HDR excited to build HQ in Aksarben Village, 'a vibrant area we had a hand in revitalizing'

By Cindy Gonzalez / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Friday, July 1, 2016 12:00 am

HDR’s future 10-story corporate headquarters, announced Thursday, will anchor the last sizable tract of undeveloped land at central Omaha’s Aksarben Village.

The architectural and engineering firm’s 245,000-square-foot office building will house retailers on its first floor. To the east, a new parking structure will contain ground-level shops and restaurants.

An alleyway between the two structures, at 67th and Frances Streets, is envisioned as a hotbed of retail and entertainment.

The pieces create a proposed HDR campus for up to 1,150 employees that will replace the digs that the century-old firm has outgrown near 84th Street and West Dodge Road.

HDR Chairman and Chief Executive George Little said Aksarben Village, while not the downtown site that company leaders had originally selected, has alluring attributes: land to expand and nearby bike trails, hotels and entertainment venues.

“We’re excited to be in a vibrant area that we had a hand in revitalizing, and happy to be part of the area’s strong educational presence including engineering, architecture and construction management programs at the University of Nebraska and Peter Kiewit Institute,” Little said in a prepared statement.

Construction is slated to begin later this year and be completed in early 2019.

Thursday’s announcement follows HDR’s rejection in April of an 11th and Dodge Streets spot that serves as surface parking. That site was discarded after HDR could not come to terms with the majority owner, Omaha Performing Arts.

HDR waited to announce the replacement site until after a lease was signed and the design was finished.

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert said that while she had hoped HDR would build in the downtown business district, she supported the company’s decision and its commitment to Omaha.

Stothert had promoted a few sites downtown, including a parking lot in north downtown next to the CenturyLink Center and TD Ameritrade Park, known as Lot B. She called HDR one of the city’s most recognized businesses. “The city will work with HDR as the development process moves forward,” she said in a statement.

City Councilman Chris Jerram, whose district includes Aksarben Village and downtown, expects the city to...
clear any remaining hurdles, including a tax-increment financing application. “I don’t expect there will be any hiccups along the way,” he said.

When HDR first announced a downtown site, Jerram said, he was excited. “That didn’t work out, we turned a page and today we celebrate they are coming inside the urban core.”

HDR will lease the headquarters from owner Noddle Bradford Holdings. Noddle Cos. is the project developer.

Jay Noddle of Noddle Cos. said the price tag for the office building, parking garage and retail alleyway is about $110 million. He called HDR a “perfect fit” that will further energize the village. “They are such a hugely important employer and to have them stay here and grow here and be in the middle of Omaha is a big, big win for our community.”

Noddle said HDR contacted him after it pulled out of the downtown site. Noddle already had been working on the design for a building at the Aksarben Village spot and had been talking with potential tenants.

Discussions quickly shifted to HDR, Noddle said. “We focused on trying to determine how easily HDR might fit. Could we accommodate their growth in the future? Could we deliver their schedule?”

“It all came together very, very quickly.”

The 10-story HDR building is about as high as Noddle wanted to build in that part of the city. The structure will contain 18,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space.

There will be another 20,000 square feet of shops and restaurants lining the west side of the parking garage. Noddle envisions the alleyway between the HDR building and the parking garage being filled with activity. “It’s truly a walkway, an alleyway with retail shops on both sides — kind of a hangout place.”

That corridor, he said, will lend itself to a more “eclectic” shops and boutiques and will have food truck accessibility. “The alleyway will be a really special place within the village,” he said.

HDR’s Little described the firm’s future campus as ideal for the firm’s workforce based in Omaha and outside the city. He cited convenient Interstate access from the airport for visitors, entertainment within walking distance and hotels.

HDR is familiar with Aksarben Village: It crafted the initial master plan for the urban village and has conducted traffic studies for the area.

Among the firm’s other design work nearby: Baxter Arena, the Gordmans headquarters and the Think Whole Person Healthcare building.

North of the HDR site is room for a second 120,000-square-foot building. Until that second HDR structure is needed, it will serve as parkland or public space complementing proposed further development in the broader, nine-acre area bounded by 67th Street, 64th Avenue, Frances and Shirley Streets.

Noddle said that in addition to HDR, the broader zone is slated for apartments and another office and retail structure.
HDR has about 900 full-time employees based in Omaha. Worldwide, the company that specializes in engineering, architecture, environmental and construction services, has nearly 10,000 employees in more than 225 locations.

HDR was formerly known as Henningsson Durham & Richardson.

Speculation on where HDR would build its headquarters began more than a year ago when Little said the company had outgrown its suburban-style campus.

As planned, HDR will be the architect of its new building. First National Bank of Omaha is providing financing for the project; Kiewit Building Group will provide construction services.

“This location will serve our needs today and take us well into the future,” Little said.

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