

# The Boston Globe

## Faneuil Hall renovation brings early American history into the 21st century

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Since the fall of 2010, Faneuil Hall has been surrounded by temporary fencing as it undergoes renovations.

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In a few months, visitors to Boston will have access to one of the most technologically advanced 200-year-old public buildings in the nation.

For almost a year, the city's iconic Faneuil Hall has undergone a dramatic internal transformation that will bring new amenities, improve retail space, and add a large new visitors' center to help educate tourists and locals about the city's historic sites.

With new interpretive exhibits, educational space, and up-to-date technology, the center will be one of the most advanced of any in the National Park Service's 395 parks.

In use for three decades, the park service's current visitors' center is in a basement across the plaza south of the Old State House. Sean Hennessey, a spokesman for the service, described the existing center as "antiquated and inadequate."

"It's downstairs, it's kind of dank, it's been there since 1980, it's not exactly state of the art," Hennessey said. "It's not exactly the kind of place that we want to show our best face to the visitors who come to Boston."

The new visitors' center will encompass 7,400 square feet of the market level and basement, adding a bookstore, interpretive exhibits, an audio-visual orientation program for all 16 sites on the Freedom Trail, iPad kiosks for accessing information independently (the first of the 395 units of the national park system to have such access), and a visitor information desk where rangers will distribute information and maps, conduct tours, and talks.

Faneuil Hall is one of eight sites that make up the Boston National Historical Park, established in 1974, just before the American Bicentennial. Most of the sites are also stops on the Freedom Trail, including Faneuil Hall, the Old State House, Old South Meeting House, the Paul Revere House, and Old North Church.

It is a "partnership park": though some sites are owned by the park service, others are not. The Paul Revere House is owned by the Paul Revere Memorial Association, for instance, and the Old South Meeting House by the Old South Association.

The city of Boston owns Faneuil Hall. When the Huguenot merchant Peter Faneuil built the hall in 1742, he gave it to Boston with the stipulation that it would always serve as a market for goods on its first floor and a market of ideas above.

The second-floor Grand Hall was the site of the first public protest against British rule in Boston and later served as a venue for abolitionists and suffragists to protest the injustices of their times.

Throughout the renovations, the Grand Hall has remained open for naturalization ceremonies, lectures, concerts, graduations, and other events. (The only shutdown was for filming of the Kevin James film "Here Comes the Boom.")

The renovations underway affect only the basement and the first floor, which once served as a market for produce and meats but more recently has offered mostly souvenirs and gift items for visitors to the city.

In addition to remaking the Park Service offices, the renovation will improve the retail space on the market level and make it more open, as well as introducing new heating, air-conditioning, and electrical systems.

The renovated basement, accessible both by elevator and by a new centrally located stairwell, will also feature public restrooms and an education area with 55-inch video monitors for the "People and Places" curriculum the park service offers to Boston Public Schools students.

"When you figure that the basement is now fully utilized for the public ... the design really has maximized the use of the building, going forward for the next 30, 40 years," said David Michael Lieb, construction manager for the project. "I think that's a nice statement about the building and its longevity."

Hennessey said the renovation grew out of years of conversations between the park service and Mayor Thomas M. Menino about how to create a better facility for visitors interested in the city's historic sites.

"I think Mayor Menino recognized that there was a real need to have a visitor orientation center ... that would provide a fitting welcome to all our visitors, to the people of Boston, to all the tourists and others who come and walk the Freedom Trail and enjoy our history," Hennessey said.

Hennessey said Menino has long been convinced that Faneuil Hall was the right place for the new facility.

"That's where the people are, so we're kind of bringing the visitors' center to the people," Hennessey said. The site's access to several forms of transportation was also a plus.

What made the move possible was a \$7 million earmark that US Senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry added to a transportation bill eight years ago. That bill was passed and signed by President Bush in 2005, and two years ago the planning for the renovation began.

Lieb estimated construction costs at about \$4.4 million, with the remainder of the federal money going to planning and design, construction management, fabrication costs, relocation of vendors, an archeological survey, and other expenses.

The National Historic Preservation Act required that the archeological dig be conducted before work could begin at the site.

The survey uncovered around 3,500 artifacts, which will be catalogued and added to the city's archive. Most were everyday items from the period such as animal bones, shells, stems from clay smoking pipes, and pieces of broken pottery. The project began with light demolition at the tail end of 2010 and has remained on schedule since then. "It's going surprisingly well, actually," Hennessey said this week. "We've hit no snags."

The market level is expected to reopen in spring 2012, in time for the tourist season. Lieb said he expects the project to be "substantially complete" by the beginning of February, with final details addressed through that month and vendors beginning to return to the building shortly thereafter.

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## Progress on Faneuil Hall renovation

December 2011, Jeremy C. Fox, Globe Correspondent

Since the fall of 2010, Faneuil Hall has been surrounded by temporary fencing, its first floor and basement closed to the public, as it undergoes renovations to create a new visitors' center for Boston's historic sites. National Park Service spokesman Sean Hennessey said the Cradle of Liberty was the logical site for the new center. "That's where the people are, so we're kind of bringing the visitors' center to the people," Hennessey said.

A rendering depicts the completed visitors' center area at right with new, more open vendor kiosks at left. Faneuil Hall has undergone many changes in its 269-year history, and even within the past 50 years. "When I was a kid ... it was the meat market for the city," recalled Hennessey, 54. "There were slabs of beef hanging from hooks, the floors were covered with sawdust, cars and trucks were parked all around the building. The whole area was kind of depressed and derelict."

In this photo from Sept. 29, David Michael Lieb, construction manager for the renovation, stands inside the market area, about halfway down the south corridor between vendor stalls. Behind Lieb is the site of the future visitors' center desk.

