

## Adaptive Reuse of Allegheny Jail

Pittsburgh  
IKM Incorporated



The preservation and adaptive reuse of H.H. Richardson's Allegheny County Jail was preceded by a decade-long struggle to find a purpose for the architectural monument, abandoned in 1993, and to put financing in place. Its rebirth required the determination of many area champions including: Allegheny County officials, members of the preservation community and local architects, IKM Incorporated. The group persevered in their efforts to convince others of the necessity for preservation. Their persistence held strong as the building was vacated of prisoners; as deterioration set-in, and throughout a period of County budget freezes.

To save the building, IKM Incorporated presented a design incorporating a method of inserting a new floor structure in place of the five-story-tall freestanding cellblocks, thus introducing the space to house County Court functions. And through an innovative design/build/lease-sublease arrangement with Mascaro Construction Company, Allegheny County was able to arrest deterioration of the landmark building and consolidate 400 Family Court employees and operations from two separate, crowded buildings.

The \$34 million construction project began in December 1998. The design-build team of IKM Incorporated – Mascaro Construction Company completed the historic renovation on time and on budget. By October 2000, the Allegheny County Jail was resurrected as the home of the Family Division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, which occupies the 200,000 GSF within the walls of the Historic Structure.

For more on this project please see the October 2001 issue of Architectural Record.

Architect  
IKM Incorporated

Client  
Allegheny County Dept. of Public Works

Key Players  
Developer/Contractor:  
Mascaro Construction Co., L.P.

Structural Engineer:  
Atlantic Engineering Services

Lighting Consultant:  
Trevor Salmon, Consulting Engineer, HHF Design

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### **Reuse of old jail benefits family and juvenile courts**

Corrections Today , April, 2002 by Robert J. Bailey, Thomas E. Donatelli

In 1989, former President George H.W. Bush held a luncheon for regional editors and broadcasters at the White House. An attendee from Pittsburgh asked Bush about the crowded Allegheny County Jail, in which a population cap was mandated by court order and suspects arrested on drug charges were being turned loose. In his reply, Bush noted several options for existing facilities, which became a prophetic statement for Pittsburgh; he said, "There are innovative programs -- in terms of jail construction -- of lease backs. And so there is a lot of new thinking going on." This concept became one of the keys to the adaptive reuse of one of Pittsburgh's most historic buildings, and with it, the dramatic improvement of the Allegheny County Family Courts System. as E. Donatelli

This article explores the problems the Allegheny County Family Courts System faced during the 1990s and how the county determined what to do with an important, but vacant and deteriorating, jail in downtown Pittsburgh. The solutions to both problems intertwined to produce a model family courts arrangement and a successful building restoration project. The project and process described illustrates a creative solution to a functional problem that many family court systems in older cities could face and encourages revitalization of former correctional facilities that have the potential to be viable for related functions.

### **The Old Jail**

In 1995, six years after the presidential luncheon, Allegheny County opened its new jail in Pittsburgh. The former jail, which was 109 years old, sat vacant, unheated and deteriorating. Besides having been crowded in the past, time had rendered the jail woefully out of date as a correctional facility. A court order requiring it to be upgraded or closed and vacated was issued, but the cost of upgrading was far too high. However, this particular jail is designated a national historic landmark. Designed in the 1880s by H.H. Richardson, one of America's well-known architects, it is part of a complex that includes a

courthouse and is considered a crowning achievement of Richardson's career. To simply demolish the facility was not an option.

The county, in anticipation of eventually vacating the old jail, began working with architectural firm IKM Inc. in the late 1980s to determine what could be done with the structurally sound building. In 1987, the company identified the need for judicial space and consolidation, and later asserted the feasibility of renovating the old jail. Ideas included a shopping mall and a hotel, but by 1993, the county and IKM were exploring plans for the adaptive reuse of the building as a criminal justice center.

