

DOWNTOWN DALLAS

Latest project plans shown

City chooses convention center design that looks like original concept



Jack Matthews, the developer at the helm of Inspire Dallas, spoke about an update on the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center master plan during a community briefing Thursday at The Black Academy of Arts and Letters in Dallas. Matthews said officials were in the midst of creating the “building blocks” of the final product. (Chitose Suzuki/Staff Photographer)

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Dallas may stick to its original plan to rebuild the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center after months of quagmire.

Uncertainty ensued when developer Ray Washburne announced he was planning on selling the old *The Dallas Morning News* building, a key component of the project, to a data firm.

The chosen design, unveiled at a community briefing Thursday, mirrors the site plan the City Council approved last year to avoid conflicts with the Texas Department of Transportation's plan to widen Interstate 30, the Union Pacific rail line and a high-speed rail project to connect Dallas with Houston and Fort Worth.

The meeting was hosted at the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, and officials spent roughly an hour parsing through design details that include a plaza and pedestrian connections. The main entrance to the convention center will face City Hall. New exhibit halls will not be disjointed the way they are currently, and the Omni Hotel will still have a connection to the revamped events space.

"We feel this is the most viable option going forward," said Michael Lockwood, who is part of the design and architecture team leading the project.

Rosa Fleming, who oversees the city's convention and event services department, said the city considered 16 different conceptual designs, including plans shared by Hunt Realty that shifted the convention center closer to the Reunion Tower, a property it owns.

However, the city indicated Thursday it was closing the door to that proposition.

Washburne, whose plans to sell to a data firm risked throwing plans for the \$3.7 billion redevelopment project in a state of flux, had maintained previously he was open to a deal with the city. The developer also said he could move the data firm to another site he owns.

The City Council has been meeting in closed session for weeks to deliberate a solution for Washburne's property at 508 Young St. Last year, Inspire Dallas, the firm tapped to manage the project, said it was exploring a land deal with Washburne, but Washburne said he hadn't heard from the city when he announced plans to sell the property earlier this year.

The developer did not respond to questions Thursday evening.

Among other updates, Fleming said the city had completed reworking the water and utility lines since last year's ground breaking.

Jack Matthews, the developer at the helm of Inspire Dallas, said officials were in the midst of creating the “building blocks” of the final product.

“The architectural design is starting now,” Matthews said, adding that officials were trying to stay within the budget.

Fleming added that the city’s financial adviser said the project could stay within \$2.5 billion to \$3.5 billion, but she cautioned that none of the plans were final until the City Council gave it a seal of approval.

Council members are scheduled to receive a comprehensive briefing May 21.