

html

Arlington Citizen-Journal

Arlington leaders want to expedite funding for new downtown library

Posted Monday, Mar. 03, 2014

BY SUSAN SCHROCK

sschrock@star-telegram.com

The city is considering putting \$190 million worth of projects before Arlington voters this November, but a new downtown library likely won't be on the list.

City leaders said last week that they prefer to find alternate funding such as natural gas revenue and Arlington Tomorrow Foundation grants for a proposed \$26.6 million facility that would replace the 40-year-old George W. Hawkes Central Library east of City Hall.

By expediting funding for the project, city leaders hope to capitalize on private developer interest. Leasing the site of the current library for redevelopment and parking would create additional revenue that would lower construction costs on the new library for taxpayers, City Manager Trey Yelverton said.

"If you have someone who is eager to move forward now, it creates more of an impetus to proceeding sooner rather than later," Yelverton said. "If you move later, the interest might not still be there and then the public might take on the full cost."

Arlington has been trying to decide what to do about the structurally sound but outdated Central Library since 2009. The 63,000-square-foot concrete-and-steel building needs an estimated \$7.5 million in repairs and is no longer large enough to meet residents' demands, officials have said.

Past proposals

The city had previously considered renovating the library, adding a fourth floor and a parking garage for \$30 million, or demolishing the structure and building a new 100,000-square-foot library and parking garage on the same site for nearly \$40 million.

But both of those plans were abandoned late last year when city staffers presented the City Council with [a scaled-down proposal](#). Arlington now wants to build a new three-story, 80,000-square-foot library on city property between City Hall and the railroad tracks, which would involve closing a section of Main Street.

The project would also include a pedestrian plaza between the library and City Hall, reconfigured parking and a separate 6,500-square-foot building that would serve as the City Council chamber and library meeting space.

Councilman Robert Rivera, who served on the Arlington Library Board for five years, said the municipal plaza would create a public gathering place and be a focal point for civic pride.

"The potential citywide impact of this project will be felt for decades. This is larger than just the library," Rivera said. "This can be another destination to help anchor our downtown, and it will help add to the city's core identity."

The city does not plan to sell the land where the current library is located, Yelverton said. Ideally, the site would attract a mixed-use development with retail, office and perhaps housing, he said. Such a project would compliment recent downtown projects such as [College Park](#) at the University of Texas at Arlington, Block 300 on east Abram Street and the Arlington Music Hall at Front and Center streets.

\$10 million this year

Last week, the council informally approved a proposal to appropriate \$10 million in this year's [capital budget](#) for the project. Doing so would delay about \$5 million in residential street rebuilds, \$1.5 million in parkland acquisition and \$3.6 million to replace streetlights with more energy-efficient bulbs.

The residential street rebuild projects that would be affected had originally been planned for later years but had been bumped up to this year's capital budget because funding was available. They will now return to their original schedule, Yelverton said.

The city expects to tap other sources, such as natural gas revenue, the [Arlington Tomorrow Foundation](#) and private developer participation, to pay for the balance of the project.

The proposed [bond election](#), if approved by City Council, is expected to be held Nov. 4.

This report includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.

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

[Looking for comments?](#)