

Perth Amboy Dedicates Public Safety Complex

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PERTH AMBOY—Mayor Joseph Vas and the Perth Amboy Municipal Council officially dedicated the new 160,000-square-foot Perth Amboy Public Safety-Court-Community Complex, located at 365 New Brunswick Avenue on Saturday. The new complex will be the home for the Perth Amboy Municipal Court, Police Headquarters and Community Center.

The dedication ceremony was for the Municipal Court and Police Department sections of the complex, which are expected to open by late June, which will allow sufficient time for the city to make a physical transfer to the new facilities, and allow time for interconnection and approval for state agency systems. Construction continues on the community center portion of the complex, expected to open later this summer, for which a separate dedication ceremony will be held.

“Today marks a historical day for the City of Perth Amboy, as we celebrate our future with the unveiling of the Public Safety-Court-Community Complex. It is an impressive building that keeps pace with the city’s planned growth and future demands. The centrally-located complex will deliver superior public safety and emergency resources, municipal court services and quality recreation opportunities for the residents and families of Perth Amboy, providing a level of services unparalleled in the city’s history,” Vas said.

The Public Safety-Court-Community Complex houses two courtrooms, police headquarters, administrative offices, an emergency management center, community auditorium, as well as a family community center complete with a fitness center, two pools, running track, and many more amenities. The impressive new facility boasts a distinctive rotunda with dome and copula, decorative columns, and a 261-glass panel serpentine wall, which showcases the community center portion of the building.

The new complex compliments the 44,000-square-foot Fire/EMS/Code Enforcement building that was officially opened on Dec. 2, 2006. The buildings’ centralized location provides easy access for emergency vehicles onto primary circulation routes, allowing for faster response times throughout the city and provides modern, easy facilities for public interaction with the city’s code enforcement department.

Several reasons prompted the City of Perth Amboy to construct the Public Safety-Municipal Court-Community Complex. The city was mandated by the Middlesex County Court system to replace the existing facilities, which were found to be grossly substandard. Additionally, the success of the \$1 billion Landings at Harborside redevelopment project rested on the relocation of the Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services departmental headquarters, which were all in need of substantial improvements. Finally, Sam Halpern, owner and developer of Habortown development project, donated to the city eight acres of land that was centrally located and ideal for emergency services.

“The vision for this tremendous project was first demonstrated in August 1999, when the city hired Michael Zemsky Architects of Westfield to determine the feasibility of the project,” said Vas. “The land was found to be centrally located, leading to reduced response times for the Fire, EMS, and Police departments. In addition, the construction of the project would have the least impact on the neighborhood, only requiring the acquisition of 18 parcels. After determining the project to be feasible, construction began in November 2004.”

The total actual construction cost for the two Public Safety Buildings is \$56,341,235.25, an average of \$280 per square foot. The cost includes complex systems, courtroom finishes, police security systems, and swimming pools. Funding for the complex construction was provided by the issuance of lease revenue bonds through the Middlesex County Improvement Authority (MCIA) on 2003. Supplemental funding was provided by bond ordinances passed in 2006.

The city encountered several obstacles, which lead to the delay of the project and additional costs. The city’s first issue was a nearly 3-year delay due to litigation with Conrail, which determined that the city would have to relocate Conrail’s abandoned rail line before the project could commence. This relocation involved the acquisition of additional properties, construction of a new rail bridge, and the relocation of several utilities lines. This issue is estimated to have cost the city an additional \$9 million over the actual construction costs.

The first legal issue that impacted the project from both a monetary and time factor are claims asserted by the “steel delay” as well as construction claims attributed to other aspects of the project. The “steel delay” was caused by the bankruptcy of the low bidder, Interstate Iron Works, after the project commenced which caused a 7-month delay. As a result virtually each of the prime

contractors have asserted claims against the City and the surety relating to this delay and insuring damages.

Due to the magnitude of the steel and other claims, the city took a proactive step of filing a complaint in the Superior Court asserting that the city's contracts only provide additional time as recovery and are thereby limited to an extension of the time fixed for completion of work. The case is currently pending in the Middlesex County Superior Court.

Further more significant and costly delays occurred that were related to the prime general contractor (TAK Construction) when remediation of the entire brick exterior at the Fire/EMS building was required. In 2006, costly delays continued to be caused by TAK Construction, which lead to a lengthy, costly arbitration process. Although the general contractor agreed to new project schedule completion dates for both buildings, TAK Construction failed to meet and adhere to the new project schedule and finally in May of 2007 the city took decisive legal action to terminate TAK Construction as general contractor and has been working with its surety company, Safeco Insurance Co. and the surety's on-site construction management company, FA Associates, to complete the project.

"Despite the costly delays associated with the project, the construction of these new facilities was needed. The new Public Safety-Court-Community Complex will provide our taxpayers and residents with quality, first class facilities that will be enjoyed by generation to come. Today we are building for Perth Amboy's future!" declared Vas.



Mayor Joseph Vas and city officials formally dedicated Perth Amboy's new public safety complex on Saturday.