

Star-Telegram

Arlington closer to finalizing design for downtown library

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View of the proposed downtown library, plaza and new Council Chamber from the roof of City Hall, looking north.

ARLINGTON — City leaders informally selected a design for the future downtown Arlington library and approved reimbursing \$4.9 million in expenses for a mixed-use development that could one day open where the former library now stands.

Consultants presented the City Council with a handful of possible designs Tuesday for the proposed \$25 million library, civic plaza and council chambers building, which is expected to open north of City Hall in 2017. The council directed Dewberry architects to move forward with a new council chamber that will be attached to City Hall and a three-story library with a rooftop garden, a two-story glass entryway, and a bookstore and cafe that will face Center Street.

The library, with a curving south wall, and the council chambers, with a curving north wall, will each face a landscaped plaza featuring reading nooks, seating, cafe tables, public art and a winding water feature, according to the consultants' presentation.

“We’re setting the tone for downtown — that it’s a new downtown,” District 4 Councilwoman Kathryn Wilemon said, adding that the contemporary design also received positive public input. “It’s going to be a place where people want to come. It’s going to make downtown the hub for the community. We’ve seen that begin and this is another step in that direction.”

The design for the city’s project could be finalized as soon as June and construction could begin by October, according to city documents. Cost estimates have not been finalized.

Arlington has been working with consultants and community members to develop plans for a new library since 2009. The 63,000-square-foot Central Library east of City Hall had significant maintenance issues and was too small to offer the services residents say they want.

To fund the project, Arlington issued \$19.5 million in certificates of obligation, which do not require voter approval and are repaid through property taxes. The rest is expected to come from a \$4 million grant from the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation and \$1.3 million from the parks gas well fund. The Arlington Public Library Foundation is expected to raise \$3 million for furniture, fixtures and equipment.

Also Tuesday, the council unanimously approved economic development incentives for C-I Arlington City Center L.P., previously acting as Integral Development Llc. and Catalyst Urban Development Llc. The \$4.9 million agreement will reimburse the developer for demolition and abatement costs related to tearing down the library and will help pay for a parking garage that will serve municipal buildings.

The developer plans to tear down the 40-year-old George W. Hawkes Central Library, which closed in late December, in the coming weeks to make way for an approximately \$40 million mixed-use development called 100 Center. Construction on it could begin this summer.

According to city documents, 100 Center is expect to feature up to 27,000-square-feet of live-work/office/research space, up to 9,000 square feet of retail/restaurant space and about 241 market-rate rental residences.

It would also include a structured parking garage with about 628 spaces and a surface parking lot with about 96 spaces. Both will also serve City Hall and the future downtown library.

Last month, the downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone board approved \$2,554,869 in economic development incentives for the project, including demolition and abatement of the library and parking construction.

A temporary downtown library is open at the former Water Utilities North Service Center, 200 N. Cooper St., between Division and Main streets.

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