

FROM THE FRONT PAGE



Photos by BEATRIZ COSTA-LIMA/Missourian

Fleet operations manager Eric Evans stands next to one of the city's firetrucks in the Grissum Building. Improvements for the building are part of a capital improvement project that would cost roughly \$4.5 million.

Building renovations included in Aug. 4 sales tax extension

The half-century-old city maintenance building needs work on the roof, energy systems and parking lot

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The garages smell faintly of motor oil, with patches of kitty litter scattered over the floor to soak it up. Tires are lined up halfway to the ceiling, some the size of car doors. Sheets of orders and schedules are pinned to the walls.

It's an active workplace, but the building itself — now nearly a half-century old — is showing its age and outliving its usefulness.

Both the wiring and storm drainage systems are antiquated. It is difficult to comfortably regulate the temperature inside during hot summers and cold winters, let alone keep the building energy-efficient. Birds nesting in the garages have damaged the insulation and structural materials.

These are just a few of the issues city officials hope can be addressed through capital improvement sales tax funding.

"We've done the best we can to extend the life of this building as long as we have," fleet operations manager Eric Evans said.

Voters will decide on Aug. 4 whether to extend the existing sales tax at its current level for another 10 years. The tax, last approved in 2005, is one-fourth of 1 percent for

construction, maintenance, repairs and replacements of city infrastructure such as public works and public safety buildings and vehicles and roads. The 2005 tax is set to expire Dec. 31.

A total of \$4.5 million has been budgeted on the list of sales tax projects for Grissum Building renovations.

If the sales tax is extended for another decade, it is estimated to generate \$63 million in revenue for the city — \$10 million for the 2016 and 2017 fiscal years and another \$53 million in revenue for the 2018 through 2026 fiscal years.

The list also includes major road projects; construction of municipal facilities for police and snow removal operations; and repairs and replacements of Fire Department resources such as fire stations, the fire training academy and fire trucks.

"Our goal is to have a usable facility," public relations specialist Steven Sapp said about potential improvements to the Grissum Building. The building does not have to be palatial, he said, just efficient and safe.

Building issues

THE ROOF

Sapp said that the first priority with sales tax funding would be repairing the roof. The insulation above the

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ERIC EVANS
Fleet operations manager

garage bays is falling apart. Birds are nesting inside pockets of peeling yellow insulation, and their activity further damages it.

Office employees also report that when it rains, they can hear drops of water tapping their ceilings, Evans said.

ENERGY AND SPATIAL PROBLEMS

According to Evans, the Grissum Building encompasses 77,000 square feet on an 11-acre lot. It is open 24 hours a day Monday through Saturday, with some recycling operations on Sunday. A total of 235 personnel are employed there.

In his division, Evans said that between 10,000 and 12,000 repairs to city vehicles were performed at the site last year, a number typical of the past several years.

To service all of those vehicles, the building has 45 garage bays. Without central air conditioning, almost all of the doors to the bays are open during the summer to provide relief from the heat.

There is no climate-con-

trolled area large enough for employee breaks. The training area is a conference room just big enough to fit a small round table and a few chairs. There is a shortage of restrooms — only one in the front office section of the building and two single-person unisex bathrooms for the rest of the employees.

During the winter, the facility uses ceiling-mounted radiant space heaters to keep vehicles and employees warm in the garage bays. But with 45 doors routinely opening and closing, "we spend a lot of money on gas," Evans said.

An alternative heating system to space heaters needs to be installed in order to safely accommodate repairs to compressed natural gas vehicles in the city's fleet.

"Without major modifications we will never be able to do a lot of compressed natural gas repairs in here," Evans said.

To date, the city has purchased 49 compressed natural gas vehicles and received 37. These include Ford pickup

trucks used by various departments, dump trucks, garbage trucks, 40-foot transit buses and at least one transit van serving passengers who use wheelchairs, Evans said.

In addition to the city's expanding fleet of natural gas-powered vehicles, the city also wants to increase its use of electric-powered buses, Sapp said. The electric-powered buses not only have environmental benefits, but they are more economical. Sapp said that a \$5.75 battery charge would get the same distance worth as \$90 to \$100 of diesel fuel.

