

St. Pete cops carry rich memories from old HQ

By Kathryn Varn
Tampa Bay Times

ST. PETERSBURG — Down the hall, past desks that could be straight out of the 1970s TV series S.W.A.T. and an interview room where a defendant once escaped through the drop ceiling, descends a stairwell that leads to nowhere.

No one seems to know why it's here and the only way to reach it is through a toddler-sized hole in the wall. That puts the staircase high on the list of weird features in this time capsule of a building that, until this year, housed the St. Petersburg Police Department.

The department's 562 sworn and 220 civilian members have nearly completed their move to a new \$78.3 million center across the street at 1301 First Ave. N. The new station's clean lines, spacious conference rooms and elaborate break rooms present a stark contrast to the quirks and the lore of its venerable predecessor.

But, like all change, this one comes with a touch of wistfulness.

"That's a phenomenal building," said longtime Officer George Lofton, speaking of the new one. "But for an old guy like me, there's a little bit of nostalgia."

The old headquarters is technically two buildings. The west side was built in 1978 and will soon house St. Petersburg employees temporarily while City Hall is renovated. The east side was built almost three decades earlier in 1951 and will be closed for good.

The east wing is reminiscent of an old-school cop flick, in part because



St. Petersburg Police Chief Mike Kovacsev walks in the area that served as the Uniform Patrol sergeants office in the old St. Petersburg Police Department in St. Petersburg on May 9. The old St. Petersburg Police Department building is full of horror stories. Labyrinths of desks. Haunted evidence lockers. Archaic plumbing. Dungeon-like, windowless buildings. So the detectives and civilians who make up the 800-member force are thrilled to be moving to the shiny new state-of-the-art building across the street. [DIRK SHADD/TAMPA BAY TIMES VIA AP]

of the asbestos, said Assistant Chief Mike Kovacsev. The insulation material becomes harmful when it's disturbed, so any remodeling would require expensive remediation. It wasn't worth the investment, so the building remained locked in time.

One example is the office of the economic crimes unit, where Lofton once worked as a detective. A series of metal desks in different shades of green and tan are outfitted with wooden shelves attached by the detectives and passed down through the years. The oldest desk dates to the 1960s, Kovacsev said. Tucked in the back corner is an interview room with a vestige of old-time policing: the two-way mirror. Video cameras have made them obsolete.

Across the hall is another interview room with a curious sign on the door: "This room is not secure. Do not leave suspects/prisoners unattended." Look up, and it makes more sense.

Years ago, the drop ceiling with speckled tiles like you'd see in a classroom or office once served as an escape hatch for a teenage defendant, Lofton said. The teen didn't make it out of the building, but officers haven't left anyone alone in the room since then.

Nearby is one of two cramped conference rooms shared by the entire agency. The floor-to-ceiling windows with their view of drooping oak tree branches are unlike any others in a building with rooms that are window free or where the openings are covered

with metal grating à la the cheese grater building that once stood nearby.

This view was a favorite of retired Sgt. Katy Connor-Dubina. Downstairs, in the rooms used by units Connor-Dubina once supervised — crimes against children and domestic and personal violence — challenges abounded.

The teams shared bathrooms often crowded with detectives and supervisors but moreso when the Florida Department of Children and Families brought children to the station. Archaic plumbing meant the toilets made a booming sound when flushed, Connor-Dubina said.

"You knew these little kids were probably scared to death, like they

See COPS, B7

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PUBLIC NOTICE OF ENACTMENT OF AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF ALACHUA, FLORIDA

Notice is hereby given that the City Commission of the City of Alachua will hold a public hearing on a proposed ordinance. The hearing will be held on June 10, 2019, at 6:00 p.m., in the James A. Lewis Commission Chambers in City Hall, located at 15100 NW 142nd Terrace, Alachua, Florida.

