

IN THE NEWS

Library block getting revamp

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The block housing the downtown library is poised for a major overhaul after city council approved a land swap, demolition of an aging parkade and construction of a new one.

"There's an opportunity here we can't miss for developing an entire city block," Ald. Linda Fox-Mellway said, adding it means the library can move forward with an international design competition. "We can get going, now that we know we have a site."

The decision, made Monday evening following an in-camera meeting of council, affects the block south of 6th Avenue between Macleod Trail and 3rd Street S.E. It gives the library and Bow Valley College better lots on which to build their new facilities, squaring up the space available to them. Bow Valley will now have the entire east end of the block, rather than the awkward rectangle where the provincial courthouse now sits. And that leaves the library the rest of the block for its proposed new building, once the police service moves and the parkade is torn down.

Tearing down the parkade on the block, which has 288 stalls, most used by the city, will create some short-term problems, Ald. Druh Farrell said. "We have to be creative in finding parking solutions," she said. "That parkade is one of the ugliest structures in the city and it's about to fall down anyway. To change the configuration of the site based on that hideous structure would be a tragedy indeed."

But losing the parkade will help accelerate construction on a new, 1,512-stall facility along 9th Avenue, east of 3rd Street. Mayor Dave Bronconnier said the new above- and below-ground structure will also address additional parking demands anticipated once the East Village development gets underway. The land where the parkade will sit, already a surface lot, will also house the new district energy plant being built to heat and cool downtown buildings.

Calgary Parking Authority general manager Dale Fraser said they expect to be working on detailed construction plans by the fall, with construction on the new parkade beginning early in 2008. The structure would likely be finished in 2010-11.

Bow Valley also hopes to have its expansion and new building completed by 2010. Council's decision Monday means a redesign of its second facility, as the plans brought to the city's planning commission last year were based on the courthouse site. The building will now front onto 6th and 7th avenues, as well as 3rd Street.