A worker gets a cup of water in the area that will become the visitors' center desk. The area around the desk will include interpretive exhibits, an audio-visual orientation program for all 16 sites on the Freedom Trail, and iPad kiosks for accessing information.

The new central stairwell is seen in September, at left, and in November, after railings were added to the edge of the opening and the metalwork was painted.

In the later photo, a new ceiling panel has also been added above the stairwell.

In the basement, the new stair stands alongside an original granite foundation wall from the 1742 Faneuil Hall, prior to the building's expansion by Charles Bulfinch in 1806. Most of the granite has now been covered with a cementitious plaster to protect and stabilize the 269-year-old stonework, but three small sections were left for visitors to see how the foundation was constructed. "You have to celebrate the historical nature of the wall," Lieb said.

Copper basins were fashioned to capture rainwater seepage around unused bulkhead doors added to the basement during an earlier renovation.

On the left, in September Lieb showed a sample section of the tongue-and-groove wooden slats that will cover the plaster and utility lines of the basement ceiling.

By November, as seen on the right, much of the basement ceiling had been covered.

On the north side of the building is a new basement stair. This is where the archeological survey was conducted last year in a 15-by-15-foot pit. "They had a whole archeology water station, filtering station," Lieb said. "It was quite impressive, actually." Lieb holds together two shards of a broken pitcher that were found during the archeological excavation. The shards date back to the 1700s. Hennessey said such digs were important opportunities to find lost bits of American history. "We think the book is closed on a lot of this history, but we're continuously unearthing stuff."

Workmen recently installed a new set of granite stairs on the south side of the building, adjacent to a new sloped entryway that provides easy access for the elderly, handicapped, and parents with strollers. The new entry replaces an elevator that rose only 18 inches to transport visitors from the entry level to market level.

In the photo at far left, the new, sloped entryway is shown in September, when it was just a concrete path. In the second photo workers lower slabs of granite into place to complete the entryway. "Basically you now have a non-mechanical means of access to the market level, which is really a major piece for the facility," said Lieb. "So you don't have to worry about if the elevator breaks down, you're on the upper market level, how do you get out of the building."

# The Boston Globe

## Faneuil Hall renovation ready for unveiling

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For more than a decade, hundreds of Boston tourists and natives have asked Mark Verrochi the same question: Where is Faneuil Hall? “You’re standing in it,” he would tell them.

Many influential leaders, such as Samuel Adams and Susan B. Anthony, have walked through Faneuil Hall’s doors since 1742. Yet Verrochi, who opened Red Barn Coffee there in 1998, said it is often overlooked.

“We used to see a swarm of people walking toward the hall, but then they would just walk around it -because there is no signage on the windows. So -people just thought it was another museum on the Freedom Trail,” Verrochi said

That may all change beginning Friday, when Faneuil Hall, the stout red brick building across from City Hall, opens its doors to the public after a 20-month renovation, just in time for Memorial Day weekend.

In November 2010, renovations began to the street-level market area and basement of Faneuil Hall, including upgrades to electrical and lighting fixtures and a new look for the vendor area. Verrochi described the \$6 million renovation, paid for with city and federal money, as “rustic industrial.”

Even with the renovations, history remains evident in every corner.

Consider:

Grasshopper Sweets owner Sara Youngelson and her employees slide platters of dark chocolate truffles into a new polished glass case. Next to it sits a 270-year-old column that displayed the stall numbers of Faneuil Hall’s original shops.

Verrochi and his wife unpack freshly ground coffee and meticulously clean their brewers. They will never use the old meat hangers that hover over their shop, a legacy of the building’s past.

“There is so much history within this building,” Youngelson said. “This is the history hub, and that’s what makes it so unique.”

The most significant change to the hall is the addition of a National Park Service visitors’ center, which will include an interactive information booth. A portion of the basement will also be used as a classroom, so that the Park Service can host lectures and other informational sessions.

“Faneuil Hall is a very special place, but it adds more to the area in terms of tourism to have a partnership with the National Park Service,” said Peter Sullivan, Faneuil Hall project manager with the city of Boston.

Sean Hennessey, a spokesman with the National Park Service, said the renovation was an opportunity to move the agency's visitors' center from 15 State St., to Faneuil Hall, a major tourist attraction.

"Our visitors' center had pretty much outlived its lifespan. It's not nearly as open and airy and light-filled and welcoming as this place is," Hennessey said.

It was not as technologically advanced as the new visitors' center, either. Visitors will have access to four wall-mounted iPads, which will display an app showcasing major historical sites with videos, audio features, and basic historical information.

Visitors will also be able to download the app, called NPS Boston, on an Android or Apple smartphone and use it as a map guide to historical sites.

But Hennessey said technology will never replace old-fashioned human-to-human contact.

"You are still going to be able to come in and be greeted by a Park Service ranger or guide," Hennessey said. "We are marrying the old with the new."

The Grand Hall area, where the mayor delivers the annual State of the City address, was not renovated because it was not needed, said Sullivan. Renovating the market and basement levels ensures that the building continues to meet its purpose, Hennessey said.

"In 1742, Peter Faneuil donated this hall with the stipulation that it is always to be used as a public meeting place, and this floor was always to be a public market," Hennessey said. "That's the way this place was supposed to be, and that's the way it is."

Security guards surrounded the hall Thursday morning because Sullivan said people still try to get in, even when each door is surrounded by three steel gates.

"There has been a lot of anticipation. People have been asking when they are going to open, and what shops are going to be in there because people were very familiar with some of them," Sullivan said.

Hennessey said the renovations will allow future generations to continue incorporating new technology while preserving the history of Faneuil Hall.

"The best way to save a place is to use it. We have made it more contemporary and upgraded the system, but these are the bricks that were here before," Hennessey said. "It's the cradle of liberty, and it's still rocking."

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