



UNDER ONE ROOF

CITY OF FULTON MAXIMIZES EFFICIENCY WITH NEW PUBLIC FACILITIES COMPLEX

by Darin Wernig

Change can be difficult for people, no matter if it's moving to a new city, buying a new car, or transitioning into a new career. However, change will not be hard for many of Fulton city's employees as they prepare to move into a new Public Facilities Complex (PFC).

Scheduled to open in late 2015, the 107,600-square-foot complex will feature seven structures - an administration building, solid waste building, repair garage, warehouse, a callout facility, and two vehicle storage buildings. When designing the site's layout, the main goal of Fulton's administrators was to maximize efficiency.

"As we are a small community, departments have a great need to share equipment and personnel on a somewhat regular basis," said Fulton

Director of Administration Bill Johnson. "By having everyone under one roof, this coordination is going to be very efficient and very effective."

"Our current facility has areas that are far reaching, offices that are far reaching," said Fulton City Engineer Greg Hayes. "Therefore, communication between the different types of crews is difficult."

Finding the ideal location to build the complex was almost as important as how it should be designed. Seven acres, the size of the current warehouse facility, was too compact to effectively handle all of the employee's vehicles, city vehicles and equipment, as well as the necessary office space. A preferred site needed to have a footprint twice the size.

"A large site was a big thing," said Fulton Mayor LeRoy Benton.

"Of course we wanted it on property that the City owned, so we didn't face additional costs. Also, it needed to be a site that was relatively easy to prepare, not on a hillside."

The chosen area was a large city-owned tract of land that had been previously purchased from Harbison-Walker Refractories. It's only a half mile northwest of the current warehouse, contains 20 additional acres if needed, and should not cause problems for residents.

"We tried to identify a location that wasn't near a residential neighborhood," said Johnson. "There are going to be times in operations, such as when we plow snow, when heavy equipment will be operating in and out of that facility 24 hours a day. We wanted to be as little of a disruption to the residential properties as possible."

Since some workers may be called to an emergency at any time, the PFC includes what the City describes as a "callout" building. It will contain the necessary vehicles and equipment for most emergency situations and is designed to save time.

"When we get called out in the middle of the night or on a weekend, we don't want to have to breach the entire facility to get out one piece of equipment," said Hayes. "So the convenience of a callout facility allows a person to enter into a single building without going into a fenced-in area to get the equipment needed for repairs."

Truck drivers for the solid waste department also will not have to enter the complex to reach their vehicles. They will simply pull up to their building, enter through a locked door, open the bay doors and drive off. This will help ensure a secure compound when staff is not on site.

"Solid waste starts their days at 3 to 4 a.m.," said Johnson. "Now, the trucks are inside a fence and when they begin their day, the gates are left open and the whole property is left unsecured. With the new layout and design, we eliminate that as a problem."

Mechanics will appreciate improved work space. The current repair garage has two doors and room for three cars while the new one will have nine work bays, as well as indoor and outdoor wash bays.

"If you tear a piece of equipment down very far, you have lost anywhere from a third to a half of your garage space," Johnson said. "In the new facility, even if we have a couple pieces of equipment torn down, there's still plenty of space."

A new complex has been needed due to the condition of the current warehouse site that the City purchased in three phases between 1951 and 1986. Once home to Harbison-Walker's fire brick plant until the late 1940's, some of the buildings used by the City are more than 100 years old. Areas once used to mould and dry fire brick are now used for offices, a repair garage, and vehicle storage. The buildings, are showing their age as portions of the exterior stone and mortar walls are crumbling, with large holes that allow bystanders to peer inside. Utility poles have been added to help stabilize roof trusses since the weakened outer walls support the roof. A heavy snowfall two years ago caused a few trusses to snap,



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requiring additional bracing.

"That was when I decided it was time to quit talking and put it at the forefront," said Benton.

"It's in very poor condition, not very efficient, not very effective," Johnson said. "The only thing it had going for it was that it was large enough to allow most of the departments to be in the same general proximity, which did lead to some economies of scale."

Meanwhile, the PFC will have plenty of room for practically everything, including employee's personal vehicles. At the existing warehouse, staff's personal cars park alongside work vehicles. With the new complex, employees will have a separate

lot outside of the secure perimeter and away from city equipment.

Another added convenience will be a fuel island for city-owned vehicles that will include both diesel fuel and gasoline. Currently, the City only stores diesel on site. The \$150,000 cost, that is separate from the overall PFC budget, is expected to provide a long-term economic benefit.

"There has been a fine balance between wants and needs," said Hayes. "There are the needs of the facility that we have to have. There are also the wants that will make it an even better place. Hopefully, this will reduce our cost of fueling."

At a cost of \$7.1 million, Fulton

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is paying for the project using two sources. A \$4 million loan has been provided by three of the City's banks - The Callaway Bank, Central Bank and Bank Star One. Through a 10-year lease-purchase agreement, each bank will contribute an equal share. Debt service for the project will be covered by each of the departments using the complex that will total \$400,000 annually plus interest. The remaining costs will come from city reserves.

"I think it's pretty impressive that three of the City's major lending institutions are willing to work together to finance the project," said Johnson. "Citizen's who have their money in

the bank will be able to look at the warehouse facility and know that their deposits are assisting their community in providing a higher level of service and a more efficient facility."

The City managed to save significant money on the project by utilizing its own staff for some of the pre-construction work. This included the preliminary design, site plan and earth moving, as well as electric, water, gas, sewer and stormwater infrastructure.

Major projects like the PFC are nothing new for the city of Fulton as it is one of many major improvements made during the past 13 years. In 2002, a new

City Hall opened that replaced a much smaller version built in 1899. A second fire station was constructed in 2011, and the City purchased and renovated an existing building for use as police headquarters in 2012. Soon, a new animal shelter will open thanks in part to private contributions. It will replace a 56-year-old structure that once served as a swimming pool bath house. Also, \$13 million in federally-mandated upgrades to Fulton's wastewater treatment plant will begin in the coming months.

"The City Council has shown a great vision in developing some of the major infrastructure that is going to sustain this community for the next 50, 60 or 100 years," Johnson said. "We've done major ongoing improvements to the sanitary sewer. In 2005, we did major improvements to the water system. The electric system was rebuilt in the early 2000's and the natural gas distribution system has been 100 percent completely rebuilt. "

Once the Public Facilities Complex opens, the old warehouse site will quickly become a ghost town. The complex still retains some of the site's history as a kiln and smokestack still stand from its heyday as a brick factory. The ever-fading paint that reads "Lewton Truck Line" is barely legible on the north wall of one building. Its future remains unsolved, but there have already been suggestions.

"I have been contacted by an individual that has a dream for the existing complex, but the City is going to do a little bit of cleanup and get completely moved out before we make much of an effort to dispose of the property," Johnson said.

"It would be a great goal to convert that property back into private use," said Benton. □

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