

East Baton Rouge Parish Library

River Center Branch Library Project

Commonly Asked Questions & Answers

LOCATION

Why did you schedule the Public Forum downtown? The Library typically holds meetings for community input in the community for the branch under discussion. Additionally, the River Center Branch Library has been widely discussed at public meetings held throughout the parish, since 2004, and a number of documents relative to construction are posted on the Library's website, www.ebr.lib.la.us.

Updated information and an online survey are posted at the Library's website for those who cannot attend the Public Forum on August 16, 2010. Additionally, patrons are always welcome at meetings of the Library Board of Control, held on the third Thursday of each month. Board Minutes, meeting schedules, and email addresses for each Board member are posted on the website.

Why spend money downtown? Each and every one of our libraries should offer a basic level of quality services, programs, and amenities for the public, regardless of where they are. Built in the late 1970s, the River Center Branch as it stands now does not meet the needs of a modern library user. It is not a good reflection of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library system. The facility is out of date, inefficient, does not meet current ADA requirements, and does not function well for patrons or staff.

We promised the voters in 2005 that regardless of which site was selected to serve as the Main Library, each library on Goodwood and downtown would have "their turn" for renovation, expansion, or replacement. We are working now to keep our promise to attend to the library at Goodwood—the new Main Library for the parish will break ground in spring 2011. It is time to keep our promise for the River Center Branch.

Why did you decide to stay at the existing River Center Branch site? The Board examined cost, availability, size, site suitability, and a host of other criteria for a number of sites downtown, and voted on May 20, 2010 to keep the River Center Branch Library at its current location on the corner of North Boulevard and St. Louis Street.

How close is the River Center Branch Library to other libraries? The River Center Branch is 6.4 miles from the Main Library, 1 mile from Carver Branch, 4 miles from Eden Park Branch and 5 miles from Delmont Gardens Branch. Additionally, the State Library is .6 miles from the River Center Branch; however the State Library serves a different clientele, has a different mission and scope for collection and services, and has limited hours.

Some people have commented that with the Carver Branch nearby, we don't need River Center Branch at all. However, choosing a site for a library is not just about where people live, but where they go...and how they go. Geography is not the only divider; traffic, buildings, and other objects create natural barriers. Carver enjoys brisk business from pedestrian traffic. Patrons who frequent the Carver Branch tend to stay "close to home" within the Old South neighborhood environment. As another example—the Delmont Gardens and Scotlandville Branches are only 2 miles apart, and the Eden Park Branch is located 3 miles from the Main Library.

BUILDING PROGRAM

How big is the River Center Branch going to be? We don't know yet—we have several scenarios in mind, but these are just starting points. It will be as big as it needs to be, based on the services and programs that it will contain. The same process has been used for other library construction projects.

Are there only three choices to pick from? No—we aren't to the point of "picking" a design yet. The three options presented in the 2009 Feasibility Study were fleshed out to serve as the basis for discussion of what can and cannot be accomplished within such spaces. The ultimate building program will undoubtedly be a blend of each, perhaps with some spaces and features omitted, and other spaces added. Once we know what needs to go into the building, we will derive the target square footage. It is a process—the three design options sketched out in the Feasibility Study are part of the "journey," not the destination.

What's the difference between the building program for the Feasibility Study and the Building Program for the Design? The Feasibility Study used several "what-if" scenarios, for which we chose 30,000 n.s.f. and 45,000 n.s.f. as the target size. The three Design Options you have seen are by-products of the Feasibility Study. They are not the final designs, nor will the simplified building program used to create them be the final Building Program.

The fully-realized, fully detailed Building Program for the final design won't be created until the Board has made a decision about how big the building needs to be to deliver the services we want to deliver. Public input will be taken into account before the Board makes their decision. Once that occurs, we will commission an architect who specializes in library design to revise the Building Program according to the newly designated square footage and accommodating desired features, services and amenities. This Final Building Program will then be used by the Department of Public Works to create a RFQ for the Architectural Selection Committee. Finally, the Architectural Selection Committee will choose the architect for the Project. The selected architect will use the Final Building Program to prepare the concept design, schematic design, and so on.

