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## Some homeowners resist making way for police station

**To make way for the new East Patrol station and crime lab, four blocks will be razed. All but a handful of homeowners have accepted city offers.**

By TONY RIZZO and LYNN HORSLEY  
The Kansas City Star

Her home of two decades exemplifies old-world craftsmanship.

But soon, its 110-year-old stone walls and intricate interior woodwork will be bulldozed to make way for the Kansas City Police Department's new East Patrol station and state-of-the-art crime laboratory.

Yet Arleatha Mays no longer grieves its coming demise.

"The emotional part is over," she said of losing the home at 2624 Park Ave. where she raised her children. "I know that I've got to keep moving on."

Mays represents the majority of homeowners in the affected four-square-block area — those who have accepted city offers and have moved or are preparing to do so.

A handful of other residents, upset about being forced out and dissatisfied with the money being offered, continue to resist city offers. If they can't reach agreements, they likely will end up in court, where a judge will decide their cases.

City officials hope that, in addition to solving Police Department needs, the \$57 million project will spur a needed revitalization around the project area, which runs from 26th to 27th streets and Brooklyn to Prospect avenues.

Once a thriving community, the neighborhood has deteriorated to the point that vacant lots and blighted properties outnumber well-kept homes.

Police and city officials said they looked at 25 viable locations but chose this site because it provided the needed 17 acres, was affordable and was easily accessible. It was far from highway and railroad track vibrations that could hamper some of the crime lab's delicate equipment. And it sits in the hub of an area profoundly affected by violent crime.

Vacant lots or buildings accounted for about half the tract's 128 parcels. Homeowners lived in half of the 66 occupied properties.

The city arranged to have three appraisals done on each property and offered to pay the highest amount. It offered an additional 25 percent for owner-occupied homes, and if the property had been in the same family for more than 50 years, the city provided 50 percent above the appraised value. The city is providing up to \$22,500 in relocation expenses.

The full cost of acquiring the parcels will not be made public until all the deals are done, officials said. There is no timetable, though officials hope to finish by year's end. Architects still are designing the project, and construction is not scheduled to begin until 2013.

City officials say they understand that some people are making big sacrifices. But ultimately, they believe the project will benefit the wider community by creating an anchor of stability and security for what has become a worn-down and crime-torn section of the city's core.

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The neighborhood was not always that way.

It was vibrant and safe in 1948 when young Bobby White and his parents moved into 2636 Wabash Ave.

"It was a wonderful neighborhood," said White, now 75, whose 96-year-old mother, Helen White, was the oldest resident displaced by the project. "There were 18 or 19 other boys who all lived within two blocks. We all ran together.

Played sports together.”

Small businesses like the Blue Goose Ice Cream Parlor, Lindsey’s Bakery and the Wise Buyers Market packed the 2600 block of Prospect. Hardware and drug stores existed, as did a dentist office and a lawyer’s office.

Today, the only commercial enterprise is a single corner market, across Prospect from where the police campus will be built.

Henry Lyons, who remembers the area during its commercial heyday, became the area’s largest property owner through purchases made over many years. They include an apartment building, a rental house and, in a partnership, a number of those vacant lots along Prospect.

He watched for years as one proposed development after another failed to materialize.

“The police station will stabilize one of the worst corridors in the city,” said Lyons, who grew up at 22nd and Olive streets but now lives in Johnson County. “You won’t find the prostitutes hanging out on 27th and Prospect any more.”

Convince people the area around the new station is safe, he says, and it gradually will repopulate.

But for now, it is emptying.

Bobby White’s mother, for one, already has resettled.

Several Kansas City police officers, working on their own time, dug up her beloved flowers and transplanted them to her new Raytown home.

Although there was a certain sadness in his mother’s having to leave a place she had been for so long, White is glad he no longer has to worry about her living in an area where drug deals were made openly on the street and prostitutes brazenly plied their trade.

He said of the move, “To me it was a blessing.”

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Not everyone feels that way.

In Aameena Powell’s mind, homeowners never should have been asked to sacrifice property they worked so hard to acquire in favor of a police campus. She doesn’t believe it will make the area safer or spur economic development, either.

“Residents have been backed into a corner where their only option is to sell,” she said in a email to The Star. “That is un-American. ...”

Among the most vocal opponents of the city’s plan, Powell remains a holdout and displays a “Recall Reed” banner in her Brooklyn Avenue front yard.

The sign refers to 3rd District City Councilman Jermaine Reed, whom project opponents wanted to recall from office. Their campaign failed to generate enough valid signatures for a vote.

Reed, who participated in the site selection, remains convinced the city and police picked the right location.

Uprooting people “was something I wasn’t really in favor of at first, but after weighing the pros and cons of all the locations that we had to choose from, it was the best one,” said Reed, who at age 12 lived just east of 27th and Prospect. “They’re certainly making the ultimate sacrifice for their neighborhood.”

Danny Garrett, a Brooklyn Avenue resident, isn’t ready to make that sacrifice. Still holding out, he has hired a lawyer to assist him.

The house has been in his family more than 50 years, but his mortgage is more than the city wants to pay.

“Why should he have to lose his home and then have to write a check to the mortgage company?” asked Joseph Borich, who is representing Garrett.

City officials say they have helped financially challenged residents by getting dangerous-building liens waived and helping resolve other liens.

But there’s no way the city can pay enough to resolve the tremendous debt on Garrett’s property, said Assistant City Attorney Ted Anderson.

Another resident, Shirlean Burt, said the experience has been stressful and frustrating for people forced to move. Her

mother, Gracie Neal, 86, has lived along Wabash Avenue nearly 50 years.

Neal has spent time in the hospital as a result of the stress caused by the situation, Burt said. They had just invested a significant amount of money into repair and renovation before learning of the city's plans.

"We weren't planning on leaving," she said.

After initially "fighting tooth and nail," Burt said she accepted an offer to spare her mother further stress.

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The Kansas City Police Department has known for years that it needed a new East Patrol station and crime lab.

The outdated East Patrol, at 27th Street and Van Brunt Boulevard, was built in 1949. The current crime lab, housed in a former pharmaceutical building at 6633 Troost Ave., is old, too small and has poor climate control.

After Kansas City voters agreed to renew the quarter-cent public safety sales tax in November 2010, these two projects became top priority.

Officials decided to combine them into one campus, just as the police academy and the Shoal Creek station were combined in the Northland and the special operations and South Patrol divisions were combined in the Southland. Having a single campus saves money on site preparation, roads, utilities, maintenance and security.

Though the department has undertaken a half-dozen major construction projects since 2005, the East Patrol project is the first to directly affect a residential neighborhood.

"This involves people living in their properties, which we've never done before," said Maj. Sharon Laningham, commander of the police building operations and construction division.

Laningham said the worries and anxieties of the long-time residents and their families struck a chord with police, who tried to help people make the transition easier.

Though police were unaccustomed to dealing with long-time homeowners, the city was not.

The Midtown Marketplace project at Linwood Boulevard and Main Street, involving Costco and Home Depot, was much more complicated.

"We had over 300 residences. We had to condemn a bunch," recalls Don Frank, who has been the city's manger of acquisition and relocation services since 1997.

People forced to move for a city project always are apprehensive, Frank said.

"At the onset, we always hear all these negatives. It's understandable. At the end of it, we have all these people saying, 'Gosh, I wish you'd done this 10 years ago.' We're getting a lot of that here."