

## **Baraboo Public Library Upgrade Review Committee – September 14, 2016**

David Wernecke opened the meeting with an introduction and summary of the group's objective: Expansion plans for the library have been under consideration for about 15 years, and the City is almost in a position to contribute financially, so this committee is intended to re-evaluate and re-energize the project, filling in gaps from community members.

A few ground rules:

- Meetings will begin and end on time;
- Everyone is committed to attend all five meetings;
- Everyone is committed to completing their homework before meetings and coming prepared;
- Electronic devices are to be turned off during the meeting (except for hearing aids);
- Discussion will be limited to one conversation at a time (no side conversations, please);
- Keri and David will rein in the discussion and re-focus as necessary;
- Everyone is encouraged to participate;
- Participants may disagree with each other, but please treat one another with respect;
- Treats & bathrooms!

Each committee member gave a brief introduction. Maria Luisa Ramos Romero was absent.

On behalf of the library staff, Jean Funcke thanked all the participants for their time and effort and presented a video by Joan Wheeler that demonstrated the current configuration and limitations of the library spaces that staff use to serve the public.

After the video, Gil wondered if there would be as much physical “stuff” to store in a future library. Lacey noted that in the planning process for the new City Hall, stakeholders were each asked to tour three comparable buildings, which was a very valuable, though time-consuming, experience. Melanie said it is obviously a challenge to work here and that programming is very important to the community and requires space. She added that supervising the youth at the library must be a huge challenge. Andy said the video illustrated how important staff input will be in this process. Michael said it comes down to how to most efficiently use the space to its best potential in order to do your job. Lacey thought that keeping the current magnificent library should be a priority, but could be expensive. Beth praised the staff for being very versatile up to this point, despite the challenges of storage and organization.

The group divided in two, and library staff conducted tours of the building. Downstairs, staff emphasized line-of-sight problems, storage limitations, ergonomic issues, the lack of privacy, and noise concerns. They also reiterated the popularity of the program room and the importance of free wi-fi, particularly now that the public schools are issuing each student a laptop and some of them have nowhere else to go to complete their homework. Upstairs, staff pointed out some of the building's architectural details along with congestion problems at the circulation desk and the challenge of shelving books very high or near the floor. Noise and storage were concerns here, too.

Due to time considerations, the group decided to skip the Financial Summary discussion.

Meg gave a review of the expansion project to date. The over-arching rationale for the addition is to allow the library to achieve its mission and fulfill its strategic plan. A few statistical highlights:

- About 60% of library users are City of Baraboo residents;
- 255,000 physical items are checked out each year, compared to 12,000 virtual items;
- This means staff are handling over half-a-million items each year;
- In 2015, there were 482 in-house programs, with an attendance of 8,600, plus 328 off-site programs reaching 7,700 people;
- Despite the growing popularity of wi-fi, there are still many people who absolutely rely on using the library's computer work stations.

The current library was built in 1903 with a \$15,000 grant from Andrew Carnegie. The 1982 addition expanded

the building from 6,000 square feet to 15,000 square feet. The downtown location is a big plus, and the library contributes to the vitality of other nearby businesses. A very committed staff and excellent customer service are also major strengths.

Meg then listed some of the building's weaknesses:

- The 1982 addition was designed for a service population of 15,000. Our current service population is 18,666, 24% beyond the design capacity;
- The HVAC, electric, and networking systems all need upgrades;
- There is a shortage of electrical outlets throughout, especially with the popularity of wireless devices;
- The library is deficient in many areas of ADA accessibility;
- There are 40 to 50 youth programs per month, making it very difficult for other community groups to use the program room;
- There is no place to put something new (like the 3-D printer);
- Lack of storage;
- Lack of quiet space and study rooms;
- Two service desks lead to an increase in staffing costs;
- Some patrons have noted the library looks “shabby.”

The Library Board has been pursuing an addition since 2001. In 2009, OPN Architects was hired, based on their experience with Carnegie libraries and their history of bringing projects to completion under budget. OPN conducted a design charrette to gather ideas from community members. One early decision was to expand east, rather than north, based on 1) a \$300,000 estimate to move the utilities in the alley; 2) a greater connection to the Square and the rest of downtown; and 3) a southern exposure provided better opportunities for sustainability and energy efficiency. The result of the charette was a design with a total square footage of 34,000 and two floors throughout. The estimated cost was \$7.9 million in 2010. A fundraising feasibility study was conducted. From the City's perspective, however, the UW-B/SC Science Building consumed available funds, a decline in equalized value reduced City income, and the increased pace of technological change had some questioning whether a physical library remained relevant.

So, in 2014 the conceptual design was revised to reduce the size of the addition and its cost. Features included:

- A single-story addition to the east, all on-grade;
- A single public service area/circulation desk;
- Dedicated youth services program area, with a larger program room for community use;
- Study rooms;
- A maker space;
- Improved staff offices and work space.

The total cost (in 2020) is estimated at \$8.1 million. We are hoping for \$5 million from the City, plus \$2.2 million in library trust/impact fee funds, leaving a \$900,000 fundraising target. There is a sense of urgency based on the City's budget timeline and the library's needs.

Remaining questions include:

- Can we afford to build it?
- Can we afford to operate it?
- Does the community still want the same thing they did in 2009?
- Should we change the facade?

Feedback and questions followed Meg's presentation: Gil asked what size service population the current building could serve. (Meg didn't know the answer, but would find it before the next meeting.)

Sean questioned where the continuity and commitment were at the Board level and asserted that the City would not fund the project under the current rationale. There needs to be a much better message and marketing (not just statistics) that emphasizes how the library will transform our community and schools instead of settling for “good enough.” The project will continue to be pushed back until public pressure forces the Mayor and Council to act. The library is critical to youth literacy, which in turn is crucial to an individual's future success and the health of the community. Given that the City is committed to a \$14 million building that will serve a couple of

hundred people a year, it is a no-brainer that they should fund a less-expensive building that serves over 18,000 people a year. The library is the most popular institution in the community. Someone needs to “own” the project and sell it at “the tip of the spear” and that person shouldn't be the library director. (Sean used the example of the indoor pool.)

Beth agreed that the Board needs to generate excitement but tends to get bogged down in details and loses sight of the big picture.

Keri said that the messaging needs to place a sense of urgency front and center and agreed that the City should fully fund the building, with library funds reserved for programming and operations.

Andy affirmed that the quality of the library and its role as a community center was one of the key elements he and his partner considered when moving to Baraboo.

Keri recommended having a conversation about the future of libraries.

Sean countered that as long as the space is a large, flexible learning environment, it can be easily reconfigured to meet the future needs that we may not be able to anticipate now. We have to sell the idea of what we can do better in the future. Must get the Mayor on board. Our community needs *more* programming from the library in order to complement what the schools are able to do.

In bringing the meeting to a close, David said he would send out some links to additional web sites that he recommends people study. He also said the director at the Reedsburg library would be happy to give committee members a tour of her facility. She is available on Sept. 17 (1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.), Sept. 20 (4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.), Sept. 22 (6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.), and Sept. 24 (9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.)

*--sconelessly submitted by Rob Nelson*