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Premature expansion: Oakwood City Hall getting bigger

OAKWOOD - When Oakwood City Hall opened in May 2003, city officials hoped the building would take care of governmental needs for the next 10 to 15 years.

Growth forced other plans, however, as Oakwood prepares to open an expanded City Hall in mid-October.

"Truthfully, we were out of space probably a year, year and a half, after we had been in the building," said Patti Doss-Luna, assistant city manager.

"There's really no room for us to expand inside here. We've done some revamping in the front office," she added. "Now we are expanding, and it's a good thing."

Crews are working on interior projects, landscaping and otherwise finishing touches in what was budgeted as a \$900,000 effort and may end up costing about \$700,000.

The extra good news for taxpayers is that the city had put away money for years for such improvements.

"It's paid for," City Manager Stan Brown said.

The city built the 4,000-square-foot City Hall building at 4035 Walnut Circle with plans to expand eventually.

"We've gone from 16 employees to 25 over the last five years," including adding a full-time planning director and code enforcement officer, Brown said.

"And with that (growth in personnel), we need to have facilities for them," he added. "Now we've got people operating out of a trailer, and that's not ideal."

The portable unit is across the street from City Hall near the public works and police department buildings.

Last fall, city officials went to City Council to push for the 3,200-square-foot addition.

"When you consider that a good portion of the existing building is the council room, which has limited day-to-day use, we're adding a significant amount of administrative ... and storage space," Brown said.

The addition, which connects to City Hall with an interior hallway and features the same exterior design, has room for growth.

"We've got two conference rooms that can be converted later into office space," Brown said.

The addition also features an office for a city engineer, which Brown hopes will become a full-time position in a couple of years.

Brown, who has an engineering background, has assumed those duties for the city, which has grown from 2,600 residents to more than 4,000 this decade.

"We'll try to be moving in and getting everybody established in the middle of this month, and once we get everybody's feet on the ground over there, we'll schedule a ribbon-cutting (ceremony)," Brown said.

Long term, the city expects the expanded City Hall to become the city's public safety building.

"We've built this addition and this building in such a way that we can convert that space to other uses," Brown said.

The police department has grown to 15 employees from 10 during the past four years.

The department houses municipal court, which "is getting very crowded, and the room is not that big," Brown said, adding that one short-term way to create more elbow room would be to use the City Council room as the courtroom.

"There's a lot of things we need to do," he said.

"We're looking to try to get public works out of ... our downtown planning area and maybe get them in more of an industrial location," Brown said.