

Bellefonte Borough has given an old Armory new life. Look around the historic building

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An office in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Jackson Ranger
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BELLEFONTE

A former Armory building has a new life after Bellefonte Borough began a journey two years ago to repurpose the 26,000-square-foot space.

The building has been transformed into the borough's meeting location and offices, and houses several tenants. Located at 301 N. Spring St., it was purchased by the borough in 2022 after they received a \$1.8 million state grant with help from then-state Sen. Jake Corman. The borough has been operating out of the Armory for about a year, with the transition being made last December.

An open house was held Thursday, where all three floors of the Armory were made available to explore, with a number of borough employees and council members present to talk about the Armory and its transformation. Much of the work that was done was to make sure that the building was up to American Disability Act standards.

TOP VIDEOS

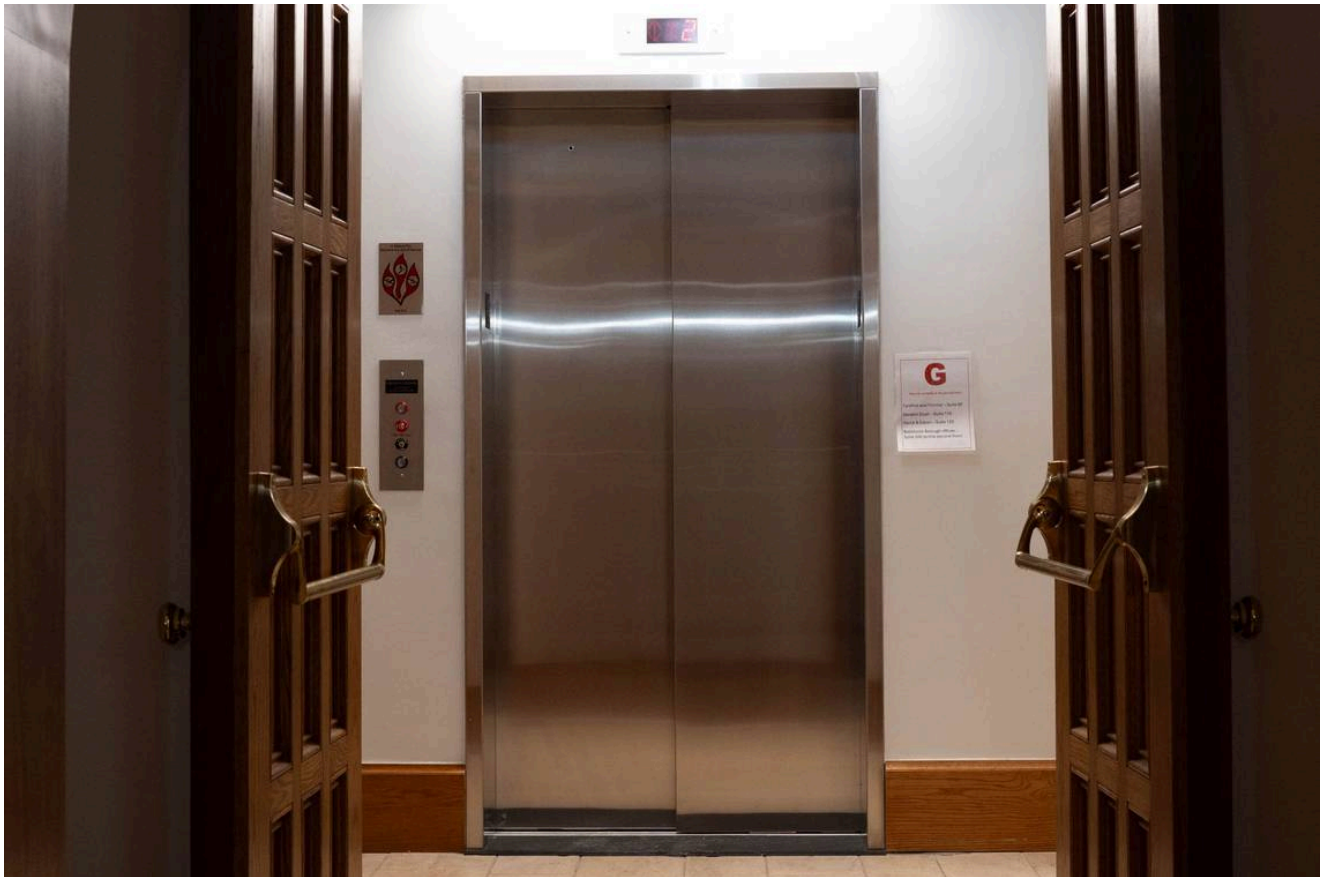


The council meeting room is pictured in the new Bellefonte Borough office within the former Armory. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com

“Honestly, when we had purchased the building, a lot of what it looks like now was already here,” Borough Manager Ralph Stewart said. “The rooms looked pretty similar to how they look today, trimming included, but the big thing that we needed to do was bring the building up to code. It needed a new sound system, ADA-accessible ramps and a new elevator, which ended up being the biggest challenge.”

For the elevator installation, the borough first hired Hoffman Leakey Architecture of Bellefonte to map out all of the crucial support beams found in the building’s walls. Because none of these supports could be relocated or removed, the elevator had to be constructed in an area where it wouldn’t interfere with the supports.

After a suitable location was found and the months-long design phase was finished, the borough hired J.C. Orr & Son, Inc. of Altoona to construct the elevator, which was completed in early May.



A new elevator was installed in the former Armory that was purchased in 2022 by Bellefonte Borough. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com

In addition to the elevator, an ADA-accessible ramp was installed outside the building's West Lamb Street entrance with another installed inside the building, and a new sound system was implemented in the council's meeting room to aid people who are hard of hearing.

