



# NEWPORT BEACH

## City Council Staff Report

May 14, 2024  
Agenda Item No. 11

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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**TITLE:** Balboa Branch Library / Fire Station No. 1 Concept Review and  
Approval – Project No. 23F12

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Staff requests City Council review of the leading concept designs for the replacement of the Balboa Branch Library / Fire Station No. 1. To date, staff has noticed and conducted two public meetings on the concept design, one with the Board of Library Trustees and another with the Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission. Based on the input received from these meetings and the public at-large, the architect has produced and refined three different floor plans and two architectural styles for review by the City Council. Staff requests City Council review to provide direction and approval of a floor plan and an architectural style. With this, staff and the design team will complete production of final plans, permits and entitlements for the project.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- a) Review, take in public input, and recommend/approve a conceptual design floor plan and architectural style for final design of the Balboa Branch Library / Fire Station No. 1 facility;
- b) Find this project exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15301 (Class 1 – Existing Facilities) and 15303 (Class 3 – New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) of the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3 and CEQA Guidelines, because this project has no potential to have a significant effect on the environment; and
- c) Direct staff to proceed with preparation of final building and site plans, required permits, and solicit public bids for its construction.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The existing Balboa Branch Library / Fire Station No. 1 is located at 100 and 110 Balboa Boulevard. The existing library was originally constructed in 1929 and has undergone several expansions and rehabilitations over the years. The library is currently a series of several rooms that add up to approximately 4,500 square feet; including about 360 square feet dedicated to historical society displays. The fire station was built in 1962 and houses three fire personnel in its approximately 3,400 square feet. The entire lot site is approximately 24,000 square feet.

Both facilities were evaluated as part of the 2021 Facility Condition Assessment and rated as Poor Condition due to environmental and age-related deterioration. The replacement project is currently programmed in the Facilities Finance Plan with a planned construction start in 2025.

Once budget funding was approved for the project, Public Works staff began meeting with other affected City of Newport Beach departments as well as a three Councilmember working group (consisting of Mayor Pro Tem Stapleton, Councilmember Blom and Councilmember Weigand) to better understand the needs and programming for the site and proposed new facilities. The goals developed from these discussions included:

- Review site trees' health for future viability;
- Provide a modern fire facility with accommodations for four staff members and two apparatus bay parking spots;
- Provide a modern, right-sized neighborhood branch library with a well-designed children's room, work and study areas, up-to-date technology and improved sight lines;
- Try to work in a neighborhood recreation component that complements the library (playground);
- Try to find/include additional on- and off-site public parking spaces;
- Include an outdoor programming area;
- Improved access;
- Try to include an area for beach/area maintenance equipment and material/emergency supply storage; and
- Maintain the existing sewer line in easement.

On January 10, 2023, the City Council awarded a professional services agreement to COAR Design Group for the design of the replacement project. Working toward the project goals, a site program was conceived that included a neighborhood branch library sized at just over 3,600 square feet; a fire station at about 5,100 square feet; 1,500 square feet for a new playground area; and an expanded parking area and improved site access. In addition, the plans included 900 square feet for Public Works equipment and material/emergency supply storage.

COAR Design Group worked in partnership with both the Fire Department, as well as the Board of Library Trustees ad hoc group and Library Services staff to develop both the new fire station and library floor plans and refine the library needs, functions, and programming for their respective parts of the new facility. They also worked to refine and ultimately prepare two building themes to be reviewed and evaluated. The building themes will dictate the look and architectural feel of the building.

On January 16, 2024, the design team presented the proposed design concept layouts and themes to the full Board of Library Trustees and the public at a regularly scheduled meeting. The 16 public comments at the meeting were mostly concerned with the disposition of the remaining eucalyptus trees on-site as well as the seasonal nesting birds.

Other comments received included a request for a traffic study to determine if a stop sign was needed at the corner; a request that the library facility be expanded; and requests that the playground be deleted from the project. After the review and discussion, the Board of Library Trustees voted in support of Layout 1 and the “Beach Cottage Style” exterior theme.

On March 5, 2024, updated designs considering the feedback received from the Board of Library Trustees meeting were then presented to the Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission (PBR). The meeting was further noticed to the public via postcards (per City Council Policy related to the tree removal recommendation), on-site postings, social media, and emails to an interested party list. As part of the PBR Commission presentation, staff requested the removal of both the Special Landmark City Blue Gum Eucalyptus tree and Canary Island Date Palm.

The removal of the remaining Landmark Blue Gum Eucalyptus was recommended due to the internal rot caused by an identified fungal infection in the tree. Previously, two other Landmark Eucalyptus trees on this site have been removed due to extensive fungal rot that compromised the integrity of the wood in the trees’ trunks. A sonic tomography study conducted in October 2023 by the City’s tree consultant, Dudek, found the internal decay in the remaining Eucalyptus was 7%. This type of infection is progressive and incurable. It is estimated that it may take up to five years for the decay to reach the one-third safety threshold where tree removals are then recommended for public safety reasons.

