

106 SUCCESS STORY

Consultation Balances Preservation Solutions with Building Performance Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



“In short, this is a building worth keeping. This idea stands at the heart of the restorative work just completed, work that blended various needs and desires... that were unimagined in 1932.”

— DENNIS MONTAGNA
Historian, National Park Service



THE STORY

The First Congress of the United States established the U.S. Customs Service in 1789. As the nation grew and commerce expanded, it built customs buildings in port cities. By the turn of the 20th century, Philadelphia had become a prosperous center of industry and one of the nation's largest ports. After almost a century of operation, the U.S. Customs Service outgrew its original 1824 Greek Revival regional headquarters and constructed a new building to serve the port of Philadelphia. Designed by Ritter & Shay, the 17-story Art Deco building opened in 1934 as a product of the great federal building campaign of the Depression era. Distinguished in richness of materials, quality of design, and decorative program, the Custom House is an architectural icon in downtown Philadelphia and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2011.

THE PROJECT

In response to the economic crisis of 2008, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The \$787 billion ARRA program spurred an unprecedented increase in federal infrastructure improvements, demanding condensed project delivery timeframes, design excellence, and exemplary regulatory and environmental compliance. This produced the largest surge in Section 106 reviews in decades. In March 2009, \$30 million in ARRA funding was allocated for the Custom House. Planned work included the restoration treatment of exterior masonry, replacement of multiple roofs, repair and replacement of windows and exterior lighting, restoration of the main entrance, and installation of a new, high-efficiency heating system.

THE 106 PROCESS

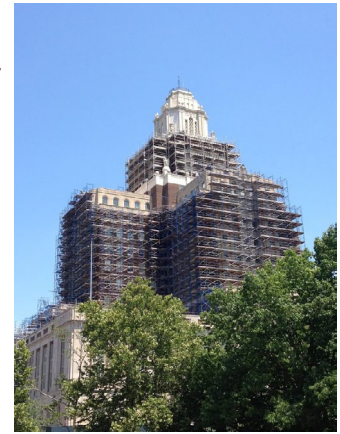
The General Services Administration (GSA) was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects may ensue. GSA had completed an extensive restoration of prominent public

Photos: Above, U.S. Custom House, Philadelphia (photo by Bruce Andersen, Wikimedia Commons); Right, lobby ceiling and lobby interior (courtesy Library of Congress, Carol M. Highsmith Photography, Inc./GSA)

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Photos: Left, historic view (courtesy GSA Center for Historic Buildings); Above, restored masonry (courtesy Sean Hearn/GSA); Right, exterior scaffolding (courtesy Thomas A. Rufo/GSA)



spaces in the 1990s, and by the mid-2000s, the agency began to evaluate solutions for the deteriorating façade of the Custom House. In January 2009, with ARRA funding on the horizon, GSA's Regional Historic Preservation Officer (RHPO) initiated early consultation with the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation provided technical assistance. Shortly thereafter, GSA began official consultation with consulting parties.

The consulting parties needed to consider alternative treatments to alleviate water infiltration in the masonry façade and address the existing windows with a sensitive hybrid design to meet energy and security needs.

THE SUCCESS

Through the Section 106 process, GSA administered the Philadelphia Custom House project in an efficient and effective manner, given the well-established relationship between the RHPO and all other parties. GSA's qualified team developed an innovative treatment for the failing masonry façade and a window solution that met energy, security, and preservation goals. Consultation was informed by original design documents, located at the SHPO's request, which helped the project plans comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. GSA engaged the SHPO early and kept the consulting parties informed consistently throughout the course of the three-year project. The consultation for this complex undertaking was completed within six months after funding was secured.

The project earned several acknowledgements and awards in 2013. They include the following: Illuminating Engineering Society Illumination Award of Merit; Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Preservation Achievement Grand Jury Award; Mid-Atlantic Chapter Construction Management Association of America, Project of the Year; and, GSA Construction Management Award, Large Construction.

The Section 106 process was critical in making this ARRA-funded project a success. The outcome marks a milestone in GSA's long-term stewardship efforts for this prominent Philadelphia landmark.

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Consulting Parties:

- Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer
- Philadelphia Historical Commission
- Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
- National Park Service

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov



Preserving America's Heritage