

Special Meeting of the Board of Library Trustees
Wednesday, March 02, 2011 - Library Board Room
05:30 PM - 07:14 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: David Edelstein, Faye Hill, J Gordon, Marilyn Mastor and Rachel Myers.

Board Members Absent:

Library Staff: Pamela Kiesner; Christine Perkins; and Deborah Brewer.

Others: Stan Snapp, City Council, Tara Sundin, City of Bellingham Planning & Community Development Dept, Andy Law, Capital Facilities Task Force Representative, Jim Long, Public Development Authority.

Call to order and introductions: Special session was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chair, David Edelstein.

Approve/modify agenda: No changes to agenda.

Introduction: Pam said that now is a good time to take a fresh look at sites and building planning in general. She showed everyone the building program statement from 2007-2008 and reminded the group that they have this plan as a reference. There's a "new reality" at the library since the plan was written – since 2008 we have had budget cuts resulting in 13% fewer staff. We've developed staffing and workflow efficiencies. The Public Development Authority was established. Sites previously considered are no longer available, and new sites are now available. We will want to review the building program as it relates to the size of the building as well; this could change based on a number of new factors.

Pam stated the purpose of today's special Board work session is to discuss if the Library Board agrees with the findings of the Capital Facilities Task Force and if so, what should the next steps be? If not, why not?

Board will also have to determine where to find funding to implement the findings of the Capital Facilities Task Force. Expert assistance is required, yet this is not currently in the library budget.

Pam said the scope of facilities planning includes the need for a strategic plan, financial plan, and an operational plan to build new facilities and continue to operate the ones we have already.

It may be timely to revisit annexing to WCLS, perhaps by incorporating data from a small previous study and building on it during the planning phase.

Pam said we should consider a small northside library as part of this process.

City Center Master Planning Update: Tara Sundin, Special Projects Manager, COB Planning and Community Development Department presented a City Center Master Planning update.

Currently there is a City Center Master Plan that covers the entire Central Business District and surrounding neighborhoods and influence areas – Lettered Streets, Municipal Court, some Sehome, York, Marina area. It was adopted in 2002. The public process started in 1998. Tom Beckwith and Steve Price conducted Downtown Development Workshops. Major changes have occurred citywide since this plan was adopted. Georgia Pacific is no longer in operation. The

2006 Comprehensive Plan was adopted with Urban Villages made a priority for infill. Most of 2002 plan has been implemented except a new library and 2-way Holly Street. It is now on the City Council docket to update the City Center Master Plan.

The City has much less funding now for consultant services – it will be a staff-driven process this time. Tara wants to know what the Library Board would like input on from the public – what the Board's expectations are, and how the Board would like to interface with the City so we can work well together.

This project involves the Waterfront but that has its own sub-area plan.

COB will develop a Steering Committee of approx. 15 people (property owners, Transit, residents, a Library Board representative).

The City will spend this year on public process, and bring the plan to City Council in 2012 for adoption.

Tara said they will take the old plan as a starting point, then pull all existing nearby neighborhood plans into this. The plan will ask where should the City invest next and what areas should we focus on for the City Center.

Tara said the City Center incorporates more than 10 different boundaries – CBD, reduced parking overlay, multi-family tax exemption boundary, part of Waterfront has sub-area plan, Old Town etc. TIF reduction boundaries – different boundaries apply to each parcel within the City Center.

Tara said that as she has been working on other urban villages – Samish Way and Fountain District – she has heard from public – let's focus back on Downtown. The Downtown Bellingham Partnership has been asking as well.

The Downtown Bellingham Partnership includes business and property owners and residents, too; this is the neighborhood association for the area. They have 100+ members. There are several thousand people working downtown.

Pam said that in the past the Library Board has wanted a new Central Library to be in Central Business District / Downtown, whether it be Old Town, port, etc. We should confirm that this is still true.

