

Last modified at 11:35 p.m. on Monday, April 23, 2001

# Statehouse plans include underground parking

By **JIM McLEAN**  
The Capital-Journal



The long-anticipated renovation of the Statehouse will begin in the fall -- underground.

The Capitol Restoration Commission recently approved plans to start the massive project with the construction of a 561-car parking garage under the north lawn of the Statehouse. The schedule calls for the first dirt to be turned in late September or early October.

The garage is expected to add about \$13 million to the previously estimated \$120 million cost of the eight-year project.

Secretary of Administration Dan Stanley said the garage was added to solve long-standing problems of access and aesthetics.

"The grounds of the Capitol really look like a Kmart parking lot," Stanley said, referring to the parked cars that ring the building on a typical day.

Senate President Dave Kerr, left, R-Hutchinson, and Secretary of Administration Dan Stanley displayed an artist's rendering of renovations planned for the Kansas Capitol. The plans call for a visitors center on the north face of the building, an underground walkway all around the Capitol, new offices, interior and exterior restoration and an underground parking garage north of the building.

*Chris Ochsner/The Capital-Journal*

## Audio interview

Rep. Kenny Wilk, R-Lansing

[Parking garage is](#)

[something that has to be done](#)

[Make the Statehouse a destination](#)

[Statehouse has been neglected](#)

Sen. Dave Kerr, R-

In addition to improving the appearance of the Capitol, the garage will provide much-needed parking for visitors. Now, visitors are often forced to circle the building until one of the few spaces that isn't designated for legislators, elected officials or building staff opens up.

"Legislators have parking. It's not a big problem for us, but it's a big problem for

**Hutchinson**

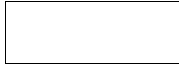
[Make parking more](#)

[convenient for visitors](#)

[Looking to the future](#)

[Must stay committed](#)

[through thick and thin](#)



[Click here](#) to download  
RealPlayer.

people who come to the Capitol," said Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, chairman of the restoration commission.

Kerr said one of the primary goals of the renovation is to make the "people's house" more accessible to the people. He said the parking garage will help achieve that goal, as will plans to enlarge hearing rooms and legislative offices.

The updated plans also call for the addition of a visitors center on the north face of the Capitol.

A circle drive will provide access to the garage and visitors center from S.W. 8th.

Bill Groth, the Statehouse architect charged with overseeing the renovation, said when the center is completed, visitors will enter the Statehouse at what is now the basement level. To make the area more accommodating, the current maze of dark storage rooms and utility pipes will be replaced with brightly lighted classrooms, a cafeteria and new offices.

Groth said an underground walkway will be built all the way around the Capitol between its current foundation and a corridor of new offices planned for legislative staffers and the media. Skylights in the ceiling of the walkway will provide visitors and basement dwellers with light and a unique view of the Capitol's distinctive green dome.

"We will really be introducing a lot of light into that area with the skylights," Groth said.

Over the course of the next eight years, crumbling areas of the Capitol's limestone exterior will be repaired, and its marble and wood-trimmed interior will be restored to its original grandeur.

Restoration specialists have spent the past several months peeling off layers of paint to reveal the original color of the walls and decorative stenciling. Plans call for those colors and decorative touches also to be restored to make the building look much as it did in 1917, the last time an extensive renovation was done.

Most lawmakers agree that the 134-year-old building is in desperate need of repair.

"Over the years, it has deteriorated," said Rep. Kenny Wilk, R-Lansing, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and a member of the restoration commission. "It is time we respect what our forefathers did for us and restore it to its original majesty."

The state will issue \$40 million in bonds to pay for the first phase of the project. The bonds will be repaid by interest earned on \$75 million in unclaimed property money that the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System has invested for the state.

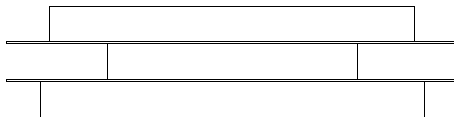
How the remaining phases of the project will be financed hasn't been determined.

A downturn in the economy is forcing lawmakers to struggle to fill a \$206 million hole in the budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1. But Kerr said he doesn't expect the budget problems to lessen legislative or public support for the multiyear renovation project.

"Unless you stay committed and stay hitched to a project like this through thick and thin, you never get it done," Kerr said.

Groth, who has visited several Capitol restoration projects, said Kansas will have "one of the most beautifully renovated Capitols in the country" if it sticks to the plans approved by the restoration commission.

Jim McLean can be reached at (785) 233-7470 or [jmclean@cjonline.com](mailto:jmclean@cjonline.com).



**Copyright © 2000 The Topeka Capital-Journal/CJ Online. All rights reserved.**

