

Statehouse headed toward a return to glory

An eight-year, \$135-million renovation under way

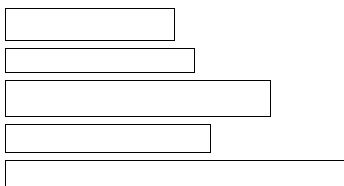
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By Jim McLean
The Capital-Journal

It will be at least another year before workers begin restoring the inside of the Kansas Statehouse.

But there is plenty of activity outside the historic building. After several weeks of preliminary work that included the relocation of electrical and telephone lines, what Statehouse Architect Barry Greis calls "the big dig" finally has begun on the north lawn.

"I think most people are excited to see this project truly get under way," Greis said.



Workers are digging down as deep as 40 feet in some places to make way for a \$15-million underground parking garage. The garage will contain 550 parking spaces, 200 of which will be reserved for visitors to the Capitol.

The construction has temporarily forced some legislators to park in the streets and reduced the number of visitor spaces in the vicinity of the Statehouse.

"A lot of members have expressed some concern about that," said Appropriations Committee Chairman Kenny Wilk, R-Lansing, referring to the scarcity of parking spaces for constituents. "But I think everyone realizes there will be some inconvenience until we get though this period. When it's done, the parking situation will be much better."

Whatever inconvenience lawmakers, staff and visitors are experiencing now could pale in comparison to what they will suffer when workers and artisans begin renovating the interior Statehouse's east wing. That work will displace the governor and his staff for months. Senate leaders also will be forced to move

out of their offices.

"The earliest that any of that could happen would be after the 2003 session," Greis said. "The schedule is not fine-tuned yet."

Plans for the eight-year, \$135-million renovation project call for many Statehouse offices -- particularly those occupied by the governor and legislative leaders -- to be restored to the way they looked in 1917, the last time the building received a comprehensive face-lift. Technology will be updated, but the color schemes and furniture will take the rooms back to a period look.

The basement will become the main working area of the Capitol. Now home to steam pipes and storage bins, it will be transformed into offices for the Legislature's permanent staff and the media. A new visitors' center also will be constructed in the basement to receive people as they enter the building from the underground parking garage.

To filter light into the basement level, a skylight will be constructed at ground level around the Statehouse.

Though it will be several years before the visitors' center -- which will include a cafeteria and meeting rooms -- will be operational, its shell will be constructed with the parking garage. The garage is expected to be completed in the spring of next year.

While there has been some grumbling about the project's price tag, Wilk said most lawmakers believe that after years of neglect, the Statehouse is in urgent need of renovation.

"We're going to have about six or seven years of inconvenience, but when it is all said and done, it will be something that future legislators and all Kansans will be proud of," he said.

The restoration project is being paid for with state-backed bonds. To date, lawmakers have authorized the sale of \$55 million in bonds.

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Statehouse history

1866 -- House Bill titled "An Act Providing for the Erection of the Statehouse" signed into law by the governor.

1867 -- Start of east wing construction.

1879 -- Start of west wing construction.

1902 -- Began maintenance activities with stone preservation.

1903 -- Construction of the north/south wings and center dome completed.

1917 -- Deterioration of stone exterior of east wing addressed.

1920-1980 -- Corridors were used to provide additional office space; skylights were blocked to add floor space for offices; electric lights were added to compensate for the loss of natural light for skylights; central air conditioning was added; false ceilings were altered; decorative paintings were painted over and submerged under layers of plaster; passageways of the basement became clogged with pipes, ductwork and conduit; and basement windows were removed and closed with concrete blocks.

1985-present -- Removal of surface mounted electric wiring, restoration of portions of the Senate and House chambers.