

Work begins on Oklahoma State University's Postal Plaza

Crews have begun gutting a building in downtown Stillwater that Oklahoma State University officials plan to convert into an art gallery.

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Published: December 25, 2011

STILLWATER — During the past few weeks, crews have been tearing out the innards of a historical building in downtown Stillwater.

Oklahoma State University is renovating a downtown building called Postal Plaza with plans to turn it into a gallery to house the university's art collection. University officials hope to have the project completed by spring 2013.

The project is in the early planning stages, said Joe Weaver, OSU's vice president for administration and finance. University officials are working with Oklahoma City-based architect Rand Elliott to develop a design for the building, he said.

Postal Plaza dates back to the 1930s, and, as the name might suggest, it originally served as a post office. In more recent years, the building has been renovated to be used for offices. At the moment, crews are tearing out the insides of the building, he said, which left a larger, open space that is better-suited for an art gallery.

“It was sort of a labyrinth of office spaces,” he said.

For a building its age, Weaver said, Postal Plaza needs relatively little work. The mechanics of the building are outdated and the plumbing is old, he said, but the building is structurally solid.

While a design for the building hasn't been developed, Weaver said he expects it will preserve the open feel it has today. He also said university officials hope to keep as much of the original steel and brick work as possible.

Those architectural details are part of the reason the university chose the building for the gallery, Weaver said.

“There was a definite style to those buildings,” he said.

The building's downtown location also will make it more convenient for community members to visit the gallery once it opens. Weaver, who also serves as a member of the

Stillwater City Council, said the gallery will allow the university to interact with the community in a way that wouldn't be possible if the gallery were tucked away on campus.

OSU officials brought the proposal to buy and renovate the building to the OSU/A&M Board of Regents in June 2010. At the time, officials told the board the university lacked a good place for storing and displaying its permanent art collection.

Weaver said that remains the case today.

Up to this point, the only space available on campus to display the collection is the Gardiner Art Gallery, a gallery inside the Bartlett Center for the Visual Arts.

The Gardiner gallery typically hosts temporary exhibitions rather than displaying works from the university's permanent collection. The gallery occasionally has displayed portions of the permanent collection, such as a collection of Malian art that went on display in July.

Bruce Crauder, interim director of the OSU Museum of Art, said the new gallery will also give faculty and students easier access to the collection. At the moment, most of the university's art collection is in storage, he said. The collection had been stored in a number of locations across campus, including the OSU Library Annex.

More recently, the university converted several offices into secure storage spaces, Crauder said. That means making sure the rooms have adequate heating and air conditioning systems, as well as light and humidity controls.

Having the university's art collection all in one location would allow the university to use it for its intended purpose, he said. Right now, he said, it's difficult for faculty members and students to study the collection. When the gallery is complete, the works will be stored on racks that will allow easier access, he said.

“This allows the collection to be more than just a repository,” he said.



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