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By a vote of 4-0, the East Baton Rouge Library Board agreed Thursday to build a new main library at Independence Park instead of renovating and expanding the existing one.

Building a new 95,000-square-foot main library is projected to cost \$30.9 million, roughly \$2.5 million more than renovating the 63,036-square-foot library and adding an extra 31,972 square feet to the first floor.

The cost of renovating the building, however, could easily increase if problems are discovered during construction, Dallas-based architect Denelle Wrightson noted.

Another drawback to renovating and expanding the library is that having an 80,000-square-foot main floor might be confusing to library patrons, Wrightson said.

Plans are for the new library to be built in back of the current library, with two floors of approximately 40,000 square feet each plus a third floor with 15,000 square feet to house the library system administration, said Wrightson, who was hired to help plan the new library, but not to actually design it.

Library Director Lydia Acosta said one of the biggest advantages of building a new library is that the main library could remain open while the new one is constructed. Acosta noted that if the main library is renovated and expanded, it would have to remain closed for at least a year.

Board members Georgia Brown, Dorothy Stepteau, Stephen Moret and Dan Reed voted in favor of the new library. The fifth board member, Katherine Auer, was out of state on family business.

Officials from the East Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission made it clear they prefer the construction of a new, three-story library because it will fit in better with their master plan for the redevelopment of Independence Park.

Among other things, BREC is looking at developing gardens around the new main library.

BREC's assistant planning director, Reed Richard, told the Library Board that his agency wants to get the library away from Goodwood Boulevard. The Library Board has already

Board OKs building new library

agreed to relocate the main entrance to the library to the north side of the park, off Independence Boulevard.

Richard said BREC officials are concerned that some motorists might use the new road to cut through between Goodwood and Independence boulevards as a shortcut.

“I could see the temptation of cutting through if there was an entrance on Goodwood,” Brown said.

“I know it will cost more (to build a new library), but I think we’ll get more bang for our buck,” she added.

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