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Plans for new alumni center unveiled

by Cheryl Roland
March 26, 2014 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO—New building wings refined to reflect the existing look and feel of East Hall were among the features unveiled March 25 when architects from TowerPinkster unveiled the final design for the new Western Michigan University Alumni Center.

The renovation design shown in the third and final public session has been done with the aim of achieving LEED Platinum certification. Construction will make use of salvaged materials, use locally sourced new materials and incorporate geothermal heating.

Construction is due to begin in May with an anticipated completion date of June 2015.

The two small wings shown in earlier public presentations have been re-envisioned to be clad in brick similar to that on the original structure—possibly even using salvaged brick from the south wing of East Hall. Horizontal architectural lines also will tie the new wings in to the details of the original building.

“The additions will be carried out in a way that feels more balanced and in keeping with the original,” says TowerPinkster’s Jason Novotney, who outlined the changes and final design.

North Hall portico to be preserved

External site plans call for preserving the center part of the North Hall portico to become a landscape focal point. Site work on the east side of East Hall overlooking the city will extend the usable space near the portico with a retaining wall and outdoor platform. The hillside below will be cleared of shrubs and trees that have grown on it over the years.

During the presentation, interior details were showcased through renderings of a main floor library that features the fireplace salvaged from North Hall, a ballroom with a seating capacity of 180, historically correct light fixtures and a lobby and public area that reinforce the building’s current axes.

The building’s interior spaces will be heavily devoted to WMU’s history. Alumni and community members are invited to help by sharing their personal stories about East Hall and WMU.

“If I think of East Hall as a sacred place, and I do, the best way to capture that spirit is through storytelling,” says Jim Thomas, WMU vice president for development and alumni affairs whose units will be housed in the new center. “We need to get the very best stories to rotate through the building in years to come.”

For more information, or to share stories about campus life or East Hall, visit mywmu.com/alumnicenter. The page includes a way to share stories, make a gift to the Alumni Center, post comments about the center and view the architects’ March 25 presentation.