



CITY OF HOMER

POLICE DEPARTMENT

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MEMORANDUM 16-039

DATE: February, 18th 2016
TO: Katie Koester, City Manager
FROM: Mark Robl, Chief of Police
SUBJECT: New Police Station Square Footage

Some members of the Council have expressed concern about the large increase in size of the new Police Station as compared to our existing building. This is understandable - though the Public Safety Building Committee has spent significant time on the justification for increased space, Council has not. I hope this memo helps explain both the current and future space needs for the Homer Police Department.

The Committee has reduced the proposed size of the building from the initial design significantly. The first estimate put the anticipated space needs at 31,520 SF. Cost concerns sent the building committee back to work resulting in the current space needs estimate of 23,659 SF. I'll try to explain the need for the increased square footage in a segmented breakdown. Anyone looking at what appears to be the floorplan for the new building should realize it is not a floorplan. It is a projection of square footage needs and how they might be connected. One thing I'd like to note here applies to the entire building. Our existing storage space for records, tools, equipment and supplies of all types is woefully inadequate. We currently have two old connex's behind our building and a wooden shed we utilize in creative manners to meet our needs. There are square footage increases in every area of the new building to accommodate necessary storage.

Jail

Jail size in the new facility is estimated at 3768 SF. The most significant area of square footage increase in the jail is in the number of cells. It also has new spaces we do not currently have. These include a new soft interview room, secure and private attorney/inmate visitation rooms, a laundry room, temporary storage for evidence, officer/inmate interview rooms, an increased jail records storage area and a temporary holding room. The new jail is proposed to contain 8 cells versus the four we have now. Four cells are not enough, causing us to run out of space for prisoners on a regular basis. Just last week we had 23 new arrestees go through the jail resulting in several of them sleeping on cell floors and three trips by HPD personnel to Wildwood pre-trial to keep our numbers compliant. We also don't have the right configuration of cells. We are required by law to keep juveniles sound and sight separated from adults. We cannot do so in our current facility. Felons need to be separate from misdemeanants, males from females, ill

prisoners from healthy ones and so on. We often have prisoners in jail on mental health holds or detoxing. These inmates need to be in separate properly equipped cells. We are in violation of federal law every time we have to hold a juvenile. We always hold females and males in separate cells but often cannot meet mandated separation requirements.

The soft interview room will be located near the main entrance. It will provide us a friendly area where a member of the public can quickly and privately speak with a police officer or dispatcher while filing a complaint, filling out a witness statement, answering a few questions, providing a mandatory breath test and more. Most of these things are now done in the lobby with no privacy at all. This results in a rushed or hurried process which is ultimately less accurate than what we might achieve with a bit more time and privacy.

Our existing jail doesn't have nearly enough storage area for bedding, supplies or uniforms. Most of these items are stored behind the building in connex vans or ordered weekly when bi-yearly ordering would result in considerable cost savings and having adequate supplies on hand. The new jail should be designed to provide adequate storage as depicted in our current size estimates. Also new in the design for us will be a laundry room. Having a laundry room will eliminate the jail laundry contract by enabling jail officers to clean all jail linens, sheets, blankets, towels, etc.

The proposed design has rooms for an attorney to privately and safely meet with a client. The designed visitation space will double as visitation space for relatives and will eliminate some of the safety problems we have with our current facility. Prisoners will not have to be taken out of secure jail spaces for these meetings resulting in a huge and much needed increase in safety.

The new design also includes secure meeting spaces for an officer to interview a prisoner without having to take them out of the jail area.

Also new for us in the jail will be a temporary holding room. It is very common for us to bring in more than one arrestee at the same time. Being able to place one in a secure room while booking the other will offer us another vast improvement in safety and personnel flow. It will also enable one officer to safely process two prisoners while the other officer returns to a crime scene or ongoing situation of some type.

The booking room in the new facility is projected to be approximately 561 SF versus the 120 SF we now have. This additional square footage is sorely needed to allow multiple officers to safely handle a combative prisoner.

Another new feature included in the design is a sally port at an estimated 1024 SF. The sally port is essentially a two car drive through garage. It will provide a very significant and important officer safety and general public safety upgrade by providing a secure space to safely load and unload prisoners. Prisoners going back and forth to court will be safely confined in the sally port with very limited escape options. New combative arrestees coming in will also be more controllable for us in a confined space.

Property and Evidence

The evidence processing and storage areas in the new design is projected at 4879 SF. This is a very large increase over what we now have and is barely adequate to meet our projected future needs. It is the one area not significantly reduced in square footage from

the initial design estimate to our current one.

The need for adequate evidence storage room is dictated in part by the courts and department of law. We are now required to store some evidence for the life of the victim. Some has to be stored until the possibility of appeals is exhausted in the case. For major felonies, this can be 6 years or more. Some evidence even has to be retained for the life of the defendant. The evidence storage time for basic misdemeanors usually runs a minimum of two years, four and five is very common. Even though every arrest we make is done under Alaska State Statute and the state prosecutes our cases, there is no location we can send evidence to. If we make the arrest it's our case and our evidence. Every department in the state is in the same boat we are when it comes to evidence storage. We currently store evidence in a room inside our building we made by knocking down walls, eliminating an office, lobby area, break room area and reducing the size of our meeting room. We also store evidence in one of our connex's and our wood shed. These areas outside the secure building do not technically meet the requirements for secure evidence storage. They are also very problematic for us resulting in having to sometimes look in two or three places to find things. The new design with one central storage area will be a great improvement for us.

