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[Budget overruns plague East Patrol project](#)

Posted August 27, 2013 at 11:00 pm

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Northeast News

August 28, 2013

Over budget. It's a phrase continually associated with the construction of the East Patrol station and crime lab campus.

What began as a \$57 million project has soared to \$74 million, but city officials say the original budget was grossly underestimated.

When proposing the original budget to the city, the Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) failed to include "soft costs," like furniture, lab equipment and installation costs, among others, said Kansas City's City Communications Director Danny Rotert.

The soft costs amounted to \$23 million and could continue to climb, depending on the crime lab specs, he said.

Then, the city asked the architect to redraw the plans several times to include items like a community gym, community meeting room and to create a campus that fit with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. As a result, the architect fees were higher than normal, reaching about \$9 million, he said.

The campus, which spans four blocks, will be located near East 27th Street and Prospect Avenue. For the project, the city purchased more than 150 parcels, including about 60 homes.

For the acquisition phase, the city allotted \$5 million, higher than normal, to purchase the properties, offer relocation assistance to residents and pay for moving costs.

"We paid them over and above the worth of their house because we thought that was fair," Rotert said. "Home prices have really taken a hit. We really didn't think it was fair that the city go in when home prices were at a low and buy up these homes for less than we would have five years earlier. Because the city decided to use this East Patrol project as an economic development tool, there were going to be increased costs."

Crime lab debate

While the crime lab portion of the campus continually receives the blame for being over budget, KCPD Crime Lab Director Linda Hetzel said it isn't true.

"The crime lab has steadily remained within budget estimations since 18 months ago," Hetzel said. "We feel beaten and battered in that we're the object of the overrun and we really are not."

If the city built the crime lab to the original specs of 71,000 square feet, construction would cost \$24 million for the lab and about \$29 million in lab equipment and design fees, she said. However, building the crime lab with 71,000 square feet would raise the total cost of the East Patrol/crime lab campus project to about \$80 million. One proposed compromise is to build a crime lab featuring 54,000 square feet, which would meet the current staffing and spatial needs, but would leave no room to expand to accommodate future needs.

City Council member John Sharp said the crime lab has an unacceptable backlog. From January through June of 2013, the crime lab had a backlog of 1,386 cases, Sharp said. There's more than a 12-month backlog on DNA testing and for latent print testing, the backlog totals 2,266 and doesn't account for burglary cases. Even for the most serious cases, the backlog on latent prints is 16 months and the backlog for ballistics and firearms testing is 4 months, he said.

"When we can't process the evidence, when it's sitting there in a lab waiting for processing, these guys don't quit committing crimes because that's their job. That's what they do," Sharp said. "The evidence that would incarcerate them and make this a safer city is sitting there waiting to be tested."

The city needs to build a crime lab not just big enough for today's needs, but large enough to accommodate needs decades into the future, Sharp said.

Project funding

Funding for the project originates from the Public Safety Sales Tax, which voters voted to renew in 2010 with an expiration date of 2026. To date, the tax has funded construction of the Shoal Creek Patrol Division station, Kansas City Regional Police Academy, Metro Patrol Division station, South Patrol/Special Operations Division station and renovation of the downtown police headquarters.

"We have some issues with the police on these projects," Rotert said. "We were significantly over budget on the police academy, we were over budget on the headquarters project and we're over budget on East Patrol."

Both KCPD and city officials are hosting discussions to find solutions for preventing cost over-runs on future projects, Rotert said.

"Despite the contrary, we don't have excess money laying around," Mayor Sly James said. "I don't think the voters ever asked us to build an \$80 million East Patrol with or without a crime lab...I'm sensitive to people saying this council or administration is not doing what the voters asked because that is absolutely not true. In fact, we're doing a lot more than the voters asked. The promise hasn't been broken. If anything, people have broken their backs to keep that promise and do more."

James stressed the city doesn't have an unlimited budget and that it "can't do everything

everybody wants with the budget we've got.”

Commissioners on the Board of Police Commission (BOPC) have stated they can find the extra \$600,000 per year for 13 years to fund a 71,000 square foot crime lab. BOPC Commissioner Lisa Pelofsky said the department would be eligible for grants and tax credits from the Missouri Development Finance Board to offset the costs of the lab. However, receiving those tax credits and grants isn't a sure bet.

City Council member Cindy Circo said she'd like to see the BOPC provide a detailed budget for finding the extra \$600,000 per year.

To fund the project, bonds must be purchased by Sept. 11 and will expire in 2026.

At the request of city council members and KCPD, the city council voted to table issuing bonds during the Aug. 22 city council meeting.

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