

ICE awards contract for San Antonio immigration detention center

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has awarded a contract to convert a building it owns in San Antonio to an immigration facility. The agency bought a warehouse on the East Side, shown here, in January.
Monte Bach/San Antonio Exp*

The federal government is moving forward with [plans to turn a warehouse on San Antonio's East Side into an immigrant detention facility](#), even as it cancels such projects around the country.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Thursday awarded a \$17.3 million contract to security contractor GardaWorld Federal Services LLC to renovate an agency-owned building for a processing and detention center, according to an award document.

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The document doesn't specify the building's location, but says the work will take place in the 78217 ZIP code. ICE leases space at office buildings on the city's Northeast Side for its field office, which oversees the agency's detention facilities in South Texas, and other functions.

ICE didn't respond to an inquiry about the project on Friday, and GardaWorld referred questions about the contract to the agency.

In January, ICE paid \$66.1 million to acquire a vacant, 639,595-square-foot industrial building at 542 S.E. Loop 410 from Atlanta-based Oakmont Industrial Group. The purchase was part of a spree of purchasing and retrofitting warehouses across the country as the agency continued to ramp up arrests and deportations.

ICE plans to use the East Side building to house between 1,000 and 1,500 people per day during their immigration proceedings.

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In a June letter to Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones, acting ICE chief David Venturella said [ICE expects to open the center next winter](#) as it tries to secure more space to "address rising operational tempo and increasing arrests."

ICE will review designs with local and state officials and “encourages community stakeholders to raise any concerns during forthcoming discussions,” Venturella said.

“Please note, ICE plans to renovate these facilities to safely, securely, and humanely house detainees,” he added.

GardaWorld Federal is an U.S.-based affiliate of Canadian company GardaWorld, which bills itself as the world’s largest privately owned security services company.

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As part of a \$38 billion plan to buy and retrofit warehouses for immigration proceedings, ICE spent about \$1 billion buying 11 properties nationwide this year. But the agency began scaling back its plans this summer amid leadership changes, lawsuits and questions about whether the buildings are suitable for conversion.

It is seeking to unload at least seven of those sites, including properties in Romulus, Mich.; Social Circle and Flowery Branch, Ga.; Hamburg and Tremont, Pa.; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Roxbury, N.J., [the New York Times reported](#). In early August, U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar (D-El Paso) told media outlets the agency plans to sell three warehouses it purchased in El Paso County.

San Antonio officials have tried to stop the East Side facility from being turned into a detention center, citing concerns about substandard conditions at other ICE facilities. They've also said the operation could potentially burden the city’s utilities and become a deterrent to development in a part of San Antonio that's seen little economic growth.

But local officials have little power to stop it.

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The City Council in April [changed zoning requirements](#) to prevent detention centers from opening near homes, schools, places of worship and public parks without their approval. But properties owned by or leased to the federal government don’t have to follow local zoning and permitting regulations.

The council also mandated that detention-facility developers notify them of their plans and secure a special designation unless they can show the city’s rules don’t apply. Such rules largely don't apply to federal agencies.

District 2 Councilman Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, who represents the East Side, recently filed a policy proposal asking CPS Energy and the San Antonio Water System to determine how the detention center would affect water and power services.

“Anecdotally, we know this warehouse wasn’t built for people and the utilities weren’t either,” McKee-Rodriguez said.

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He also submitted another proposal, known as a Council Consideration Request, asking the San Antonio Police Department to regularly provide data about officers asking about someone's immigration status and the department contacting ICE or assisting the agency.

"We are still committed to doing everything we can to stop the facility," McKee-Rodriguez said.

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