

SECTION B  
**METROPOLITAN**

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THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Monday, February 19, 2001

# Decrepit fire stations draw council's attention



Poor conditions are the norm at several Kansas City Fire Department stations. The sleeping area for firefighters at Station 34, 4136 N. Birchton Ave., has furniture from garage sales, from a firefighter's home and from Kansas City government offices. The kitchen cabinets, top right, lack doors, and tiles with asbestos adhesive are loose. At Station 35, 5005 Swape Parkway, top left, an extension cord has been run through the brick wall for a parking lot flood light.

## STATIONS: Some officials want improvement money to come fr

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are typical of several firehouses, including Stations 35, 36 and 38. Some public facilities also suffer from leaky roofs and overcrowding. As in any city department, or the typical household for that matter, some things get financed and some don't.

The department has already spent millions to upgrade its fleet of trucks, its communication system and the air tanks firefighters wear. The city has paid the firefighters higher salaries.

But facilities, for the most part, have deteriorated. Under the current budget structure, it would take 15 years to improve just the locker rooms at 35 stations, most of them

decades old.

Fire Chief Smokey Dyer has placed a priority on quickly improving the facilities. Last week, the City Council discussed ways to make the improvements. Councilman Troy Nash spent the night at Station 34 to, as he put it, get a firsthand look.

City Manager John Collins sent a letter to the City Council detailing ways to trim \$15 million from the proposed 2001-2002 budget to spend on fire and police stations. Planners have estimated the cost of those renovations at \$120 million to \$150 million.

City officials once talked of sending a bond issue to the voters to pay for the upgrades, but now some City Council members are pushing to

find a way to finance improvements out of the existing budget. The city manager said that would require hundreds of layoffs or other drastic cuts.

Regardless of whether they can agree on how to pay for it, some council members say the issue has reached a crucial point.

"It's much too frequent that I hear firefighters talk of deplorable living conditions," Councilman Jim Rowland said. "I also think it's wrong for us to say 'We don't have the full \$150 million, so we can't do anything.'"

What we need to do is begin the task," Eric Boehm, manager of design and construction for the city architect's office, said his department had hired

two firms to review all the city's fire and police facilities. By summer, he said, the city ought to know what upgrades are needed and how much they will cost.

Meanwhile, the Public Works Department will continue to make quick fix-repairs.

Jeff Johnson, who drives a pumper for Station 35, said he and his co-workers appreciated the recent discussions of improvements. But they've heard the talk before.

"We're still somewhat — I don't want to say pessimistic — but we're waiting to see," he said. "There's been talk for seven or eight years of tearing down this building."

Johnson tried to put into perspective the living conditions at Station

35, 5005 Swape Parkway. He talked of one locker room for 11 firefighters. In the corner, bathroom for firefighters the for shower, only to get scalded body flushes a toilet, should be happy to have often runs out.

"We boil water, then pour it to do the dishes. The kitchen isn't run usually have mice jump stove," he said. "We do all the time and use on firefighters don't furniture. But the furniture is decades patched with tape. He