

# East Palo Alto gives YMCA OK for new facility

## New building will add services for adults and seniors

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EAST PALO ALTO — After 12 years of providing community services in cramped and temporary conditions, the YMCA got a nod of approval Tuesday from the City Council to build a new facility, providing impetus for an endowment program guaranteed to allow all residents to join.

"I think this adequately reflects the (project's intention)," said Councilwoman Sharifa Wilson, as the latest designs were revealed at the City Council meeting Tuesday evening. "I'm really encouraged with the endowment."

The YMCA already provides youth and teen services from the city-owned Bell Street Park along University Avenue, but the series of modular buildings it operates from has prevented expansion and has felt like anything but home.

"We don't even call it a facility," said Laura Toller Gardner, spokeswoman for the YMCA.

The signing of a lease two years ago gave the YMCA all that it needed to design a permanent facility that it will own and operate for the next 55 years. When the lease expires, ownership of the facility will return to the city.

The YMCA has already raised \$6.3 million in donations and grants to go toward the \$9 million cost of the 42,000-square-foot facility. The expansion will allow the YMCA to expand its services to include adults and

seniors.

"The idea there is that it will be a family YMCA," Toller Gardner said.

Practically everything at the current location will be rebuilt, with the exception of the pool and the adjacent senior center.

The current out-of-date gymnasium will be torn down and replaced with a fitness center three times its current size, filled with new weight equipment and locker rooms.

Child-care services will be added, to the relief of parents sweating away in the new aerobics room, and a new teen center should give youth one more reason to stay off the streets.

A multi-purpose room will be available for use by the community for functions and meetings, and a new stage outside will provide a setting for summer concerts and performances, officials said.

The senior center, located on the same property, will remain untouched for now, as the city determines how it will address its senior services. However, the YMCA design allows for the center's expansion, should it be approved at a later date.

YMCA representatives are especially proud of the \$6 million endowment program, which will guarantee that all residents have access to the new facility.

"The endowment is not something organizations necessarily do," Toller Gardner said. "But we feel very committed that nobody will be turned away."

All that is needed now is approval from the Planning Commission to move the project forward. Construction could start as early as spring 2003, with doors opening in 2004.