

# City and County Building getting a face-lift

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Colleen O'Connor

The scaffolding being set up around the clock tower of the Denver City and County Building is the first sign of a major restoration of the historic building, expected to be complete in October.

The \$7.24 million project is funded by the Better Denver Bond program, approved by voters in 2007.

The neoclassical granite-and-travertine structure, built in 1932 as part of then-Mayor Robert Speer's dream of creating "Paris on the Plains," will be watertight once again, and its original shine restored.

"The stone has gotten a lot of grime over the years," said city project manager Mike Sheehan. "It's almost brown-looking. It's really filthy right now."

The building's mortar joints will be repointed — a labor-intensive job, especially for historic buildings.

"We're removing all the mortar," said Rhonda Maas, president and co-founder of Denver-based Building Restoration Specialities, which also did restoration work on the Voorhies Memorial and the Greek Theater at Civic Center.

The old mortar has been patched so many times that the joints are mismatched.

For the redo, a laboratory that specializes in historical mortars analyzed the old material so that the new mortar will be an exact match — right down to the sand giving mortar its color.

"It took us a couple of times to get the right-size sand," Maas said.

Decorative panels, festooned with geometric patterns, cover the cornice facing east and west, and the restoration detectives are looking into those too.

"They're one of the unique things the building has," Maas said. "We believe they were previously polished, so we are investigating to see if we can repolish them, so people can see them better."

The front steps of the building also need some attention. Over the years, the freeze-and-thaw cycles of winter led to expansion and contraction, causing the steps to start pulling away from the building. This has affected the waterproofing membrane below the stairs.

"The stairs take you up to the second floor, and they sit over the first floor and basement file rooms, which have been subject to leaks," Sheehan said.

After the steps are removed and the water barrier replaced, the stairs will be reset.

When the stonework is done, the building's 630 steel-framed windows will be caulked, painted and repaired to make the structure watertight and more energy efficient.

"It's a beautiful granite building that's in excellent shape," Maas said. "It just needs some maintenance."

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