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Bidding process starts for new SD Central Library

by JOHN GREGORY

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This rendering of the new Central Library illustrates the domed shape of the nine-story, 497,652 square foot building.

The San Diego City Council voted last month to allocate \$500,000 to start the process of seeking bids from subcontractors to build the new Central Library downtown.

The library — a nine-story, 497,652 square foot project — is planned for the block surrounded by 11th Street and Park Boulevard and J and K streets in East Village.

The search for bids on the project will tell City Council if the project can be completed at or near \$185 million, which was the cost estimated in 2005. The hope is that the bids on the project will be within the 2005 estimated cost based on the

possibility that companies will be hungry for business due to the slow economy and scarcity of construction projects.

"This process will determine the actual cost in comparison with the 2005 estimate," said Deborah Barrow, library director for the San Diego Public Library.

Things could move quickly if the bids are within range. The bids and statement of viability would return to council for approval in May 2010, Barrow said. A construction contract could be awarded in July 2010 and construction would start in August. The grand opening would be held in July 2013.

The planning for the project up to this point has involved more than 30 years of public input and the site chosen is actually the third site considered, Barrow said.

Barrow expressed her appreciation for Mayor Jerry Sanders' leadership and "forward-thinking" approach listing the new Central Library as one of his key infrastructure projects, and applauded the City Council's decision to move forward to determine for certain what the project will actually cost.

"To our knowledge, San Diego is one of the last of the large cities to build a new Central Library," Barrow said.

"The new Central Library will be representative of the educational and cultural opportunities that are the hallmark of public libraries," she added.

Barrow noted the new building will incorporate a high level of green technology and will be a significant part of the Park-to-Bay Link, a public improvement project to connect Balboa Park to San Diego Bay.

She also explained that the information technology the new library will provide will allow the public access to information they would otherwise have difficulty locating. Examples of technology the current library possesses provides access to special databases, encyclopedias, language courses, testing courses and a program that allows students to access a live tutor for help with homework.

"The current library is already beginning to be the library of the future," Barrow said.

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