Ground Broken For Civic Center Construction

Construction of the new $44 million Lafayette Civic Center, began this week, signaled by a traditional groundbreaking ceremony Wednesday.

The customary rite was anticlimactic since there was a spontaneous groundbreaking at the end of last year.

State, city and USL officials gathered at the civic center site, on USL property next to Cajun Field, in December when Treen announced the city could count on the state to provide some additional dollars needed to get construction started. A shovel was produced and suddenly dignitaries were turning the first shovelful of earth.

But, yesterday's ceremony was more organized and dignified.

'Glyn,' Abel, director of the city's Department of Recreation, Education and Culture, says a contract calls for construction of the Civic Center to be completed in 3½ years, but the contractor, Blount Bros. of Montgomery, Ala. is hopeful the work can be accomplished in less time.

'We're moving forward,' Abel commented.

The project has come a long way since it was proposed about three or four years ago.

From the start, the project was a joint effort among USL, the city of Lafayette and USL. The three will share the cost of construction and the facility will be managed and operated by the City of Lafayette, with USL one of its primary users.

When first suggested, it was to cost $24 million. The original financial agreement called for the state supplying $18 million and the city kicking in a remaining $6 million.

The city's funds became available when citizens voted to reallocate $8 million that had originally been appropriated to renovate the existing Municipal Auditorium on South College Road.

Of that, $8 million, $6 million was to be used for the construction of the 12,000-seat assembly center, while $2 million was set aside for street improvements, such as widening Congress Street to six lanes from Bertrand Drive to Coulee Mine and building a three-lane street from Johnston Street at Blackham Coliseum to Congress Street at the site of the center.

USL donated the land on which the facility is to be built, next to Cajun Field.

By April 1980, there were rumblings that the Civic Center was going to cost more than original estimates. 'It was then predicted it would cost $36 million to $37 million.'

In May 1980, Gov. Dave Treen agreed to amend the Capital Outlay budget to include a $30 million maximum state appropriation for the Civic Center if the city would provide a $10 million match.

Part of that $40 million total was used for engineering and other miscellaneous pre-construction costs, leaving about $36 for the actual construction contract.

But bids on the project came in much higher than expected. The low bid, which was offered by Blount Brothers, came in at $44.8 million. That included a base bid and bid alternates which provide for seating and a kitchen.

Treen was then asked to encourage the state legislature to come up with the extra funds needed.

After several weeks of review and deliberation, he announced in December that he would urge a legislative budget committee to approve the additional appropriation.

The committee approved the extra expenditure, with the city chipping in one fourth of that $9.2 million cost — $2.07 million. The state will use funds which are available from the state's Capital Construction Interest Account, while the city will probably tap its share of the Mineral Trust Fund which it will receive this year — $1.3 million. The remainder of its contribution will probably either come from the city's portion of the Enhanced Mineral Trust Fund or possibly from unencumbered funds which the city may have at the end of its 1981-82 fiscal year.

Civic Center Has Many Use

Convention .......... 14,000 seats
Exhibit Space .......... 40,000 sq. feet
Basketball .......... 12,000 seats
Full Service Banquet .......... 5,000 seats
Total Meeting Room Space .......... 47,000 sq. ft.
Theatrical Seating .......... 6,040 seats

Permanent Arena .......... 8,703 seats
Festival Seating .......... 11,335 seats
Exhibit Booths .......... 192 booths
Building Parking .......... 1,000 slots
Parking Across Street .......... 3,000 slots