

denver & the west

Courthouse design "gratifying"

Preview eases concerns raised after departure of famed architect Steven Holl

By George Merritt
Denver Post Staff Writer
DenverPost.com

Article Last Updated: 11/29/2006 10:11:06 AM MST

Denver officials released a preview Tuesday of what a home-grown Justice Center Courthouse will look like.

The design has been the subject of anticipation and speculation since famed New York architect Steven Holl was removed from the project and local Brian Klipp took over as the lead designer.

But even as city leaders mourned the loss of a "signature" building, Klipp's firm worked furiously to keep the courthouse on time and on budget, Justice Center policy manager James Mejia said.

"It is a design with a high aesthetic," Mejia said, adding, "It is gratifying to see a design with our entire program included - which sounds basic, but it hasn't been done until now."

Local architect and Golden Triangle Neighborhood Association president Dennis Humphries previously worried that the city would end up with "a big rectangular box" without Holl.

But on Tuesday, he said, "I think there are some very exciting moments in the building ... I think overall the building is very dynamic."

Humphries said he still has some concerns. The building "doesn't quite have the spirit" of the Holl design, he said. But he described it as "bold, fresh" and "a step in the right direction."

This fall, the \$127 million courthouse became the most controversial of the three planned buildings that will make up the \$378 million Justice Center campus.

City officials complained that Holl's design was more than \$30 million over budget and did not meet the functions, or program, requested. In early October Klipp announced Holl was off the project, shocking the local architectural community.

Holl has since disputed claims that his design did not meet the program, and he said his plans would have been only about \$3 million over budget.

To ensure the courthouse lives up to the signature status Humphries and other residents had hoped for, Mayor John Hickenlooper last week announced a review panel of local, national and international architects to assist Klipp.

"The process of getting there, and continuing to improve, is one that is being embraced by Klipp," Mejia said. "We are already very happy with (the design). And with the process that is in place, there is a chance that we could get even more."

The Peer Review Committee is scheduled to meet with the Klipp firm Dec. 12.

Staff writer George Merritt can be reached at 303-954-1657 or gmerritt@denverpost.com.