



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 9413)

Report Type: Study Session

Meeting Date: 9/17/2018

Summary Title: Public Safety Building Design and Status

Title: Review of Public Safety Building Design and Project Status

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Public Works

Recommendation

Staff recommends that Council review and comment on the status of the Public Safety Building project. No formal action is requested.

Background

On June 9, 2014, Council adopted the 2014 Council Infrastructure Plan including nine major projects, of which the Public Safety Building was designated as the top priority (Report [#4889](#)). The full list of the nine projects is as follows:

1. Public Safety Building
2. Fire Station 3 Replacement
3. Fire Station 4 Replacement
4. Charleston/Arastradero Corridor
5. Bicycle Bridge over Highway 101 Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge
6. Downtown Parking Garage
7. California Avenue Area Parking Garage
8. Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan Implementation
9. Byxbee Park

More information about the 2014 Council Infrastructure Plan and the status of these projects is available at: <http://infrastructure.cityofpaloalto.org>

On May 15, 2015, Council held a study session to review site options for a new Public Safety Building (PSB). Report [#5483](#) from that meeting contains an

extensive background of the PSB project up to that date. On December 14, 2015, Council provided direction to proceed with design of a new 3-story PSB and a public parking structure on Parking Lots C-6 and C-7 in the California Avenue business district, respectively (Report [#6069](#)). Nova Partners, Inc. (Nova) was hired in June 2016 to assist with the program management of the nine Infrastructure Plan projects that include the PSB and the new parking structure known as the California Avenue Garage (Report [#6809](#)). In December 2016, the City entered into a contract for design and environmental assessment services for both structures with RossDrulisCusenbery (RDC) Architecture, Inc. (Report [#7417](#)).

The California Avenue Garage project at 350 Sherman Avenue received Council approval on June 11, 2018 (Report [#8967](#)) along with the certification of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for both the garage and the PSB. The new public parking structure to be built on Lot C-7 mitigates for the loss of existing surface parking on Lot C-6 where the PSB will be built. Therefore, the EIR studied the two structures as one project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). At the June 11, 2018 meeting, Staff committed to return to Council for this status update on the PSB. Councilmembers expressed interest in the cost estimate for the project and the need for the communications tower.

Discussion

Project Status

The PSB project is nearing the end of the Architectural Review Board (ARB) process. The first formal hearing occurred in October 2017 and included both the PSB and the Cal Ave Garage. At that meeting, the ARB feedback for the Cal Ave Garage was favorable, while the feedback for the PSB was not. Although the CEQA process for the PSB and Cal Ave Garage continued to analyze the environmental impacts as a single project, staff separated the ARB reviews to move the Cal Ave Garage more quickly to construction. To minimize Cal Ave area parking impacts, the City has committed to sequence the projects so that the PSB construction would not begin until the new garage becomes functional, which avoids loss of parking from both existing surface lots at one time.

The Cal Ave Garage had two additional formal ARB hearings and was recommended for approval by the ARB on March 1, 2018. The garage is expected to receive construction bids in October. Three firms were pre-qualified to bid on the garage project: Swinerton, Build Group, and McCarthy. The project cost

estimate, not including staff salaries and benefits, is \$45.8 million. Construction financing through certificates of participation (COPs) is currently being planned. Groundbreaking for the garage is anticipated in January 2019.

After the October 2017 ARB hearing, the PSB design was reevaluated and numerous architectural ideas were considered by RDC, staff, and Nova for both aesthetics and cost. The PSB had a second formal ARB hearing on August 2, 2018 and is scheduled to have a third and final ARB hearing on September 20, 2018. A recommendation for approval is expected. The latest plans and renderings are available at this [link](#). Following the final ARB hearing, the PSB design will be brought to Council for a record of land use action to approve the architectural review application.

Estimated costs have been carefully monitored during the Cal Ave Garage and PSB design iterations. Early in the process, the underground basement footprint for the PSB was reduced along the Birch Street property line as a cost-reduction measure. Numerous PSB architectural features proposed by the design team in response to ARB feedback were eliminated to limit cost increases. These efforts were opportunities to control costs without impacting the operational functions of the PSB's programming. As presented today, the current construction cost estimate for the PSB is \$87 million, and the total project cost estimate (without staff salaries and benefits) is \$106 million. It is important to note that the \$106 million estimate includes a \$7 million design contingency which is intended to prevent further increases to the estimate as the design process continues, and additional details are included. The FY2019 Capital Improvement Program funding for the project is based on an earlier estimate of \$91 million.

