

## Columbia to build new Parks and Recreation vehicle maintenance facility

By [Megan Zagorski](#)

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*This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Joe Gerke's name and to clarify that the building targeted for demolition is not the former hangar now being used by the Park Services Management operation.*

COLUMBIA — The Columbia Parks and Recreation Department's vehicle maintenance facility is in dire straits. Plagued with building code violations, structural problems and safety hazards, it's only a matter of time until it becomes unusable.

That's why the Columbia City Council voted Sept. 4 to demolish the building and replace it with a new 7,000-square-foot, \$750,000 one that will be designed by Peckham and Wright Architects. The \$100,000 demolition will bring the total cost of the project to \$850,000. Peckham and Wright will be paid \$43,500 to do the design work.

Mechanics who work at the facility, located on the south side of Cosmo Park, are responsible for maintaining all the department's equipment. That means "anything from chainsaws, weeders, pumps, lawnmowers, golf carts, mini excavators, (to) construction equipment," site supervisor Joe Gerke said.

Gerke is one of three employees who service the department's fleet of several hundred vehicles.

Many of the problems with the building are due to the fact that the facility is not being used for its originally intended purpose. It started out as an airplane hangar and later was converted into a recreation center before it became the vehicle maintenance building.\*

"The building's not designed for what we're using it for," Gerke said. "It would need a lot of updates to get it up to that condition."

Upon entering the building, the sagging ceiling is immediately noticeable.

"The roof above us coming down is a major safety hazard," Gerke said.

The building also is infested with termites and has an insufficient fire suppression system, uneven

flooring and poorly designed plumbing.

"Out in the shop we have no running water, no wash station to wash our hands," Gecke said.

The lack of sufficient plumbing presents more than a hygiene problem.

"There's no floor drains in the floors for any chemicals that get spilled," Gerke said. "We have to automatically get on all that, get it all cleaned up."

Although the maintenance staff has been coping with the building's condition, Gerke emphasized that they won't be able to keep it up for much longer.

"Some of the other stuff, it could last a while," Gerke said. "But it still needs to be done and done pretty quick."

*Supervising editor is [Scott Swafford](#).*