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More shelf life for Spirit Square complex?

Plans outlined for combining Spirit Square with library in major project

Charlotte Business Journal - by [Erik Spanberg](#) Senior staff writer

The transformation of the Spirit Square complex being pitched by consultants and Charlotte's library system is massive.

But the potential impact, they say, would bring much more than a revamped library to uptown.

The ambitious plans outlined this week to members of the task force studying the future of Spirit Square preserves the McGlohon Theatre while putting the main library in a new building that includes a cafe, rooftop garden and community gathering spots for lectures and other events.

The project also includes:

- 500,000 square feet of office space in a 15-story tower.
- 40,000 to 60,000 square feet of shops and restaurants.
- 100 to 125 apartments or condominiums.
- 150,000 square feet for the new library.
- A boutique hotel.
- 1,000 to 1,200 parking spaces.

Jenkins-Peer Architects and national library consultant **Providence Associates** pieced together the plan for the library. It will be reviewed May 7 by the full **Spirit Square Task Force**.

"This is such an opportunity for Charlotte and for the county to really create something special," says Cyndee Patterson, co-chair of the task force. "It's very exciting because it also creates taxpayer value."

Last year, library officials began exploring possibilities for renovating the 157,000-square-foot main branch at 310 N. Tryon St. Amid those talks, the county acquired the nearby Spirit Square

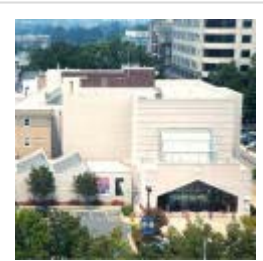


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The redevelopment plan for Spirit Square that's being pitched by The Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County would preserve the McGlohon Theatre but add a number of commercial uses to the site to offset public costs.

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arts complex and enlisted the task force to come up with redevelopment ideas.

No cost estimates on the library's project have been given, and architects stressed the proposal discussed this week represented a preliminary stab at fleshing out possibilities.

Real estate analyst Frank Warren says the market for such a project should be solid by the time construction would begin. The likely scenario calls for a county request for proposals late this year.

Providence Associates, a national library consulting firm, says new main libraries across the country typically incorporate stores, coffee shops, high-tech offerings and an ambience aimed more at attracting noisy crowds than hushed patrons. Architects, consultants and local library executives cited recent visits to main branches in Salt Lake City and Minneapolis as inspiration. New or vastly renovated libraries in downtown locations are in the works in New York, Philadelphia and Austin, Texas.

"I believe this will become the model" for projects combining a main library with broader development, says Laura Isenstein, president at Providence Associates. "It takes this to a new level."

Spirit Square Task Force members, as well as task force consultant **Jones Lang LaSalle**, are eager to delve deeper. Jones Lang LaSalle's assessment of Spirit Square has determined redevelopment of the site without the library "results in the least optimal solution."

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