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Architectural brilliance on a budget in Cayuga

By  J.P. Antonacci, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter — Last updated Sep 28, 2020

Getting a building permit in Haldimand County used to resemble a scavenger hunt. Residents had to visit various offices scattered around the county, a consequence of several autonomous municipalities merging 20 years ago.



Photo Credit: Tom Arban

County staff were distanced from one another, and customer service suffered as a result of the inevitable delays.

That all changed as of February, when the county's new [\\$21-million administration building](#) opened in Cayuga.

"In the past, you had to go to four or five offices for one project," explained Phil Mete, Haldimand's general manager of public works and operations, and the co-lead on the administration building project.

"Now, all of our administration is located in one spot. We really have a one-stop shop."

Residents who can't make the trip to Cayuga can still connect with the county by picking up the phone or logging into the myHC system at all Haldimand library branches.

The three-floor administration building, which shares a parking lot with the Cayuga arena, was designed with the future in mind, says architect Bill Curran of Hamilton-based Thier and Curran Architects.

"It's a state-of-the-art office building for 2050," Curran said. "We were looking ahead, trying to make sure we have a good building that will endure."



Photo Credit: Tom Arban

Every workspace is steps away from the building's many tall windows, which open to allow for airflow. Desks convert from sitting to standing position, and each cluster of desks has its own thermostat and noise-cancellation system.

Exposed steel crossbeams nod to the Nanticoke steelworks while painted murals by Hamilton artist Jamie Lawson incorporate historical photos from around Haldimand.

Bright colours adorn the walls, which are mostly painted drywall, but with judicious use of natural materials like wood and stone to highlight key areas such as the council chambers, which double as a provincial offences court.

"There is no beige in the building. Everything is rich and animated," said Curran, whose firm also designed Cayuga's library and heritage centre, which opened in 2018.

A climate-controlled room houses the collections from the county's museums, and public display space lets residents see artifacts that would otherwise be in storage. The main floor currently has a display on Haldimand's Black history, including the story of Canfield as a stop on the Underground Railroad.



Photo Credit: Tom Arban

CAO Craig Manley noted with pride that the five-year project will stay within its budget of \$21 million, a price tag that includes the planned demolition of Cayuga's former admin building down the road.

The new building, which took one year to design and nearly two to build, replaces six county buildings throughout Haldimand.

The building opened for business in February but the pandemic has twice-delayed a planned grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony. Some desks sit empty as employees continue working from home, but Manley said the building's spaciousness is a bonus since it allows for physical distancing during the pandemic, while spaces can be rejigged to incorporate more staff as the county grows.

"It's been designed for collaboration. You can work anywhere in the building," Manley said, praising Curran's design as combining "rural, small-town practicality" with an artistic flourish.

Mete hopes the new building will provide Haldimand residents centralized service with style for many decades to come.

"It's a well-constructed building that the community can be proud of," he said.



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