What about the final design for the River Center Branch? The Board will decide on details such as desired services, square footage and cost, and a Final Building Program will be prepared. The selected architect will use the Final Building Program as a template or recipe for the new building, but it too changes along the way. The architect will create a concept design, then schematic design, then move into design development and finally, prepare construction documents for the bid package. The Department of Public Works will announce the construction bid and select a general contractor. The architect, engineers, contractors, specialists, and staff will make regular reports at public Board meetings throughout the design and construction process. Progress will also be documented on the Library's website.

Sometimes changes occur in the Building Program as new technologies are developed, or new collections are added which were not part of the original Building Program. We have also seen square footage change in our existing buildings when it made more sense to straighten out a wall and thus add some space rather than go to expense of creating a jog in the structure just to restrict the building's footprint to a specific amount of square footage.

However, shaving off square footage or adding square footage to a multi-story building is NOT the same thing at all as working with a single story structure. We can't just change square footage numbers without realizing where the spaces attached to those numbers are, in relation to other spaces on the same floor and on other floors. Logical re-distribution of the space, taking into account function and interplay of adjacent, discreet spaces, as well as obvious issues such as stacking of plumbing and mechanicals, etc. must all be considered.

USAGE

What about usage? What about schools? I thought only the jurors ever went there. More than 4,000 residents live within 10 blocks of the River Center Branch, and 52,745 live within a 2 mile radius. However—library use is not just about where people live—it is about where people go. With the exception of a few "pedestrian" neighborhoods, our patrons are fairly mobile. Many patrons frequent more than one location on a regular basis. So our "business model" must in some ways mimic that of a business looking for walk-in or drive-in customers... like a fast food restaurant or a grocery store.

More than 23,000 people work downtown, and thousands more visit downtown on a daily basis (up to 100,000).

As with our other branches, patrons visit the River Center Branch to use free public computers, free Wi-Fi, browse print collections such as newspapers and magazines during lunch, ask questions, check out materials. Patrons also use the special Foundation and Grants Center, meet with the Career Coach, and examine the resources of the BR Room, though these last two special collections will move to the new Main Library when it is completed, several years from now.

The total gate count for the River Center Branch was 105,113 in 2009, which includes over 13,500 jurors who reported to the River Center Branch. In spite of minimal meeting room or activity space, library staff hosted or presented 275 library sponsored programs with 1,709 attending. This does not include the 1,655 other patrons who were tutored, visited with a group home, or who came to the library en masse as part of an unscheduled class, or the jurors.

There are currently 37 schools or learning facilities located within an approximately 2 mile radius of the River Center Branch, and many more within 5 miles. A number of the classes from these facilities make regular visits to the River Center Branch; the new Mentorship Academy charter school is already in contact with the Library and intends to take full advantage of the library's facility and resources.

People use libraries for different things. Some patrons do one thing and one thing only, while others take full advantage of the services and programs offered. Circulation and gate count are two important numbers, but people also attend meetings and programs, take classes, ask reference questions, use computers, meet tutors, and visit our facilities for personal or business use. Though its circulation and gate count are indeed in the lower tier in comparison to other branches, the River Center Branch is not the "least used" facility we have in any of our output measures. Without convenient parking and a well-functioning building, the River Center Branch will most likely continue to come in near the bottom when comparing these numbers.

We have observed firsthand that as our buildings have been replaced with modern facilities that are functional, spacious, warm and inviting, usage increase. Before we opened the beautiful new Eden Park Branch Library, staff members recall a week when only 6 books checked out. Before we opened the beautiful new Carver Branch Library, staff remembers a day when only one person visited the branch. Use skyrocketed for each of these libraries when a spacious, efficient, and inviting new facility replaced the small space previously occupied.

Will the River Center Branch ever have the same services or features as other branches? Patrons using the River Center Branch deserve to receive the same level of quality services, programs, and amenities offered in other locations.

The River Center Branch building project will address these needs.

What about parking? Parking is indeed the question. Demolishing and replacing the River Center Branch, regardless of the size of the new building, would allow us to integrate parking into the design.

There are also several parking garages currently under discussion for the immediate area. They may or may not be amenable to long-term leasing arrangements, joint-use, or public-private partnerships.

