

Edmond's public safety building is a new look for downtown



by [Diana Baldwin](#) • Published: October 28, 2015 12:00 AM CDT • Updated: October 29, 2015 7:00 PM CDT



Edmond Deputy Chief of Police Steve Thompson shows movable evidence storage cabinets that hold 1.2 million pounds of confiscated property. [PHOTO BY PAUL HELLSTERN, THE OKLAHOMAN.]

EDMOND — The skyline has changed dramatically during the past two years, as a nearly \$37 million public safety center building has risen out of a deep, muddy hole in downtown Edmond.

The more than 70,000-square-foot building on the southeast corner of First Street and Littler Avenue will soon be the home of police headquarters, public safety communications and emergency management operations. Two buildings make up the public safety center complex. A 15,000-square-foot building near 33rd Street and Broadway will be the police department's crime lab and provide storage for evidence and vehicles.

Dream come true

The project has been a dream in the minds of many people for more than 10 years, while city employees continued to work in crowded and uncomfortable quarters, enduring basement flooding and a situation that put victims and their attackers too close together during interrogation.

"Space needs drove it all," said Deputy Police Chief Steve Thompson. "It started with the need for more jail space and it grew into looking at not only needs for the police department, but also for communications and emergency management. We are all cramped into very small spaces."

Thompson was assigned full time to work with the architects and contractors during the construction.

"There are many facets to the need," said Matt Stillwell, public safety communications and emergency management operations director.

"Number one is space. We currently house our operation for communications and emergency management in two separate locations. The current working conditions have been less than ideal for quite some time.

"Working in an area that is prone to flood is not only unpleasant, but is also a potential safety hazard. Our folks can't wait to get out of that environment."

City officials will hold a dedication at 10 a.m. Thursday. People can tour the three-story downtown building after the ceremony.

Move-in will start Monday.

The cost

Voters in October 2011 approved a half-cent sales tax for five years to pay for the complex.

The first attempt to raise money to build the center failed in 2008 when voters rejected a larger, more expensive center to be paid for with a 10-year property tax increase.



VIDEO: Edmond's public safety building new look for downtown

As of this week, the city has spent or encumbered \$36.95 million for the project. That figure includes all change orders, engineering, furniture, fixtures, equipment, artwork and parking.



The original contract to construct the two buildings was for \$27.47 million.

The city has collected through the middle of September \$27.36 million from the half-cent sales tax, which ends in April 2017.

Voters also agreed to borrow money from a trust fund from the sale of Edmond Memorial Hospital to help pay for the center.

"With the assistance of the \$6,881,060 hospital trust fund revenue, we have been able to pay as you go," said Ross VanderHamm, city clerk and finance director.

Money borrowed from the hospital trust fund will be paid back after all project expenses are paid. VanderHamm anticipates that will be by the end of 2016.

The jail

The historical-style downtown building, made from concrete, steel and metal, is expected to take care of the city's needs for 25 years.

The 14-cell jail — 9,932 square feet — is in the basement. It will house 38 inmates.

The old jail across the street at 23 E First St. was crowded and not safe for detention officers working in the 748-square-foot holding facility, city officials said.

The new jail is equipped with a master control area where detention officers can see all the prisoners.

"The entire detention center was designed with security and safety in mind," Thompson said. "Even the glass in the area is designed through reflective glass and lighting so that the inmate cannot see out, but the staff can see them very well."

The new jail, to be called the Edmond Detention Center, is one of the the only such facilities in the state lighted with natural sunlight. The light will be funneled down a tube.

"We are required to have so much candle power in each cell," Thompson said. "Light was a priority for the staff also to help with morale."

The lobby

Artwork displayed in the three-story lobby and outside the entrance is one of a kind.

A bronze sculpture of a police officer in an Edmond uniform, sitting on a bench with a young boy and his dog kneeling on the ground sits outside the entrance. The sculpture is called "Edmond's Finest — Edmond's Future."

Inside, two abstract paintings hang where they can be seen at night from the outside. The 10-foot by 16-foot paintings are by artist Dennis Johnson and cost \$26,000.

"The lobby is going to be really nice for the community, and then of course, the exterior of the building is phenomenal," Thompson said. "It is in my opinion the most attractive building in Edmond."

Communication center

The communication center will be on the third floor, where employees can see outside. Before, they were in a basement with no windows.

"The windows will improve morale and employee retention," Stillwell said. "They also will have the option to sit or stand at their new work stations."

"The communications dispatch furniture is very exciting. Not only does it create an ideal working environment for our communications professionals, ergonomics and individual heating, lighting and air, but also a great environment to house our technology."

In the event of a tornado, dispatch operations can be moved to the basement, Stillwell said.

Crime lab

The new crime lab and storage areas allow space to work with state-of-the-art equipment.

"We will have all the modern technology that a crime lab should have today," Thompson said. "We have a main lab, an alternate light source lab, a digital fingerprint lab and a vehicle exam bay lab plus space to actually work with the right tools to make it safe like ventilation snorkels to get odors and chemicals away from the lab technicians."

The mobile storage unit can hold up to 1.2 million pounds of evidence that will be coded for finding certain item at ease. Each unit is 16 feet tall by 35 feet wide.

"The evidence storage or property room is enormous," Thompson said. "It will meet our storage needs for many, many years to come."

Heating and cooling

In downtown Edmond, 20 miles of black PVC pipe are hidden underground and headed to the public safety center to make way for geothermal systems. One hundred and one wells will heat and cool the center.

In a geothermal system, water is circulated through underground plastic pipes.

During the winter, the fluid collects heat from the earth and carries it through the system and into the building.

During the summer, the system reverses itself to pull heat from the building, carrying it through the system and placing it in the ground.

A geothermal system is cost-effective, reliable, sustainable and environmentally friendly, city leaders said. The system cost \$1.25 million.

Brian Sauer, director of mechanical engineering for Frankfurt Short Bruza, said the public safety center will recoup the investment two or three times faster because the building will operate 24 hours a day. The average building has a payoff in the five- to 10-year range.

“This building will pay back faster because the building never really sleeps,” Sauer said. “A typical office building runs eight hours and gets a break. This building will get a payback in a couple of years.”