Also included in the new design are improved and increased areas for evidence processing, receiving, handling and packaging. We do not currently have any areas to safely handle evidence with blood or body fluids on them. We handle other types of hazmat materials while dealing with evidence that require ventilation and controls. We also need room to dry out drug evidence and other items. The methods we've developed and now use to handle these items violate OSHA requirements and established industry standards. They also complicate and confuse the chain of custody requirements we must meet to certify the purity of the evidence for court purposes. Our new building should be designed to address all of these deficiencies.

The new building has a projected two bay indoor area for the evidence processing of large items currently estimated at 580 SF. This will be utilized to process vehicles, snowmobiles, boats, ATV's, essentially anything that will fit inside. We currently have to store these items in an unsecure outside location and either process them outside or in a bay at public works. It is a critical need for us to be able to process this type of property in a secure, clean, controlled space at our own facility. We'll have the equipment on hand to do the job right and we won't have to work around someone else's schedules. It will also safely preserve the chain of custody for this type of evidence. We currently search and process vehicles on a bi-weekly basis or more and will keep this space busy. We had a project on the CIP list to accomplish this need for us for several years but it was never funded.

Another important thing to mention is our current lack of evidence processing areas. Latent fingerprint evidence is often very fragile in nature. We now have to package it and send it to the crime lab for analysis. Having the room to increase our processing abilities will allow us to use methods to stabilize latent prints and other types of evidence before we package them. This will improve the crime labs ability to successfully process the evidence we send them. Being able to improve our processing ability will also result in our ability to fully develop some types of evidence in-house to the point where it is usable in an on-going investigation. This can result in getting criminals off of the street and into custody faster and improve conviction rates.

There are a few other new to us features in the grey color coded portion of the new facility design I'd like to point out. They are near the police officer and staff entry area. Included is

a decontamination area, uniform/gear and boot storage and a small laundry room. The reasoning behind this area is we need a space where an officer can come in and get completely decontaminated before tracking contaminants through the rest of the building. Officers sometimes come in from bloody crime scenes with blood and body fluids on them. They can be contaminated by chemicals and fuels at accidents and fires. This area will provide them a space to change uniforms, wash down if necessary and launder soiled clothing.

There is also a small bunkroom included. This new room will enable an officer to sleep if having to work for very long periods of time. When we have a major felony crime committed against a person, we will initiate work on the case immediately. Work on some of these types of cases must continue unabated until all existing leads are followed up on. Experience has taught us if you don't catch a murderer within the first 72 hours after it's committed the odds of apprehending them start to quickly diminish. Other felonies such as a stranger sexual assault against another are similar. These types of cases must be vigorously pursued in a continuous flowing fashion without delay. The officers in charge of these investigations can't leave for those first crucial days or a successful outcome is jeopardized. The bunk room could also be utilized during an ongoing response to any major disaster or emergency situation.

Dispatch

Projected space needs for dispatch are at 2863 SF in the new building. This includes room for up to four dispatch consoles, (we currently have two), increased storage areas for supplies and records and a break room for use by all department employees. The dispatch area includes a reception area for greeting the public, a mail room area and restrooms.

The increased area for records and storage will replace some of the area contained in the connex's. The new design will enable dispatchers to be talking to someone in the lobby while still in earshot of the radios. The available room for the dispatch consoles is more than doubled over what we have now. Our existing space is very tight and cramped. Our two consoles meet current needs but there is not enough room for the future. Four consoles will enable continued dispatch activities while training new dispatchers and provide supervisor oversight and control positions. Having spare consoles will also expand our emergency response capabilities and provide spares in the event of equipment failures.

Lobby

The lobby in the new building is projected to be 1016 SF versus our existing lobby of about 400 SF. The new lobby will meet ADA space requirements and provides for an elevator to access the second floor, another ADA consideration.

Investigation and Patrol

The projected space needs of 4568 SF for investigations and patrol are shown in blue on the drawing. This is another area where our existing spaces for these functions are woefully inadequate. The new design will provide us designated and properly designed soft and hard interview rooms and a room for a polygraph. There are offices for all of the department's supervisors and senior patrol officers. There is space for an open area for most of the patrol officers to do case work in and a small briefing room for quick meetings

of on-shift personnel. There is also space provided for the copy room we don't have but need and storage of supplies and some patrol equipment.

We have reduced the projected space needs in this area of the building by approximately 1000 SF from the initial design. This is the core working area for the patrol officers, investigations and police supervisors. I have some concerns about this area becoming too small for our needs in the future. It is slightly larger than what we need now with our existing work force but it doesn't have a lot of room for expansion. The new building is being built and designed with the idea in mind it might have to be expanded in the future. This is one area where I feel the need to do so could well occur the soonest.

