

# 'Underdog' wins big Hillsboro deal

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The underdog came out a winner on the Hillsboro City Hall project, securing a major contract to develop six acres in downtown Hillsboro, including a new city hall and library.

The team of Specht Development, LRS Architects, Baugh Construction and financier Bank of America proposed a \$35.4 million development and beat the two other finalist teams headed by Gerd-ing/Edlen Development Co. and Tram-mell Crow Co.

"After the stage-one submittal in October, we just barely made the cut," said Steve Lee, managing principal at

LRS Architects of Portland. "We came in third by the points system."

But Greg Specht, president of Specht Development, said he had no intention of losing. His plan, he told *The Business Journal* before the stage-two proposal was submitted, was to go above and beyond the city hall committee's ex-pectations by providing an incredibly detailed proposal.

"Greg Specht was totally involved in all the meetings, and totally committed to winning the competition," Lee said. "he led by example."

The Specht team's 90-minute presen-tation included a video that translated two -dimensional plans into a three-



dimensional virtual tour of the project, featuring former television news anchor Shirley Hancock as the tour guide and pre-senter.

**Specht** "Our overall concept held throughout," Lee said. "We basically had a plaza that was defined by the existing 1890 building, the library and [ground floor] retail on the corner of First and Main, and the city hall in the middle of the block. That held true all the way to the end."

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Their proposal's housing component, a plan for development partner GSL Properties Inc. to build 120 housing units, also remained consistent, reduced only slightly from the 140 units proposed in stage one.

"We really understood the city's pro-gram and what they needed to accomplish looking into the future," said Steve Mileham, a principal at LRS and lead designer of the project. "We were looking forward to 20 to 50 years from now, especially with the public spaces."

The center of the six-acre project area is the block between First and Second avenues, and between East Main and Southeast Washington streets. A large amphitheater was designed to accom-modate as many as 3,000 people and overflow into the street, and a smaller plaza was designed near the housing component.

Gerd-ing/Edlen Development Co.'s proposal, designed by the Portland

architecture firm Fletcher Farr Ayotte, offered a different development strategy. It proposed only 35 affordable housing units in the first phase, with the potential to develop 75 to 100 units more of market rate housing at a later date.

Kip Richardson, spokesman for Fletcher Farr, said the market studies indicated that there was immediate demand only for affordable housing, but that market-rate housing would likely be in demand after the retail component was built.

Fletcher Farr and the landscape ar-chitecture firm Walker Macy planned the public plaza to include a "winter garden," a glassed-in pavilion that could be opened in the summer. "The plaza was envisioned as the public amenity for the civic center," Richardson said. "It was designed so it would be usable year-round, because much of the year, public plazas are not very friendly environments."

The Gerd-ing/Edlen plan placed

second in the final selection. Mark Edlen, a principal at Gerd-ing/Edlen, said although his company's proposal was not selected, he wouldn't do anything differently.

"The way these things work, you give them your best solution and hope they agree" with your vision, Edlen said.

Although the Specht team was selected as the winner in the design and proposal competition, the deal has not yet been finalized.

Hillsboro's voters could throw plans for the civic center a curve if they vote down a bond measure on May 21 that includes funds to build the library. Hillsboro leaders will also negotiate a development contract with Specht, but if an agreement is not reached, they may opt to contract Gerd-ing/Edlen for the job.

Edlen said he's not counting on it. "I can't imagine that they wouldn't be successful in negotiating the contract with Greg."