Doing any work that involves the electrical system, such as expanding capacity for electric vehicle charging stations, is complicated by the current state of the building's wiring.

"It's a tedious task when there are electrical problems," Evans said. No one knows the true capacity or grid of the system in the building — as with the piping, too — because of the uncoordinated patchwork of additions to the building over the years.

THE PARKING LOT

The parking lot is a mix of asphalt and gravel. With the weight of heavy vehicles rolling over it, the asphalt sections have to be constantly patched, Sapp said.

Behind the garage where

buses are parked stands a signal-transmission tower that Sapp said is owned by Water and Light. The tower's guide-wires pose a collision hazard and limit traffic flow on the lot. Barriers have been erected around the tower, and all of this limits possibilities for structural expansion on the lot.

Another barrier — the lot's chainlink perimeter fence — is decaying. While Evans said that the last vehicle theft off the lot happened before he started working at the Grissum Building 19 years ago, he cited other more recent acts of vandalism at other city and private vehicle facilities as security concerns.

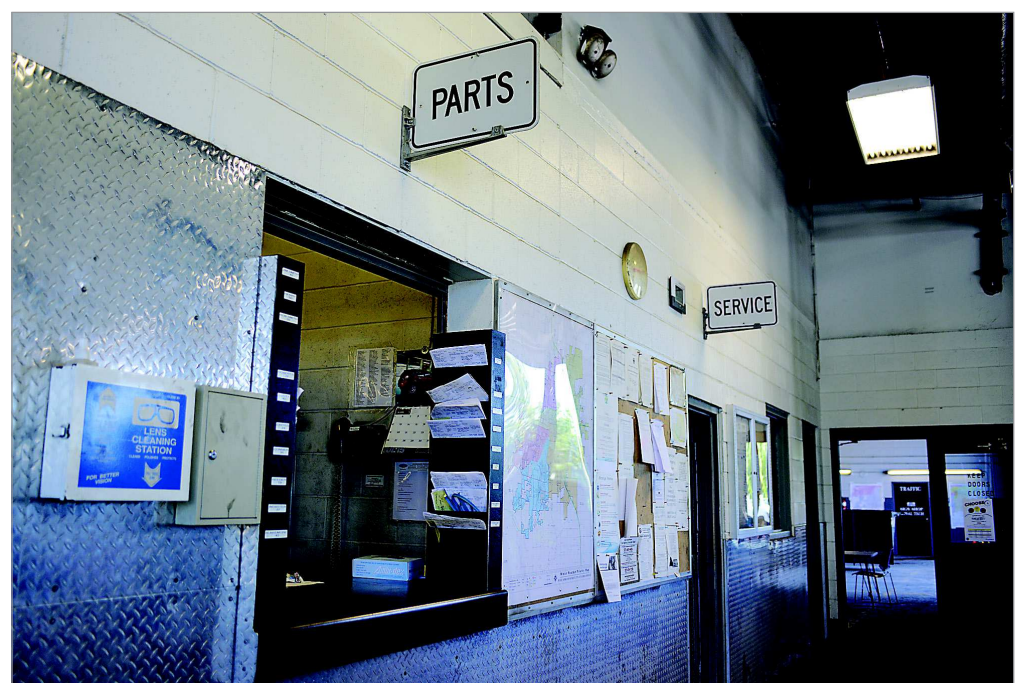
The gravel sections also present a stormwater drainage issue. Drains have filters in them to trap motor oil and other petroleum products, and a section of the employee parking lot has been built as a drainage filter. Evans said to stop most seepage of oil, gasoline and diesel fuel into the ground, the entire lot needs to be paved with concrete.

"Everybody depends on these guys being able to do their work," Sapp said of the Grissum Building's overall importance. Work there "has a ripple effect on everybody."

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Materials for making street signs are stored in the city's Grissum Building. Residents will vote Tuesday on whether to extend a sales tax for another 10 years to fund improvements to the building and various other city projects.



The Grissum Building houses the fleet operations for many of the city's vehicles. The building, which was built 50 years ago, is in need of repair to bring it up-to-date, according to Columbia Public Works spokesman Steven Sapp.