The ordinance title is as follows:

ORDINANCE 19-26

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF ALACHUA, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE AMENDMENT OF THE CITY'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN; AMENDING THE CITY'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FUTURE LAND USE ELEMENT TO AMEND OBJECTIVE 1.4, AND POLICIES 1.4.A, 1.4.D, AND 1.4.F RELATED TO THE CORPORATE PARK FUTURE LAND USE MAP DESIGNATION; PROVIDING A REPEALING CLAUSE; PROVIDING SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

At the public hearing, all interested parties may appear and be heard with respect to the application. Copies of the application are available for public inspection at the Planning and Community Development Department, 15100 NW 142nd Terrace, Alachua, Florida, on any regular business day between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Written comments on the application may be sent to the following address: City of Alachua, Planning and Community Development, P.O. Box 9, Alachua, FL 32616. Notice is given pursuant to Section 286.0105, Florida Statutes, that, in order to appeal any decision made at the public hearing, you will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, you may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any persons with a disability requiring reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this meeting should call the City Clerk at (386) 418-6100 x 101 at least 48 hours prior to the public hearing.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE THE PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD OF THE CITY OF ALACHUA, FLORIDA

Notice is hereby given that the Planning and Zoning Board of the City of Alachua will hold a public hearing on June 11, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. The hearing will be held in the James A. Lewis Commission Chambers in City Hall, located at 15100 NW 142nd Terrace, Alachua, Florida, to consider a request by the City of Alachua to amend the City of Alachua Land Development Regulations (LDRs) as follows: amending Section 2.4.4 relating to Special Exception Permits; amending Section 2.4.7 relating to Variance Permits; creating Section 2.4.10(B)(3)(i) relating to residential development in the Corporate Park (CP) zoning district; amending Section 3.1.1 and Table 3.1.1 relating to maximum gross density in the Corporate Park (CP) zoning district; amending Section 3.5.2(F) relating to the specific purposes of the Corporate Park (CP) zoning district; amending Section 4.1.1 and Table 4.1-1, Table of allowed uses, relating to permitted uses in the Central Business District (CBD), Commercial Intensive (CI), Corporate Park (CP), Industrial Light Warehousing (ILW), Planned Development— Commercial, and Planned Development— Traditional Neighborhood Development zoning districts; creating Section 4.3.4(G)(11) relating to use-specific standards for microbreweries; amending Section 5.1.3 and Table 5.1-3 relating to maximum gross residential density and dimensional standards for residential development in the Corporate Park (CP) zoning district; amending Section 5.1.3 and Table 5.1-3 relating to maximum height for development within the Commercial Intensive (CI) and Corporate Park (CP) zoning districts; creating Section 5.2.3(B) relating to special height requirements in the Commercial Intensive (CI) and Corporate Park (CP) zoning districts; amending Section 10.2 relating to the definition of "dwelling, live/work" and "microbrewery".

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The ordinance title is as follows:

ORDINANCE 19-29

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF ALACHUA, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE AMENDMENT OF THE OFFICIAL ZONING ATLAS; AMENDING THE OFFICIAL ZONING ATLAS FROM AGRICULTURAL (A) (ALACHUA COUNTY) TO AGRICULTURAL (A) ON AN APPROXIMATELY ±199 ACRE PROPERTY; LOCATED EAST OF COUNTY ROAD 241 AND SOUTH OF NW 88TH PLACE AND EAST OF COUNTY ROAD 241 AND NORTH OF MILLHOPPER ROAD; CONSISTING OF TAX PARCEL NUMBERS 04043-000-000, 04044-000-000, 04049-000-000, 04049-004-000, 04049-004-001, 04049-004-002, 04049-007-000 AND 04051-000-000; REPEALING ALL ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT; PROVIDING SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

At the public hearing, all interested parties may appear and be heard with respect to the application. Copies of the application are available for public inspection at the Planning and Community Development Department, 15100 NW 142nd Terrace, Alachua, Florida, on any regular business day between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Written comments on the application may be sent to the following address: City of Alachua, Planning and Community Development, P.O. Box 9, Alachua, FL 32616. Notice is given pursuant to Section 286.0105, Florida Statutes, that, in order to appeal any decision made at the public hearing, you will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, you may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any persons with a disability requiring reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this meeting should call the City Clerk at (386) 418-6100 x 101 at least 48 hours prior to the public hearing.



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