

NOVEMBER 2011

# Thomas M. Cooley Law School GRAND RAPIDS CAMPUS



CASEstudy

SOCIETY OF ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE FACILITIES

**LOCATION:** 111 Commerce Avenue, SW  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

**OWNER:** Thomas M. Cooley Law School

In 2003, Thomas M. Cooley Law School chose the former H.H. Cutler Building and Durfee Building in Grand Rapids, Mich., for its third campus site. The renovation project was completed in 2006, and the 111 Commerce Street SW building has since served as an integral campus in a vibrant downtown core.

At five stories and 107,000 square feet, this facility was a major undertaking for Cooley and Rockford Development. Rockford began to redevelop this site and a dozen other buildings in the Cherry Street Landing area. Before, the neighborhood was mostly abandoned with some areas designated as Brownfield sites; now, it is a developed and bustling destination.

Cooley's Grand Rapids campus began as a partnership program with Western Michigan University. Initially, Cooley held classes at the WMU Grand Rapids campus while renovations began. It

was important to Cooley to establish a presence in Grand Rapids, one of the fastest-growing and most economically prosperous cities in the Midwest.

This building is an outstanding example of adaptive reuse. Proper adaptive reuse can transform a facility's form or function without changing the fundamental integrity of the former structure, while maintaining the character of the surrounding area. Cooley's renovation project adapted a historic 1890s-era building and built an expansion onto it. The building itself was not in good shape. It had been designated a Brownfield site by the state of Michigan. This is a common designation for formerly industrial properties that



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have a certain amount of contamination associated with them. State law requires these environmental contaminants be removed before construction is complete. Not only did Cooley accomplish this, but they sought to preserve and enhance the facility itself.

Though the Grand Rapids campus features state-of-the-art water efficiency systems, modern insulation, high air quality standards, and efficient computer systems, old-world charm is never far away. Exposed original brick walls, handsome wood floors, and worn wood columns abound in



By reusing expansive elements of the building, Cooley engaged in recycling on a macro scale. Cooley further promotes recycling at the Grand Rapids campus with a robust recycling program that features numerous recycling bins in the common areas and a policy of donating or recycling over 75 percent of its electronic waste.



this classic building. As esthetically pleasing as these features may be, they also serve to benefit the campus in other ways. Cooley was able to save these materials rather than discard them and consume more raw materials. Cooley even used parts of wood floors they were replacing to patch up broken areas of surviving floor.

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Cooley also located the Grand Rapids campus in an area where car travel could be minimized. Located adjacent to the principal business district, the campus is within walking distance of apartments, restaurants, entertainment, Van Andel Arena, and plenty of internship/job opportunities. For those who must commute via car, the campus sits right on the edge of U.S. Highway 131. Cooley also worked with the city of Grand Rapids to build an attractive and reasonably priced public parking garage next to the campus.

The Grand Rapids campus is a stunning reminder of how effective adaptive reuse in a vibrant urban core can be, and a great example of *Practical Environmental Stewardship*<sup>™</sup>.

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