

hosted in an amphitheater on the center's plaza. In the City Council's chamber, the dais was recessed and the seating arranged above it.

"I thought everybody should look down on the council," Gibbs explained.

Some of the virtuous goals of the designers didn't survive to the facility's dedication on the Fourth of July in 1976, the nation's bicentennial. Seating for the amphitheater was axed during construction — Gibbs said officials balked at allowing meetings in the space — and a crescent-shaped patch of grass in the plaza east of City Hall commemorates the spot.

Other features had a slower demise. The Main Library's park was closed periodically after it opened in 1977, mostly because of lack of use, and later permanently shuttered because of water that leaked into the building below.

Today, Long Beach is examining an approximately 40-year public-private partnership as a means to build a new Civic Center that could cost more than \$200 million. More specifically, officials are looking to replace City Hall, which a series of seismic studies since 2005 have deemed unsafe in the event of an earthquake similar to the 1994 Northridge temblor.

A process started by the City Council in October will release a request for proposals to three selected developers at the end of this month. On July 1, elected officials are scheduled to decide on a preferred firm to develop a project for approval in early 2015. The development process would include input from the community.



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Critics, and Gibbs is among them, consider the timeline too fast — and an unnecessary outlay of tax dollars when a retrofit of a facility that is not yet 40 years old would suffice.

City officials counter that the \$12.6 million Long Beach spends annually on operations and debt service for the Civic Center — money that can't be applied to a retrofit — can be turned around to pay for a new nexus of municipal government that will attract more visitors to downtown and engage more citizens in their government.

And perhaps most importantly, because the engineering studies have demonstrated a danger, officials claim the cost of doing nothing and facing possible lawsuits if employees are injured or killed in an earthquake could be disastrous for the city.

It's an issue that has unsurprisingly found its way into this year's campaign for mayor. Mayor Bob Foster, who decided not to run for a third term, has supported the project, but his office didn't respond to an interview request for this article.

During a forum held last month at the Houghton Park Community Center in North Long Beach, mayoral candidates including Councilwoman Gerrie Schipske, Long Beach City College Trustee Doug Otto and Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, each stated they are against building a new Civic Center.

Schipske, the only dissenting vote when the council voted to create the proposals request last year, told the Press-Telegram on Wednesday she intend to introduce an item at Tuesday's council meeting delaying the project until after new council members take office on July 15.

"This is one of the most major projects that the city will undertake and it was railroaded through," Schipske said.

The councilwoman has been skeptical of results of the studies conducted in the wake of Hurricane Katrina that found seismic deficiencies at City Hall, including excessive load created by the concrete wing panels, overstressed columns and vertical trusses and weak beams. The reports found no fault with the construction of the buildings.

A peer review of the studies released in October found additional problems, including excessive movement between the fourth and seventh floors of City Hall that could lead to structural collapse in an earthquake.

"These buildings are 37 years old," Schipske said. "There is no city in California that is tearing down a Civic Center because of an earthquake."

She also criticized the public-private partnership that would be used to construct the facility as a giveaway of public land to a private developer.

The "P3" procurement process was used to build the recently completed Gov. George Deukmejian Courthouse on Magnolia Avenue. In the case of a new Civic Center, which may include a Port of Long Beach headquarters, a developer would assume construction responsibilities and maintain the finished buildings while the city would pay rent for 40 years. At the end of the term, control of public buildings and land would revert back to the city.

Unused land within the 16-acre Civic Center megablock may be given over to the developer for residential or retail projects. What would happen