Additionally, due to unavoidable construction impacts and disease, staff also recommended removal of the remaining Landmark Canary Island Date Palm. Staff has had to remove two previous Landmark Canary Island Date Palms on this site due to death from an incurable Fusarium disease, common to the species.

The Commission reviewed the facility plans and themes, considered the playground element, reviewed the tree recommendations, and took public comment on the project. The 13 public speakers expressed concerns about the removal of the Eucalyptus tree and the impact it would have on the nesting birds. Several speakers requested that the playground and/or the Public Works storage area be deleted. One speaker asked that no new facilities be constructed and that instead the existing facilities should be renovated. One speaker had comments related to separating the alley entrance from the parking lot entrance.

After review and consideration of the public comments, the PBR Commission voted to approve the removal of both Special trees with the condition that they are not removed until September 2025, and that staff return and present their findings on the condition of the trees after their removal. Their conditions also included that no tree removal is permitted while any nesting birds are present. The Commission also directed staff to continue to refine the concept plans, building elevations, and recreation components to possibly further address the public comments.

Based on the feedback from the previous public meetings, staff has prepared an additional layout for the City Council consideration that removes the Public Works storage bay and slightly increases the amount of available green space.

Presented below is a summary table of the proposed layouts. The layouts and themes are shown in Attachment A.

	<b>OPTION 1</b>	<b>OPTION 1A</b>	<b>OPTION 2</b>	<b>EXISTING FACILITIES</b>
Total Building square footage	9,850 SF	9,170 SF	10,025 SF	7,932 SF
Library square footage	3,762 SF	3,770 SF	3,805 SF	4,140 SF (used as library)
Museum square footage	0 SF	0 SF	0 SF	360 SF
Fire Station square footage	5,203 SF	5,400 SF	5,285 SF	3,432 SF
Public Works Storage	885 SF	0 SF	935 SF	0 SF
Playground square footage	1,500 SF	1,500 SF	1,600 SF	0 SF
Green space square footage	2,830 SF	3,675 SF	3,470 SF	6,550 SF
Trees (today/planned)	16	16	13	11
On-site parking spaces	14	14	13	8
Additional street parking spaces	8	9	8	n/a

Option 1 layout orients the facility along Balboa Boulevard with public parking and the library entrance off Bay Avenue.

Option 2 layout orients the facility along Island Avenue with access to the parking lot from Balboa Boulevard and Bay Avenue.

Option 1A was developed to remove the Public Works storage bay but otherwise follows the layout orientation of Option 1.

During construction, the Fire Department will be temporarily relocated to a parking lot area near the Balboa Pier or other suitable location. The temporary facility is under consideration by the Fire Department and will be brought back to the City Council at a future meeting.

If directed to move forward at this meeting, staff estimates that design and permitting would take approximately one year leading to construction beginning in the last quarter of 2025.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The cost of preparing the plans, specifications, and estimates for the project were included within the current FY 2023/24 Capital Improvement Program Budget and have been encumbered into the existing design team contracts. The latest Facility Finance Plan estimated the all-in cost at \$10,173,000 with construction beginning in 2025. With the new facility design concepts now complete, a rough construction cost estimate has been completed based on recent regional construction values and market conditions. The estimated rough cost for the construction for the new facility is approximately \$16,000,000 for a 2026 build.

A few known items increased the estimated cost, such as the addition of the recreational play and structure, median and street work on Balboa Blvd, a constrained site, a little more building SF, and that the FFP model escalates cost at only 2.5% which is more typical in the long term but has not been the reality over the last few years due to strong inflation and supply constraints. However, the largest upward pressure seems to be from a continuing very strong building market and demand for contractors. The building climate may be different a year from now when this project goes out to bid. This estimate also does not include the cost of the temporary fire facility during the construction.

At the time of the award of the construction contract, a budget amendment will likely be required, the amount depending on the size of the bids for construction. It is anticipated that a budget shortfall could be funded, in part, from the projected General Fund budget surplus for Fiscal Year 2023/24, and from capital reserves.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

Staff recommends the City Council find this project exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15301 (Class 1 – Existing Facilities) and 15303 (Class 3 – New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) of the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3 and CEQA Guidelines, because this project has no potential to have a significant effect on the environment.

**NOTICING:**

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

In addition, postcards were mailed to residents within 1,000 feet of the project, interested parties were contacted via email, and meeting notices were published on the City's various social media channels.

**ATTACHMENT:**

Attachment A – Proposed Layouts and Themes