Training, Fitness, Meeting Space

The space needs shown on the second floor of the possible design provide for our needs in general meeting spaces, physical training and exercise and an indoor range. This area is projected to occupy approximately 6366 SF of the new building.

The training room and office total 924 SF. This room would be utilized for department meetings, meetings with other agencies and classroom type training sessions as well as some storage of training supplies and materials. Our current meeting/training space is too small for us. It is not large enough to hold the entire department work force and is very cramped for just the patrol force alone. When having monthly patrol meetings everyone can sit down but no one can move. Joint meetings of patrol and jail officers require someone to stand. Add in some training props/equipment and it is really, really undersized. The new proposed space will meet our current needs but will become small as time goes on and department growth occurs. It would be very difficult for us to perform meetings and trainings in another building. Dispatchers and officers can attend meetings and trainings at our own building while on duty. Having to travel to a different location will mean some of them won't be able to attend. It would result in having to meet or train two to four times instead of less costing more in overtime and causing scheduling problems. We discuss very confidential and protected information in meetings and some training sessions. It is safe to do so in our own secure environment but trying to do so elsewhere would be very problematic. We will conduct mission planning sessions and debriefs in this area as well. These types of meetings carry a high need for a secure space. I am totally against any plan to reduce or eliminate this critical space need.

The physical training and exercise spaces are projected at 1098 SF. Along with this space comes a subsequent need for showers and locker rooms currently estimated at 1639 SF. About 90% of our officers and many of our dispatchers utilize our current exercise room on an almost daily basis. There is a great need for officers to maintain fitness through regular exercise. An officer in good physical condition is less likely to resort to high levels of force in a situation if they can physically control it. They are less likely to be hurt or hurt someone. Stress reduction through exercise is another critical need for all public safety employees. Providing the space for our police department employees to exercise within the station is well known to increase the rate of participation. It enables employees to exercise before or after shifts that often start and end before any local exercise facilities are open. Participation is also increased because police employees are in a comfortable and secure environment. Many of our officers would simply not be able to go to our local clubs without being exposed to harassment at all levels. Another advantage to having adequate exercise equipment on site is officers recovering from on the job injuries can continue to perform their necessary physical therapy ordered exercise while working in a limited duty capacity. Our current exercise and physical training room is very small. We have a very limited

amount of workout equipment without enough room to add equipment that can specifically target areas known to be injury prone in officers such as backs and knees. Our space limitations also limit the number of employees that can workout at the same time. This causes problems when employees share the same time off together with overlapping exercise times. We try to utilize the exercise area for some physical training as well. Our goal is to conduct physical training, physical means of arrest training and defense tactic training on a regularly scheduled year round basis. We don't have the room available to do so now resulting in having to try to schedule time in the matt rooms at one of our schools. This is very difficult to arrange and schedule to match up with the availability of our personnel. The result is we're lucky to be able to do some things twice a year that we should be doing a minimum of six times a year. There is also the issue for us of doing defensive tactics training in a public area. This type of training needs to be done in a secure location. Having our tactics displayed on a Facebook recording must be avoided.

Shooting Range

The indoor shooting range is projected to have a space need of 2359 SF. This would be a small range with four to six shooting lanes, supply storage, an armory and a gun cleaning room. The proper storage for ammunition, guns and shooting related supplies along with a properly ventilated gun cleaning area is a current pressing need for us. We currently do these things in a small wooden building behind the police station with no ventilation and a small space heater in it that is inadequate much below thirty degrees.

We do our very best to maintain a very robust and active firearms training program on a year round basis. We currently have to shoot at the outdoor range owned by the local gun club located between Homer and Anchor Point. Officers should be firing each one of their weapons systems once per month on their own and are required to participate in department organized training and qualification sessions which we try to do four times per year. Inclement weather, varying shift schedules, scheduled vacations and other department training needs are all impediments to meeting our desired quarterly shooting objectives. Sometimes we'll get all of these various factors to fall in proper alignment, have weapons qualifications scheduled at the range and end up having to cancel due to driving rains and 40mph winds. Other factors working against us with utilizing the range include the changing schedules of the gun club and their needs. Additionally, the outdoor range is located in an old gravel pit. Radio coverage is poor and often totally non-existent. Cell phone coverage is the same. There is no guarantee of being able to contact the officers at the range. With more than half of the department at the range at one time, our ability during scheduled shooting events to provide rapid back-up to an officer in need is severely hampered. I firmly believe any new police station being built in Alaska should have an indoor range as part of the design and I think our unique local conditions amplify this need. We will also use the indoor range to provide us with ample matt space for defensive tactics training. Even in the projected 1000 SF exercise room, there will be very limited space for matt work. We would have enough room in the indoor range to work two to three officers through conflicts at the same time, thereby maximizing the amount of training we can do simultaneously. We could also utilize the range for other types of training, such as force on force, simulated munitions, shoot don't shoot and more. Having our own range will lower overtime costs, improve the quality and quantity of our training and ease scheduling.

I suggest that if we can't afford to build a completed indoor shooting range now, let's at least build the empty space and finish it when we can afford to do so. This is an area where it might be possible to pursue some grant funding or local fund raising projects.