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Star-Telegram

Arlington's central library is soon to go

Posted Friday, Oct. 31, 2014

Not that Arlington's downtown George W. Hawkes Central Library isn't still special after 40 years, but next month the city is planning to celebrate its farewell.

It's another milestone in the plan to turn the current library site over to private developers and build a new central library linked directly to City Hall.

The current building will be torn down sometime next year, and construction will begin on a \$25 million project that will include a new library and a 6,500-square foot meeting room for the City Council, all connected to City Hall by a new public plaza.

Maybe the thought of finally being able to expand into new, more modern space (the new library will be 80,000 square feet) will add some levity to the farewell celebration for the old building, tentatively planned for Dec. 13.

The new facilities are expected to open in 2017. Meanwhile, the library has six branches across the city and eight outreach locations in elementary schools. A new, \$5.7 million east Arlington branch, co-located with a reconstructed Hugh Smith Recreation Center, is proposed in Tuesday's bond election.

Star-Telegram writer Susan Schrock reported that the council on Tuesday approved a nearly \$2.5 million design contract with Dewberry Architects of Dallas for work on the new central library.

Libraries Director Cary Siegfried said to expect lots of natural light, an inviting place "where people want to be, not just a warehouse for books."

Library personnel began working five years ago to assess the current facility and determine what the future service plan for a central library should be.

The roof, elevators and plumbing in the building were found to be deficient. Problems also were found with several other aspects of the facility, and repair costs were estimated to be at least \$7.5 million.

Starting anew is much more attractive, even if it means saying good-bye to an old friend. Plus, the private development on the current building site is expected to add offices, retail space and apartments to the central city.

Early next year, the Arlington Public Library Foundation and Friends of the Arlington Public Library will begin a campaign to raise \$3 million for furniture and other building needs.

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