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The Warlong Glove Building in Conover seamlessly blends the old and new.

Inside, century-old brick and mortar shape around giant, arching windows that replicate glass panes familiar to manufacturing buildings of old.

Upstairs, wood creaks and rolls with the foot's gait, but reinforced support beams below ensure a steady floor. The building's new elevator is only 6 inches from where it shuttled passengers in the early 1930s.

In a matter of weeks, the revitalized building will open, and citizens will be able to read a book from the second-floor library, sip a mocha latte from the coffee bar and tap their foot on the same wood floor that seamstresses of old tapped theirs 100 years ago.

Major infrastructure renovation to the Warlong Building in Conover Station is complete, and the building's first tenant will begin business in three weeks. The Conover Library will close its current location Sept. 3 and shut down for two weeks while it prepares to move into the Warlong Building, said Donald Duncan, Conover city manager.

Conover has worked on the Warlong Building since the city bought the property more than five years ago. It is not a complete renovation project, Duncan said, but rather an opportunity to re-use and design an old building for the long haul.

"We didn't change what the building gave us, we just re-used it," Duncan said. "You have to work with what the building gives you. We want to take a building that's been here for 100 years and design it to be around another 100 years."

In addition to the library, the three-story building will house a community room, Greenway Transit Authority administrative offices, a coffee bar and an outdoor patio with tables for visitors. In addition, Duncan said the N.C. Department of Transportation purchased a portion of the second floor, where Conover hopes to start a train depot. Until a depot opens, Duncan said the space can be used by the public for meetings.

The building dates back to shortly after the Civil War and was part of the large industrial area that helped Conover establish as a city. In the fall of 2004, the Broyhill Furniture Company closed down its factory site in Conover, where the original Warlong Glove Manufacturing Building is located. After sitting vacant for several months, Conover bought the 27-acre Broyhill site and started revitalization of the property – calling it Conover Station.

Since then, the Warlong construction has been the hub of Conover Station's development, which will also include a Manufacturing Solutions Center, a park, and several development opportunities.

Over time, the Warlong Building has had more than seven additions.

Today, Duncan said the facility is like three separate buildings linked together through steel. It is built on "X" and "Y" axes, Duncan said, and on the building's "Y axis," for instance, the rear and front entrance to the building line up as well as the stairwells.

Making a 100-year-old building match modern codes is sometimes hard, Duncan said, and installing air conditioning, bathrooms, access ramps and other necessities can be challenging.

"With these old buildings, you run into surprises from time to time," Duncan said, adding that planners, engineers and Conover officials had to get creative in solving snags along the way.

Outside the building, the public will have about 180 parking spaces in addition to an access ramp. There are also several patio areas for the public's use.

The first floor

A 100-year-old building does not have air conditioning and modern mechanical machinery – something Duncan said took six months to install into the building.

While the first floor was once used for manufacturing, it is now the mechanical room. Duncan said the ceiling of the room was too low to be used by modern standards, so engineers and planners decided it would be better used as a mechanical room rather than nothing at all.

"We didn't want to put the mechanical equipment on the roof because of the look of the building, and we would had to have re-do the whole design that would cost money if we didn't put it in here," Duncan said.

The first floor will also feature a community room for citizens. Duncan said it can be used for wedding receptions, meetings, or teaching seminars, among other things. It will seat about 250 people with floor seating or about 150 people in table seating.

The room features a stage and green room for performances, and there is a patio outside for citizen use as well. Citizens can start using the community room in November.

"It gives you a lot of flexibility," Duncan said. "This was an industrial warehouse before."

Second and third floors

In addition to the main entrance to the building, the second floor will house future offices for the Greenway Transit Authority. One floor up are the Conover Library, coffee bar, and NCDOT offices. A ribbon cutting ceremony for the library is planned for Sept. 26, Duncan said, and Conover is in the process of signing contracts with a local couple that will operate the coffee bar.

On the third floor, there is original hardwood flooring from the building. Renovators worked to level the floor from indentations and unequal sections from old machinery that once sat on it.

The third floor also offers an outdoor patio adjacent to the coffee bar that overlooks all of Conover Station. It offers one of the best views from the building and will eventually eye the planned environmental park.

The views from the third floor are also intriguing, as downtown Conover can be seen from any of the tall, rounded windows that are placed symmetrically throughout the entire building.

It's green, too

The building will be green, too, and planners are hoping for a LEED Gold rating. The building is not designed for re-use purposes, and Duncan said engineers have had to utilize creative strategies to incorporate re-use into the facility.

One of those ways is incorporating a water-filtering system and cistern that re-uses rainwater. Rainwater comes down gutters and gets collected into a tank. From there, it is sent to a water filter in the building's mechanical room, and is then pumped back out into a cistern that will provide water for different things.

"We could use it for anything, even irrigation if we wanted," Duncan said.

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture provided a grant for the building.

For more information about the Warlong Building or Conover Station, visit conoverstation.com.

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CONOVER, N.C.

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