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Historical society unveils plan for move to Civic Center

By Mary Voelz Chandler, Rocky Mountain News
July 12, 2007

The Colorado Historical Society made its first public presentation Wednesday of a proposal to move to Civic Center, a plan that would add a facility southeast of the City and County Building.

City officials, the society's new president, the architect and developer outlined a project that would give the historical society more space while attracting more people to Civic Center.

The society needs a new location because its neighbor, the state judicial center, wants to expand onto the whole block that the two institutions share on Broadway.

"There is support for moving forward with this idea," said Bill Mosher, area director of Trammel Crow Co. and project manager for the judicial and society plans.

He first called funding "very feasible" but later amended that to "viable."

Progress on the plan will be discussed at another public meeting before backers of the proposal approach the governor and legislature this fall about funding.

Because this involves Civic Center, there was a difference of opinion among the 140 stakeholders who attended the session in the Colorado History Museum, on such issues as the loss of green space and preservation.

"I look at this as a collaborative opportunity," Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper said. "State government and city government so often have the same goals, with missed opportunities for these connections."

Talks have begun between the city and state about the move, in terms of the state's use of city land and the infrastructure needed for a new building.

The president of the Civic Center Conservancy, which has contracted with the city to program and support work there, showed some caution.

"We're excited about the idea," Chris Frampton told the group. "We think it has incredible merit. But there are a lot of questions."

The historical society hired architect David Owen Tryba in 2000 to design an expansion of the museum. But when the economy tanked, so did the project.

Tryba is a longtime supporter of a new Civic Center that would complete a plan created in 1917.

"They would share a space that has more capacity and a higher dignity that not only the state can use, but the city as well," Tryba said of the new and old buildings.

From the study

- The new state judicial center would be about 650,000 square feet, costing \$275 million to \$290 million paid for by increased court fees and certificates of participation.
- The new Colorado Historical Society building would be 190,000 square feet to 240,000 square feet, most of it underground, at a cost of \$90 million to \$115 million paid for by certificates of participation.
- A use agreement for city land at Civic Center could save \$10 million to \$20 million for the historical society over the eight other locations studied.

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Putting a new building in the park is not a solution, offered one Denver resident. "We need to focus on the preservation of Civic Center," said Brad Cameron. "You don't save a park by just building on it." *By Mary Voelz Chandler, Rocky Mountain News*

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