

Hutto could turn abandoned silo into new City Hall

City envisions civic complex that also incorporates cotton gin buildings near downtown.

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Hutto officials have big plans for the empty grain silos visible from U.S. 79 as the highway passes through town: In a few years, the City Council plans to hold its regular meetings inside one of them.

Four of the silos will be used for a cogeneration power plant. They will all be part of the new civic complex the city is planning that will also use an abandoned cotton gin building and a horizontal silo known as the Long Building for city offices and retail space.

The buildings are on 18 acres the city owns near U.S. 79 and Short Street, west of downtown Hutto. The city's current offices are south of U.S. 79 on Front Street.

The first phase of construction is estimated to cost \$7 million, and the second phase is estimated at \$6.4 million, said David Mitchell, Hutto's assistant city manager. He said the city doesn't have the money for the project but hopes to sell bonds and attract developers to raise enough to start the first phase in 2012.

Designs recently drawn up by Antenora Architects of Austin call for the first phase to include the renovation of the 15,000-square-foot Long Building so it can be used temporarily for a City Hall and the development of a park next to it.

Antenora Architects owner Michael Antenora said the proposed park would include a stage constructed from parts of old buildings on the property and a hill created with dirt dug up when a parking lot is created. The first phase would also include two 1,500-square-foot buildings around the park area for local businesses to rent, Antenora said.

The second phase would be a permanent 35,000-square-foot City Hall that would reuse one of the silos for City Council chambers, Antenora said. The cotton gin building, built around 1949, would be moved and placed adjacent to the silo, and its roof trusses and columns would be used for the City Hall, Antenora said.

Four silos would be reused to create a power plant to generate electricity, steam and chilled water for the complex. Antenora said the skyline of the complex is supposed to re-create what Hutto's skyline looked like 50 years ago.

"It's a very artful way of doing it that is not mockery," he said.

The proposed complex was designed to accommodate the growing needs of Hutto, where the population is projected to increase from the current 17,000 to 50,000 by the year 2025, Antenora said.

Antenora's previous work includes the conversion of a World War I Army airbase on South Congress Avenue in Austin into Penn Field.

Mitchell said the idea to use the silos in future construction came from Hutto residents, the city's Historic Preservation Commission and architects.

"The defining features for Hutto have always been the cotton gin and the silos," Mayor David Begier said.

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