

Project Background

The Palo Alto City Library has five branches – Main, Mitchell Park, Children’s, College Terrace, and Downtown. The City’s library system has been under study for many years to determine the best approach to improving library services and facilities to meet the needs of current and future generations. Since its formation in 1999 to advise the City Council on library planning and policy matters, the Library Advisory Commission (LAC) has been leading the study. On December 4, 2006, the LAC presented to City Council the final version of its Library Service Model Analysis and Recommendations (LSMAR) report.

During development of the LSMAR, the Council confirmed that all five branches of the library system would be maintained and directed the LAC to identify needed improvements and recommend a strategy for upgrading the Mitchell Park branch to a full service facility.

City infrastructure funds had previously been designated to upgrade the Children’s and College Terrace libraries. With a combination of private and public funding, a contract was awarded in 2006 for an expansion and total renovation of the Children’s Library. This project was completed in September 2007. A major infrastructure project to rehabilitate the College Terrace Library was approved in the 2006-07 capital budget. Design for this branch is nearing completion, and construction to renovate this historic city facility is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2009. The project will take approximately twelve months to complete.

Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning, Inc. was hired to evaluate options for improving Mitchell Park and to determine if Main and Downtown libraries should be remodeled. Following a needs assessment, Group 4 recommended a significantly larger Mitchell Park Library to meet current and future usage, a small expansion of Main Library, and an interior renovation for Downtown Library. Council approved developing the costs for these facility improvements and the highest level of recommendations associated with the LSMAR report. After evaluating different concepts for upgrading the Mitchell Park Library, Council chose the alternative of designing a new joint library and community center at that site.

The need to upgrade library facilities was confirmed by the City Auditor who determined that Palo Alto’s libraries are in the poorest condition when compared to libraries in ten neighboring communities.

Schematic designs and preliminary project costs for a new Mitchell Park Library/Community Center, expanded Main and renovated Downtown libraries were presented to Council on February 4, 2008. In August 2008, the City Council unanimously approved placing a \$76 million general obligation bond measure on the November 2008 ballot to fund the needed improvements.

On November 4, 2008, the voters of Palo Alto passed Measure N. With 89.8% of eligible voters casting ballots, 69.4% voted in favor of the measure, exceeding the required two-thirds for passage.

The City has hired Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning, Inc. of South San Francisco to finalize the design of these three facilities.

The tentative schedule for construction of these facilities is:

Downtown Library – Spring 2010 - Spring 2011

Mitchell Park Library/Community Center – Spring 2010 - Spring 2012

Main Library – Winter 2012 - Winter 2013

While under construction, temporary facilities for the Mitchell Park Library and the Main Library will be provided.