

Make Patch better! Take our survey: [OK](#) | [Sorry, maybe next time](#)

(survey will open in a new window)

GOVERNMENT, ARTS

Patch Primer: The New Downtown Library is Coming Soon, and It's Been A Long, Interesting

Not so long ago, voters were going to the polls and debating at City Council meetings about the new downtown library. This Patch Primer offers an overview of the timeline, controversies, successes and hopes behind Walnut Creek's newest landmark.

June 1, 2010

The new Walnut Creek Library will open at 10 a.m. Saturday, July 17--two years, one month, four weeks and one day after groundbreaking for the building at North Broadway and Lincoln Avenue.

But it's been nearly 20 years since studies and surveys began to eventually replace the old library, built in 1961 on the site.

Over the years there have been successes and setbacks. They range from a \$5 million fundraising campaign by the Walnut Creek Library Foundation to the 2005 election failure, by a few percentage points, of a \$21 million bond issue for an even bigger, more expensive library. On community blogs, some critics still say it's too big, and the city will have a tough time paying for its operation.

This we know for sure: The library at 1644 North Broadway cost \$41.5 million. It measures 42,000 square feet, compared to the old, 9,240-square-foot branch built to serve a Walnut Creek population of about 9,000; Walnut Creek's population is now more than 65,000). It will offer 151 parking spaces, 121 of them underground.

While the city took the lead in planning and construction, it's not just for Walnut Creek residents, but a part of the Contra Costa County Library system.

TIMELINE

1991: "Community needs assessments" begin for a potentially expanded, updated library. The staff says the library hasn't been able to respond adequately to library service since as early as 1970, just nine years after the building opened, when the city's population had already quadrupled.

1998: The Walnut Creek Library Foundation is established to support the library, at about the same time the city begins setting aside money for a new building.

2002: Voters approve Measure Q, a parcel tax to pay for extended hours for the downtown and Ygnacio Valley Library branch on Oak Grove Road. It expires this June 30.

2003: Contra Costa County Library staff and consultants Kristen C. Wick and Sara Behrman present a "Plan of Service" for a new library. It is to include extensive programs for young children, homework assistance, services for seniors, a technology center and space for community groups to meet.

2005: Measure R, a city bond issues to finance a new library, receives more than 60 percent of the votes, but not the required two-thirds majority. Critics argued that a five-story parking garage would overwhelm Civic Park and the intersection of North Broadway and Lincoln Avenue. Still, supporters call the vote a mandate to proceed-but with a drastically revised plan.

2007: The City Council opens four bids for construction of the new downtown library, and they turn out to be lower than preliminary cost estimates. West Bay Builders gets the job for \$42 million. The design is by Group 4 Architecture of South San Francisco, which has done more than a dozen library construction and expansion projects.

Group 4's slogan, "Building Relationships," neatly fits the Walnut Creek library's eventual promotional phrase, "A Place for Everyone-A Place for You."

Two months after awarding the contract, the City Council authorizes a \$1.4 contract with Gilbane Building Company to manage the construction project, to keep the library on track.

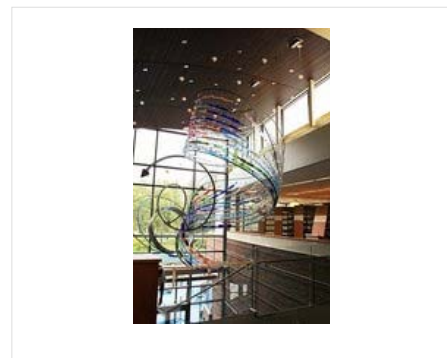
2008: The old downtown library is demolished in February. Groundbreaking ceremony for new building is held in April. Construction is a public-private partnership between the City of Walnut Creek and the Walnut Creek Library Foundation.

2009: The city cuts about \$500,000 from the budget that would have paid for such features as the technology and business center and opening-day library collection. The Library Foundation begins more fundraising to cover the costs.

WHAT'S YOU CAN EXPECT

The architects call the library "the culmination of the community's vision and years of planning." They say they've synthesized a variety of needs, and although the new building is more than four times the size of the old, the new site will actually add green space to Civic Park. (For one thing, the tennis courts have been eliminated.)

Beyond traditional books-on-shelves, the city and Library Foundation point to:



- A 6,000-square-foot children's study area (two-thirds the size of the entire old library)
- A teen center with small study rooms as well as a 65-inch, flat screen, split-screen TV monitor
- Conference rooms for civic groups
- A business resource and reference center
- The addition of 15 works of public art
- And though some critics say most Walnut Creek residents already have access to home computers, the library will add 90 public computers, including 20 in the technology area.

Both the architects and the city also cite the flexible design, with a "marketplace" area, including a coffee bar and the Friends of the Library store, which could have extended hours.

The idea is to create a community center within a library within a community park.

"Libraries aren't the book warehouses they were when we were young," says Lorie Tinfow, assistant city manager and the library's project director.

Adds Kristin Anderson, executive director of the Library Foundation: "Libraries of the 21st century are community centers. Right now, there is really no place in Walnut Creek where you can gather for free. I think when the new library opens people are going to say, 'Why didn't we do this years ago?'"

There's more information about the library and its opening online at www.newwclibrary.org (<http://www.newwclibrary.org>). For more on library services (and the closing June 19 of the temporary Park Place branch downtown, go to www.ccclib.org (<http://www.ccclib.org>)). The architect's Web site, with images of other new libraries, is at www.g4arch.com (<http://www.g4arch.com>).



SEE NEXT IN GOVERNMENT

Crazy in Suburbia: A Special Memorial Day Service in Walnut Creek Honors Those Who Fought in America's "Forgotten War"

COMMENTS (1)

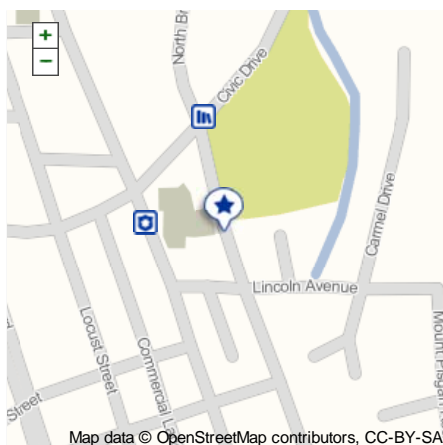


P Martha Ross

12:11pm on Tuesday, June 1, 2010

Okay, I know some of you out there think the library is a great addition to the downtown, now and in the future. Robert Taylor and I will be going on a tour of it next week. Can't wait. I'm very interested to see how it looks, and I foresee hanging out there quite a bit. But I know there are some readers who have concerns about the city spending the money now to build this new landmark. But even if you didn't want it to be built, do you think you'll still visit it?

[Log in to reply](#)



Advertise

Advertise on Patch and reach potential customers in your backyard and beyond. [Click here for more information.](#)

Volunteer

If you want to help local causes, or your cause needs local help, your next click should be right here.

Contribute

- + Send us news tips
- + Put an event on the calendar
- + Announce something to everyone