were outfitted with wood panels and custom over-sized doors, which were replicated to create more offices for the larger number of councillors. The need for a large, separate board room was met through a structure made of triple-paned glass and installed in the two-storey space.

Hunter says the final product is well beyond the expectations set out at the beginning. “The whole approach to the project was based on ‘the right thing to do.’ As the project evolved and we were able to assess available finances, things were added and decisions made that might not have been had everything been detailed ahead of time.”



Among such additional elements, Hunter mentions the overhaul of the Council chamber and the detailing in the forecourt. “The initial scope of the work called for a restoration of the skylight in the Council chamber but when we looked at it, it really was not serviceable for the long term and so it was completely replaced. The forecourt had stunning outdoor pools that had been changed over time. Their impact would have been lost if we had just restored them so instead, they were recreated to their original design.”

Hunter says there was a lot of pressure and public scrutiny involved with this project because the ‘tear it down/ restore it’ sides were so divided from the start. “City Hall was both a symbol of where the town was going and where it had come from and public opinion was certainly divided. In the end, the City has a great example of this style of architecture (international style modernism), which has been restored and upgraded. At the time a lot of the details that really made it worth saving were in such a state it was hard to see their value but now, it is very clear it was a building worth preserving.”

Dynamic Flow Balancing, a CAABC Certified Air and Hydronic Balancing Company, was responsible for the complete air and hydronic balancing for the project. President Ed Molnar said that working around the original wood and marble required special precautions, however, that challenge was overcome by our team proceeding with diligent care. “Everyone involved did an excellent job. At the end of the day, Dynamic Flow Balancing looks

with pride on the accomplishments of our staff, and of all involved, in producing a comfortable, healthy environment and an energy efficient building for the present and future occupants.”

Hanham said visitors certainly notice a difference when they enter the new City Hall but are pleased that it looks and feels like the original. “We’ve had very positive feedback from the city and the community.”

Sather commends the design style for the above-expectations results. “The contract allowed us to do things we might not have otherwise had room to do, such as using actual marble instead of a replicate look for the service counters and the glass enclosed boardroom instead of a boring and intrusive drywall version. The final version is better and more impressive than it was intended to be.”

Hanham says his firm was proud to be part of such ground-breaking work. “Heritage often equates to older buildings. This is a fairly modern example of architecture and one that, at one point, wouldn’t have been considered heritage. This is an example of a fairly modern building justifiably preserved and certainly the first of many. It shows the value in reinventing buildings of this era to improve their relevance for safety and accessibility while maintaining the integrity of what was there.”

For more information on the companies involved visit [gjarch.on.ca](http://gjarch.on.ca); [mccallumsather.com](http://mccallumsather.com); [ventinggroup.com](http://ventinggroup.com); [ellisdon.com](http://ellisdon.com); and [dynamicflowbalancing.com](http://dynamicflowbalancing.com).

+VG Architects collaborated with Garwood-Jones & Hanham Architects & McCallum Sather Architects.

+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. The staff of 55 operates from five offices in Ontario, in Brantford, Toronto, London, Kitchener and Belleville.

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