

Bellefonte Borough Plans to Buy Original Armory Building for Police Department Headquarters

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The original Bellefonte Armory building at 301 N. Spring St. Photo by Geoff Rushton | StateCollege.com

Bellefonte Borough intends to buy the historic Armory building at 301 N. Spring St., with plans to renovate it to become the new home for the police department, according to a press release on Wednesday.

The borough has entered into a sales agreement to purchase the 26,000-square-building after determining over the past few years that the police department's space in the nearby municipal building on West Lamb Street was inadequate and badly in need of upgrades.

Closing on the sale is expected at the end of the September.

A design professional estimated the cost for upgrades to the existing space at about \$1.8 million, according to the release. Mayor Buddy Johnson explained the project to state Sen. Jake Corman, R-Benner Township, who helped secure a Department of Community and Economic Development grant for the estimated cost, which does not require municipal matching funds.

In the meantime, the borough also began exploring the possibility of instead purchasing the Armory building, citing its square footage and “extremely attractive” asking price.

The property was **listed earlier this year for \$990,000.**

It will require upgrades including ADA access, installation of an elevator and a sprinkler system, according to the release.

“Spending \$1.8 million to purchase and renovate the 26,000-square-foot historic Armory over renovating the 2,000-square-foot police department space will benefit the Armory, the entire borough staff and residents,” Borough Council President Randy Brachbill said.

Borough council toured the current department space in January and agreed with staff that “a facility overhaul was long overdue,” the release stated. Problems included lack of space, building security, officer and visitor safety issues, employee morale and a lack of professional appearance.

“The new building will address all of the issues that the police department has been dealing with for decades,” Police Chief Shawn Weaver said. “The department is looking forward to seeing first-hand the benefits of working in a facility that provides for all of the needs of the department. This facility upgrade will greatly alleviate many tangible and non-tangible obstacles that our officers and staff face on a daily basis, obstacles that largely go unseen by the citizens in which the department proudly serves.”

The police department is expected to relocate sometime in 2023 after upgrades have been completed.

Because the Armory provides more space than the police department needs, “consideration is underway for moving the Borough Office and related departments as well,” according to the release, and the storage of borough records may also be relocated there. The building would provide a large room for council meetings as well as smaller conference rooms for departmental meetings and trainings.

The current borough building would continue to serve as the public works operations center and some space may be leased to other entities.

At the Armory building, two tenants under lease will make up for the property tax revenue that will be lost in the transfer to the borough and will provide operating and maintenance funds, according to Bellefonte officials. Additional space in the building also could potentially be leased.

The Armory was built in 1894 by Col. W. Fred Reynolds and then used by the local National Guard. It was the largest National Guard Armory in Pennsylvania at the time, according to Bellefonte Historical and Cultural Association.

It served as Bellefonte Armory until the early 1930s when it was purchased by Bellefonte Area School District and a new Armory was built on East Bishop Street. (The second Armory was sold earlier this year with plans to convert it into a brewery and restaurant.)

The school district used the original Armory through the late 1970s. After that, it has been owned by a series of private investors and used for leased offices.

Then-owner Trinity Investments performed extensive renovations on the building in the late 1980s.

It has three floors of office space, another for storage and two parking lots.

“The place is in amazing shape and in good condition,” real estate broker Marc McMaster said in March. “It is absolutely beautiful. One of my favorite buildings in all of Centre County and I’ve been in a lot of them.”

The Centre County Gazette’s Vincent Corso contributed to this report.