Stan said in the past he heard that only City-owned sites would be considered for the library, contrary to what has been done for Fire Stations.

Faye said she didn't think this was the case, that City-owned sites was advised but not required.

David clarified that if two sites were comparable, a City site would be preferable, easier, and less expensive.

J. Gordon said he thought in the past there was funding for land purchase.

David reminded the group that the site footprint needs to be 60,000 – 70,000 s.f. or more; it could be on two floors, but room for green space, loading docks, and parking is needed.

J. Gordon expressed concern that a recent *Bellingham Herald* editorial has information inconsistent with library standards and contemporary trends in library science. He wants to get some fundamental library science principles out there to public so we don't get "lost in the

weeds” – establish those up front. For example, that a Central Library is necessary to support a branch library system.

J. Gordon said that when the 2008 program was written, it was a different world – starting with this site, which is probably off the table at this point.

Rachel asked who the other stakeholders are in the City Center Master Plan.

Tara said one stakeholder is the Public Facilities District, including the Museum. Museum is completed. Mt. Baker Theater still has another phase. WTA has a recently adopted plan. Other groups include the Public Development Authority, Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Port of Bellingham, tourism community, real estate, social services, WWU (for student housing opportunities), and nonprofit housing organizations.

The stakeholders group will have a maximum of 15 members, and will have help with facilitation. Tara wants to engage a broader cross-section of community.

Tara said it would be helpful that the library is included in this policy document in order to get Council buy-in and public support.

Jim Long suggested emphasizing the place-making aspect of the library project as the defining issue. He thinks this needs to be a big part of the policy statement. It will become the nucleus for all other projects, and it’s the one most realistic project likely to happen in the City Center at this time.

David said he thinks if we found a good site we could go to Council and ask to buy it now, with a long-range project in mind. Otherwise, we may find ourselves part of someone else’s project – someone else will put something else together and need us as a partner and we’ll have to be there.

Jim asked if the Board had done an RFP to see what a property owner could bring as a possible deal.

David said yes, we’ve done this before, and if we do it again we may get new offers. We could ask Council for bonding capacity to purchase property.

Jim said this would be a tangible step forward.

David said need we need to lock down a site so it makes it real, and gives us something to move forward on.

J. Gordon reviewed past history with the group. We had a site, it was put on hold and the Board hasn’t really put the plan back together again. This is the first meeting to say, where are we today? Trying to get a Foundation off the ground. Since Tara is working on the City Center plan, this is a good time to get moving. There may be a property owner who is willing to sell now.

Jim suggests looking at locking in a site with a long-term closing of 3 – 5 years – this may be more attractive to a seller. Bonding may need to be completed in a shorter term, but this is something to consider.

Tara suggested that perhaps the PDA could buy property, then sell it to COB in the future.

Stan said he is excited, and wants to see something happen.

Capital Facilities Task Force Final Report: Stan Snapp, City Council liaison to the Library Board, reviewed the Capital Facilities Task Force Final Report.

Andy Law was on the committee. He said the main reason why the library project was not a top priority for funding was the group was afraid that by allocating a lot of money to one project it would short-change other projects.

The Task Force consisted of Stan and Terry Bornemann, Mark Asmundson, Barbara Ryan, and strong citizen participation. John Carter was the staff liaison. They formed a bonding sub-committee.

Stan reviewed the Task Force's process: they listened to many presentations from COB Department Heads about their needs.

Next, they established guiding principles for making fully informed decisions, not for political reasons. These included: being prudent, pursuing alternatives (based on economic situation), protecting city assets and services, and how & where we build matters – combining facilities, making multiple use facilities when possible.

The Bonding sub-committee thought the City Council could make councilmanic bonds – John Carter reminded everyone that though we have good bonding capacity, we do not have actual capacity to pay for bonds.

Street overlay and repair is the biggest project. There is no sustainable funding mechanism to do this properly and regularly.