Before the purchase of the Armory, the Bellefonte Borough council had been meeting in the second floor of the Bellefonte Municipal Building, found at 236 W. Lamb St., with the police department working in the floor below.

The Armory was originally purchased with the intention of moving the police department into the new building, but after a change in plans, the borough staff and council moved their operations instead, leaving the police department to have the upper floor to expand their operations.



A chandelier in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com

“One day, recently after I got voted in as the borough’s mayor, I was walking through the police station and saw that they barely had enough room to operate properly, and I thought to myself, ‘something has to change here,’” Bellefonte Mayor Gene “Buddy” Johnson said. “That’s when borough council started talking about buying the Armory for the police department. However, things changed, and instead (the borough staff and council) ended up moving there instead.”

The reason for the change, Stewart said, was to help bring in more funds to the borough through rent money. Since borough staff alone was not going to fill all of the office spaces in the Armory, the additional rooms could be rented out.



A cornice decoration in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com

The Bellefonte Borough Administration offices were moved to the second floor of the building and the large meeting room on the Armory's first floor was turned into the borough council's meeting space. A room is also available for smaller meetings.

Also found on the first floor are the offices of Derck & Edson, an engineering consultant company, and the office of state Sen. Cris Dush, R-Brookville. The office of FyreRok, a reservoir consulting firm, is the only business operating on the ground floor of the Armory, however, according to Stewart, that could change soon.

A sign for the office of state Sen. Cris Dush in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com

The Bellefonte Borough's fire department, comprised of the Logan and Undine fire companies, will soon be moving its administrative office to the ground floor. That will leave no more spaces available for rent in the building.

A hallway in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com

The money brought in from the Armory's tenants helps pay for other fees, such as heat or needed maintenance.

Many of the borough council members at the open house expressed gratitude for the new building, with councilman Doug Johnson being particularly impressed with the building's intricate design.