What is the life expectancy of the facility? The River Center Branch Library was completed late in 1979. Libraries have been typically planned with a functionality span of 20-25 years. This is partly due to the nature of the materials collection to expand in number and variety, and the fact that as libraries have become so technology-driven, our structures must be adaptable to as-yet-unknown technologies. However, the Board has stressed sustainability and adaptability in all new design projects, and the Library's collections are now a blend of print, non-print, and electronic, so with the exception of specific areas of the materials collection which will invariably grow steadily through the years, we hope to be able to "make it work" in the future.

DESIGN

What about the three designs we saw in the Feasibility Study? Each design represents an idea of what might be accomplished on the St. Louis Street site, within the constraints of the existing site's foot print and square footage desired. Using 29,000 sf as the size of current building (later determined to be approximately 26,350 sf when it was re-measured for the Feasibility Study), and knowing that the BR Room and the Career Center would ultimately move to the new Main Library on Goodwood, we speculated that an additional 15,000 sf would address most of our issues. Therefore we set 45,000 n.s.f. as our target size for the "wishlist" building program and defined the various collections and spaces we desired to fit into the space. As a point of reference, the Delmont Gardens branch and Main Library projects doubled or will double the original size of the facility, and new buildings for Carver, Eden Park and Pride increased the size of each branch by more than 6 times the original space.

The three concepts presented in the Feasibility Study give us a starting place, against which we can test or superimpose the features specified in our "wishlist" as well as any other features or spaces that are desired.

The 30,000 n.s.f. "Renovation" concept illustrates what might happen if we update the library cosmetically, fill in the space lost due to the existing atrium, and bring the building up to code. Obviously, you can't cram 45,000 square feet of services and spaces into a 30,000 square foot box. Certain features on our "wishlist" building program had to be omitted.

The 45,000 n.s.f. "Renovation/Expansion" concept illustrates what might happen if we do the necessary renovations to bring the building up to code, etc. but also push out a bit on our existing site. This solution delivers everything on our "wishlist" except for parking and a drive-through window.

The 45,000 n.s.f. "Replacement" concept illustrates what might happen if we demolish and rebuild the River Center Branch, reorienting the replacement building and integrating underground parking within the confines of our existing site. This solution delivers everything on our "wishlist" including parking and a drive-through window.

What is the best plan? Whatever functions and services are finally programmed into the plan for the renovated/ or expanded/ or replaced River Center Branch, and whatever the final square footage is determined to be for the River Center Branch, the Library will make it work, but the bottom line is without access to convenient parking, no plan will bring this facility to the next level.

With a 30,000 g.s.f. renovation, to bring us up to code, we actually lose space as it is re-purposed for bathrooms, meeting rooms, staff areas, etc. to bring the facility up to the level of other branches. We will have to cut the existing materials collection by 25%. Cost to renovate the existing structure to 23,936 n.s.f./30,000 g.s.f. is estimated at \$9,544,350 based on \$300 per square foot for 26,500 s.f. renovated space plus \$450 per square foot for 3,543 s.f. of new construction.

With a 45,000 n.s.f. renovation and expansion, we can offer the same level of resources and services enjoyed by patrons using other libraries throughout the parish, but non-pedestrian patrons will still face the parking dilemma on Mondays-Fridays from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Cost to expand to 45,000 n.s.f./ 60,418 g.s.f. is estimated at \$19,821,300 based on \$300 per square foot for 26,500 s.f. renovated space plus \$350 per square foot for 33,918 s.f. of new construction.

With a 45,000 n.s.f. replacement, we have the opportunity to include parking as well as offer the same level of the resources and services enjoyed by patrons using other libraries throughout the parish. Estimated cost to tear down and replace with 45,000 n.s.f /60,750 g.s.f building is \$21,512,500 (based on \$350 per square foot for 60,750 per square foot plus \$250,000 for demolition) plus cost for 46 parking underground parking spaces est. at \$1,242,000. This option provides parking. Since most complaints from the public about the River Center Branch begin with "Since you don't have parking..." expending these additional dollars to create a parking solution addresses the greatest barrier to use.

What about the other downtown design projects? There are number of other projects underway: North Boulevard, Galvez Plaza, Repentance Park, the City Parish Governmental Complex, the Court House, and various parking garages. The North Boulevard and Galvez Plaza projects will have an immediate impact on the River Center Branch. Since it is important to take the urban landscape into consideration as we plan our own space, the Library's ultimate design must be crafted with those contiguous spaces in mind. Moving the Library's front door to North Boulevard is an important question.

