

Police, fire cost estimates rise

KC proposal would upgrade stations

By LYNN HORSLEY
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The estimated cost of fixing Kansas City's crumbling police and fire stations has risen from about \$120 million to more than \$200 million, the Kansas City Council learned Thursday.

But although City Manager Bob Collins recommended a hefty tax increase to pay for those public safety needs, the City Council favored a more modest tax increase coupled with shifts in budget priorities.

Collins said the latest cost estimates were much higher because this was the first time professional architects and engineering consultants had reviewed the condition of every police and fire station. The experts are still evaluating buildings, he said, and more precise estimates will be ready in a month.

The preliminary review lists 38 fire projects at an estimated cost of \$162 million and nine police projects at an estimated cost of \$101 million.

But Collins said he thought the most the city could afford was about \$200 million over 20 years. In addition to the construction, increased operating costs would total about \$21.7 million annually — \$6.7 million for fire and \$15 million for police. Those costs reflect 140 additional police officers, 15 additional police support positions and 135 additional firefighters.

To pay for all that, Collins recommended a quarter-cent sales tax for fire, which would raise about \$15 million annually for construction and operations. He recommended a quarter-cent sales tax and a property tax increase of 17 cents per \$100 of assessed value to pay for police construction and operations. Together, the tax increases would cost a family making \$100,000 a year an estimated \$171 a year for 20 years, with operating costs continuing.

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ing after that. But Mayor Kay Barnes said she opposed paying for operating costs with a tax increase. Other council members said the city must cut spending to build credibility before it could ask voters for any tax increase.

Council members Becky Nace and Jim Rowland urged Collins to find ways to finance much of the spending within the existing budget.

Nace suggested that the city could raise millions more dollars by charging the full cost for many of the city's fee-based programs, such as restaurant inspections, street cuts and zoning reviews.

Rowland suggested that the city could reduce some of the millions of dollars allocated annually for deferred maintenance to other facilities, directing that money specifically to police and fire stations.

That would require that other projects be eliminated from the current five-year capital improvements plan. The leader of Local 500 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees has also pointed out that the plan would take money from other city facilities, such as parks and public works, some of which are as decrepit as the police and fire stations.

For several years, the council has debated the city's public safety needs and how to pay for them.

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