Around the time the old jail was vacated, the newly appointed Allegheny County Family Courts administrative judge made a plea for a new facility for the county's Family Courts Division. The family court, with facilities in two downtown Pittsburgh buildings, and its juvenile court, located several miles away in Pittsburgh's Oakland community, were infamous for insufficient space and depressing conditions. At the family division, courtrooms were being double-booked, and waiting areas and restrooms were inadequate -- the restrooms were not large enough or handicap-accessible. At juvenile court, crowding meant that victims and defendants often had to share the same small waiting area, with no privacy for attorney consultations. Although the situation was bad for all concerned, the children -- the very ones juvenile court intends to serve -- suffered most from the stressful conditions. Meanwhile, the county was shouldering the cost of operating courts in multiple locations and services were being duplicated.

### Adaptive Reuse

The county and IKM turned their ideas about the old jail to that of adaptive reuse of the structure as a family courts facility. Several studies indicated that such a renovation would be substantially less expensive than the cost of a new building, meeting the same needs. With backing from the county commissioners, the family courts administrative judge's pleas were heard and IKM was authorized to proceed with the design of fitting the complex family courts program into the parameters of the existing building.

Program requirements totaling approximately 200,000 square feet include courtrooms, hearing rooms, offices, separate waiting areas for victims, defendants and witnesses, holding areas, separate entrances, secure corridors, public and secure elevators, judges' chambers, security clearance areas and correctional officer stations. The old jail had a 90-foot-high central rotunda space with four radiating cellblock wings. The cells did not touch the exterior walls of the wings, so removing the cells made the wings empty for their entire height. This lent itself to infilling the wings with a new structure to create four new floors, totaling five stories. The architects designed the floor heights to coincide with the sight lines of Richardson's original windows. The great rotunda was kept as the focal point of the design and as the orientation point for visitors. The architects proposed altering the building's exterior at only one point. The massive wall enclosing the north courtyard would receive a new arched opening to serve as a separate entrance to the juvenile division.

Working closely with court officials and institutional employees, the architects developed optimal access and circulation systems. The first floor has secure entries as well as child-care facilities, a concession area and duty rooms. The second, third and fourth floors have courtrooms, waiting areas and staff facilities. The fifth floor houses judges, staff, a library and a conference room.

In addition to meeting the physical requirements of the program, the architects studied the design with an eye toward overcoming important emotional factors. Because the existing family court facilities had become so horrific, one of the goals of the adaptive restoration was to create a facility that better responded to the specialized needs of those who come to family court. The challenge was not only how to do that in a building originally designed to convey a fearful atmosphere, but also how to transform the ambiance of the building while showing appropriate deference to the original historical design.

By the end of 1995, the design was developed to the point when preparation of construction documents was under way. In November, two of the three county commissioners were voted out of office, and by January 1996, the new commissioners placed the project on hold. Gaining the commissioners support for the project, which was crucial to its success, had to begin anew.

One of the new commissioner's top aides, who was motivated by the perception that people involved in hearings in the family division are in a vulnerable emotional state and that the conditions of the facilities only added to their misery, urged the new commissioners to reconsider the project. The aide's position was bolstered by the presence of a strong children's advocacy coalition that publicized the deplorable conditions of the juvenile court and wrote letters in support of the project.

Lending momentum to the process was the fact that the county already had made a significant investment in the project in terms of fees paid out for professional services and studies. In addition, the county's judges strongly supported the project. The new commissioners were persuaded to go ahead with the project, but again, there was a hitch: A financial feasibility study revealed that the project was too costly. The county examined the proposed design, looking for areas that could be improved to optimize funding for which it was eligible through the Child Support Enforcement Program (Title IV-D of the Social Security Act). The financial feasibility study was conducted again. The additional Title IV-D funding proved to be a deciding factor toward a positive conclusion.

