

COUNCIL PRESIDENT KENNETH V. COCKREL, JR. STATEMENT ON PUBLIC SAFETY MALL IN THE FOURTH PRECINCT

December 4, 1998

Today, along with a majority of council, I voted to support the construction of a new Public Safety Mall in the Fourth Precinct. This Public Safety Mall, a component of Detroit's Empowerment Zone, will replace the aging Fourth Precinct at Fort and Green Streets.

Fourth precinct residents have long complained about the need for a new building to replace the Fourth which is Detroit's oldest precinct. But this proposal generated controversy because of an attached plan to eliminate the Third Precinct and merge most of that area into the Fourth. Some residents have questioned the ability of the Police Department to provide public safety in what would be a larger area.

I voted to support this proposal because I believe these concerns can or have already been addressed in the following ways.

First, the merger of the Third and Fourth precincts will actually put more officers on the street to patrol the new larger area. Specifically, a total of 51 officers who are currently performing staff functions in the Third Precinct will be reassigned to patrol duty in the Fourth. And while the precinct will grow in size, the outlying portions of the current Third precinct will be shifted to the 10th and 13th precincts. This means that the new Fourth will not be so huge as to be unmanageable.

Second, the Public Safety Mall brings with it the potential for innovative collaborative law enforcement. The Mall will not only house Detroit Police Officers but potentially the Detroit Fire Department, the Wayne County Sheriff's Department, the Michigan State Police, and Detroit's 36th District Court. The mall is also intended to serve as a model for other facilities to be built in the central and eastern parts of the city.

Third, the concerns of residents in the South Schaefer area should be addressed by the department's guarantees to provide scout car coverage and two officers per shift in that area's mini-station. Chief Napoleon has also committed to exploring the opening of both a new mini-station in the area as well as 24-hour mini-station service. South Schaefer residents have long voiced valid concerns about escalating drug traffic and other crimes in their area - which has limited points of access by vehicular traffic. They should not be forgotten and deserve the same level of police protection as other Detroit residents.

Some outstanding issues remain. Most of the commitments of other law enforcement agencies to share space in the Public Safety Mall are not yet firm. How costs for maintenance and upkeep will be shared between the city and those agencies also has yet to be determined. Furthermore, Council will have to diligently monitor the police

department to ensure that it meets its manpower commitments particularly in tough access areas like South Schaefer.

The key issue here is police manpower and the department's ability to deploy resources and personnel in a effective manner. Complaints about the need for more officers are valid not only in the Fourth Precinct but throughout the city. The reality is that this would be an issue whether the Third and Fourth precincts were merged or not.

It will continue to be an issue unless the Administration couples a salary increase for police officers with its ongoing recruiting attempts. Not doing so, will likely mean that we will continue to lose police officers to suburban communities whose police department wage scales have outpaced those of our city.

Some residents will say that the site of the Public Safety Mall is not a central enough location. It's worth pointing out the site sits only a few blocks away from the location of the current Fourth Precinct at Fort and Green. Additionally, it is time to face the fact that a location that is acceptable to all residents will never be found given the diversity of opinion about what is or is not a "good" site.

But the time has come to put differences aside and construct a new Fourth precinct. The citizens and officers of this precinct have suffered with a substandard building for too long. The police officers who work in Southwest Detroit, and most importantly, its residents deserve a first-rate facility.