

Special Meeting of the Board of Library Trustees
Tuesday, November 07, 2006 - Library Board Room
01:00 PM - 03:30 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: Alan Kemble, Vice-Chairperson: David Edelstein, Faye Hill, Vicky Marshall, J. Gordon

Board Members Absent:

Library Staff: Pam Kiesner; Lizz Roberts; Gladys Fullford

Others: John Watts, City Council Liaison, Tom Glenn, Friends of BPL, Sam Taylor, Bellingham Herald, Margaret Ziegler, Myra Harmer, Cliff Baacke, Ruth Baacke, Stan Snapp, Sal Russo, Marcia Leishman, Joan Brannigan and Jack Weiss

The Library Board was called to order at 1:00 p.m. in the Library Board Room. First order of business was an **Executive Session** for the purpose of considering acquisition of real property by lease or by purchase. No action was taken.

Called to Order: Regular session was called to order at 1:30 p.m. in the Library Lecture Room by Chairperson, Alan Kemble; the agenda was approved.

Communications: There were two communications in the Board Packet: a memo from Sheila Hardy and a letter from the Bellingham Planning Group. Vicky Marshall commented that the letters were enlightening.

Public Comment: Sal Russo said he was attending the meeting in response to the Bellingham Herald's newspaper article, and would like to find out more about plans for the Fairhaven Branch. Alan explained the Board was given a draft report on the condition assessment by the architectural firm, BOLA. A full report will be presented by BOLA at the Regular Board Meeting on November 21, 2006. The draft report is available on the Library website: www.bellinghampubliclibrary.com. It is called the Fairhaven Condition Assessment.

Strategic Planning: Pam reviewed some information for the Board to help with their discussion. Pam attended the first Department Head meeting with Mayor Tim Douglas. Malcolm Fleming, CAO, said the city's space needs assessment is moving forward. This is a study of space needs of parks, public works, city hall, etc. They are anxiously awaiting our decision. If we decide to go to the Municipal Court site, it would greatly impact the study and where other departments are moving or expanding. They are waiting and hinging their decisions on what the Library Board decides.

Pam urged Malcolm to set up a parking meeting after John Watt's message about the importance of talking about parking. Parking will be a factor for the library no matter where we are located. We must look at this as a community. That includes the County, the Cultural District and the City. There is a meeting set up for Wednesday with Dick McKinley, Public Works Director, Patricia Decker, Director of the Public Facilities, Tara Sundin, Planning Department, and Tim Douglas. Tim has met with Dewey Desler and Pete Kremen, who have expressed willingness to meet and work with the City on parking. After this initial meeting, we will meet with the Parking Commission and the County. Tim's message was that Pete and Dewey continue to be interested in the Library project and how the parking might be handled if we were to do the project on the current library block. Pete wondered why if we were able to do a floor of parking below the building, couldn't we do one or two floors above ground. He indicated the County would be in a position to help fund that aspect. This topic does need to be discussed with the Parking Commission at least as an initial exploration.

Pam also mentioned we are planning to go live with a website for the public to check for updates on library planning. You will find Frequently Asked Questions and all the information that has been shared with the Library Board in our planning efforts, such as population and drive time maps and Facilities Needs Assessment. This will be kept updated.

The title search on the library block has been completed. It is clear. Jeff Capell from Legal also checked with Parks, and said all is o.k. Pam shared a copy with the Board.

Alan reviewed the three sites the Board is considering: Maritime Heritage Park, Municipal Court site with parking lot on one side, and the Current Library Block with Lottie Street vacated. The Board also heard a presentation from a private property owner in Executive Session. Alan does not plan to call for a final decision until we know more about the recent proposal. The Board hopes to have something in writing as a concrete proposal fairly soon.

The Board's homework was to go through the list of 31 criteria for the sites, and rate their importance. Lizz Roberts is compiling the results of what the Board members turned in.

David Edelstein observed that we talked about a site not heretofore considered, and hopes to consider anyone else who has a site with merit. The Board agreed they were willing to look if someone comes forward. We are looking for a minimum of 65,000 square feet which is the best part of a city block.

Lizz passed out copies of the Site Evaluation Criteria Ranking by the Board. It was noted that perception of accessibility, impact on traffic, parking availability, and size and shape of the lot stand out as being most important to the Board members.

Pam explained the list of Site Evaluation Criteria comes from a list of criteria that the Library Board determined was important in 2002. The list was reaffirmed in 2005. It is drawn from a number of industry standard planning studies and documents.

John Watts commented that it is a good exercise, but some factors are wide spread and some are remarkably close. He wondered if this type of exercise would lend itself to attract community input. A broad cross section of the community could weigh in on these factors. It might be a useful exercise, and then evaluate the weights against the sites.

