State College Municipal Building

State College, Pennsylvania

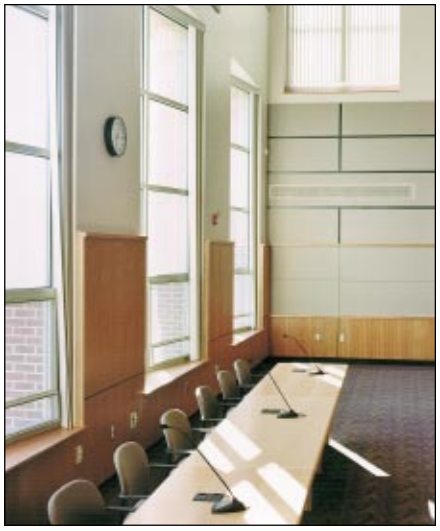
Architect: L. Robert Kimball & Associates and John C. Haas Associates

The new State College Municipal Building, completed in December 2001, is a long-awaited and welcome addition to the community of State College. The 75,000-square-foot facility offers more than just a space in which to conduct local government; it is a building that truly offers a community-oriented environment for all residents of the county's Centre Region.

Initial planning discussions for the new building began about ten years ago. As part of the process, a citizens' advisory committee was organized to elicit public input into the design of the facility. Early plans had identified the project concept as a "town center" encompassing local government offices, a library, and a performing arts center interspersed with retail space. While the project was ultimately scaled back to a single building, elements of this original concept can be seen in the final design.

At the completion of the programming phase, it was apparent that the new facility would be more than double the size of the previous municipal building. The new building was designed to house police, finance, and public works departments, information services, borough administration, and council chambers. Approximately 10,000 square feet of tenant space was included to accommodate future expansion. Allocations were made for a large multi-purpose room and conference rooms for public use.

The building is arranged on four floors zoned for ease of access to the most frequented public spaces. The two-story main lobby with natural slate floor and cherry wood paneling was designed not only to direct visitors to their destinations, but also to accommodate public receptions. Flexible track lighting allows the space to function as a gallery for art exhibits.



Photos Courtesy of Jim Schafer

A natural light-filled stairway leads visitors to the second floor lobby overlooking the main entrance. One story above, the stair terminates at the entrance to the council chamber. This space features a circular council table, cherry wood paneling, tiered ceilings and eight large windows which provide an abundance of natural light and a sweeping view of the town. The cherry wood and slate are design elements used throughout the lobbies, stair, and council chamber to articulate the public spaces.

The 2,400-square-foot community room on the second floor features maple flooring to accommodate performances by a local dance company. Provisions for theater lighting and a flexible backstage area support a variety of performing arts.

Debated at great length was the look of the building and how it would relate to the architectural traditions that define State College. Some felt that the new building should mimic the existing traditional brick facades. Others felt that the design should present a modern vision of the town and its future. Ultimately, red brick and precast concrete were selected as contextural building materials, while the massing and fenestration establish the building as a modern facility with a public role in the community.

The building is located on a 2-acre site with two main entrances, each leading into the main lobby. One is adjacent to the parking lot at the rear of the building. The other, a pedestrian entrance, is accessed through a large outdoor plaza that features planters, garden wall seating, and cascading pools.

The municipal building combines classical elements found in traditional borough structures with the modern design that captures the progressive atmosphere of the growing business district of State College.

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