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by Victor Gamez
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Penn Law building to open up in 2012

Golkin Hall will connect Silverman and Tannenbaum halls near 34th and Sansom St.



Penn Law's Pepper Hall has been ground up to make room for a new law school building on Sansom Street.

The construction job for the new Golkin Hall — known as the Sansom Street Project — will complete a “10-year transformation of the Penn Law campus,” stated Penn Law Dean Michael Fitts on Penn Law's website.

The new law school building, will connect the existing Silverman and Tannenbaum Halls, feature a 350 seat auditorium and be LEED certifiable. The building was designed by Boston-based architect firm Kennedy & Violich.

According to Vice Dean for Administrative Services at the Law School Jo-Ann Verrier, Fitts sought a new building in the 2006-2007 academic year after the size of Penn Law's faculty had increased. “The joke became that our standing faculty were truly standing!” wrote Verrier in an e-mail.

The biggest challenge was to balance the look of the historic Silverman Hall with the newer Tannenbaum hall. “With most of our projects here, we have a design guideline that says we should seek to build buildings of their time ... We balanced that idea along with the historic fabric we have on campus.”

Kennedy & Violich achieved balance by choosing the size of the building and its building materials, Kocent said. “They researched and landed on the brick, limestone and marble trim to match the feel of the law school of Silverman,” said Kocent, adding that the building is three stories on the east to match Silverman's height, and two stories on the west to match Tannenbaum's.

Penn law faculty and students also had a voice in the design through the school's Building committee, which met with the architects.

“I was an art history major in undergrad with a focus in architecture,” said rising second year law student Craig Olson. “So I was definitely interested in the committee.”

According to Olson, students were able to provide input in how students use the interior spaces of the buildings, which areas seem to be more crowded and what makes student spaces successful.

He added, “I think a lot of people are going to be excited for the roof terraces — one of which will be above the Goat, a new student space...and the other will be on the top of the building.”

The new building will also include a courtroom, funded by a \$1 million gift from legal firm Kline & Specter. According to Kline & Specter partner Shanin Specter, he had suggested the courtroom before the start of the Sansom Street Project.

“I had been teaching trial advocacy at Penn for the last 10 years, and I told the dean a long time ago that I thought the law school needed a new courtroom,” said Specter, an 1984 Penn Law graduate. “He came to me recently and told me that the school was now able to build a courtroom if [the firm] would fund it and so we agreed.”

The courtroom will be used as classroom setting for purposes such as mock trials. However, it may also be used as the location of Pennsylvania Superior Court arguments. “They have come to the law school and used rooms that were much less appropriate,” Specter said.

“We have a lot to do together, the law school and the firm,” said Specter, adding “I love the law school and I love being able to help advance its mission.”

Golkin Hall will open in January of 2012.