



Memphis Real Estate Recap: Levitt Shell to 'Promote Building Bridges' Through Music

1928 Poplar Ave.
Memphis, TN 38104
Permit Cost: \$501,000

Project Cost: \$1.2 million

Permit Date: Applied August 2007

Completion: August 2008

Architect: Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects (Memphis)

Contractor: Out for bid in September

Details: Renovation of the former Overton Park Shell, now known as the Levitt Pavilion for the Performing Arts at the Overton Park Shell - or just Levitt Shell, for short.

The shell, built in the 1930s as a Depression-era Works Progress Administration project, served as the site of Elvis' first paid concert in 1954. It was shuttered in 2004.

The planned renovation is partly thanks to funding from the Mortimer Levitt Foundation in New York, which has opened other pavilions in Westport, Conn., Los Angeles and Pasadena, Calif, said Barry Lichterman, president of Friends of the Levitt Pavilion Memphis Inc.

Site work will include removing old benches in favor of seating on the grass, said Lee Askew, Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects' partner in charge of the project.

"We're pretty much gutting the inside of the Shell. We'll keep the stage, we'll keep the Shell, of course," Askew said. But we're creating new handicapped-accessible toilets, new green rooms on both sides, a big audio-video screen so you can see things projected up there that might be the performers or sponsors' messages on a screen on both sides." As part of the agreement with the Levitt Foundation, Memphis' Levitt Shell will host 50 free concerts a year, with music geared to the local population, Lichterman said.

"Our mission is community building, so we are using a proven model that shows that people of diverse cultures can find common ground in each other's music and can actually enjoy and celebrate and respect each other with that," Lichterman said. "So that's our goal and that's what we're using - music to promote building bridges." Askew said the project will be out for contractors' bids in September. Construction will start in October and should wrap next August, he added.

The engineer on the project is OGCB Inc., the structural work is by Askew Hargraves Harcourts & Associates Inc., and the landscaper is Richie Smith Associates, Askew said.

whether it's installing extra windows to let in natural light, shading a parking lot or using carpet and ceiling tiles made from recycled materials, Conrad and Land said there are plenty of ways for building owners to make the best use of their buildings by looking to infuse a little green in their design.