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Arlington Mill Community Center Planning Moves Forward

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It's halfway home for the design of the new Arlington Mill Community Center, with the basic design of the buildings complete and the focus soon turning to the public plaza.

County officials on Feb. 21 unveiled updated design plans for the new community center, to be located on Columbia Pike at South Dinwiddie Street.

"It's distinctive on purpose - we want it to be a standout," said Jamie Martin of Public Private Alliances LLC, which is partnering with the county government on the project.

Martin called the multi-building design - which still is likely to be tweaked - "very civic, very identifiable." It features a heavy dose of glass and metal and a straight but angled roofline on the community center itself.

When complete, the new Arlington Mill facility will include a large community center, high school-sized gymnasium, slightly more than 200 residential units, retail space and underground parking. It will replace the current community center, which in a previous life was a supermarket.

Years of planning have paid off, said Linda LeDuc, chairman of the Arlington Mill Steering Committee.

"I think we've come up with a much better product," she said. "Our goal is to try to get this project going by this fall."

County officials have long seen the Arlington Mill site as a landmark structure for the western end of Columbia Pike in Arlington. Unlike the current community center, which sits back from the roadway behind a parking lot, the new design will push buildings right up to the Pike.

County Board members on Jan. 29 approved the concept plan for the site, and approved a proposal to apply for state funds to help pay for affordable housing as part of the project. As currently envisioned, about 60 of the apartments will be reserved for low- and moderate-income residents, who will pay rents about half the estimated \$1,500 to \$3,000 per month the other units will rent for.

Next up is a series of community meetings to discuss the design of the large plaza, which is seen by supporters of the project as key to the success of the space.

The plaza "will provide an opportunity for us to hold larger, smaller and different-sized events," said Dinesh Tiwari, director of the county's Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources.

"We want to make sure that the plaza works for the county every day," Tiwari said.

Also up for future discussion: signage placement and the possible expansion of retail space on the site.

"It's a work in progress," Martin said. "We've got some work to do."

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