



Gerding Edlen and ZGF woo San Diego

Portland developer, architect propose civic complex that combines mixed-use buildings, government office space
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BY SAM BENNETT

Gerding Edlen Development Co. and Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Architects have been shortlisted for a four-block civic center project in San Diego.

Gerding Edlen has proposed a three-phase, public/private partnership approach. The first phase would include a 34-story city hall with 831,000 square feet of office space for city employees, 175,000 square feet of spec office space and 19,000 square feet of retail – all to be finished by 2013.

The second phase, to be completed by 2016, would have a 23-story housing tower with ground-floor retail and a fitness center. It would also have a 24-story office tower, with a hotel or residential component, ground-floor retail and a grocery store. Phase three, completed in 2018, would have a 30-story residential tower with office and retail, underground parking and a fire station.

Also shortlisted is the Houston developer Hines, which has proposed a 19-story office building and a four-story glass encased city hall with a public patio on top.

Anyeley Hallova, Gerding Edlen's development manager on the project, said her team wants to transform the four-block area.

"What we want to create is a 24-hour neighborhood that will be vibrant at all times of the day," she said. "We will have the ability to bring all these [city] employees into one area and create a walkable district that connects to public transit."

The 34-story LEED platinum city hall building would be on the block bounded by First and Second avenues and B and C streets and would be the centerpiece of the complex.

ZGF designed a curved aluminum and glass building – with a top floor public observation deck and education center – that would be flanked by a city hall plaza on the south side along C Street and a village square and renovated civic theatre on the east.

The design is intended to connect people to government and is derived from the concepts of light, air and water, according to Gerding Edlen principal Tom Cody. It will be "symbolic of San Diego weather and culture – warm, casual and relaxed yet sophisticated in nature," he said.

"We want to create engaging and energetic places that encourage people to participate in civic activities and community events," Cody said. "We want to do it in an environmentally friendly way that saves the city money and preserves our natural resources."

The varied phases of the proposal will include sustainable design practices such as solar panels and green roofs.

An energy system that centralizes heating and cooling components as well as the wastewater treatment and reclamation for all the buildings would also be created for the complex. Gerding Edlen is proposing a partnership with NRG Energy Inc., the downtown district chilled water system operator, to connect with the existing plant and build a new on-site facility for the civic center complex as well as private customers.

Gerding Edlen's nearly 300-page proposal to the city includes themes such as "transparent government," "the heart of the city," "a place for the people" and "supporting ourselves."

Braulio Baptista, the lead designer with ZGF, said the city hall will be a "graceful form that reflects the DNA of San Diego and the natural assets of the region." At the top of the building will be wind turbines and in the plaza at the base of the building will be the council chambers and one-stop area for city services. "They really wanted to drive the message of accessibility and transparency," Baptista said.

Cost estimates for the designs have not been released to the public by the two teams. The city will make its choice between Gerding Edlen and Hines by November.

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