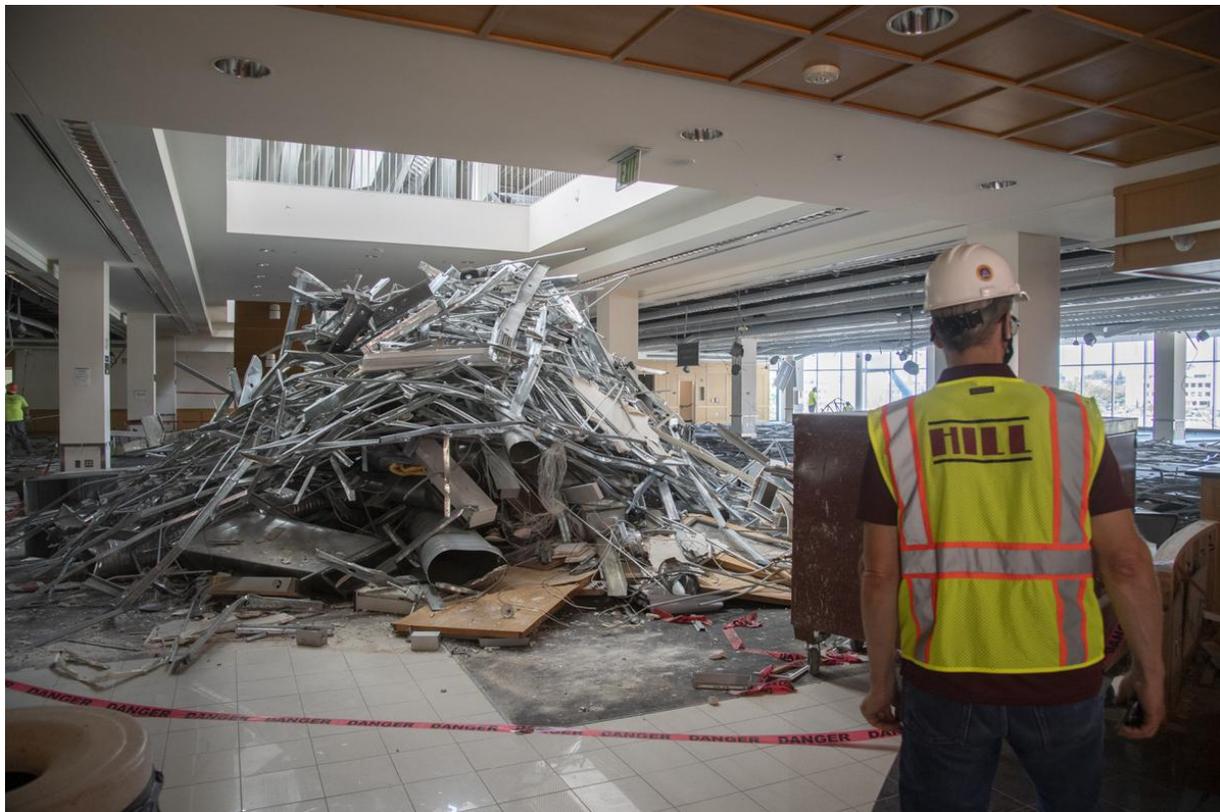




NEWS > SPOKANE

Despite pandemic, downtown library renovation on track

Wed., Aug. 12, 2020



The second floor of the Spokane Public Library, shown Tuesday is being gutted to prepare for the renovation that will add new amenities to the downtown library. Above, third-floor windows of the library look north across the (Jesse Tinsley/The Spokesman-Review)