An important driver of the project's cost is the limited footprint of the site that requires a large 2-level operational basement to fulfill the PSB program. Therefore, staff evaluated further reductions to the underground PSB basement to achieve significant cost reduction. The most impactful of these options eliminates the second basement level. The second basement level is primarily used for staff personal vehicle parking as well as a significant amount of equipment storage. Under such a scenario (i.e. the one-basement option), PSB personnel would be expected to park their personal vehicles in the new garage at 350 Sherman Avenue. The one-basement option would shift a total peak parking demand of approximately 98 vehicles to the new parking structure. Although it is

estimated to reduce the PSB project cost by approximately \$10 million, staff does not recommend further development of the one-basement option.

A single PSB basement level is not recommended because it would be crowded, with tight turning radii for vehicles and undesirable mixing of police patrol operations with other functional groups. It would eliminate future opportunities for the PSB to utilize any of the second basement level for expansion needs. The option also negatively impacts the capacity of the new public parking structure. Eliminating the second PSB basement level would essentially require that one floor of the public parking structure be dedicated to PSB employee parking. On January 22, 2018, Council voted to maintain the 636-space program for the public parking structure, rather than save an estimated \$6-8 million by removing its second basement level.

Lastly, staff believes it is premature to consider negatively impacting the PSB's functionality at this point in the design process. Another significant driver of the current project cost estimate is the overall amount of construction activity in the Bay Area. With the start of PSB construction slated for mid-2020, it is possible that the construction market will be more favorable than at present. If it instead worsens, a redesign of the basement levels could still be feasible to consider in the future.

Communications Tower

The PSB design includes a new communications tower that will be 135 feet tall. The proposed tower will allow the PSB to be directly connected with the County-wide microwave emergency communications network (ECOMM). The basic topology of the existing ECOMM network is that of a large "ring" of microwave communications links with a "spur" extension stretching to the southeast to connect to participating jurisdictions in the southern part of Santa Clara County. Each of the sites, or nodes, on the basic ring connects to two or more sites and allows communications to all other sites in the ring, whether clockwise or counter-clockwise around the ring. The basic ring topology provides the network with a redundancy that allows service to continue to all other nodes within the ring if one of the nodes in the basic ring goes offline.

The PSB will house the Palo Alto 911 Center which is also referred to as a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). The ECOMM network allows PSAPs within Santa

Clara County to work together, share loads, and creates redundancy to handle emergency situations. For this reason, the communications tower is an essential component of the PSB, and the PSB would be functionally disabled without it.

Timeline

Garage construction is expected to begin in early 2019 and be completed by mid-2020. The PSB construction will then begin and is expected to be completed before mid-2022.

Resource Impact

COPs for the Cal Ave Garage construction funding will be sold by the end of 2018. Debt service for the COPs will be provided by revenue from Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT). The increase in the TOT placed by Council on the November 6, 2018 ballot can be used to assist in addressing the shortfall in funding for the 2014 Council Infrastructure Plan nine projects, including the increase in cost for the PSB project as discussed in this memorandum.

Policy Implications

Both the Cal Ave Garage and PSB projects are consistent with this element of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan:

Policy L-9.10 Design public infrastructure, including paving, signs, utility structures, parking garages and parking lots to meet high-quality urban design standards and embrace technological advances. Look for opportunities to use art and artists in the design of public infrastructure. Remove or mitigate elements of existing infrastructure that are unsightly or visually disruptive.

The PSB project is consistent with these 2030 Comprehensive Plan elements:

Policy S-1.7 Regularly review the adequacy of law enforcement services and emergency services in the city. Plan and develop law enforcement infrastructure and technology according to overall need and city growth.

and

Program S1.7.2 Design the new Public Safety building to essential service standards and to meet the needs of the public safety departments and be resilient against known threats and hazards.

The California Avenue Garage is consistent with this element of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan:

Program N7.6.2 Promote use of the top floors of new and existing structured automobile garages for installation of photovoltaic panels and green roofs.

Environmental Review

Council certified a Final EIR and approved the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) on June 11, 2018. Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the PSB and California Avenue public parking garage are considered as a single project because the public parking garage will mitigate for the loss of approximately 310 existing public surface parking spaces on both sites.