

Architect selected for East County courthouse project

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Gresham's future courthouse now has an architect.

Multnomah County announced on Monday, Feb. 1, that it has hired LRS Architects in partnership with HOK Justice to design the East County courthouse proposed for Gresham's Rockwood area.

Commissioners unanimously approved moving forward with the plan for a new courthouse in October when they approved spending \$800,000 on a "schematic design process" for the facility. Later this year, the board will review the proposed designs, hear public comment and decide how to proceed with the project. Funding for the courthouse has not yet been secured.

Located on county-owned property just south of Stark Street off 185th Avenue, the \$17.5 million to \$21 million courthouse will replace Gresham's obsolete and dilapidated one-courtroom facility on Powell Boulevard.

The current courthouse is on Powell Boulevard in the original Gresham City Hall, which the city still owns. It's been called woefully inadequate and in disrepair by its own landlord, Mayor Shane Bemis. The roofs and windows leak, pipes backup creating flooding and sewage spills.

In addition to providing two to three courtrooms, the new facility also will include space for the county's district attorney's office. As for the cases it hears, the new courthouse will primarily handle misdemeanor traffic offenses.

Eleven architects submitted proposals for the project and four were interviewed.

Founded in 1976, LRS Architects is an award-winning architectural design, planning and interiors firm specializing nationally in commercial office, retail, housing, interiors, planning and civic projects. The company's portfolio justice centers and other civic facilities on the West Coast, including the Clackamas County Jail intake expansion and the El Dorado County Juvenile Facility in South Lake Tahoe, Calif.

HOK Architects is a global firm with extensive courthouse design experience, including the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center in San Leandro, Calif., and the Miami Dade County Children's Courthouse in Miami, Fla.

Hiring the firms is the first part of the county's schematic design process, which calls for preliminary plans, a site plan, architectural specifications, cost estimates and updated budget details.

Proposals from construction companies also are being accepted until Feb. 10. That contract could be awarded by the end of the month.

Once the schematic process is complete, an internal oversight committee will review it before seeking approval from county commissioners in April. If approved, construction could begin as soon as next spring.

The announcement that an architect has been hired provides momentum to a project 25 years in the making. After decades of studying where in Gresham to build the new courthouse, the county opted to build in the city's Rockwood area, citing savings by building in an urban renewal district and potential to draw businesses and improve the area's safety.

In 2007, the county bought property at 185th and Stark for a full service justice center, complete with space for Gresham police and sheriff's deputies.

But when the facility's price tag more than doubled to nearly \$43 million and the economy collapsed, Multnomah County scaled down the facility to a simple courthouse.

The county also decided — as a money-saving strategy — to move the project to county-owned land in downtown Gresham. But a buyer for the land in Rockwood fell through, so the county returned to the courthouse's originally proposed location.

The new 35,000- to 40,000-square-foot facility will house one large courtroom with space for a 12-person jury, a smaller courtroom for a six-person jury and medium sized flexible courtroom that could be used for after-hours community activities.

It is scheduled to open in spring 2012.