Alan suggested putting the exercise on the website.

Faye said the criteria exercise was easy, but connecting responses with the three sites was very difficult to do. Up to this point, the Board has evaluated the sites with a plus or negative, and it was difficult to transfer responses to this weighting method.

J. Gordon mentioned that being brand new to the Board, he did not contribute to the exercise. He has found it fairly daunting to educate himself quickly about what the Board should consider as the most important factors. He hesitates to put it to the general public. The board should be educated and have enough history to make good decisions for the public. He did rate the sites on a technical basis. Some of these items have a significant impact or basis on the decision, so they are weighted. The weighing is done several times. It's not about the small differences in totals, but the wide point range that clearly makes one site shine or drop out. The Maritime Heritage Park site fell out for critical reasons: not enough real estate, not enough access, and should be closer to retail. The waterfront has some huge development that is exciting for this community. A site between there and the CBD would be good. J. Gordon said he would entertain dropping the Maritime Heritage Park site. He rated the current site slightly higher than Municipal Court primarily because the Municipal Court site is farther removed.

Faye said she felt similarly. Sometimes parks attract crime. If we put the library in a park, the library must find ways to avoid that stigma. Maritime Heritage Park is off the board from Faye's perspective.

Vicky reached the same conclusion. Reading the site considerations made things clear. The topography in the park is difficult and possibly would not meet our needs. Vicky seriously thought about Municipal Court, but doesn't see it expanding the economic base. A library could possibly bring in other businesses.

David said Maritime Heritage Park has great possibilities, but the negatives outweigh the positives. It is on an old landfill, and would be faced with a difficult situation with the Department of Ecology Agreement about the perceived methane problem. David does not see pilings as a problem. The Boss Tweed site is the piece of the puzzle that would make the site become preeminent.

David said Municipal Court site would be the easiest to on which to build. It is interesting that it is perceived as so far away, and yet it is in sight. Location trumps the ease of building on the site.

Alan liked the Municipal Court site, but it is farther away. After the exercise the Maritime Heritage site drops out, and he ends up with the current block. Alan asked for a reaffirmation that the Board should be unanimous in its decision before going before City Council.

David would like to reaffirm the concept. It is not wise to go forward unless it is the very finest site and all agree.

Alan said the Board should be unanimous to convince the Council and the public.

Vicky said the Board needs to stand firm together to go to the taxpayers for a vote.

J. Gordon asked about the possibility of giving the Council two sites: a best site and an alternative. None of the sites quite do it for him. Is there that very excellent one that would do it? The community doesn't seem to care if it is in the Civic Center. How long can we pursue the very excellent one?

Alan said when he came on the Board in 1997 there was discussion about support for a new library. There has been no "must have" site. If anything comes up, we will certainly look at it.

Pam spoke about the publication from Wisconsin included in the Board's packet. When referring to locating in the Civic Center, it was speaking to locating in the same building as a city hall or a cultural center—which is not our intent. Since plans are forthcoming for the Flora Street District and the new Children's Museum, this may be in the library's favor, being located right here.

David said we already have the library here. We are not breaking new ground. Our library circulation per capita is one of the best in the country. We have one that functions extremely well. We built the library and then renovated it based on population and usage. We could have made a case for a new library 5 years ago, certainly now, and shouldn't wait for a magic site to come up. We've looked at 22 sites. We need a site that is available. Show us the land that is ready to go. Where is it; how much is it?

Faye mentioned in the last several weeks the Board has completely changed their thinking. It is a totally different decision to decide to take the building down and have a new building than it is to have two buildings on this site. Faye said this should be explored further.

Alan agreed he had reservations about telling the public we plan to tear this building down.

Faye said she was concerned about what kind of building can be built out there that will not overcrowd City Hall even with a Lottie Street vacation.

J. Gordon said the Board seemed to be gravitating to the current site. The City needs to know if the Municipal Court site is off the board. Where would the library be located temporarily during construction? Would that be an option? Would moving twice be horrendously expensive?

David answered that it has been done in the past, but not in Bellingham. Libraries have moved out, renovated, and moved back in.

David said he had the dubious distinction of championing not tearing down this building, and then changing his mind. It was originally thought that it would be logical to consider building additional floors here and/or putting an addition on the building. Additional floors cannot be added because structurally it won't hold up. The pilings are at a high 90 percentile of capacity. It is not a good value for an addition to the building. The end result would be a building partially 60 years old, partially 20 years old, and partially new. A single purpose building makes sense. It makes more sense to build a multi-purpose building. David is certain it would not overshadow City Hall. There would be no cars there, but a park between our new building and City Hall. If we put two levels of parking beneath the building and remove all the traffic on Lottie and Grand Streets, it would be a much nicer experience. Originally David said he was thinking, free parking. He doesn't believe that is going to work. If he had his druthers, the Parking Commission would build two levels of parking underneath the building and the City would maintain the parking as the Parkade. This would be easier than trying to figure out how to make it work with the County. David would rather work with the County to lease the top one or two floors to help pay for the building. These floors would then be available for future expansion, if needed.