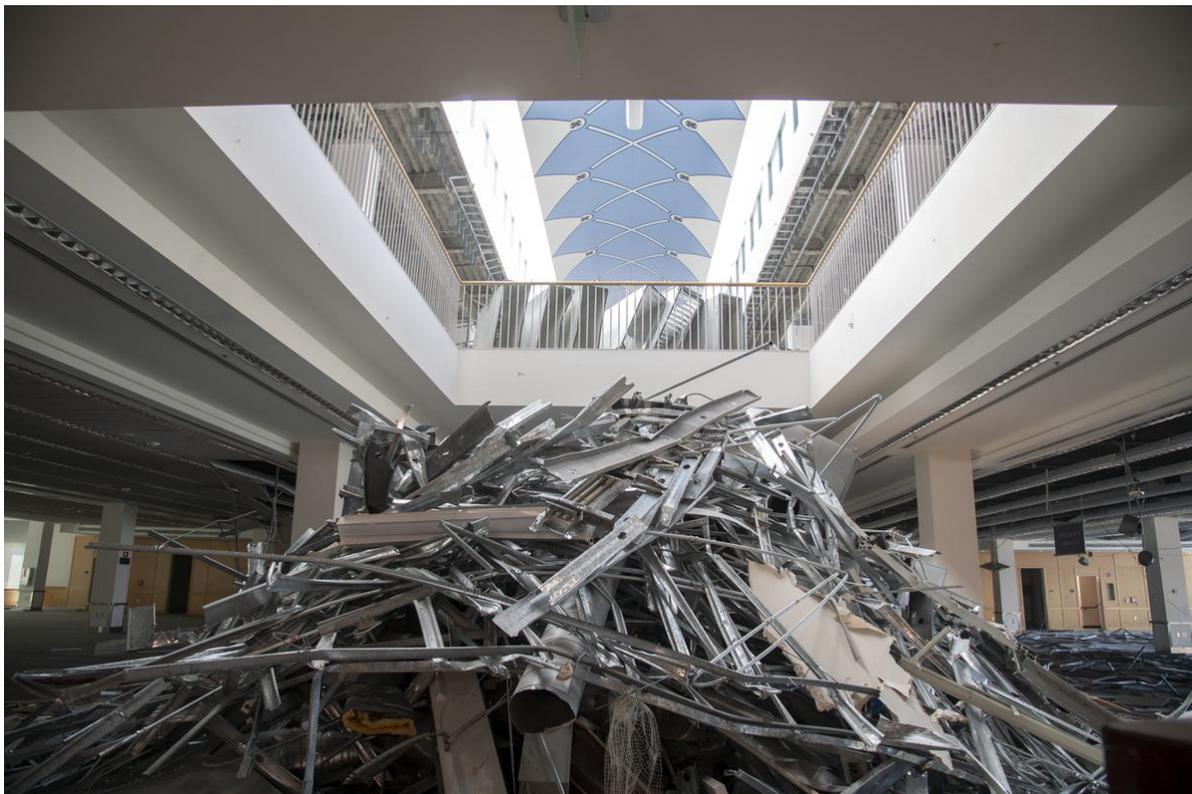
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The coronavirus brought much of public life to a swift halt this spring, but the renovation of the downtown Spokane Public Library has continued apace.

Despite disruptions to the construction industry caused by the pandemic and the building's [temporary use as an emergency shelter for the homeless](#), the project is still on schedule for completion in spring 2022.

The renovation downtown is just one of several planned throughout the network of branches operated by the Spokane Public Library.

Major work already underway at other locations – Shadle, Liberty Park, Hillyard at Shaw Middle School and East Central at The Hive – remains on track despite the coronavirus, also. All are expected to be completed next summer .



The second floor of the Spokane Public Library is being stripped of lighting, false ceilings and other infrastructure to prepare for the renovation that will add new amenities to the downtown library. Shown Tuesday, August 11, 2020. (Jesse Tinsley/The Spokesman-Review)

All of the Spokane Public Library's branches were closed due to the pandemic earlier this year, and it remains uncertain when they will reopen. But the downtown branch closed for renovations just weeks before the virus took hold of Washington state and the country. Its temporary replacement, tucked into

the STA Plaza in a former pizza restaurant, has also been closed during the pandemic.

“We were lucky to still be in a phase of planning before construction began when the building was used for emergency shelter,” Amanda Donovan, a spokeswoman for the library, wrote in an email to The Spokesman-Review. “Right now, crews are in the demo phase and removing the interior structures of the building.”

The building’s use as a shelter “allowed us to wait and see how the COVID impacts were going to be,” said Matt Walker, program manager for Hill International, the construction manager for the project.

The March shutdown was disruptive for some ongoing construction projects, but new projects have been largely unaffected, Walker said.

Likewise, the city of Spokane hasn’t fallen far behind on its busy summer construction season.

“We’ve actually been fortunate to accelerate some of the street work due to unexpected availability of resources,” said city spokesman Brian Coddington. “That has allowed us to take advantage of lower traffic volumes to ease the disruption to motorists.”

There is a full-time health checker at the library site who checks everyone entering the building for symptoms. During the interior demolition, which began in July, workers have been able to maintain 6 feet of social distancing, Walker said.

“They’ve also made part of their routine to wear masks with the rest of their (personal protective equipment), that’s just become second nature,” Walker said.

Library materials at the downtown branch were dispersed to remaining branches after its closure. The more delicate, historically significant items of the Northwest Room were taken to Gonzaga University for safekeeping under a special agreement inked earlier this year.

Though the downtown building is far from ancient – it opened less than 30 years ago – officials pitched the project as a transformation that would reflect the new, “21st century” ways in which people use public libraries.

In its previous iteration, the building's first floor was primarily dedicated to staff offices. When the library reopens, the first floor will be remade and open to the public with retail space, a cafe, computers and meeting space. The cafe will be operated by New Leaf Bakery, a project of the Transitions nonprofit that hires women who face barriers to employment at traditional workplaces.

Access to the library's collection of books and other materials will begin on the second floor, which will include the young adult and teen section and the Children's Discovery space.

A reimagined Northwest Room – with its collection pared back to more narrowly focus on local history – will be relocated to the third floor. A recording studio and video editing room will also be on the third floor and open to the public.

The project, which includes renovation or construction of seven branches, was funded by a \$77 million property tax bond passed by voters in 2018.

Under Gov. Jay Inslee's reopening plan, libraries are not allowed to reopen until Phase 3. Spokane County is currently in Phase 2 and, like every other county in the state, is indefinitely paused from progressing.

The Spokane Public Library is offering curbside pickup at multiple locations, though the downtown branch is not one of them. The Spokane County Library District also offers curbside pickup.