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Design for Pensacola's new library unveiled

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The design for building Pensacola's new downtown library is complete, and construction is expected to begin in September.



Here is the design for Pensacola's new library. Construction is scheduled to begin in September. (Special to the News Journal)

The traditional design, in keeping with the city's historic downtown, was unveiled at Thursday night's Pensacola City Council meeting.

"When I came to work here 22 years ago people would ask me, 'When are you going to build a new downtown library?' " said Eugene Fischer, executive director of the West Florida Public Library system. "People still ask me that. And I am glad to tell you that it is now well within our proposed time frame to get it built."

Construction bids are expected to go out in mid-July on the estimated \$7.6 million project. Completion is projected for fall 2012, said Architect Ben Townes, whose firm Townes + Architects designed the new building.

The existing library on West Gregory Street will be gutted and renovated, and the building will be expanded. It will remain open during construction.

The old city fire station next to the library will be torn down, and a 19,000-square-foot building constructed in its place.

A mostly glass, two-story lobby area will connect the renovated library to the new building, forming a 47,000-square-foot, L-shaped building fronting Spring and Gregory streets, Townes said.

This connector lobby area — about 50 to 70 feet long — is designed to feel like a commercial bookstore, including a coffee shop, wireless network, used/new bookstore, comfortable seating, a circulation desk, community area and a

grand staircase and elevator.

The popular computer area will grow from 25 computer stations to 50.

The new library also will include a spacious children's area, teen sanctuary, large conference room, study areas, craft area and a stage that opens to a small park on the north side where musical performances can be held.

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"We want it to be a community destination instead of a drop-off," said library board member Bette Hooton.

Parking will be behind the library, similar to its current layout.

"Those watching the (council) meeting at home may be thinking, 'It looks great but how are we going to pay for it?' " Mayor Mike Wiggins said. "Everyone needs to know the money is in the bank."

The project's funding is \$6 million in local sales tax, a \$606,500 U.S. Department of Energy grant, and \$1 million left over from the new Tryon Branch Library, construction of which came in under budget.

The library system also is applying for a \$500,000 state library construction grant, which would bring funding up to \$8.1 million, Hooton said.

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