### Creative Project Funding

The new jail created one final problem for the old jail: After the new jail and other recent construction expenditures, the county lost its ability to create new bond issues to finance the conversion of the old jail. The commissioners emphasized the obvious point: The project only could be carried out if it was constructed revenue-neutral, meaning without issuance of a bond but with current cash flow. Several key county staff, assisted by IKM and a local contractor, explored the options and investigated financing by the builder of the project as the developer (design-build financing). The problem this time was that Pennsylvania law does not permit a public building to be financed without public money. Thus, special legislation that would enable a developer or contractor to assume ownership of the project and then lease it to the county was required; the county's team developed the legislation. In the proposed arrangement, the competitive bid process (required of all government entities within Pennsylvania on a project with a certain dollar value) would be waived. To ensure that the trade unions would support the legislation, the county mandated the use of union labor by the developer.

In January 1998, Pennsylvania State Senate Bill 382 passed, fulfilling Bush's statement about "lease backs" and "new thinking" of nine years earlier. The bill specifically allowed Allegheny County to enter into a design-build lease/buyback contract to adaptively restore the old jail, with the project developer

providing the financing. The concept is similar to a private sector turnkey contract in which the provider completes the entire project then turns it over to the buyer. The bill enabled the county to issue a request for proposals from developers, which were based on 60 percent complete construction drawings provided by IKM.

While the county evaluated the proposals, the Pennsylvania Judiciary Committee Domestic Relations Task Force submitted its findings on family court reform to the state Supreme Court. Out of this, a progressive procedural rule that came to be promulgated by the Supreme Court is that of "one judge or one team per family." Under this concept, one judge or judicial team hears all family law matters relating to a particular family, which eliminates fragmentation in the system by providing consistency. The Council for Court Excellence subsequently identified implementation of the one-judge/one-family concept as one of the 10 best practices in family courts, and the administrative judge initiated the practice in Allegheny County. Although the separate locations of the family and juvenile courts made implementation of this practice a logistical nightmare, Allegheny County's family court looked forward to completion of the new facility, which would result in a centralized location for family and juvenile divisions, proximity to other county judges, and ample courtroom and conference space. A new administrative judge, the Hon. Kathleen R. Mulligan, was appointed and took office, resolving to fulfill the promise of her predecessor's vision, stating, "Our investment in this facility is a statement for the importance of families and children of the county. They need and deserve this courthouse," according to the article "Old County Jail to House Family Division Facility," which appeared in the April 1999 edition of Lawyers Journal.

The selected developer formed a limited partnership that leased the unrenovated building from the county and subleased the renovated building back to the county. The sublease was assigned to the partnership's trustee (a bank), which issued certificates of participation in the sublease. The trustee sells the certificates to finance the project. The county's lease is an annual appropriations operating lease, in which the county is obligated to make lease payments for one year and then renews the obligation annually.

## The Result

Construction began a year after the requisite legislation passed. The schedule called for project completion in 22 months. The downtown Pittsburgh location meant that the only place to store materials was in the courtyards, which also served as the primary means of getting construction equipment and personnel into the building. Material deliveries, hampered by prohibition during rush hour, were meticulously scheduled and coordinated to maintain the project schedule. Construction of the new facility within the existing building had its own set of problems. One of the foremost issues was that a temporary holding area for offenders awaiting trial in the adjoining courthouse had to be maintained; throughout construction, inmates continued to occupy a small portion of the building. Structural steel was first envisioned to support the new floors infilled within the cellblock wings, but because of potential difficulties transporting the steel into the building and erecting it, a special type of concrete floor was installed. Concrete was poured on formwork supported by jackposts from beneath to form the slab. The concrete encased steel cables that hung out the ends. When the concrete was cured, the cables were tensioned (stretched tight) to add the proper reinforcing strength to the floors.

