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Elevations: Tulsa's Central Library

By [Kirby Lee Davis](#)
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TULSA - Over the next two years, the Tulsa City-County Library will get a chance to do something very few organizations can: make a 50-year-old icon cutting-edge once again.

Much like the Oral Roberts University campus, the soaring pillars upholding its overhanging canopy have always lent a modern appeal to downtown Tulsa's Central Library. With its 1965 opening, this creation of architects Charles W. Ward and Joseph Koberling also boasted several functional advances, including one of Tulsa County's first computers and a full cable studio.



A night view of Tulsa's Central Library. (Courtesy rendering)

But while the building still claims a striking profile, the 135,000-square-foot facility cries out for improvements, from its deteriorating exterior rock panels to its narrow interior passages, aging infrastructure and deficient technical capabilities. For those reasons the [library](#) system closed the iconic structure in August to prepare for a two-year renovation, the first in its history.

Chief Executive Gary Shaffer said many of the interior walls will be removed and the floors raised to provide both improved access and modern technology systems.

"It will make the space very flexible," he said. "It allows us to put power where we need it. It allows us to put data cabling more where we need it. And it's set up more for the age of the computer and wherever else the computer may go going forward."

The renovation will bring a so-called chilled beam environmental technologies to Oklahoma, Shaffer said, using a system that heats or cools the air at the point of delivery, instead of at a central source.

"It's not new technology, but it's never been deployed in Oklahoma before," he said.

As proposed by architects with the Minneapolis firm [Meyer, Scherer and Rockcastle](#), along with the Tulsa office of [Crafton Tull](#), the rejuvenated library would gain a four-story parking garage and children's garden.

As with the temporary [Librarium](#), which the library system opened last month at 1110 S. Denver Ave. to maintain downtown services during this project, the Central Library would gain a creation station with sound studios, an expanded education center, a 33-percent hike in computer stations to 120, and automated book checkout and return systems.

The existing auditorium would be enlarged, its octagon-shaped space squared off to allow for more flexibility with table and chair arrangements. A coffee shop also could be incorporated.

Even the library's dramatic exterior will see changes, and not just in the concrete panel replacing the decaying pebble boards.

"The plan is to put eight study cubes out on the balcony, where each of the windows is," he said. "That is basically a study room that someone can check out on their library card."

The \$47.8 million project remains somewhat in flux, since \$10 million of those improvements

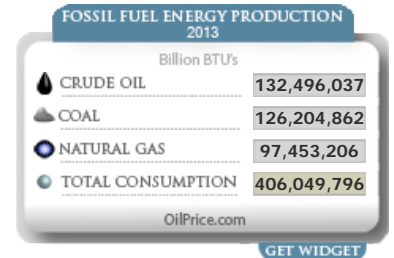
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hinge on how county voters lean in this November's elections. Should the "Improve Our Tulsa" campaign fail, Shaffer said some of these plans may change to meet budget needs, which would delay when contractor [Flintco](#) can truly dive into its work.

But Shaffer still anticipates substantial improvements.

"We think library business will double when this renovation takes place," he said.

The Central Library has reported between 400,000 to 500,000 or more users annually.

As demonstrated with the design of the Librarium, Shaffer said the Central Library renovation will help people gather and collaborate. He sees it not only gaining influence and use as a learning tool, but a business resource and refuge, one where people actually come to do business.

It also will prove a source of recreation and fun, he said, with multiple sources for downloading books, music and other media - in short, capturing all the different uses people have today for their public depositories.

"Libraries are an engine of economic growth," said Shaffer. "Having the library where it is is a boon to downtown Tulsa."



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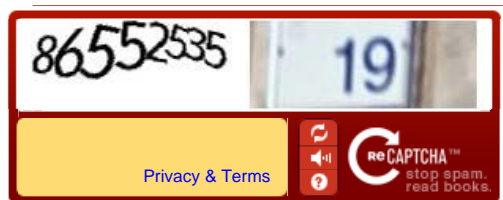
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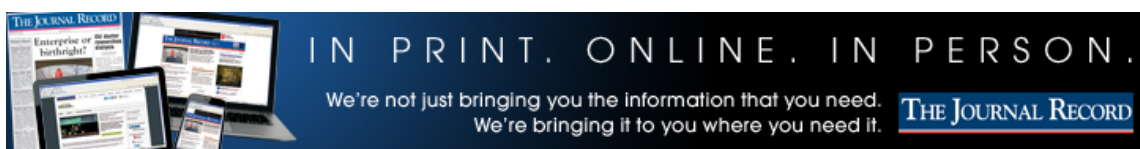


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