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Architect quits Justice Center project

BACKGROUND | Steven Holl had voiced concerns the budget was not enough for a signature building, but his decision still shocks Denver's architectural community.

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Article Last Updated: 10/05/2006 05:15:31 AM MDT

The nationally renowned architect selected to design part of Denver's \$378 million Justice Center has quit the project, shocking the city's architectural community.

Steven Holl's decision comes as a blow to Denver officials and Mayor John Hickenlooper, who commissioned Holl after auditioning five well-known architects.

"I am greatly disappointed," said Dennis Humphries, a local architect and president of the Golden Triangle Neighborhood Association, who served on the project's selection committee. "The neighborhood had gone out and supported the project based on it being a legacy project ... and now I am not sure exactly where it is going to fall."

With Holl gone, responsibility for designing a

signature building in the Justice Center approved by voters in 2005 falls to local architectural firm Klipp.



Steven Holl's decision to quit the Denver Justice Center project has shocked the city's architectural community.

Craig Miller, curator of the Denver Art Museum's Department of Architecture, Design and Graphics, said Holl's loss will affect the area.

"Civic Center now is becoming one of the most important architectural complexes in the area," he said, just days before the city unveils Daniel Libeskind's new wing of the Denver Art Museum. "We had two very distinguished national firms chosen to do these two municipal buildings, and so losing one of those does upset the equation."

After an international search, Holl was hired in December 2005 to design the \$127 million courthouse. Hartman-Cox was selected to oversee the \$165 million jail.

Holl headlined the team put together by Klipp - which designed the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center. The firm said it will finish the job without him.

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"I have tremendous respect for Steven ... and I think his talents are going to be greatly missed," architect Brian Klipp said. But he added: "We are committed to delivering world-class architecture for the project."

Denver's Justice Center project manager, James Mejia, said that while "we certainly knew there were issues for the last couple weeks," the decision to proceed without Holl was up to the Klipp team.

"We have been holding Klipp accountable for delivering the project on time and on budget," Mejia said.

Mejia said Holl already has done some planning work, such as determining which offices should be next to each other in the Justice Center.

"All of that is still intact ... so we're not starting from square one," he said.

Holl was named by Time magazine as America's best architect in 2001. He also received the Smithsonian Institution's 2002 Cooper Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture.

City officials and local business leaders touted his hiring in 2005.

"We are inspired by the caliber of signature architects who competed for this opportunity, and we are understandably excited about the selected firms," Hickenlooper said at the time.

But by this spring, Holl was showing some reservations about the project.

In May, he told The Denver Post he was concerned the budget was not enough for a signature building.

"I'm excited to make an exemplary work of architecture for the city," Holl said, "but they have to

be realistic, that if they want to be making a comparable justice building, we should really make the number (cost) per square feet comparable, because that's the only way we can achieve that kind of (qualitative) comparability."

Holl did not return calls for comment Wednesday, but Klipp issued a statement saying the project objectives "could not allow (Steven Holl Architects, New York) to design a building consistent with Steven Holl's design philosophy."

Hickenlooper, who is out of the country this week, released a statement reaffirming the city's commitment to world-class architecture but noting the responsibility to the public.

"At a certain point, one has to do all one can to come in on-time and on-budget with a building that delivers the functionality voters were promised," he said.

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