A glass wall with steel framing attached to the edge of the new floor slabs was added as a formal separation between the rotunda and the wings. However, it was done in such a way that the curtainwall does not touch the rotunda's original historic columns, expressing the functionality of the new program within the existing structure and maintaining the rotunda's singular spatial characteristics. The adaptive reuse was designed to conform to the existing building in such a way that the historic exterior of the building would not be adversely affected in accordance with National Historic Register requirements. The minimal alteration to the exterior proposed by the architects was approved by the City of Pittsburgh Historic Review Commission because the opening was built as a true stone arch matching an original archway on the south side of the building. The arch was built entirely of stones taken from other existing walls that have been altered. A decorative wrought iron gate, fabricated to match original grillwork, infills the arch. The addition of this gate further enables the north and south courtyards (formerly an exercise and a gallows yard) to be open to the public as gardens. New windows conform to the original architect's sightlines and paint color. The entire existing tile roof was lifted and relaid after new sheathing and roofing felts were installed. Damaged tiles were replaced. Deteriorated gutters and downspouts were replaced with new copper components, true to the originals. Historical stone masonry was pointed with mortar formulated and colored to match the original.

The architects' use of materials helped change the impression of the building from that of intimidation to respect. The polished granite floor and wall tile, much of which was obtained from the quarry that supplied the original stone in the 1880s, was used in contrast to the massive rusticated stone of the original walls. Courtrooms, suffused with indirect lighting, make abundant use of rich cherry paneling and trim. Existing interior stonework was cleaned and the deteriorating plaster of the rotunda ceiling patched and repaired. In a tribute to the old jail's important history, the architects provided a museum area just off the rotunda on the first floor, in which a salvaged portion of one of the iron cellblocks has been relocated and several of the oldest brick cells dating back to Richardson were reconstructed. Space also was provided to exhibit artifacts, many of which have not been seen by the public for more than 100 years.

Because the architect's design, with security as a paramount issue, conforms to the original building plan, the safety of the children, other citizens, attorneys and judges has been improved. The sensitive issue of children being taken away from their parents no longer occurs in a chaotic courtroom environment.

Ample space has been provided to confer with attorneys and caseworkers. The outcry that occurred about the county's former family and juvenile facilities proved that citizens going to court are not so overwhelmed by personal matters as to be unaffected by their surroundings. The new design responds to the landmark heritage of the building, while infusing it with a new feel, and brings dignity to the family court process. The environment of a truly monumental building effectively dispels the lamentable notion that the family and juvenile divisions were least important in the county's judicial system. Both legal practitioners and clientele deserve to come to a courthouse that has dignity and presents itself as a proper courthouse should.

Centralizing the family and juvenile courts downtown creates new synergies among the various judges, who are able to help one another and share cases without having to travel to another part of the city. Judges in adult family court who go to juvenile court once per week to hear dependency cases now do so in one building. Housing both divisions in one building also means that judicial scheduling difficulties

that arise (due to temporary vacancies on the bench) are eased. It also is hoped that this might encourage more attorneys to take on juvenile pro bono work because they can handle a juvenile case as well as their family cases in one location. The central location makes it easier for citizens to get to court; they no longer must take one bus into the city and then a second to get to another part of the city. In addition to the significant savings achieved by not having to maintain and lease disparate facilities, the county has been able to reduce costs associated with basic items such as couriers, parking fees and employee time spent in transit.

Finally, because the county implemented a capital investment in the building, it is able to gain nearly \$2 million in grants during a three-year period from various foundations to fund a Juvenile Court Hearing Officers Program requested by the administrative judge. Under this program, qualified hearing officers assist the court by hearing various cases. At a 1998 presentation to the foundations, the county explained the capital investment that was being made (noting that the budget included no money for additional costs). The foundations were asked to fund the salaries of the masters or qualified hearing officers who assist the court by hearing various cases to reduce court backlog and free up time for judges who can deal with more complex cases. Funding salaries typically is not something that foundations do, but in this case, they agreed to make an exception. The hearing officers program, which has been deemed highly successful, provides the court with the necessary assistance to dispose of the multitude of cases that are brought before it.

Some honors garnered by the project include the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Pennsylvania's Merit Award, AIA Pittsburgh's Honor Award, the Historic Review Commission of Pittsburgh's Preservation Award, Building Design and Construction Magazine's Reconstruction Project Award, Preservation Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's Historic Preservation Construction Project Award and a commendation from the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation.

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