

Design work on new downtown Arlington library to begin next month

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ARLINGTON — -- Eager to start a new chapter in downtown's history, the City Council voted Tuesday night to hire an architect to draft how the future \$25 million Central Library and City Council chambers look on paper before becoming brick and mortar on Main Street.

The council unanimously approved a nearly \$2.5 million design contract with Dewberry Architects of Dallas, the firm that did the interior design for the existing Central Library and the Southwest Branch Library.

Councilmen Charlie Parker, Robert Rivera and Robert Shepard were absent.

Although the new library's look and construction materials haven't been decided, Libraries Director Cary Siegfried said the building will feature lots of natural lighting.

"Natural lighting is always very inviting to people," Siegfried said. "That is something we really want to achieve with the new Central Library. We want it to be someplace where people want to be, not just a warehouse for books."

The council approved funding in the summer to replace the 40-year-old George W. Hawkes Central Library, which is expected to be torn down sometime next year by private developers, and to build a 6,500-square-foot meeting room for the council that is more accessible for the disabled.

Design work is set to begin next month, said Alf Bumgardner, public works construction manager. The new buildings, which will be connected to City Hall by a public plaza, are projected to open in spring of 2017.

The Central Library is expected to be 80,000 square feet, larger than the current library, and either three or four stories tall, depending on the interior design.

"We don't necessarily have any preconceived ideas on what the building will look like. As far as what goes into the building, we have that vision already on the table," Siegfried said, referring to the Central Library plan crafted over the past few years with consultants and public input.

Dewberry Architects will also design the public plaza, street parking and the council chambers, which will have meeting space that the library can share.

A committee of city employees and library board members recommended Dewberry from among 13 architecture/engineering firms that responded to the city's request, Bumgardner said.

The council also approved a \$64,380 construction manager-at-risk contract with Byrne Construction Services of Fort Worth for preconstruction and estimating services.

The new library will be more energy efficient. The city hopes to attain LEED Silver certification through measures that may include on-site storm water management, recycling construction materials, drought-tolerant plants, low-flow toilets and use of natural light, Bumgardner said. More sustainable options will be explored as the project is designed, he said.

Siegfried said the city hopes to begin gathering public input about the new library design during the Central Library's farewell celebration, tentatively set for Dec. 13. A page planned on the library's website will also feature updates on the project, she said.

Early next year, the Arlington Public Library Foundation and Friends of the Arlington Public Library will kick off a capital campaign with the goal of raising \$3 million for furniture, fixtures and equipment. The library's shelving system and much of its furnishings are original to the building, Siegfried said.

"We have public funding that is going to pay for the basics in library services, but it's really going to be that capital campaign that is going to make the Central Library special," Siegfried said.

While some furniture purchased in the last five to 10 years may be reused, the city will likely auction off outdated furnishings or send usable items to other branches. The computers, however, are leased, and will not be available for public purchase, she said.

The council also voted 6-0 to formally approve an amendment to an ordinance that bans pedestrians from stepping into a roadway to interact with motorists, such as to solicit for donations or distribute literature, at any intersection controlled by a traffic signal. Under the

amendment, pedestrians can still interact with motorists from the sidewalk or an unpaved shoulder of the road but not the median or the road itself.

The change was prompted after a federal judge blocked Arlington from enforcing a more restrictive version of the ordinance.

Open Carry Tarrant County has said it plans to take Arlington back to federal court over the revised ordinance.

“We’re tired of you violating our constitutional rights,” said Jacob Cordova, a member of the gun-rights group. “We plan on seeing you guys in federal court. We are going to fight the tyrannical forces that we have to.”

This report includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.

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