

Civic Center renovations give Charleston a fresh face

By Elaina Sauber
Staff writer

When visitors come to Charleston for conventions, concerts and other events, they often don't have a chance to experience the city's charisma to the fullest extent, city officials say.

They believe the Civic Center's major facelift and renovation project will show out-of-towners just what the Mountain State has to offer.

The Civic Center, first opened in 1958, has undergone various additions and upgrades over the decades; the ongoing project's \$87 million price tag will help transform not only the center, but also the site surrounding it.

A cornerstone of the facility's redesign is making the architecture cohesive with the state's topography, such as adding cut rock walls.

"You're going to see a lot of elements that look like stone faces in terms of color and materials," Civic Center General Manager John Robertson said.

"We want people who come into Charleston to attend functions to at least develop a feel for who and what we are," he said. He said he hopes to further express that notion through installing public art throughout the facility once work is completed in December 2017.

But that's just the tipping point of the project, divided into four phases. With 146,000 square feet to be added to the center, a chunk of that space — more than 20,000 square feet — will comprise a ballroom that will overlook the Elk River.

"Before, it was the grand hall



TOM HINDMAN | Gazette-Mail photos

Work on renovations to the Charleston Civic Center has continued this winter.

area, which doubled as an exhibit space, meeting room space and ballroom space," Robertson said. "It's required a lot of extra labor and really wasn't what we needed in order to compete on a regional basis for conventions and meetings."

The new ballroom will be separate from the exhibit space and have a 1,400-person capacity. An outdoor pre-function area will allow visitors to socialize with a view of the Elk River.

Many upgrades are being done simultaneously, Robertson said, and require careful planning to ensure the center continues to operate.

"Right now, the existing parlor areas on the main level are being renovated [while] work is happening for the new lobby space on the corner of Clendenin Street and Civic Center Drive," he said.

A few things have already been completed, such as installing ribbon boards, performance lighting and a new sound system in the Coliseum. The two entrances and ballroom will be enclosed in ceiling-to-floor glass.



A artist's rendering shows an enhanced entrance to the Charleston Civic Center.

The additional entrance at the corner of Clendenin and Civic Center Drive will be the primary entry point for spectators headed to Coliseum events, while the existing entrance where the main lobby is currently, will serve as the primary entry for those attending meetings and conventions, Robertson said.

"We do multiple events simultaneously now; it will really be able to separate those audiences," he added.

A covered walkway from the Lee Street parking garage extending to the center will also be added to better accommo-

date visitors.

Despite its steep cost, paid for entirely by citizens and the city, the updated mechanical equipment is expected to produce considerable energy savings, Robertson said.

"Our experts predict our energy costs will be 30 percent less than what they are now — even with additional facilities — because our mechanical equipment is so antiquated," he said, such as the center's lighting and heating and cooling system.

While the project's groundbreaking took place last June, Robertson said the actual construction didn't really take off until mid-October. Because it's a design-build project, some of the design work is still under-

way as construction is completed on other aspects of the renovation.

He hopes to see phase one of the project, which includes the new lobby, mechanical plant and a temporary kitchen, around September. But phase two, which includes new meeting rooms facing Lee Street and storage space, can commence before phase one is completed.

"It will overlap to a certain extent, which allows us to move clockwise around the building and have as little inconvenience as possible for those using it," Robertson said.

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SAM OWENS | Gazette-Mail file photo

Semi-trucks and cars zoom past the West Virginia Division of Highways US 35 Expressway Headquarters where the four-lane road becomes a two-lane road heading into Buffalo, Oct. 15, 2015.

U.S. 35 construction work should finish during fall of 2018

By Laura Haight
Staff writer

If all goes according to plan, U.S. 35 in Putnam and Mason counties will be completely finished in the fall of 2018.

Currently, 14.6 miles remain as a two-lane road after the Buffalo bridge.

A ground breaking ceremony for the drain and grade project was held in October to celebrate the beginning of the end of the project.

The project, which cost around \$230 million, according to Division of Transportation spokesman Brent Walker, will finish the last portion of highway.

Walker said the four lane highway has made travel much safer in the two counties.

"A lot of trucks are on that road," Walker said. "On the two lane version, it's been a fairly narrow, dangerous road. The four lane road is definitely going to make it safer."

County Commissioner Joe Haynes agreed, and said safety comes first when it comes to travel on U.S. 35.

"Practically everyone in the county knows somebody who's been impacted by an accident on that road [old U.S. 35]," Haynes said. "Safety is the most important thing. Everything else — any new businesses — is secondary to the safety."

Haynes said he's excited for the remaining portion of the highway to be completed.

"The new road is going to save so many lives," Haynes said. "That's the real benefit."

Walker doesn't expect current traffic to be affected by the construction since the new highway will be built a couple miles west of the current highway, Walker said. The current two lane highway will remain as W.Va. 817.

The Division of Highways announced in June 2015 that Bizzack Construction LLC, based out of Lexington, Kentucky, was selected as the contractor for the project, with a winning bid of \$174.5 million.

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New townhouses going up in capital

By Daniel Desrochers
Staff writer

A new townhouse subdivision is going up north of Charleston, just off U.S. 119. The subdivision, called Anchor's Cove, already has seven people in contract.

Located a short distance off the Westmoreland Drive exit, Anchor's Cove contains 24 townhouses with two different floor plans. Some of the homes have three bedrooms, others have four.

The three-bedroom houses are \$261,000 and have a walk-in shower and two-car garage. They have two bedrooms on an upper floor, as well as a master bedroom downstairs.

The four-bedroom houses are \$271,000 and have the same amenities as the three-bedroom models, but with more space and an additional bedroom upstairs.

All of the homes are included in a homeowners association, which charges \$1,500 a year in fees and covers lawn care, snow removal, landscaping and mulching.

During the open house, the owner, AB Contracting, saw 82 people.

"It's the biggest, most successful house they've ever had," said Cindy Thomas, a spokeswoman for the company.

Thomas said that most of the people who are looking at the townhouses are older and looking to downsize.

She said that the lack of maintenance appeals to people, as well as the first-floor master bedroom.

"It's easy for people," Thomas said. "They're getting everything taken care of."



CHRIS DORST | Gazette-Mail

A new townhouse subdivision is going up north of Charleston off the Westmoreland Drive exit of U.S. 119. Named Anchor's Cove, it will contain 24 townhouses with two different floor plans.

The three-bedroom floor plan is built over 1,800 square feet and the four-bedroom floor plan is built over 2,300 square feet.

Thomas said that people do have the ability to add on additional amenities and that some buyers have chosen to add on a screened-in porch.

But Thomas said it isn't just a community for older residents. The owner is also looking to attract younger families to Anchor's Cove.

"At the price range, it would be a great starter home for young professionals," Thomas said.

Thomas also added that the development is benefited by its proximity to downtown because it's only a few minutes' drive away.

Thomas compared Anchor's Cove to The Gables in Teays Valley, but said that Anchor's Cove was newer and bigger.

The value of selling a brand-new home isn't lost on Thomas; she said that new homes almost sell themselves.

"It's hard to beat a brand new house," she said.

For more information on the homes, Thomas can be reached at 304-552-7237 or at cindy@abcontractingwv.com.

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