



Capitol Restoration and Rehabilitation

By Kae Warnock

Recently, many states have been exploring the possibilities of rehabilitating and restoring their capitols.

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The grand dames are getting older, and their ornaments are wearing thin. Capitols have been undergoing restorations for more than half a century, but what is notable now is that so many states are exploring the possibilities of rehabilitation and restoration.

What is driving this interest?

- Many capitols are aging. As they get older, their condition begins to deteriorate, and wiring and plumbing become less reliable.
- Many capitols were renovated in the 1960s and 1970s to reallocate space. These renovations often changed the interior structure to accommodate more people and equipment.
- Some states have reached the point where the occupants' needs for technology, space, and reliable electrical and plumbing systems, have outgrown the original design.

In many capitols, selected public spaces, such as former supreme court chambers, are restored for public viewing. In the working spaces (the legislative chambers, for example), woodwork and walls, frieze panels, stained glass and other ornamentation are restored to their original splendor. Legislative chambers may include new desks wired for computers, voting equipment and modern lighting concealed within reproduction fixtures. All of the upgrades are done subtly so that, at first glance, the chamber looks as if it's been restored to a particular era.

State Action

The Vermont State House is being restored to its 1859 glory. The project started in the early 1990s and includes long-term goals for parking facilities and offices. From 1987 to 2001, Wisconsin restored the public space of the Capitol to 1913 appearance and moved some legislative staff to other buildings in the complex. Legislative chambers and offices have been rehabilitated to accommodate added technology. Utah just embarked on a 20-year master plan that includes rehabilitation of the Capitol including installation of wireless and fiber technology, a seismic retrofit and construction of new buildings to house legislators, staff and state agencies.

Another solution to space problems is to expand the capitol by building an addition (above or below ground), and some states have even dug out a capitol basement to create additional space. From 1990 to 1994, Texas built an underground extension for offices, committee rooms and parking, and restored the public space of the Capitol. Legislative chambers have been rehabilitated to accommodate added technology. In Connecticut a legislative office building was constructed to house staff

Definitions

Preservation – to sustain the existing form, integrity and materials.

Restoration – to return to a period of time by removing materials from other periods and reconstructing missing elements.

Rehabilitation – to repair or alter for contemporary use while preserving elements that convey historical, cultural or architectural values.

Renovation – to remove original material and replace with contemporary.

displaced in Capitol restoration, and a tunnel connecting the two buildings was completed in 1989. In Delaware, wings were added to the east side of the Capitol. As the need for space grew, some capitols were chopped up to create more office space. Half floors were built in Michigan's Capitol to accommodate more staff in the 1960s. The Capitol, however, was completely restored between 1989 and 1992 at a cost of \$58 million.

Hidden Treasures. States that undertake a restoration project may also find hidden treasures. There may be decorative finishes buried under layers of paint, original flooring forgotten under carpets or other beautiful details temporarily lost in the many years of modification. In the speaker's office in Louisiana, rugs were removed and old glue scraped away to reveal the original terrazzo floor.

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Iowa's restoration is nearing completion, mostly to an 1884 look. The legislative chambers were rehabilitated during the interim. The Kansas Capitol restoration started in 1998 with the House walls and ceiling returned to their original colors, stencils, murals and gilding. Metal columns and fixtures in the Senate have also been restored. Work is to be completed in 2007. An underground extension similar to the one built in Texas is also proposed. Maine lawmakers appropriated funds to restore the Capitol, improve safety and accessibility, upgrade the heating system, and install a ventilation and cooling system. Montana completed an eight-year project in 2001 that included cleaning and repairing the exterior, installing new entry doors, revamping office space, and upgrading mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems. Public areas such as the rotunda were restored to 1902.

The Ohio State House and Senate annex were restored between 1989 and 1996, and an atrium was constructed to connect the two. Extensive research was done to determine what the original finishes and furnishings were like in 1865, so the building could be returned to its original splendor while keeping it a working state house. Nevada built a Legislative Building and moved the entire Legislature into it in 1971. Legislative chambers have been renovated to accommodate added technology. Nevada appropriated funds for a major addition to the Legislative Building, which included re-renaovation of the chambers and a three-story addition for larger offices and committee rooms. Pennsylvania added a new building to the back of the Capitol for offices and committee rooms, and restored the public space in the old Capitol to 1906.

The Ohio State House and the Senate annex were restored, and an atrium was constructed to connect the two.

The South Carolina State House has been restored to its original 19th century design. The project included asbestos removal, roof repair and a special system to protect the building's foundation from earthquakes. The slate roof was repaired, and the dome was reclad with copper. Restoration of the South Dakota Capitol began in 1975 and was completed in 1989 for the state's centennial. Restoration has been as historically accurate as possible, including re-creation of design and color schemes.

When a state legislature embarks upon a restoration project of the magnitude of a capitol building, it may discover unexpected structural faults and damage. Buildings may have crumbling foundations, water damage, faulty wiring or rotting timbers.

Restoration of a state capitol is a huge undertaking. The costs can be enormous in both time and money. States may spend \$20 million for a basic restoration or as much as \$200 million when the project includes construction of additional buildings. There can even be political dangers in taking on such a huge project. Spending \$100 million of taxpayer money is not always a popular move. When a capitol appears to be OK due to superficial repairs and paint, the public may not recognize the need for restoration. But the rewards are plentiful. The opportunity to restore and protect one of these beautiful old structures only comes once in a lifetime.

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Contact for More Information

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