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Big changes in store for East Library

December 12th, 2011 | By Jennifer Kaufman

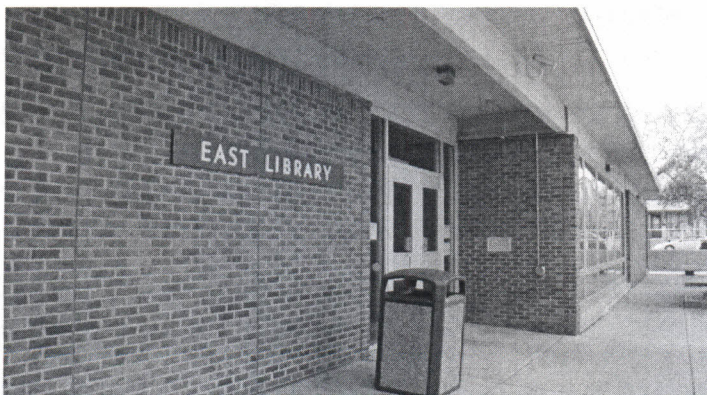
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The vibrant neighborhood that is Milwaukee's East Side will see a significant redevelopment to its local library by 2014.

The current building, located at 1910 E. North Avenue and built in 1968, is to be demolished, and a much larger library will replace the current structure. When finished, the new building will include retail space, upper-level apartments and underground parking.

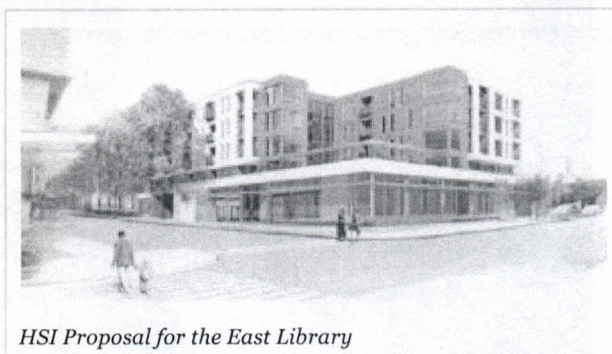
"It will not only increase the tax base for the city and really energize the business community," said Paula Kiely, director of the **Milwaukee Public Library**. "It will also add a great example of 21st century architecture to the East Side landscape."

Among the goals of the new development, said Kiely, is to bring the library up-to-date with laptops, high-speed Internet and self-checkouts, while retaining original elements like its stained glass windows. Kiely said the new mixed-use **Villard Square Branch**, which opened in October, is being used as a model.

The one- and two-bedroom apartments in the plan will cost between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per month. These apartments will take up three floors over the library and retail space. The new library will be 2,000 square feet larger than the current structure, and the parking lot will hold roughly 40 above ground spaces, free to library patrons. The retail space, which will serve to compliment the library, will be between 2,500 and 5,000 square feet.

The cost of the project will be approximately \$14.7 million, \$10.9 million of which will be financed by a commercial loan from the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**. Other funds will be raised by the developer.

Several contractors **put in bids for the development**, including Waukesha-based HSI Properties, LLC, Gorman & Company, Inc. from Oregon, WI, and Stone House Development Inc. from Madison. At a library board meeting on Nov. 22, the board voted for HSI to work on the project. Open flexible design and strong use of available daylight in the design proposal were cited as reasons for HSI's selection.



HSI Proposal for the East Library

The project is slated to begin in 2013 and should be completed sometime in 2014. For the next few months, financing options will be explored regarding the library redevelopment. Furthermore, the library wants HSI to fulfill all city requirements, and make sure library patrons can have access to basic library services during construction.

"One of the requirements of the RFP (Request for Proposal) is for the developer to provide a temporary location during construction," said Joan Johnson, the library's deputy director.

Wired Properties and Engberg Anderson Architects are joining forces with HSI Properties on the redevelopment. Blair Williams of Wired Properties, and an East Side resident, claims libraries are an extension of the public realm, but the library needs to enter the 21st century.

With nearby restaurants, shops, clubs, coffee houses and the iconic **Oriental Theatre**, the East Library is in a very lively neighborhood, and is already the city's second-most used library, after the downtown Central Library.

Rachel Collins, the East Library's branch manager, said there have been many comments and concerns about the new library.

Milwaukee resident Tom Gardner said he doesn't visit the library often, other than to use the Internet. However, he thinks the redevelopment will bring in business and a new generation will find use for it. Michael White hopes there will be more room for computers and different magazines. Esther McGuin also said she believes the new library will bring in more business and hopes it adds more programs.

Kiely said there is a lot of excitement about the project, and the East Side community really got involved. The proposals were shown to the public, and surveys showed that 80 percent of the respondents favored HSI's proposal.

Library patrons expressed their thoughts and concerns on the redevelopment and their responses, along with an interview with Jim Plaisted from the **East Side Business Improvement District**, can be seen in the video below.



To find out more information about this project go to the Milwaukee Public Library's website at mpl.org and click on the Board of Trustees' tab on the website's right hand side. There you will find agenda and board meeting minutes regarding the East Library's development.

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