

Walnut Creek Library comes in under budget

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The new Walnut Creek Library set to open July 17 will do so \$1.6 million under budget.

The news that the cost of the library project, at 1644 N. Broadway, now stands at \$39 million was announced at Tuesday's City Council meeting to a round of applause.

In total, the price has dropped \$6.1 million after construction bids were lower than expected in 2008 and the council slashed \$500,000 from the budget last year. This means city leaders will not have to borrow money from certain funding sources, such as parking meter revenue, to fund a \$1.6 million "internal loan" planned as part of the original financing for the library and the 150-parking space surface lot and underground garage.

Walnut Creek aimed for the "basic" level of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification — an official stamp of green approval by the U.S. Green Building Council. Instead, the city was able to achieve LEED "silver" status, a level higher than basic, without spending extra money.


"We spent \$6.1 million less for effectively a better building and better project," said Councilwoman Cindy Silva on Tuesday.

The budget to pay for the library and parking garage now breaks down like this:

- Library Reserve — \$28.8 million
 - Private Contributions — \$5 million
 - Parking Funds — \$5.6 million
 - County Operation Savings — \$500,000
- Last year, when the council decided to cut the library budget by half a million dollars, the Walnut Creek Library Foundation stepped in, helping raise the money above and beyond its \$5 million pledge. The foundation found donors so library rooms like the business center and technology center — which now has 20 computers — could be outfitted. The foundation, to date, has donated \$3.5 million and is scheduled to give another \$500,000 on July 17, with a final payment of \$1 million by January of next year. That means all the money will be recovered in time to cover costs, said Lorie Tinfow, assistant city manager. "The cash flow issues we thought might exist won't exist," she said, because everything will be paid for and collected in the same fiscal year. Also stepping in to raise \$100,000 for opening day collection was the Friends of the Walnut Creek Library. Even though the library is on time and under budget, there are still some thorns on the city's newest rose. Several residents were opposed to the size and cost of the library, and feel that after the worst economic slowdown since the Great Depression, that city leaders made a 42,000-square-foot mistake. Nevertheless, it is built and the new challenge becomes how to pay for operations and maintenance of the new library at a level meeting community expectations. Both Walnut Creek libraries are staffed and operated by the

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Contra Costa County Library, but because of budget cuts over the past few years cities have stepped up to pay for more library hours and build new facilities. The county pays for the libraries to be open 35 hours a week; Walnut Creek's libraries are open 56 hours a week, paid for through Measure Q, the \$22-per-parcel tax passed in 2002 which generates more than \$900,000 for the city's two libraries. But Measure Q expires July 1. The city saved \$4.3 million to pay for the 56 hours of operation and maintenance at both libraries. After that, the community and City Council will ultimately decide how, or if, it wants to keep paying for 56 hours of operation. Any new parcel tax would need two-thirds voter approval to pass. Tinfow expects discussions about how to pay for operations to begin next fall. **Contact Elisabeth Nardi at 925-952-2617. Follow her at twitter.com/enardi10.**

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