



Completed Rehoboth Beach Municipal Complex



City Hall atrium that provides access to the Convention Center as well as to the second floor. Large windows bring in natural light to the first and second floors.

A new Municipal Complex for Rehoboth Beach, Delaware

Evan Miller, MPA
ICMA Local Government
Management Fellow
City of Milford, Delaware

The City of Rehoboth Beach, located along the coast of Sussex County, Delaware, is a premier beach destination for Delawareans and residents of surrounding states such as Maryland, D.C., Pennsylvania, and Virginia. With only 1,500 full-time residents, Rehoboth Beach is small. However, during the summer season, the city's 1.6 square miles will accommodate as many as 50,000 visitors. The city's designation as "The Nation's Summer Capital" speaks to its growing popularity for its clean beach, wooden board-

walk, bandstand venue, and special events. However, one of the things that hindered the city's ability to grow and adapt with its increasing popularity was the city's Municipal Complex.

The original building, constructed in 1964, was built as a city hall, police station, library, and convention center. At the time, staffing was minimal, and technology wasn't as critical as today. To accommodate growing needs, the building underwent several renovations through the years including adding additional meeting rooms, restroom facilities, a kitchenette, and a

storage room. When the library moved from the building in the late 1980s the police department expanded into the library's former space. This additional space bought time; however, it became increasingly clear that the building's inadequacies had to be addressed. The building lacked most modern safety features and systems. While some technology had been introduced there was no integration of the various systems. Important police functions were housed in the poorly ventilated moldy basement and they were using closets for evidence storage. Some accommodation had been made, but the city hall and police station were largely inaccessible to handicapped individuals.

In 2011, a City Hall Task Force was created to study the City's operational needs and make recommendations on a new facility. The Task Force, a

14-member group, included two architects, a member of the local business community, a local accountant/financial advisor, the Mayor, City Commissioners, City Manager, Police Chief, and Chief Building Inspector. The City hired the construction management firm EDiS, and architects Davis, Bowen & Friedel, Inc. (DBF), to work with the Task Force during plan development. As part of the planning process, renovating the municipal complex was considered; however, after exploring the facility and analyzing the requirements of each department, it was decided that it would be too challenging, a poor investment, and the existing structure would not accept a much-needed second floor. Kevin Lucas, Project Manager for EDiS, said, "The existing facility had so many problems with it, to upgrade it to today's standards, to the technology that is needed, just

didn't make good sense."

"One of the things that we had to overcome was that we knew we would have to have a multistory building, but we wanted everything on the first floor," said Former Mayor Samuel Cooper. "The Commissioners Room is used three or four times a month for a couple hours, but City offices are occupied 40 hours a week." This thought ultimately led to locating the Commissioners Room on the Second Floor and Administrative offices on the first. When asked about the planning and design phase of the project, Mike Wigley, President and a principal architect with DBF, said, "We must have gone through 200-300 iterations of different parts of the building." When it came to designing what would be one of the new building's most notable features, the atrium and corner element, Mike



The Commissioners Room, located on the second floor of City Hall. This room has audio/visual capabilities for displaying documents and presentations, as well as for video/audio recording and livestreaming public meetings.



City of Rehoboth Beach Police Chief, Keith Banks (right), talks to a group of students from the University of Delaware's School of Public Policy and Administration.

said, "We went back into history books and studied the architecture of old corner buildings in the city." The goal was to create a portion of the building that was not only easy to see from Rehoboth Avenue (Rehoboth's main street and business district), but also unified the second floor with the first.

After countless designs and considerations for the new building, a final design was presented to the Mayor and Commissioners. The design split the building in half, with the west side designated as the Police Department, and the east side designated as City Hall. The Municipal Complex is 2½ stories, 44,000 square feet, and cost roughly

\$21 million, with the help of an \$18 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. On the First Floor, the building now consists of a state-of-the-art 911 Dispatch Center, a detention area, sally port, an office for police officers, and an interview room. The City Hall side features offices for the Mayor, City Manager, Administrative staff, and the Finance Department. On the Second Floor, the Police Department has offices for the Chief of Police, Detectives, administrative staff, and a break room while the City Hall side includes offices for the IT Department, Building & Licensing Department, Alderman Court, a Commissioners Room, and

Commissioners Caucus Room. Finally, the Third Floor accommodates a training room and has unallocated spaces that can be used for future offices. The existing Convention Center remained in place during the construction of the new building, but underwent thorough improvements to the main lobby, flooring, and restrooms.

Rehoboth Beach's new Municipal Complex is one that will serve the community for years to come. But more importantly, it allowed the City to create department efficiencies while having the capacity to grow and adapt to new technology. This has enabled the City to provide higher quality

services and become more transparent in its operations. The City's Police Department is currently seeking accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). The 911 Dispatch Center has set a goal of becoming the first Tri-Accredited Center in the State of Delaware. Neither of these accreditations would have been achievable in the old facility. New technology integrated into the building has enabled the City to live stream and video/audio record meetings, providing residents with the ability to participate in their city government no matter where they are. The design of the new building

creates a more welcoming environment to the public, as evidenced by the City's partnership with the Rehoboth Art League and Coastal Camera Club to display artwork throughout the Municipal Complex. Additionally, more meeting spaces and the renovated Convention Center provides adequate spaces for community groups to hold special events and meetings. When looking back on the project, Kevin Lucas with EDiS, the Construction Manager for the project, said, "It's a wonderful facility, it's stately, and we're just proud to have been involved in a project like that." He continued to say, "I even brought my two daughters

down to the grand opening with me because I wanted them to see what a public building is supposed to look like, and that's what you have in Rehoboth, it's a public building."

Evan Miller can be reached at (302) 422-1111 or EMiller@milford-de.gov. Evan would like to acknowledge the following people in the assistance of this article: Samuel Cooper, former Mayor of the City of Rehoboth Beach (27 years); Kevin Lucas, Senior Project Manager, EDiS Company; and Michael Wigley, President and Principal Architect, Davis, Bowen & Friedel, Inc. 