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Main Library heads for next stage as part of larger Seventh & Tryon project

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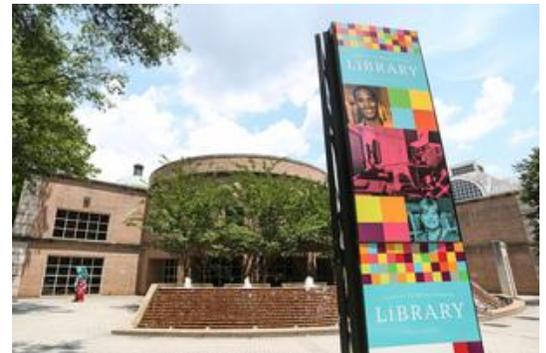
Planning work on a new Main Library branch for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is moving ahead in tandem with a larger development project.

As part of the two-block Seventh & Tryon plan, the Main Library at 310 N. Tryon St. will be replaced by a new building that library leadership says will have a smaller footprint, be slightly taller in height and contain more "community" features instead of back-of-house operations. The library has been at the corner of Sixth and Tryon streets since 1903, with the original building replaced in the 1950s before being expanded and renovated in the 1980s.

Meetings with city residents and library board members have taken place over the past several months to gather input on what's sought for the new Main Library, said [Lee Keesler](#), CEO of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. An [architect team](#) consisting of Clark Nexsen, [Snohetta](#) and Brightspot Strategy was appointed last year and should have conceptual designs of the new building by the fall, Keesler said. A joint venture between Rodgers Builders and RJ Leeper Construction is the construction manager at-risk for the new Main Library.

Another town-hall meeting will be held Sept. 18, where those initial designs and a finalized plan for what's being called the public commons will be discussed, Keesler said. Library leadership has been touring libraries and museums across the U.S. to decide what it would like to see in the new main branch.

The full price tag is "still settling out," Keesler said, declining to provide a total cost estimate for the project. The library will embark on a fundraising campaign to help pay for the new building



MELISSA KEY

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library main branch is at 310 N. Tryon St.

and an endowment.

Last year, the Mecklenburg County Capital Improvement Program budgeted \$65 million for the Main Library project for fiscal 2019. Keesler said this week \$51 million of that will go to the new building, with \$11 million budgeted for a new support-services center for the library. Keesler said the Main Library's support-services operations, which currently accounts for about one-third of the Main Library's space, will relocate to the North Park shopping center. The county acquired that property in January for nearly \$4.3 million, according to real estate records.

Mecklenburg County couldn't be reached by deadline for more information on its plans for the revamped center, which sits on a 12.6-acre site at the corner of North Tryon Street and Eastway Drive.

Keesler said other civic facilities in the U.S. have features that could be replicated at the new uptown library. The Boston Public Library, for instance, has a broadcast studio and cafe on the ground floor. And the Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio has an electronic wall where users can create a virtual art collection, which could be modified for a book collection, Keesler said. He noted that academic libraries — including the James B. Hunt Library at N.C. State University, which Clark Nexsen, Snohetta and Brightspot Strategy also designed — have technology portfolios that he'd like to see for the Main Library.

Based on feedback from the town halls, Keesler said there remains "strong support" for books and a place for people to hang out and connect.

"It should operate like a student union on a college campus," Keesler said. The current building has five floors with approximately 50,000-square-foot floorplates. The new building will likely have six floors with approximately 20,000 square feet on each level, he said, adding that specifics on building design and size are still being worked out.

Keesler said the pedestrian count at Sixth and Tryon streets is one of the highest in uptown, adding that several projects at that intersection — including the new Main Library, the revamp of Discovery Place, and the new InterContinental Hotel and Carolina Theatre restoration — will be going on over the next several years.

"These projects will help create a neighborhood," he said.

The new Main Library, still expected to break ground in 2020 and open in 2023, will anchor a larger project serving as part of the North Tryon Vision Plan. A Seventh & Tryon stakeholder group consisting of the library, Mecklenburg County, the city of Charlotte, the Charlotte Housing Authority and Bank of America are in the process of selecting a master developer for the two-block project, which will spearhead the development of office space; hundreds of market-rate, senior and affordable-housing units; a boutique hotel in the currently vacant Hall House Building; and restaurant and retail space on the city blocks bounded by East Sixth, North Tryon, East Eighth and North College streets.

In May, the stakeholder group narrowed its list down to five development teams, many of which are national firms, to submit a detailed proposal for the project. Those proposals are due Aug. 18.

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