

# Kansas City begins search for site of new Northland police station

BY LUKE RANKER

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Kansas City will soon start looking for land for a new Northland police station, which would be the final piece of the city's multimillion-dollar public safety improvement campaign.

The city-wide project to improve aging patrol stations began in 2002, when Kansas City voters approved a quarter-cent public safety sales tax. The tax raised about \$127,635,000 for renovations at the South Patrol, Shoal Creek and Metro Patrol stations, a police training academy and phase one of remodeling police headquarters, as well as upgrading computer systems.

Voters renewed the tax in 2010 to raise more money to improve police headquarters, East Patrol, a crime lab and the North Patrol station. The tax has raised nearly \$100 million since the renewal, and Kansas City plans to spend \$9 million of that to replace the North Patrol station.

The building at 1001 N.W. Barry Road, affectionately called the bumblebee station because of its yellow exterior, was built in 1976. Officials say it has structural problems including leaking roofs, sewer and HVAC trouble, no emergency generator and electrical issues. None of that immediately affects public safety or security, but it creates a hassle for officers and support staff, said Major Roger Lewis, division commander for North Patrol. For instance, the building's electrical system can't handle modern power needs. If someone wants to use the microwave in the small break room, they first have to unplug the coffee pot.

"Because you'll blow a fuse," Lewis said. "And with all the computers, we really can't afford to be doing that."

A modern electrical system in a new building would let staff add computers and other infrastructure.

And officials say the 12,000-square-foot building was not designed to handle the 95 officers and support staff who work in the North Patrol division. The Police Department wants to replace it with a 20,000-square-foot building, about the same size as the Shoal Creek station.

The additional space would allow for a public meeting area, something Lewis is particularly looking forward to. The current station has no area for a public forum or for a large group to meet with officers.

"We have to remember that all of our buildings are public buildings," Lewis said. "It's important for us to have space for people like the Boy Scouts, civic groups or others."

Lewis also wants the new building to improve detention center supervision. Currently the supervising sergeant's office is on a different floor from the detention center. An officer remains in the detention area at all times, but the supervisor can monitor rooms only by video. Ideally, Lewis said, the sergeant would have more direct access to the detention area.

The new North Patrol station is still in the early stages of development. The City Council last month awarded Treanor Architects the design bid for \$791,500. Andy Pitts, a principal architect with the Kansas City-based firm, said his division specializes in designing law enforcement buildings.

This is the firm's first time working with the Kansas City Police Department, but it has designed several buildings in the metro area and across the Midwest. Construction recently started on a Blue Springs police station expansion, and Pitts said a remodeled station will open in Lee's Summit in the few weeks.

Treanor Architects and the city will begin looking for a site for the new station in May. The key for patrol stations is finding an area with high visibility to the public, said city architect Erich Bosch. Not only does a visible police station make people feel like the area is safe, it's convenient for people who need to file a report or talk to an officer.

After the \$50.5 million crime lab and renovation at East Patrol, and the \$20.1 spent on the second phase of police headquarters, the city has only of \$9 million left to spend on North Patrol. The original plan called for approximately \$15 million for the North Patrol project, but money was moved to other projects. The new Shoal Creek station cost about \$9 million when it was built eight years ago, said Councilman Ed Ford, so the new North Patrol will be designed similarly.

The city hopes to save money by either using public land or finding a developer willing to swap private land for parcels of public land, Ford said. It's a strategy that has worked in the past. The city told voters the new station would be in Platte County, so locations in Clay County will probably be avoided, Ford said. There is land near Kansas City International Airport, but officials are concerned it would be too far from public view.

More space at the new facility doesn't necessarily mean more officers will be added to the North Patrol. A chunk of that space would be taken up by the expanded detention area and the public meeting areas, and the current front desk area is not up to modern standards for convenience and security.

The current station's age and size do not directly impact public safety because 80 percent of the staff works outside of the office on patrol, Lewis said.

"The public is not getting less police service," Lewis said.

But Lewis said an upgraded building would allow officers to work more efficiently.