



## USDA Employees, General Public Benefit from Bennett Building Renovation

\$12.3 M consolidation project offers healthy, comfortable environment for 220 federal workers as GSA looks for ways to maximize functionality of its existing buildings, while reducing overall lease costs.

By Brad Fullmer

Doing tenant improvement construction on secure federal buildings offers a layer of complexity for a general contractor managing the project, given strict security requirements due to the necessity of protecting tenants like high-ranking political and judicial officials.

On the recent completion (December 2018) of the \$12.3 million USDA Consolidation – Wallace Bennett Federal Building project in Salt Lake City for GSA by Salt Lake-based Paulsen Construction, rigorous background checks and daily security checkpoints were standard protocol.

“Every worker has to be badged to meet Tier 1 criteria, some of the most stringent background testing on any job; it adds to the complexity of a schedule,”

said John Paulsen, President. “Access is very limited in certain areas. You have to be sensitive to the fact that you’re working around federal judges and U.S. Senators. At the end of the day, this is a project where the taxpayers benefitted.”

Paulsen is referring to GSA’s initiative to consolidate leased office space for federal employees through the renovation of existing buildings it owns. The firm renovated six of eight floors (approximately 164,000 SF total) of the Bennett Building over a 16-month schedule, allowing 220 USDA (Farm Service and Forest Service) employees to relocate from an outdated 100,000 SF building in West Valley City that had been leased for 40 years.

According to Jason Sielcken, Architect and Sr. Project Manager for GSA’s Office of Design & Construction, this project came

Paulsen Construction of Salt Lake completed a \$12.3 million tenant improvement on the Wallace Bennett Federal Building, which now houses 220 employees for the USDA’s Farm Service and Forest Service divisions. Interior spaces are lively and inviting, with geometric shapes, patterns and colorful. (Photos ©Paul Rivera Photography)

in at 38% less than original projected cost, and achieved a 54% space reduction for USDA (from 300 SF per person to 150 SF), mainly through an efficient and thoughtful use of space highlighted with flexible DIRT Wall systems, glass walls with decorative film/signage, living ‘green walls’, and efficient new LED lighting, mechanical and electrical systems. Digital scanning and tape storage spaces have stand-alone HVAC systems connected to emergency power; new telecommunication pathways

were installed for future technology upgrades on floors 6-7. Overall, it saves USDA more than \$1.4 million in rent annually, and taxpayers \$2.6 million in private market lease cost avoidance.

“As design progressed, the new space became a catalyst for the agency to identify new ways to manage their building moving forward, making them more streamlined and poised to serve the public and their customers for the next 20 years,” said Sielcken. “The new space is designed

with collaboration, space flexibility, and integrated technology at its core, all of which will improve the agency’s ability to be competitive in attracting the next generation of talent.”

The design of the USDA spaces created some unique opportunities for the design team at Salt Lake-based GSBS Architects, which had a goal of providing tailored workspaces that were unique to the Farm Services Agency and the Forest Service, with an emphasis on rivaling private sector

spaces in regards to a healthy, vibrant working environment.

“From the outset, we wanted to design something fresh and unique for the USDA,” said Erin Holcombe, Project Manager for GSBS. “Our vision aligned so well with the GSA, the end result was something that surpassed all our expectations. Innovative design doesn’t necessarily cost more. In this case, the ideas everyone brought to the table ended up saving the client millions up front and for years to come.” >>



Design emphasized bright and well-lit spaces by placing work areas next to windows and adding design features that allow light to travel deep into the office. There are more collaborative and shared private spaces, and fewer closed offices, while still maintaining elements of personal space.

Different “neighborhoods” in the offices offer dual purposes of way finding, and celebrating the role of the USDA.

“GSA did a phenomenal job of supporting us as we finished the project,” added Paulsen. “With rising cost of materials and labor shortage challenges, we had a lot of discussions directly with the owner to find best values for end users. It requires a lot of communication because you can’t shut down these key agencies (during construction).”

Sielcken said GSA is looking at further consolidation opportunities with buildings like the James V. Hansen Federal Building in Ogden and the Frank E. Moss U.S. Courthouse in Salt Lake City. ■

#### USDA Consolidation

##### Wallace Bennett Federal Building

Owner: GSA  
Owner’s Rep: Jason Sielcken

#### DESIGN TEAM

Architect: GSBS Architects  
Electrical: Spectrum Engineers  
Mechanical: Colvin Engineering  
Structural: Reaveley Engineers

#### CONSTRUCTION TEAM

General Contractor: Paulsen Construction  
Plumbing: Halverson  
HVAC: Cherrington’s  
Painting: Hendricksen  
Electrical: Arco Electric  
Masonry: JH Masonry  
Drywall/Acoustics: Wallboard Specialties  
Tile/Stone: Hunter Ridge  
Carpentry: Henriksen Butler (DIRTT)  
Mapleleaf  
Flooring: Wall 2 Wall  
Roofing: Superior Roofing  
Concrete: Paulsen Construction  
Glass/Curtain Wall: Mollerup  
Demolition: TID

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