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Star-Telegram

Developers propose to replace downtown Arlington library with apartments, offices

Posted Saturday, May. 17, 2014

BY SUSAN SCHROCK

sschrock@star-telegram.com

ARLINGTON — For a year, private investors have been working quietly with city officials on a proposal to tear down the downtown Central Library and replace it with a mixed-use development that includes apartments, offices and restaurants.

Atlanta-based [Integral Development](#) and Dallas-based [Catalyst Development](#) want to create a public-private partnership that would seek \$6.8 million in funding from the downtown tax increment reinvestment zone to pay for demolishing the 40-year-old George W. Hawkes Central Library and building a 604-space parking garage to support the mixed-use development.

"We've always had our eye open for interesting opportunities where you can take a historic downtown and be part of rejuvenating it and include civic buildings," Integral Development President Art Lomenick said. "This is an opportunity to take that kind of a block and turn it into something that is very much a gateway statement."

The City Council learned preliminary details about the planned mixed-use development last week while discussing a separate \$25 million proposal to replace the downtown library, which a comprehensive study found needs extensive repairs and is too small to meet the public's demands.

"As far as things like plumbing and electricity, there is asbestos in the building that causes challenges for any type of repair. In the past year we have had significant maintenance and repair work needed," said Jim Parajon, the city's community development and planning director. "The library is not in very good condition."

Arlington has been working with consultants and community members since 2009 to decide whether to rebuild or renovate the [library](#). Last year, the city began pursuing plans to build a library just north of City Hall to free up the existing library site for private development. That plan, city leaders said, would generate revenue that would [reduce the cost to taxpayers](#) for a new library and could further spur downtown redevelopment.

The council took no formal action on either proposal but appeared receptive to both.

"This is going to do great things for our downtown," said Councilman Robert Rivera.

'Open for business'

The mixed-use development is the type of project city officials say they have been seeking to complement other public and private investment made downtown during recent years, including the Levitt Pavilion and the nearby University of Texas at Arlington's College Park District.

The proposal includes up to 27,000 square feet of office or research space, up to 9,000 square feet of retail and up to 268 market-rate apartment units, all wrapped around the parking garage, Parajon said.

"I see the impact of this as continuing to send the message to developers that we are open for business," said Councilwoman Lana Wolff, whose east central Arlington district includes downtown. Wolff added that she thought the project could be a catalyst for private investment along the nearby Division Street corridor.

Lomenick agreed, saying the project could be a linchpin between redevelopment along Front and Division streets north of the railroad tracks, and growth in and around UT Arlington to the south.

While the developers are seeking money from the downtown reinvestment zone, they are not asking for a property tax abatement on their new building.

The city also expects to receive about \$4.2 million in revenue from the private development project to use toward the new library, partly by leasing the land for \$60,000 a year for at least 24 years with three renewal options for up to 99 years. Arlington also plans to charge \$18 a month for each space in the parking garage that would be used by the municipal buildings and the mixed-use development.

Library proposal "exciting"

Arlington is expected to hold a public meeting about the most recent library proposal at 6 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall.

For a couple of years, the city had been considering renovating and expanding the current 63,000-square-foot library and building a parking garage, which would cost an estimated \$30 million, or demolishing the structure and building a new 100,000-square-foot library and parking garage there for nearly \$40 million.

Both of those plans were abandoned last year in favor of building a three-story, 80,000-square-foot library on city property between City Hall and the railroad tracks.

The project would also include a pedestrian plaza between the library and City Hall for public gatherings and ceremonies, reconfigured parking and a 6,500-square-foot building to serve as the City Council chamber and library meeting space. The existing council chamber does not meet federal accessibility requirements.

"I love the project. I wish we were breaking ground today," Councilwoman Sheri Capehart said "It's so exciting."

Details about temporarily moving the Central Library services and materials during the two-year construction of the new library have not been worked out, Parajon said. Because Main Street runs through the proposed library site, city leaders are also working on a plan to keep it open.

Parajon identified several funding sources for the new library, which include include issuing bond debt and tapping city gas well revenue and property taxes collected in the downtown tax increment reinvestment zone. The Arlington Public Library Foundation is expected raise \$3 million for furniture, fixtures and equipment for the new library.

The council is expected to begin voting on measures to finance the library project as soon as next month.

This report includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.

Susan Schrock, 817-390-7639 Twitter: [@susanschrock](#)

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