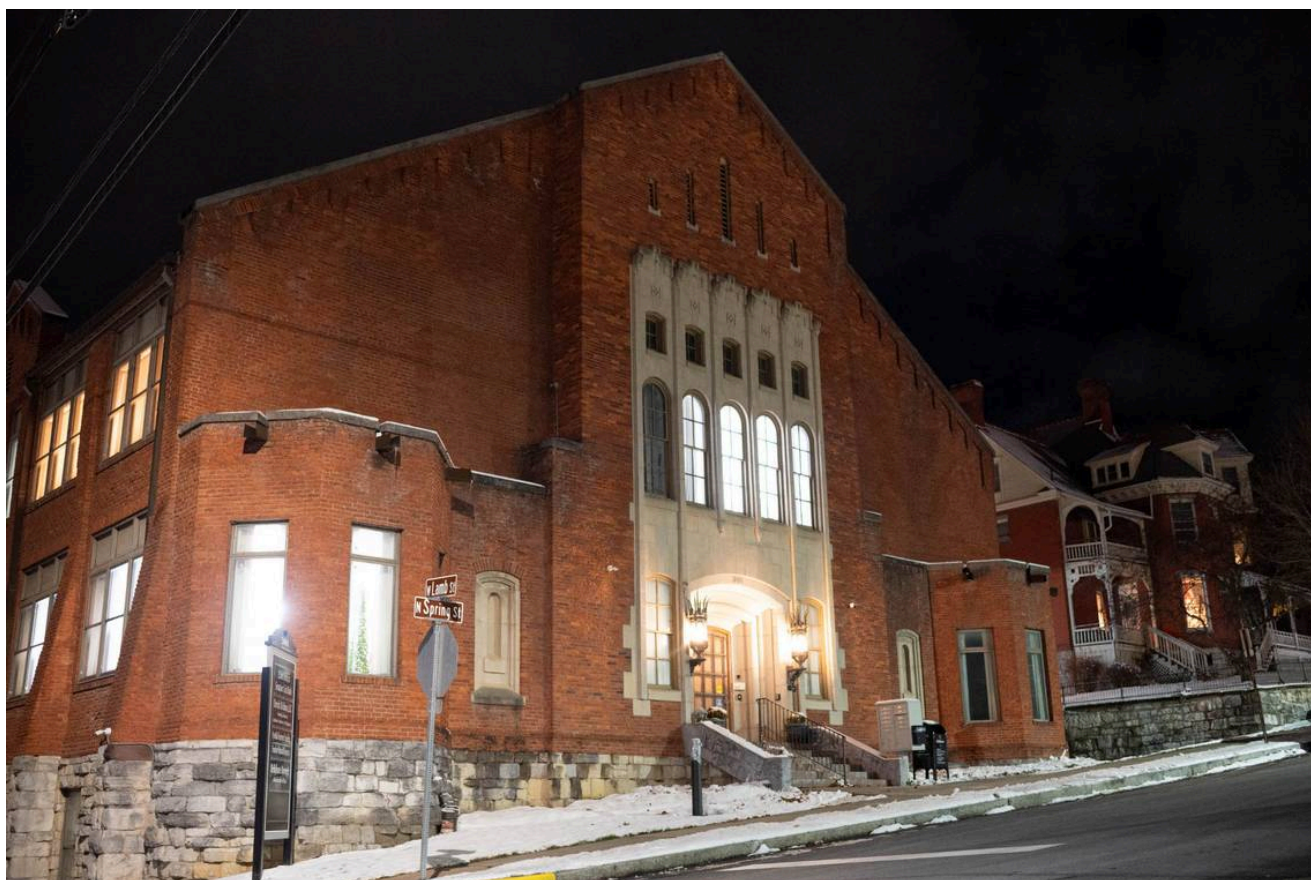
A Greek wall decoration in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024.
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"The space that this Armory has provided us with is just fantastic," he said. "The attention to detail with the building's trimming and design is incredible too. Hopefully we'll be able to conduct our business here for many years into the future."

The Bellefonte Borough office is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The Bellefonte Borough Council typically meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first and third Mondays of the month for a work session, followed by a business meeting at 7:30 p.m.



A conference room in the new Bellefonte Borough office on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024. Jackson Ranger jranger@centredaily.com



A former Armory in Bellefonte has been repurposed as office space by Bellefonte Borough.
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