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Manzanita Room More Expensive than Anticipated

By Cathy Tyson

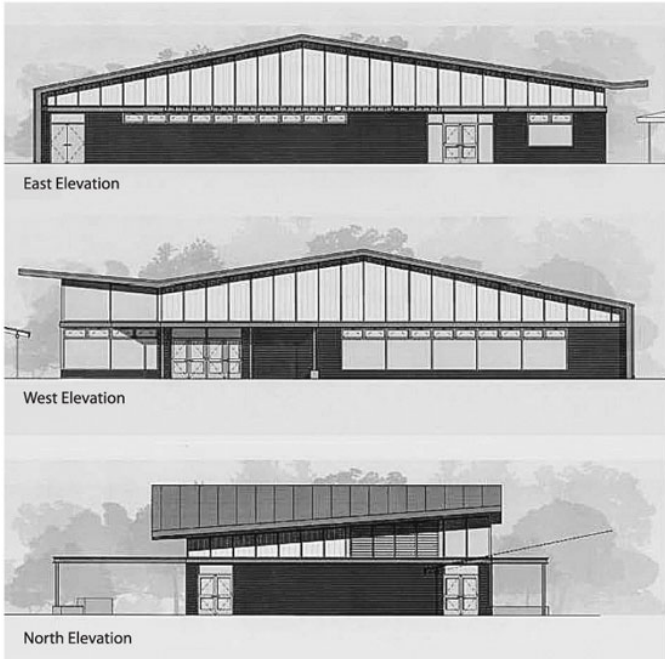


Image provided

The preliminary plans to replace the very tired 60-year-old Manzanita Room at the Lafayette Community Center were admittedly pretty basic. City Council members expressed concern at a recent meeting over the cost increase from the original estimate; it was initially slated to cost roughly \$1.8 million, but after input from the Design Review Commission, now comes in at almost \$2.3 million. Due to the change staff brought the project back to the city council seeking approval to proceed.

As the design evolved, what was a bare bones box morphed from utilitarian cube to a more dynamic design with a dramatic wall of glazed windows and nicer materials that raised the estimated construction costs. Cost savings where possible were factored in, but the Design Review Commission suggested changes, including pricey Kalwall structural window sections, which helped boost the overall cost.

"We tried very hard to keep to the original cost," said Jennifer Russell, director of Parks, Trails

and Recreation. Tony Coe, city engineer, explained that the design review process changed the building. "It's now something that makes an architectural statement - more of a pavilion than a gym." Seven of nine volunteer Parks, Trails and Recreation commissioners came to voice support for the improved project.

The City Council was not thrilled with the substantial cost increase, but members were amused by the irony. "Now we're on the other side of the table," said Council Member Brandt Andersson, adding, "I have more sympathy," in reference to homeowner applicants seeking approval from Design Review, where changes that will likely cost more are required for approval. "The building came out much better, but it's going to cost me more," he said of this not uncommon situation.

Mayor Don Tatzin asked for quarterly cash flow forecasting to get a better sense of money from developer fees that will be coming in to the fund that holds park facility fees paid by developers that are earmarked for this project. These fees are paid before construction starts and, while there are several projects in the pipeline, there is a potential risk that forecasted revenue may not materialize. Funding sources also include over \$240,000 from voter-approved Measure WW funds, a \$45,000 donation from the Community Center Foundation, and \$5,000 pledged by the teen-led Lafayette Youth Commission.

"Construction of a new Manzanita Building will span two fiscal years and, based on a forecast of facility improvement fees from new development, there will be enough funds to pay for the project," said Russell. "If the timing of contract invoices and facility improvement fees don't exactly align, staff will go back to Council and request a short-term loan to be paid back as soon as the fees are received."

Council Member Mark Mitchell brought up a relevant point - that the old building served Lafayette citizens for decades - and since the new structure will likely do the same perhaps the city should consider amortizing a portion of the cost.

Ultimately the City Council gave a measured response to the price increase, first - to submit the plans for bids, which may come in higher or lower than the estimated price tag, while at the

same time investigate less expensive building materials and fixtures, and also look into pending changes in Contra Costa County building codes, slated to go into effect in the near future, which may further drive costs up.

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