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Final design of justice center revealed

By Mary Voelz Chandler, Rocky Mountain News
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City officials today unveiled the final design of Denver's new courthouse, a building with a variety of different types of glass in its folded-plate eastern facade and a slanted vertical glass "beacon" on the side along Fox Street.

Other changes include shrinking from two stories to one the jury assembly room that juts out from the front of the building, and using bays popped out about four feet to add movement to the western facade.

"The site now complements the architecture and vice versa," said James Mejia, policy manager for the Denver Justice Center project, which includes a new courthouse, jail and parking structure.

"We're looking at a stone and glass building," said Mejia. "I hope the voters of Denver will agree that what we have is a permanent and dignified building."

The courthouse is predominantly a light Alabama limestone, accented by a dark gray granite around the building's base and on the entry canopy. The entry sits on the plaza that separates and links the courthouse and jail. At one point, the western wall was partially covered by a perforated metal screen, but the city wanted stone to be the main material.

The final design of the jail, meanwhile, has remained much the same, a 400-foot-long neo-traditional structure of buff variegated Indiana limestone, with windows that are predominantly transparent.

The primary architects are klipp design for the courthouse, and Hartman-Cox Architects with OZ Architecture for the jail, with landscape architects Studio InSite.

Denver voters approved the \$378 justice center bond issue in May 2005. Construction costs have increased dramatically since that time, with the price tag now about \$265.6 million on what had been a \$214 million complex.

Changes also include more trees on the plaza: surrounding that oval space, lining a narrow Elati Street intended as a drop-off point, and circling the entire complex between West 14th and West Colfax avenues and Delaware and Fox streets. That central space also will be the site of the \$1.2 million work of art — now dubbed a light chamber — being created by New York-based artist Dennis Oppenheim.

The post office and parking garage to the south of the jail is near an Oct. 1 completion date. Officials project a December 2009 completion for the jail, and a May 2010 finish for the courthouse.

Chandlerm@RockyMountainNews.com or 303-954-2677.

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Architecture

A model of the final design of Denver's new courthouse, top, and an artist's rendering of the jail, above.