
ORIGIN & FUNCTIONS

The Department of General Services provides goods and services efficiently and economically to other State agencies through bulk handling, purchasing, and warehousing, and by its expertise in lease negotiation, contracts, bidding, and real estate transactions. It studies the need for State office space; acquires that space through lease, purchase, or construction; provides architectural and engineering design services; and is responsible for maintenance and security on most State premises. Assistance is available to State agencies for keeping inventories, handling forms, managing records, designing graphics, and printing. Telecommunications systems are also a departmental responsibility.

The oldest function now within the Department of General Services is the care of buildings owned by the State. Prior to the burgeoning growth of State government in this century, Maryland had few State buildings, most of them encompassed within State Circle in Annapolis. Other space, in scattered locations, usually was leased as needed. In 1845, the State Librarian was delegated some responsibilities for hiring persons to look after public buildings in Annapolis (Resolution no. 36, Acts of 1845). As early as 1849, a person referred to as superintendent of the public buildings was authorized to plant trees and repair gates and gutters (Resolution no. 81, Acts of 1849). The 1860 budget provided a salary for a Superintendent of Public Buildings and Grounds, but the position was not established by statute until 1888, although legislation in 1862 made the Governor responsible for appointing a competent person for upkeep of buildings and grounds, two watchman, and a Keeper of the Steam House and Furnace (Chapter 341, Acts of 1860; Chapter 15, Acts of 1862; Chapter 175, Acts of 1888). The 1888 law specified the duties of the Superintendent of Public Buildings and Grounds; virtually the same text was used in the 1970 law that created the Department of General Services (Chapter 97, Acts of 1970). In 1920, a commission was appointed to look into leasing or building a State office building in Baltimore (Chapter 149, Acts of 1920), which later would require a buildings and grounds unit as well.

Also in 1920, the Central Purchasing Bureau, another component of the modern Department, was formed (Chapter 184, Acts of 1920). The Bureau became part of the Department of Budget and Procurement in 1939 (Chapter 64, Acts of 1939), then briefly moved to the Department of Budget and Fiscal Planning in 1969 before it was incorporated into the Department of General Services in 1970. Through centralized purchasing, the Bureau since 1920 has provided supplies efficiently and economically to all State agencies.

The General Assembly in 1947 established the Department of Public Improvements to advise the Board of Public Works and other State agencies on engineering questions and other matters pertaining to construction, renovation, maintenance, and repair of buildings, structures, and public works. This department developed the State Building Code. Its functions now belong to the Department of General Services.

When the executive branch of government was reorganized in 1970, the Department of General Services was created (Chapter 97, Acts of 1970). At that time, duties of the former Department of Public Improvements and State purchasing functions from the Department of Budget and Fiscal Planning were transferred to the Department of General Services along with oversight of several previously independent agencies. The War Memorial Commission, Washington Cemetery Board of Trustees, Board of Architectural Review, Office of the Superintendent of Annapolis Public Buildings and Grounds, Office of the Superintendent of Baltimore Public Buildings and Grounds, Hall of Records Commission, Commission on Artistic Property, and the Purchasing Bureau constituted original components of the Department, although the Washington Cemetery Board of Trustees, Hall of Records Commission, and the Commission on Artistic Property have since been statutorily removed.

Under the direction of the Secretary of General Services, Department programs and services are supervised by four Assistant Secretaries responsible for Finance and Administration, Facilities Management, Services and Logistics, and Telecommunications and Information Services.