

County officials get grand tour of new administrative offices

BY GEOFFREY GRAYBEAL Gazette Staff Reporter

Gaston County Commissioner Joe Carpenter bought his first Boy Scout uniform from the Belk department store in downtown Gastonia when he was 11. On Tuesday, Carpenter returned to the same spot to see the new county administrative offices that will house most county departments and 120 employees. The second floor where Carpenter bought clothing and shoes as a child soon will serve as office space for the county's planning, tax appraisal, finance and mapping departments. Carpenter and a few commissioners and county staffers toured the refurbished three-story, 85,000-square foot building that is scheduled to open Aug. 15. They wanted to see firsthand the fruits of a \$5.5 million construction project as it nears completion.

The county purchased the building from BB&T about five years ago. It sits next to Bits & Pieces and a vacant lot, and can be accessed from Main Avenue and a back parking lot off Marietta Street. "It's very nice," said Commissioner John Torbett. "It's built around the public use, which is what I like. In other words, large areas. It provides easier access for the public, which is key." The departments will start moving equipment, files and furniture to the new building on Aug. 12. The tax appraisal's old office space at York Chester Square next to the county police department will be converted into space for the elections, probation and parole offices. That move should take place in early 2006, said Public Works Director Ray Maxwell. As to what will become of the current county administration building, County Manager Jan Winters said all options would be considered, including selling it. "We had talked at one time about moving the school district over, but now I think it's a matter of money," he said.



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From left, Public Works Director Ray Maxwell gives County Manager Jan Winters and county commissioners John Torbett and Joe Carpenter a tour of the new Gaston County Administrative Offices on Tuesday afternoon.