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Public Safety Complex project breaks ground; completion expected this year

Several dignitaries, City of Bartlesville staff and elected officials turned out Tuesday for a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Bartlesville Public Safety Complex.

The \$5.8 million complex, which will house the City's police and fire departments, is currently under construction at Adams Boulevard and Johnstone Avenue in downtown Bartlesville.

"We appreciate the confidence and support the citizens have in us to commit the amount of money they have to redevelop a very important corner in downtown Bartlesville," said Mayor Tom Gorman. "I think the design we've come up with will be very compatible with the architecture and landscape of downtown. I also endorse the concept of having a public safety center that citizens can come to and have one-stop shopping to visit the fire and police, and I know that having the offices close together will be more efficient for them."

Crossland Construction of Tulsa began work at the complex site on March 21. It is anticipated the facility will be ready for use by late fall. Once finished, the complex will include construction of a new police station on the southern portion of the site and a major expansion of the existing Central Fire Station, which is currently located at the northern end of the site.

Funding for the complex comes from the voter-approved 2012 General Obligation bond issue election — an effort spear-headed by Jim Bohnsack of Arvest Bank, who was in attendance at the Tuesday ceremony.

“He became the face of the 2012 bond election,” City Manager Ed Gordon said, noting Bohnsack’s role in the funding effort. “It came down to deciding who in the community could best help the public understand the need for the safety complex — who has the faith and trust of the community and is known and trusted by the community. Of course, the name that surfaced was Jim Bohnsack.”

Gordon said Bohnsack worked tirelessly on the project, visiting local civic clubs and organizations, writing letters, energizing younger voters and talking with citizens about the community’s public safety needs.

“Jim is the one who was instrumental in this effort. He’s a ball of fire” Gordon said. “It was his idea to get photos of the (current) police station under water (in 1986) and to show citizens that the fire department’s snorkle truck for fighting tall building fires wouldn’t fit in our current facilities. He talked about the age of our fire station, which needed to be remodeled and upgraded, and the importance of providing the officers and firefighters space for training.

“Jim’s focus, organizational abilities and vision made this project possible. He got it done,” Gordon said.

According to Gorman, the facility will aid in the safety and efficiency of both departments but will significantly improve conditions for police personnel.

“The police department is very dilapidated — it has structural and water-proofing issues, and has for years,” Gorman said. “It will be excellent for the police department to be in a quality building that was designed and built for their purpose and provide a higher level of safety and efficiency for them.”

Police Chief Tom Holland agrees.

“We want to thank the City Council, and through them the citizens — ultimately the citizens are the ones who are building this,” Holland said. “This is so exciting for those of us at the police department. We’ve always been appreciative of what we’ve gotten, but we have to be honest and say our building — half of it was built in 1944, and the other half was built in 1986 — and six months later it had four feet of water in it. And we’ve never really recovered from that.

“This is just fantastic. We’re very excited,” he said.

Central Fire Station is one of four fire stations strategically located within the city of Bartlesville, immediately available to respond to the downtown and surrounding areas. Expansion plans for the facility include the construction of new living/sleeping quarters for firefighters and an additional apparatus bay that can accommodate larger fire trucks.

Once the facility is complete, the fire station will also house fire administration personnel, who currently office at the nearby City Hall, and will include a training room large enough to accommodate police and fire personnel.

In addition to the fire station expansion, a new police station will be constructed at the site, which will include facilities for core police functions, including office space, record storage, interview rooms and a drug lab. There are no provisions for inmates, who are instead held at the Washington County Detention Center, a Washington County-owned facility. The current police station is located at 100 E. Hensley. The small, outdated facility was heavily damage by flood waters in 1986.