

City Centre Library: not just books

'It's going to be like no library you've ever seen,' Whalley branch manager says

by Marelle Reid

Imagine walking into a large warm room where people are relaxing in arm chairs next to displays of the latest best-sellers while sipping their morning dark roast.

Rain streams down the window panes behind a roaring fireplace. People are chatting or tapping away on their laptops.

Though it looks like a bookstore, this is actually the public library.

No more the hushed reading room, the modern library has evolved to become the heart of the community.

And by this time next year, Surrey residents will be able to enjoy their new City Centre branch – a \$36-million, 77,000-sq.-ft. project – in more ways than one.

The four-storey LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver-certified structure will feature, among other things, a coffee shop on the main floor, a teen lounge and gaming area, a world languages collection, quiet and silent study areas, a children's section, living room reading lounge, outreach services for the visually impaired, and even a meditation room.

Electronic services will be the most up-to-date in the province, with self-serve check-out stations and 80 computers for Internet connection.

In designing the look of the interior space, the team at Bing Thom Architects (BTA) wanted to emphasize the library as a place for community gathering.

A neutral palette of cream and maple will allow the books and people inside to add the colour.

"Building a library with a lot of stacks in it is not necessarily the priority," said BTA principal Michael Heeney. "It's really about space – space for people as opposed to books. Trying to think about the kinds of activities that happen in libraries, we tried to make sure we had spaces that support those kinds of activities."



Evan Seal photo

Surrey Chief Librarian Beth Barlow (left) and Whalley Library Manager Surinder Bhopal with the new City Centre Library taking shape behind them. The 77,000-sq.-ft. space will be a gathering place for bibliophiles and others.

City Centre

At the current Whalley library, which will be replaced by the City Centre library, branch manager Surinder Bhogal says it can be difficult in the much smaller library to find a balance between the community's need for a space to mingle as well as space to study in silence.

Patron Chris Cahill likes using the computers and finding things to read, but he mostly shows up for the social opportunities.

"I probably come here more than I used to," he says, noting the new branch, being designed with social engagement in mind, will be more conducive to meeting up for a chat.

Along with surfing, reading and conversation, there will be a place for all sorts of different activities in the new library.

To start with, the already popular English-as-a-Second-Language classes and Lego club will continue.

There will also be more services, staff, programs, evening hours and books available to check out.

The current collection includes 50,000 items, while the new branch will boast double that amount.

And rather than expanding on the collection even more right away, the library will simply be built with areas that offer room to grow.

Bhogal said it was important to consider the information needs people will have next year, and even 10 years down the road.

In light of this, spaces on the fourth floor to be rented out until the library's collection and services expand to meet future needs.

The City of Surrey has been a strong financial supporter of the new library, committing \$16 million to the project, while the provincial and federal governments have contributed \$10 million each.

"The new City Centre library will be an architectural landmark and a wonderful gathering place for the community," said Mayor Dianne Watts.

The library is part of the Build Surrey infrastructure program – a collection of capital projects that are to be designed and constructed in the city's town centres over the next six years (2010-2016).

City Centre encompasses an area of approximately 581 hectares and is bounded by 112 Avenue to the north, 96 Avenue to the south,

132 Street to the west and 140 Street to the east.

Since 1991, Surrey planners have aimed to develop City Centre into a regional "downtown," and make it the main business, cultural and social hub for the city and the South Fraser region.

The library will be the initial building in the first phase of the City Centre development, which will later include a new city hall, a performing arts centre and plaza that can welcome up to 5,000 people.

With an eye to the future, the construction in the growing cosmopolitan centre is beginning with the iconic library as the focal point of downtown Surrey.

"It's going to be like no library you've ever seen," Bhogal says, looking out her corner office window at the construction site already dwarfing the little Whalley library. "It will just be this huge, beautiful space that everyone can access."

Other projects on the go:

■ Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre (completed) – the centre, at 13458 107A Ave., officially opened on May 15, 2010. It was initially built as a Games Preparation Centre, an official venue to the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Following the Games, the building was re-opened to the public as a 20,000-sq.-ft. recreation centre featuring a

gymnasium (named after Joe Burns), a youth lounge, preschool area and multi-purpose space.

■ Covered youth park (completion 2010) – to be constructed in Tom Binnie Park next door to the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre to provide additional opportunities for outdoor recreational activities for youth.

■ Underground parking facility (2010-2013) – will provide parking for the new library and city hall projects and will have capacity to support additional private sector development in the City Centre area as well.

■ New city hall (2012-2013) – Surrey's new municipal centre is currently being designed and will be approximately 165,000 square feet.

■ Civic plaza (2012-2013) – a large outdoor plaza will be built adjacent to city hall and the library that will serve as a gathering place for large civic celebrations and other outdoor events.

■ Performing arts centre (to be announced) – a regional scale performing arts centre will provide a venue for world-class performances. The centre will include a 1,600-seat flexible theatre and a 250-seat studio theatre.

Going to town: Community capital projects coming in the next six years