Pam explained there are plans for Public Works to move out of City Hall into a new building, and Parks would join them. John added that it would not be a concern of City Hall to be looking for more space.

Alan suggested asking for legal advice about how this would work on a bond issue.

David said he has done a drawing of a 35,000 square foot building with multiple floors, two levels of parking with 110 to 125 stalls on each level, and ramping to Commercial Street. He would charge the architect to design a library that could expand or contract. He would hope to find other community elements to join us in the building.

Vicky agrees that the key to success is flexibility. Hopefully, retail can join the library as well as other kinds of revenue producers.

Pam said once the site is determined, we would get an architect on board and figure this out. She suggests action or motion to eliminate a site from consideration, so we can let folks know where we are.

Faye moved that the Board remove the Maritime Heritage Park site for the time being, and leave the Municipal Court site and present library block open. David seconded.

Pam said it sounded like the Board wanted to eliminate Municipal Court site. David does not want to eliminate Municipal Court site, and have to go back if this one doesn't work out. Faye said to leave the Municipal site because of accessibility. Vicky added if there is a big red flag, we need a backup. The current site and Municipal Court site are close, but the current site is preferable. Vicky asked how much flex time is needed with the City. J. Gordon asked if the board wanted to establish a preference in the motion. J. Gordon proposed an amendment to the motion that the current site is the preferred site. Vicky seconded. After discussion J. Gordon and Vicky withdrew the amendment to the motion. Motion carried.

Alan asked how to work through the concerns of the Board. These are the concerns and needs about the current library site:

1. Volumetric Study – Bellingham Planning Group

a) Do immediately

2. Street Vacation Possibilities
3. Demolish Building?
 - a) Before building new
 - b) After building new
4. Parking – meeting on Wednesday this week
 - a) Below grade
 - b) Street level entrance to Library
5. Library Operations during construction phase
6. Partnerships, public and private
 - a) Talk with County, Senior Center, etc.
 - b) Expansion and/or mixed use
7. Staff Considerations and Input
8. Determine what considerations answer SITE question
 - a) What does the Council need to see?

John suggested the Board needs to focus on the library site. The Council needs to hear the site choice. Who partners with the library is the library's responsibility. The Board needs to focus on the site, be unanimous, and conception studies will follow.

Pam recapped that the Bellingham Planning Group will be engaged to adjust their volumetric studies, previously presented to the Board. Alan confirmed that Pam should pursue conversation with the Planning Group about the current site, and that we are not interested in above grade parking.

J. Gordon explained the Bellingham Planning Group's letter. They are pushing to revisit some sites because they feel the current site does not meet some of the objectives to get it into the economic hub of the City, the pedestrian part of the City, and close to the new housing going into that part of City. Looking at the Waterfront Redevelopment and where the development will be in 20 years, the synergy between a new library and new waterfront development is huge. Visionaries are saying here is an opportunity to do something that is that very excellent site. J. suggests holding on a little bit longer to go there. He realizes the Board feels an urgency to make a decision after six years of conversations about possible sites. Will the Board reconsider any of these sites?

David said the Post Office site had been mentioned. The problem is that the leaseholder is the U.S. Government. There are eight years remaining on the lease from a private owner. We cannot wait an indefinite time for availability and pricing. If the owner and leaseholder came forward to say we could have the building in so many days and for so many dollars, we would consider it.

Alan reviewed that the Board is looking at the two City owned sites plus a new privately owned site. If something came up in the next few days, the Board would look at it. Alan repeated the Board has evaluated 22 sites and advertised for any other available sites. He is not aware of anything else out there.

Faye said the Board should go to the Bellingham Planning Group for volumetric studies with the concept of whether or not we can preserve the old library building until we move out.

John added that it would help the presentation to Council to know the Board has considered other sites and has a few alternatives.

There will be a Special Board Meeting on December 5th for the Bellingham Planning Group to make a presentation of volumetric studies, if they agree to take on the project.

Next Regular Library Board Meeting – November 21, 2006 will begin at 2:30 p.m. in the Library Board Room.

Next Special Library Board Meeting – December 5, 2006 will begin at 1:00 p.m. for Executive Session and 1:30 p.m. for Open Session in the Library Board Room.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees