

20 years in the Making, Harrisburg's New U.S. Courthouse Will Open to the Public

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Working for Ennead Architects, Vanderweil provided MEP/FP engineering design services for the new courthouse.



It's been a long time coming.

It's been nearly 20 years since the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$26 million for buying land and drawing up plans for a new federal courthouse in Harrisburg.

After seven years of selecting a site, followed by six years of waiting for funding and seven more years of design and construction, the new Sylvania H. Rambo U.S. Courthouse at 1501 N. Sixth St. will soon open.

The building will open to the public on Monday, according to Will Powell, a spokesperson for the U.S. General Services Administration.

The courthouse is named after retired federal Judge Sylvania H. Rambo.

The 10-story, 243,000-square-foot courthouse that towers over North Sixth Street is moving from the Ronald Reagan Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse on Walnut Street in Harrisburg. The new \$192.7 million building sits on about four acres and includes 43 indoor parking spaces and 36 outdoor parking spaces.

Tenants of the new courthouse include the U.S. Courts of Appeals 3rd Circuit, Middle District of Pennsylvania, U.S. Marshals Service, U.S. Attorneys, U.S. Trustees, Homeland Security, GSA's Field Office, and the Federal Public Defender's office.

The courthouse contains eight courtrooms and 11 chambers. In comparison, the courthouse on Walnut Street was built in the 1960s for about \$6 million and initially had two courtrooms. Two additional courtrooms were added later. And the new building is exclusively a courthouse, while the Ronald Reagan Federal Building housed additional offices.

Updating security was a factor in building the new courthouse. Officials have said that three different paths of circulation that

could not cross were needed for it to be secure. Those three paths include one for the public, one for judges and staff and one for prisoners.

Judges have their own elevator on the ground floor that bypasses public areas and goes straight to the floors with judicial chambers and courtrooms. Likewise, people in custody have their own elevator. Judges have a restricted stairwell from floors eight to 10 so they can bypass the elevator safely from their chambers to the courtrooms.



Unlike the building on Walnut Street, the courthouse is set back further from the street.

The district courtrooms are about 2,400 square feet and are on the north side of the building. Magistrate and bankruptcy courtrooms are up to 1,800 square feet and are on the south side. The five district courtrooms have different configurations so that the rooms can be assigned appropriately. For instance, two of the courtrooms have three rows of attorney tables since more and more cases have more than two parties, and one courtroom is designed for multiple judges for ceremonial functions.

The courtrooms on Walnut Street had no windows. That's not the case in the new courtrooms, which have views of Harrisburg.

Technology is an important feature here as well. The attorney tables and jurors will have monitors. The judge, attorneys and jurors will be able to see all of the exhibits on a monitor.

One of the most visible features in the courthouse is the wall mural by Monique van Genderen on the first floor. It is 250 feet long and has 21 canvas panels. Officials said that the painting's blue ribbon is an abstract reference to the Susquehanna River, and that the tall, narrow windows that intersect the mural's brushstrokes resemble bridges spanning the river as it weaves through Harrisburg. Artist Claire Sherman will also have eight paintings on floors three through 10 based on local foliage. Both pieces of artwork are visible from the outside.