Restoring Lake Whatcom watershed is vital – everyone uses drinking water. The alternative is millions spent on water treatment.

The Task Force recommended that the library should shift to a de-centralized system. Pam asked for clarification on this point since this is not aligned with our need for a new Central Library.

Andy clarified that the Task Force recommendation didn't say there doesn't have to be a Central, just not as big a one as presented to Council in 2008 with a \$50 million price tag.

Stan said it's like having fire stations in all communities. Said Council members did not write this, allowed community to do it; Mark Asmundson left the group before the recommendation was written.

Tara said that the Task Force statement about reducing visits to the Central Library is counter to anything they want to accomplish downtown – they want to increase visits to downtown.

Pam said that library users pick up materials at WWU and BTC in addition to WCC; this doesn't reduce the business of a Central Library, just gives users more options.

J Gordon said that the Barkley Branch Library works because the capital was provided by the Barkley Company, as is the maintenance – it would cost a lot if we did it alone.

Rachel said it's the role of the Board to clarify these points with the public. Faye agreed that it's important to explain the Board's rationale.

J Gordon reiterated that the world has changed since the 2008 plan; the price tag is not realistic. He believes we should re-engage in programmatic discussion with community – rein it back in to today’s reality. Public/private partnership could be successful, but need to determine if we are driving our own bus or waiting for a bus to come by. J. thinks cohabitation of public facilities could be more realistic and successful. According to J., the PFD doesn’t have money, PDA could but do we want to wait? He thinks it’s time to get a Library Foundation started, which will provide opportunities to elevate the conversation.

Jim Long said that the PDA is a conduit for the private sector. If you could combine planning for the library with planning for another project, there should be some economies of scale.

Marilyn said that several years ago there was talk of a convention center, and that would make sense to combine with a library.

David said in terms of land acquisition he was always speaking of a civic building, not just library – a small police precinct, parks tot lot, etc. Add more public services, like a senior center, children’s museum, parking garage, institutional use.

Jim Long said the PDA focus is taking shape. Right now the PDA is working on an approach that should yield physical results. He thinks this would be the “100% spot” for downtown. They are looking for the right private community-building partner for investment. He likes the Barkley model. He believes it’s time to get out of the abstract and start dealing with reality. Get past the issue of “do we need a little library or big one?” We need it. We need to do it now when times are not good, make our move, opportunities abound.

Rachel said we need to identify what questions the community has, and answer them fully.

Jim suggested identifying 4 to 5 enduring values to justify the need for a new library.

Rachel said let’s remind people of the library’s role in community, justify why the library is still relevant, why a Central Library is still needed, usage, how do branches fit in, etc.

Pam said the Board and staff put enormous energy into this in 2005, 2006, and 2007 then put it in on the back burner when it was not supported by the City.

Jim said we need need to relight it; we need a second punch to move to next step or it will fritter away.

Stan said thinks Council is supportive and frustrated; they want to see a Central Library built. The Council needs things to be brought to them for consideration.

Tara said the library plan will surface this year with City Center Plan.

Jim sees the library as a big part of the overall picture, and the project most worth doing.

Stan said the Board needs to go to John Carter and say how do we purchase this property, how can we make it happen?

David said we had an idea for property last year – a civic site for “library” or “library and” that was compelling.

Jim has a plan that’s working through their board and he will be presenting it to Council. He said the PDA may be able to help with the study. He said it’s important to work on creating more

advocates – the library is heavily used, and many users could be advocates, we just haven't asked them yet.

Developing a Library System Plan: David wants another meeting, before next Board meeting.

Jim said he's tired of being a spectator.

Stan agreed and said let's do something.

J Gordon said let's define the process, map out steps, and establish a timeframe.

Meeting adjourned 7:14 p.m.

Next Special Library Board Meeting – March 10, 2011 in the Board Room at Central Library – at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Chair, Library Board of Trustees

ATTEST

Secretary, Library Board of Trustees