



Cooling towers to take heat off

By Mary Lynne Vellinga - mlvellinga@sacbee.com

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A rendering of the environmentally friendly heating and cooling plant under construction at 625 Q St., on the site of a 40-year-old facility. Nachi & Lewis Architects

The state of California may have killed plans for a high-rise office project this week, but it is moving forward with another, albeit more humble, downtown building.

Construction began this week on an \$181 million "green" replacement for the state's nearly 40-year-old heating and cooling plant at 625 Q St.

The new central plant will include a 10-story-tall storage tank to hold 4.25 million gallons of chilled water, allowing the plant to cool its water during off-peak hours.

Two four-story cooling towers will eliminate the need to discharge heated water into the Sacramento River, a practice that has put the state at odds with its own water quality regulators.

Skanska USA will build a new environmentally friendly plant on the site of the old one. The first element of the old plant to be demolished will be the "gasifier," a sort of giant burner designed to draw off gases from green waste. The gasifier, conceived by the environmentally conscious administration of Gov. Jerry Brown, was intended to burn lawn waste from the city of Sacramento and use the energy for state buildings.

The grass, leaves and other trimmings turned out to be too wet to burn, however, and the gasifier building was never really used, except for aerobics classes.

Built in 1969, the rest of the existing plant is a boxlike, nondescript structure that produces steam and chilled water to heat and cool the state Capitol and 22 other state-owned building. The buildings are connected to the plant by underground pipes, which will remain in place.

The new structure will be more eye-catching – with the 140-foot-tall water tower being the most prominent feature.

Eric Lamoureux, a spokesman for the state Department of General Services, said his department responded to neighborhood concerns that the tower would be ugly.

"We really want something that's going to be a signature for that community; an art piece," Lamoureux said.

He said the design is still being fine-tuned. Preliminary renderings show a cylindrical tower, surrounded by mesh that creates a flared silhouette reminiscent of the cooling tower for a nuclear power plant. Lamoureux said the tower would be covered in two shades of blue metal tile, ranging from deep-blue at the bottom to light-blue at the top.

The more technologically advanced new plant will use just a tenth of the water needed by the existing plant, according to General Services. Solar panels will produce energy to power the office space inside.

Several years ago, the heating and cooling project was part of a larger state building plan for the area southwest of the Capitol. In addition to the heating and cooling facility, the state was to build a high-rise headquarters for the state Resources Agency.

The central plant portion, considered more critical, continued as a separate project last year after the projected price tag for the office complex skyrocketed to more than \$500 million.

On Monday, the state announced it was scrapping plans to build the new Resources Agency headquarters because of the state's budget situation and rising construction costs.

In connection with the larger plan, the state held community meetings and pledged to cooperate with the city on design issues. But in the past year, the central plant has proceeded on its own with little public input.

City officials said they have no idea what the new plant will look like. "I haven't seen a thing on it," said Robert Chase, the city's chief building official.

The state addressed one major city concern by moving the cooling towers from a proposed site on the river and putting them with the rest of the plant on Q Street.

About the writer:

- Call The Bee's Mary Lynne Vellinga, (916) 321-1094.