

New DSS building nears completion

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Iredell County Director of Support Services, Jim Vernon (center), looks over the plans for the County's new Department of Social Services building with Assistant Project Manager, Justin Harvey (left) and Superintendent, Kenn Harvey. Bruce Matlock/bmatlock@statesville.com (Record & Landmark)

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The waiting room at the Iredell County Department of Social Services is overflowing. Several employees are sharing office space meant for just one person.

Don Wall, director of DSS, says conditions are so cramped that clients don't have privacy.

The department currently occupies three locations - on Center Street, U.S. 21 and on Walnut Street.

That will change once the new DSS center on Eastside Drive is completed.

"I hope it will be big enough," Wall said. "We have been cramped since 1991. ... Our workers are sharing small offices ... Each one has a client in there with their children, and there is not much confidentiality."

Social Services is not the only county department that is out of room, so the old library on Water Street is being renovated to house the new tax center.

The new DSS building is scheduled to be complete in December and open for business in February. The tax office is scheduled to be finished in October and open for business in November.

"I wish we were moving in today," Wall said.

The new DSS center, at 55,700 square feet, will more than double the space the agency currently has, said Jim Vernon, director of support services.

"It will be the second largest county building," Vernon said. The largest is the health department.

The building will feature a lobby with a children's play area and about 200 offices for DSS employees. The offices line the outside walls so each employee has a window, he said.

"It will afford us some confidentiality and it will create a one-stop shop for clients that need multiple services," Wall said.

The project, built on 23 acres, is estimated to cost about \$6.4 million, Vernon said. The property is large enough for expansion, possibly including a new EMS base and communications center, he said.

The crescent-shaped building follows the lay of the land on which it is built, he said.

"This building, if you walk from one end to the other, it feels monstrous," Vernon said. "This will be a good sizable increase for them."

The old DSS offices will be renovated for the planning and zoning departments to create a one-stop permitting center, Vernon said.