Are you being pressured by those who are trying to revitalize the area? Just as with any other library building project, patrons who live or work in the downtown area are eager to get the best building possible for their community. Just as it has done with other library building projects, the Board will decide on a course of action after weighing in on what the building should offer its patrons in the form of collections, services, programs, and features, within the constraints of available funding and within the time frame desired.

I don't want to waste money on fancy architecture. Doesn't "iconic architecture" cost more? Not necessarily—some building projects achieve a great “iconic” impact through artful use of materials and lighting. Though the River Center Branch must be an attractive, inviting space that relates well to its environment, the Library is more concerned with how the building will function. Function will drive the design. If the final design can also deliver a “wow” factor without a “wow” price, so much the better. Beyond that—we think each of our libraries is beautiful in its own way.

Who is the architect for the project? Trahan Architects. prepared the 2009 Feasibility Study. The architect for the actual River Center Library construction project will be selected via the regular architectural selection process after the Board sets the square footage and the budget.

How will you pick the architect? After the Board sets the square footage and the budget, the Library will commission a new FINAL Building Program from an architect specializing in library design. The Department of Public Works will then use the FINAL Building Program to prepare and announce an RFQ for the project. Following the regular process for City Parish construction projects, the Architectural Selection Committee will meet, score the applicants, and award the contract. The Library gets one vote on this committee.

COST

How much will the project cost? It's too soon to tell. The Board has set aside \$19,000,000 as a place holder in the budget. Once the Board decides on the target size for the River Center Branch, this number will be adjusted based on square footage times projected construction costs plus demolition, furniture, architectural and engineering fees, etc. Therefore, based on the size, and with fresh projections of costs per square foot, etc, the number could go up or down.

However, the cost of all library construction projects is a guesstimate until the construction bid is actually awarded... which happens after concept and schematic design stages, revision, final design development, and then at last, the construction documents package. The costs mentioned above and estimated by the Feasibility Study are just that—estimates based on the value of construction dollars at the time. Construction costs are generally higher within the confines of an urban environment.

How will the Library pay for the project? The Library is pay-as-you-go, and “lives” within its means, so funds for construction projects are amassed slowly, over time. In the past, a small portion of the Library's budget has been set aside and reserved for construction projects each year; these funds are assigned to Library's Fund Balance until the Board is ready to designate funds for a specific project.

Additionally, any money saved during the year due to salary savings (which accumulate during the time library positions remain unfilled after someone retires or resigns, or from other unfilled library positions) or savings realized as expenses come in below projected costs, reverts back to the Fund Balance, where funds remain until needed for construction, unanticipated expenses, etc.

What if it costs more than \$19 million? Library building projects have all been pay-as-you-go. It is very possible that the Library will have saved enough funds through salary savings etc. to make up the difference by the time the money is needed. However, the Library is not allowed to plan based upon speculation about any such future salary savings. So, if the Board chooses to embark upon a capital campaign to raise more funds, a Fundraising Feasibility study to determine capacity would have to be conducted, followed by a Capital Campaign. Since such campaigns usually take place over several years, the project would probably be delayed.

TIMELINE

Why is it taking so long? Since we are pay-as-you-go, it takes time to save up enough money for a building project. The Board elected to fast-track the Fairwood Branch project, which drew from the pool of savings in the Library's Fund Balance and made those funds unavailable for the River Center Branch project. The Board has also spent a considerable amount of time working with staff, architects, city officials, and the public on the Rouzan and new Main Library projects, which affected the time and money available for other projects. The Library has solicited and considered input from the public for construction projects over the last 6 years, which has added to the time spent working through each stage of the design and construction process. However, the Board feels that the time spent is worth it—it better to go slowly and make the best decision possible.

What happens next? The Board will decide on a target size for the River Center Branch, based on consideration of your input as well as the side-by-side comparisons and other information collected by the staff.

Where can I find out more? Visit the Library's website, www.ebr.lib.la.us, for information and updates along the way. Click “About the Library” then “Capital Improvements” to see specific documents or files related to on-going library construction projects. Our re-designed website, premiering later in the fall, will include separate pages for each construction project.

And of course, the public is always invited to attend monthly meetings of the Library Board of Control, typically held on the third Thursday of each month at 4:00pm. The minutes are posted on the Library's website, which also announces specific dates, times, and locations for each meeting.