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Surplus base goes on the market

The law gives homeless agencies first chance at such property, which Marines plan to depart.

*RICK ALM
The Kansas City Star*

The law gives homeless agencies first chance at such property, which Marines plan to depart.

When the 147-acre Marine Corps Support Activity base at the former Richards-Gebaur Airport closes in 2011, 27 acres could be set aside for the homeless.

Under a 1994 federal law, homeless agencies have first crack at claiming much surplus federal property, and a legal notice this week in The Kansas City Star announced that the application process for the Marine base was now open.

Unclear is whether any area agencies that serve the homeless are interested. But "it is in the discussion phase," said **Cynthia M. Larcom**, executive director of the Homeless Services Coalition of Greater Kansas City. "I m sure people will take a look at it. No one is going to say no to free space."

William R. Carsillo, real estate manager for the U.S. Navy's Base Realignment and Closure Office in San Francisco, said: "Every surplus federal property must go through this process. The law favors the homeless providers, but it's not a slam dunk."

Local school and park districts and others also can seek the property. Carsillo said the Navy ultimately decided to which applicant it would give or sell the land, based in part on local comment including public hearings, along with the quality of applicants development plans and standards for the highest and best use of the land.

The Marine Corps operates under the Department of the Navy.

Mike Burke, a lawyer for the Kansas City Port Authority, which acts as the city's landlord for the site, said the city was closely watching the Navy's surplus property process.

"My understanding is they're required by law to do that notice" seeking homeless agency applicants, said Burke. "I m not sure there are any homeless organizations with the money to develop it."

Larcom agreed. Despite the federal advantage in acquiring surplus property, homeless agencies still must pay a price, she said.

"Sometimes it costs more to rehab and turn it into permanent housing or something that would be useful for the homeless," **Larcom** said.

Right now there is an adequate supply of shelter space for single men, said **Larcom**, "but there is always a shortage of family shelter space."

At last count, in 2005, a coalition census identified 4,325 homeless people in the five-county area, including 1,703 children. The actual numbers are higher, she added, but unknown.

Meanwhile, there are an estimated 2,200 beds in area emergency and transitional living shelters, she said.

Larcom said she expected to see a slight increase in the local homeless population when the coalition's 2007 census data are compiled.

The Marine base site lies along the south side of the nearly 1,400-acre former airfield owned by Kansas City, which is to be sold later this year to CenterPoint Realty Services Corp. of Chicago. The company intends to spend \$250 million or more redeveloping the sprawling parcel into what Paul S. Fisher, president of parent company CenterPoint Properties Trust, has termed "a world class inland port."

The ambitious project aims to recruit manufacturing, warehouse and shipping industry tenants attracted by Kansas City Southern Railways existing regional and international rail cargo operations on 500 acres there that would become the centerpiece and main selling point of the proposed International Freight Gateway at Richards-Gebaur.

The \$5.6 million sale was announced in November 2005, but further negotiations over price and costly environmental cleanup issues have stalled final approval by the City Council, which a few weeks ago had been scheduled to vote on the matter.

The final price is expected to go up when the final terms are disclosed.

Council member Chuck Eddy, who represents the area and is chairman of the council committee overseeing the sale, said he hoped to have a contract before the council in a matter of weeks.

Now the Marine tract could become the focus of spirited bidding by public and nonprofit groups hoping to pick up the land for a song -- and a viable redevelopment plan.

According to the Navy's surplus notice published in the Jan. 3 Federal Register, the 27.2-acre site includes nine buildings, including a barracks, two transient lodging structures and a medical facility.

When completed, the intermodal transit operation at Richards-Gebaur is expected to emerge as a major Midwestern player in the movement of NAFTA commerce between Canada, Mexico and the U.S.

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-- **Cynthia M. Larcom**, executive director of the Homeless Services Coalition of Greater Kansas City

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