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Multnomah County Health Department headquarters: Project leaders release illustration, say building will cost \$46 million

By Kelly House

Multnomah County's new Health Department headquarters will be a bright, boxy structure with energy-efficient features and a \$46 million price tag.

Representatives for the project unveiled the first illustration of the planned building this week during a County Board of Commissioners meeting to approve the project's next stages. They also offered a concrete estimate of the county's budget for the project.

The artist's rendering shows a light gray, heavily windowed structure sandwiched between Bud Clark Commons and Union Station in Old Town/Chinatown.

The building's latest cost estimate is a 19 percent increase from an early estimate of \$38.5 million made when the county forged intergovernmental agreements to obtain the building site from the city of Portland. County spokeswoman Julie Sullivan said that original estimate was based on a preliminary study and was never meant to be final.

Since then, the county has hired an architectural firm, ZGF Architects, and a lead contractor, JE Dunn Construction. Project leaders from the two firms, along with county officials and representatives from Home Forward, the project developer, have homed in on more precise goals for the new building.

The new estimate comes from months of recent "value engineering" to determine how much the county should spend on materials and other factors. It includes adjustments for inflation since 2011, plus a \$4.4 million contingency fund to cover unexpected costs that could arise during construction.

Portland will pay \$26.9 million of the project's cost with urban renewal money. The county will foot the rest of the bill.

This week, county commissioners gave project leaders the go-ahead to begin the yearlong design and permitting phase.

"Providing an efficient county headquarters is at the top of the list," of priorities, county facilities director Michael Bowers said Thursday.

The building will include about 96,000 square feet of office, clinical and pharmacy space for up to 350 employees. It will be LEED gold-certified structure designed to meet the 2030 Architecture Challenge to reduce energy consumption and fossil fuel use.

It will also be designed with a flexible floor plan.

"We don't know what the health department of 80 years from now looks like, so we want to create maximum flexibility with how we construct, furnish and operate the building," interim health director Joanne Fuller told the board.

Construction crews are scheduled to break ground on the building next April, with a goal of opening it by October 2016.

The health department's current headquarters, at the 91-year-old McCoy Building downtown, is rife with structural problems that would cost tens of millions to fix.

"That really is a building that has come to the end of its useful life," Fuller said.