

Technology to benefit public

Government offices move for building renovation

From Staff Reports

The construction of the new County-City Building will continue to scatter government offices throughout the city until the project is done.

■ Oct. 6, the juvenile courts will move temporarily to Trabert Hall, 11th and South streets.

Between Dec. 15 and Jan. 15, these public service offices will move to temporary locations for about 18 months:

■ Lancaster County Sheriff's Office to Gold's Galleria, 1033 O St.

■ County and district courts to the former federal building, 129 N. 10th St.

■ Drop box for traffic citations to an undetermined location near the County-City Building addition on Ninth Street.

These offices will be permanently moved after Jan. 15:

■ Citizen Information Center to the Consumer Building, Eighth and K streets.

■ Building permits to the County-City Building addition.

■ Parking violations and finance department to the County-City Building addition.

By JOY LUDWIG
Staff Reporter

When Lincoln residents have a complaint or suggestion for the City Council, soon they all will be heard.

And when City Council members want to show the public where they will annex property or the area an ordinance will effect, they will have technology on their side.

As renovations and construction continues at the County-City Building, officials are planning new technology in the City Council chambers to improve communication between government and public.

Other improvements will help make government run smoother and cheaper, said Steve Flanders, manager of the project.

Construction on a new County-City Building, next to the existing one, started last year, and should be done by Dec. 1. Renovation on the existing building, at 555 S. 10th St., has begun and will continue through 1999, Lancaster County Commissioner Larry Hudkins said.

"The way things are it looks like the construction is right on time," he said. "(Workers) are making excellent progress."

The projects are necessary to keep up with governing Lincoln's steadily growing population, Flanders said. In the 1970s the population was 168,000; now there are 237,000 people, he said.

"We've grown, and we have to provide more services to the public and hire more people in order to do that," he said.

"I really believe in terms of public communication, we're going to see some major improvements."

PAT SALDANA
City Council public information officer

For example, technology in the new City Council chambers would help residents and council members communicate with each other easier and more effectively, said Pat Saldana, public information officer and Citizen Information Center manager.

"I really believe in terms of public communication, we're going to see some major improvements," she said.

Some technology, such as wireless microphones for audience members, will help meet the Americans with Disabilities Act requirement that says every person must be given the necessary accessible equipment to be heard.

In the existing chambers, there's no easy way for someone in a wheelchair to get to the podium and use the public address system without assistance. Someone else has to bend the microphone, and, in some cases, it still may not reach the speaker in a wheelchair. Other audio and video equipment also will enhance presentations. For example, a video presenter in the chamber can make maps, videotapes or three-dimensional items into video signals, then transmit them onto television monitors mounted on the ceilings and on the council members' table, she said.

Right now, she said there is not even a videocassette recorder in the chamber, so officials have to get one from other rooms.

Another welcomed addition, Saldana said, will be the capability to use a Geographic Information System to call up maps of city streets and zoning areas and transfer the images onto the television monitors.

In the past, she said, officials have brought in large maps, laid out the changes on top of them and presented them from easels behind the council members' table. Council members have to move during the presentation so the audience members can see.

"However, if you're sitting in the back of the room and someone's presenting from a large map, you can't see a thing," Saldana said.

With the new system, she said, maps still can be brought in but three television cameras connected to the television media center can focus on the maps so everyone can see easily.

Saldana said the public meeting room near the council chamber will provide extra space when the council expects a crowd for special

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