

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

May 2003

“The complete library ministers to all wants, satisfies all tastes, meets all inquiries. It is the cosmos of mind, the epitome of knowledge. It aids the profoundest thinker, and stimulates the simplest reader. With books all possibilities of civilization await us in the future, while without them man’s lapse into barbarism, though gradual, would be sure.” The Honorable J. Morrison Harris, 1886, on the occasion of the dedication of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland.

Reflecting on the intensity of the debate around the “Cultural District” and its proposed centerpiece, the “Centennial Project”, gives pause to wish there were a way to distill the rhetoric and defray the concerns. The “Cultural District” is not a new concept; it already exists as a uniquely Bellingham phenomenon, one that is inclusive incorporating both public and private venues.

This phenomenon is neither elite nor pedestrian. It reflects a culture that celebrates our values. Our community, to an extraordinary extent, supports parks, sports, museums, art galleries, theatres (stage and film), festivals, science centers, schools and libraries. These institutions welcome everyone from our youngest child to our eldest senior. They underwrite the ideals that inform, enhance and enrich our lives individually and communally. The Centennial Project builds on these ideals, proposing a long-range blueprint for our future.

The audit went well. We have done both more and less than the auditors would have wished. The only issue remaining is their desire for separate cash drawers for all clerks; however, our staffing patterns fail to support that feasibly. They recognized that we have instituted compensating controls that are quite adequate, the interstice between best practices and acceptable solutions. They were pleased with the print management system and the change machine, which clearly reduce cash register traffic. They were also complimentary of processes and procedures we have put in place to reconcile our circulation files with cash receipting practices.

As plans evolve for a new library, the layout of cash handling functions will be addressed, rectifying lingering concerns. A careful assessment of systems’ performance of these tasks and vendors’ commitment to developing audit compliant applications is currently being studied. We are not alone in our desire for more discriminatory functionality.

And, speaking of a new library, our public dialogs have sparked thoughtful responses and positive changes in attitudes. It is both interesting and instructive to listen to ideas and perceptions people have about public libraries. Extremes abound: some would bury the library in the obscurity of a multistory complex of government offices; others would build a landmark temple to knowledge. There is great disparity between these views; the real discussion may be philosophical.

Unfortunately the jaws of the alligator are widening; the seven- percent budget reduction will be adopted regardless of the passage or failure of the EMS levy. The analogy to the “gator” refers to the progressively broadening gap between revenues and expenditures...perhaps not immediately exponential, but it certainly recalls dim, and not so fond, memories of algebraic equations. We must develop some long-term strategies for dealing with this reality, because the analogy applies equally to the cost of books and availability of funds to purchase them.

News from the Friends includes a reminder of the annual Ski to Sea Book Sale, May 21 - 24. See y'all there! And, if you have a chance, visit the Fairhaven Library to feast your eyes on the lovely landscaping, a gift of love and labor from the Fairhaven Friends.