



To: East Palo Alto City Council
From: Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
Adina Aguirre, East Palo Alto Library Manager
Date: February 25, 2020
Re: East Palo Alto Library Conceptual Design

Background

The East Palo Alto Library has served the residents of East Palo Alto and the nearby unincorporated areas of the County for over 100 years. The Library is an important educational and cultural gathering space. Approximately 60% of residents have a library card and just under 150,000 people visit the library annually. It is a learning center, safe haven, place of refuge, and open to everyone 7 days a week.

The City is part of the San Mateo County Library Joint Powers Authority which was established in 1999. The Library JPA is comprised of the cities of Atherton, Belmont, Brisbane, East Palo Alto, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, Pacifica, Portola Valley, San Carlos, Woodside, and the unincorporated areas of the county. The Library JPA is responsible for providing library operations and services to all members, and cities are responsible for maintenance of library buildings as well as any capital investments or expansions of service.

The current library operates out of the County-owned facility located at 2415 University Avenue in East Palo Alto. The existing facility is heavily used, and the space needs significant interior improvements. At just 7,680 square feet, the library struggles to effectively serve the critical needs of the community.

Discussion

Library Needs Assessment

The City of East Palo Alto, County of San Mateo County, and San Mateo County Library JPA conducted a Needs Assessment in FY 2017-18. The findings suggested that the existing facility presented significant barriers to the effective delivery of library services including the inability to house an adequate collection for a community of its size; the need to increase seating and computers; and the need to create zoned spaces for various uses, such as quiet study areas and spaces dedicated for children and teens.

Ultimately, the 2017 Needs Assessment recommended that in order to effectively meet the community's service needs, the facility would require an increase from the current 7,680 square feet to a total building size in the range of 22,000 to 27,000 square feet.

Conceptual Design Plan

The Needs Assessment Report was accepted by County, City and Library with partners reaffirming their support for a new library and the exploration of a potential opportunity to be located adjacent to the new EPACenter Arts building. wHY Architects, an architectural design firm, was retained in 2018 by the Library JPA to explore the feasibility of the site and to develop a conceptual design and budget estimate.

Project goals included building a new library facility designed to connect innovative collections, technology, staff, services and programs to the East Palo Alto community. The vision to address growing and changing local needs includes:

- Greater access to cutting-edge technology to aid in the rapidly changing information landscape and close the technology gap
- More spaces for work, study, and events to encourage lifelong learning
- A separate children's and teens area with playful, age appropriate spaces to foster excitement about reading and learning
- Gathering places for relaxing, socializing, connecting, and enjoying meals with one another
- A strong connection to the natural world that models sustainability and builds culinary literacy with gardens and a kitchen built into the library building

Working with the community and stakeholders including EPACenter Arts, and through public meetings and outreach work, wHY Architects developed a conceptual plan that reflects the proposed program and considers resident input and preferences. Over the course of the program design phase, the wHY design team also met with library staff to review program requirements and inform the space planning of the library. Based on the conceptual plan, the new library is a two-level building, approximately 23,878 square feet, and designed for LEED certification.

Cost Plan

The total project cost estimate is \$32.4 million. This does not include the environmental impact mitigation and land and easement acquisition. Next steps include approval of the final conceptual design and cost model, and development of a funding plan.

Attachment

East Palo Alto Library Conceptual Design Presentation