

# Officials hope to reduce crime with overhaul of city bus depot

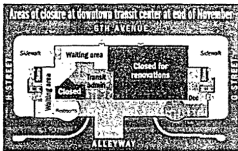
Agency says it's losing money on the building and heating and AC systems are outdated.

Devin Kelly  
Alaska Dispatch News

In a little more than a month, much of Anchorage's downtown bus depot will shut down, the first step in an overhaul that officials say is aimed at upgrading an aging building and curbing a steady stream of criminal activity.

By Dec. 1, officials say, the Sixth Avenue building will be reduced to a small ground-floor waiting area, a People Mover transit office, a security office and public bathrooms.

Gone will be small convenience and fast-food shops, a cellphone store and social services agencies. So will much of the public waiting area, which Mayor Ethan Berkowitz and



Source: Anchorage Community Development Authority. KEVIN POWELL, Alaska Dispatch News

other officials have said is too large and prone to people lingering and causing problems.

No one knows yet what the revamped bus depot will look like. The price tag also is still a mystery. Melinda Gant, public relations coordinator for the Anchorage Community Development Authority, a city-owned corporation that owns the building, said the agency is still receiving and reviewing

proposals from developers.

But right now, Gant said, the agency is losing money on the building. The heating and air conditioning systems are outdated and inefficient, she said.

"Everything needs to be replaced in this entire building," Gant said.

"That cost, plus the low

# DEPOT: 'The only way to fix this building is to shut it and gut it,' Halcro says

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tenant cost ... we were actually in the hole of keeping it open."

Saving money on security is another goal of the December closure, Gant said. Since he took the job last year, Andrew Halcro, the executive director of the development authority, has also been vocal about what he's described as a steady stream of criminal activity at the transit center, stemming from people who aren't there

to ride a bus.

"The only way to fix this building is to shut it and gut it," Halcro declared at a news conference in the transit center last fall.

Gant said the closure won't affect bus routes or People Mover operations.

The main effect of construction on bus riders will be the closure of the G Street entrance, she said.

When Berkowitz first announced the remodeling

plans at a news conference in the transit center last fall, he was hit with questions from regulars who wondered where else they'd go.

Over the past year, Gant said, transit center security has enforced a 90-minute time limit on use of the waiting area. She said the aim is to disrupt criminal activity and reinforce the idea that the transit center isn't a de facto shelter.

"You can't use it as a warming station and stay there all

day long," Gant said.

Security staff carry blue booklets with contact information for social services agencies to connect people with help, she said.

It's been nearly a year since the Anchorage Community Development Authority unveiled the plans for a remodel, calling for more private retailers and a smaller waiting area. The ambitious proposal was spearheaded by Halcro, who said last fall that he'd spent

500 hours at the bus depot over four months, observing drug use and other bad behavior.

Months ago, the Anchorage-based firm Rim Architects produced an architectural rendition of a new facade with vaulted roofing and glass doors. But that's as far as the designing has gone, Gant said.

At this point, all the offices and businesses on the second level have moved out. One upstairs tenant, the Listening Post, a volunteer drop-in

listening service, got a new lease space at the Loussac Library, Gant said.

Most of the building's downstairs tenants have moved or are in the process of moving, Gant said.

Gant said the development authority will soon update its video screens and post signs to remind people about the impending closure.

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Contact Devin Kelly at [dkelly@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:dkelly@alaskadispatch.com).