

Special Meeting of the Board of Library Trustees
Tuesday, December 13, 2005 - Library Board Room
02:30 PM - 04:45 PM

Minutes of Actions and Decisions of the Board of Library Trustees of the Bellingham Public Library as Authorized by RCW 27.12.210 and SEC. 7.02 Charter of the City of Bellingham.

Board Members Present: Chairperson: Tim Douglas, Vice-Chairperson: Alan Kemble, Faye Hill, Vicky Marshall, David Edelstein

Board Members Absent:

Library Staff: Pamela Kiesner; Margaret Ziegler; Scott Blume; Gladys Fullford

Others: John Watts, City Council Liaison, Dick McKinley, Public Works Director, Greg Aucutt, Acting Planning Director, Velma Wendt

Library Strategic Planning Work Session: This is the final work session for strategic planning purposes. Pam presented an outline of what has been accomplished and what needs to be done. Each of the sites has pros and cons. None stand out as a clear winner, but several have been identified where we could build a beautiful library. Site Evaluation Criteria was developed by looking at national standards and used local community input. The criteria was developed in 2002, and confirmed by the Board this year. The Board may want to determine which is the most important criteria. Pam asked, "Which location will consistently reinforce the most extensive use?"

Library best practice is usually to keep square footage on one floor to no more than 25-30,000 square feet. If we are building a 75-80,000 square foot building, that will dictate a 3 story structure. Also, library site size standard is usually 3 – 4 times the square footage of a building. However, as a downtown library, that standard is not followed. Dick questioned why property size needed to be 3 to 4 times the square footage of the building. Scott answered that additional land was needed for utilities such as parking, school bus drop offs, and deliveries. Pam reviewed the Library Site Evaluation Summary, which is an overview of square footage of all the sites considered from 2002 forward. The Board would like to have a "Wow" factor, but not necessarily a signature building such as the new Seattle Public Library. The new building must be functional. Pam hopes for the top site choices be affirmed at a regular Board meeting, taken to City Council, and design work to begin in 2006.

The Board is talking about three elements: A replacement central building, a library presence in north Bellingham (Barkley area,) and Fairhaven improvements. There is money in the 2006 budget for a structural review of the Fairhaven Branch. John mentioned the public's desire for adequate parking, maintaining a green setting, and indoor/outdoor programming access. Tim said he would not want to be overly bound by prescriptive downtown city restrictions and boundaries.

Alan gave his initial evaluation of the Hizzoner's site. The County owns two thirds of the site, and Brett & Daugert the other third. It is adjacent to where the library is now. There are some views of non-descript buildings across the creek. The site is not too far away for a joint program with the Children's Museum. There was concern of using the green space across the street with children having to cross a busy street. Alan asked Greg about the buffers. There would be access from three streets. Without the Brett & Daugert property, there would only be one street access. Alan expects PFD and the Parking Authority would have plans for downtown parking. Dick said the City is looking at possible parking spots. There could be a possible joint venture with the Library. Alan is concerned about the cost, and expects it to be expensive. There is a rumor that the County might exchange the site for a City asset. Demolition would be a substantial cost. Access for school buses is a problem. There is no allowance for flexibility in building orientation. A four-story building would result in a very shady site in the afternoon. Environmental concerns would want to respect the buffer. There are social and perceptual concerns with the politics of demolishing the current building. Faye mentioned that the site backs up to Big Brother's

Bingo. We don't know the future of that site. If it was developed, views to east would be gone. Dick commented that the building is not in good shape. The County paid \$3.3 million in 1993, so their asking price would be expected to be more than that. The County would be willing to work with the City and the Board. Dick said it might be possible to resurrect the old alley, or make a loop for buses to drive around the site for unloading. When asked about permeable surfaces in the buffer, Dick asked that this be a favorite site before City staff spends time to work out problems. John suggested the possibility of a bridge across the creek to the Senior Center, which has bus access. It could be a good partnership with the Senior Center.

Pam clarified that the site across the creek being discussed is Site B: DeWaard & Bode, which was not recommended in 2002 because of an ownership problem.

Greg walked the Board through considerations of downtown city center. It was originally thought that city functions should stay south of the creek to protect surrounding neighborhoods. The new city center has expanded from C Street to Cornwall to Halleck. The Police Department building replaced an underutilized medical building. The city center master plan is policy, not law. John said the City bought Calvary Temple for the Municipal Court. Tim said a Library is something that would enhance a neighborhood. The major theme would be a knowledge center. A knowledge based neighborhood would be a great thing.

Originally, the best spot for a new library was across the street from the current library. However, the PFD purchased the site for the museum.

Greg asked if the Board had considered the Sash & Door site. It could be geo-technically expensive, but could be done. It could be an anchor for redevelopment. The waterfront and Old Town will be a construction zone for many years. Tim said people have mentioned the waterfront. WWU wants to have an element there. The challenge would be to build a heavy building on fill. A reality is that Old Town is dominated by an element that could make the Library vulnerable unless safety issues were addressed. The Library could become a major shelter. It would be easy to acquire the Sash & Door land. It would need more piling than the Library's current site. Another consideration is the weather factor that makes the waterfront colder.

The Board discussed the half block across the street since American Title is moving. The owners of the site are more interested in leasing than selling, but might be willing to sell. The parking lot is mostly for tenants of that building. There is multiple ownership in the rest of the half block, and there would be the cost of demolition.

Tim said the most engaging possibility for the library on this site would be to invest in young people with programs and space. It would have been fascinating to join the Children's Library and the Children's Museum within an urban space that shared theatre and programming space. The Board talked about building across the street and connecting to the current library building.

Dick commented that it may be cheaper to renovate than to build from the pilings up. David agreed that it would be a nice thought to renovate what you have, but building from scratch is better for long term planning. He suggested going to a new big site to build a new library, children's museum and senior center. It would be multi-generational. Dick will check with the Senior Center (County) and PFD people. It would have to be very clearly defined.

The Granary site at Georgia Pacific on the waterfront was mentioned in a letter to the editor in the Bellingham Herald. Pam contacted Tara about the site to seek further information. The building would probably have to be torn down, and it would not be easily accessible.

David said it would be prudent to place a legal advertisement in the newspaper for those who own property to nominate their sites. Contacts would have 30 days to come forward. Dick volunteered to write

an RFP, (Request for Proposals,) requesting confidential proposals that would fit certain criteria. Faye moved to direct City staff to do an RFP to solicit confidential proposals for property to be offered for consideration as a site for a future library. Vicky seconded. David explained that when we ask citizens to pay for a bond or levy, we do not want someone to show up later and divert the process. This would also provide an opportunity to see if there is any property than has not been considered. Dick would write the RFP, send it to Pam, run it by the Legal Department and Purchasing, and present it to the Board at the regular meeting for adoption. The motion carried.

John suggested an information session to City Council. John said it might be possible that a property owner might want to make a donation of land. We would certainly recognize the generosity of such a donation.

Dick will have conversations with PFD and the County.

Pam will draft a press release about the RFP.

Next Regular Library Board Meeting – December 20, 2005 will begin at 2:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees