

Kitchener library expansion underway

TERRY PENDER
RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER — There is a big hole in the ground behind the main branch of the library at 85 Queen St. as the first stage in a long-planned expansion recently got underway.

During the next 12 months a \$24 million underground-parking garage with 400 spaces will be constructed for library patrons, police vehicles, courthouse workers and regional employees.

Only after that garage is complete can a 30,000-square-foot addition be constructed behind the existing building.

For Sonia Lewis, who was hired in 2004 as the library's chief executive officer to oversee the expansion, the waiting, planning and meetings for the \$40 million project will soon be over.



Library expansion Chief executive officer Sonia Lewis stands near the construction at the back of the Kitchener Public Library.
Philip Walker/Record staff

“The project has been tendered so there is no going back at this point,” Lewis said. “It feels terrific.”

Last year Maystar General Contractors Inc. out of Vaughn won the contract to expand and renovate the main library.

The underground-parking garage will be finished in late spring or early summer of next year.

“It’s really impressive to come over here and see the magnitude of the work,” Lewis said. “I think everybody is feeling great satisfaction seeing the work underway.”

The expansion and renovation of the library are scheduled to finish in early 2013 — nine years after Lewis hired to oversee the project.

“I think it is going to be worth the wait,” Lewis said. “I don’t think there’s any doubt it will be a terrific community resource.”

As part of the work the entrance to the 200-seat auditorium will be changed so people can easily go in and out after the library is closed. The entire building will be wheelchair accessible for first time.

The library expansion will cost \$40 million. That includes a \$500,000-fundraising campaign. Floor

space will be increased by 30 per cent, collections by 20 pr cent and public computers by 50 per cent.

Outside of the hard services such as roads, sewers lines and water mains, the library system is one of the most frequently-used services provided by the city.

About 3,700 people a day — 22,200 a week — use a library branch. Last year they signed out 2.8 million items, including books, DVDs and CDs. Circulation has increased about 22 per cent in the past five years. The library system has more than 102,000 card-carrying members.

City council recently approved the library's \$8.6 million operating budget with no cuts.