

July 2009 Public Meetings: Help Shape the Future of the Library

The fifth in a series of public meetings on a proposed library expansion was held on July 21, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. in the Farwell T. Brown Auditorium of the Ames Public Library, with 81 persons in attendance. Members of the Library Board of Trustees who were present included Al Campbell, Dudley Luckett, Sherry Meier, Dick Seagrave, and Kevin Stow.

Library Director Art Weeks welcomed the participants and stated that the August 20, 2009, regular meeting of the Ames Public Library Board of Trustees would be held in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 7:00 p.m., in order to offer citizens another opportunity to provide input after they have had time to mull over the ideas presented this month. He then turned the program over to Jeffrey Scherer, principal architect with Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, LTD (MS&R), of Minneapolis.

Scherer said he intended to briefly review library Options A and B, which were discussed in June, add some thoughts on sustainability, and show three-dimensional slides to give a sense of scale and illustrate a street view of the mass of the buildings. He said there would be time during the meeting for the audience to offer their thoughts on the pros and cons of both designs. Lists of pros and cons had already been made by some of the library staff and the Historic Preservation Commission. Scherer said that he would compile all the feedback into one report later in the week. Then, after further comment from interested parties at the August meeting, the Library Board of Trustees intends to make a decision on a site in September.

Scherer urged the group to consider the public library in the larger context of the city -- beyond its focus of providing materials for people. He said that, nationally, libraries are starting to expand their missions into literacy, youth services, working with at-risk children, and so forth. The mission of today's library is embedded in the needs of other organizations, much more synergy is being created, and the role of the library is a changing dynamic.

Scherer mentioned that this was the 26th meeting he has held so far in Ames (with the public and members of the library staff), and said there will be 12 or 15 more during the design stage of the expansion project. He said this process is about "getting this right for Ames," and he hoped people would see it as being a fair and deliberate exercise. He stated that the budgets he would present included buildings designed to the LEED Silver level, although he is willing to design to the top tier, if that should be the wish of the community. Goals he is aiming for include:

- Sustainable site planning;
- Safeguarding water and water efficiency;
- Energy efficiency and renewable energy;
- Conservation of materials and resources (including limiting the distance things have to be transported); and
- Indoor environmental quality.

He stated that there are environmental, economic, and health/safety benefits to sustainable design; furthermore, the library itself can be an open book to sustainability – it is possible to include design elements that allow people to see how the sustainable systems within the building actually work and that adds an educational benefit, as well. He said that he expects the library

could save 60 cents to \$1.20 of each \$1.50 it spends on energy today with an environmentally-sophisticated building. Scherer stated that he would take a common sense approach in trying to find the optimal balance between the amount of money spent and the resulting energy savings. The exterior envelope of the building has largest impact proportionally, while the more sophisticated and complex elements usually offer lower energy savings.

He listed several sustainable measures the firm intends to incorporate in either design: thermal mass designed to retain heat and reduce the demand load for heating and cooling; smart lighting, which could be all LED by the time Ames's project would go out to bid; smart, simple, and prominent recycling centers inside the library; water collection and minimized usage requirements; and use of a "green roof" or terrace as a heat sink.

Scherer briefly reviewed the basic features of the two concepts. Elements in Option A involve:

- expanding the building on the existing site;
- restoring the 1903, 1908 and 1940 buildings, but with changes inside to allow for the functionality of the library;
- purchasing the property between the Elks Lodge and the funeral home to provide additional parking;
- swapping land with the Methodist Church and reorienting the alley to accommodate the bookmobile and book drop; and
- constructing a single-level deck with a ramp up to the second level for parking north of the library.

Scherer stated that Option A was predicated on the idea that the First United Methodist Church would proceed with its own proposed expansion project, and a land trade that would result in church ownership of the northwest quarter of the block and City ownership of the southwest quarter. If the church should vote not to go ahead, the alley could not be realigned. That would mean Scherer's solution for the bookmobile would not work and the plan for the library's ground floor would have to be changed. However, he said that if church just chose not to build now, it might be possible for the City to make the land swap and some sort of agreement about the future of church's annex, anyway.

With respect to the east side of the library, Scherer said that Option A would work whether or not the extra piece of property were purchased. The option would also work without any changes to the Elks' property. The architects are proposing an easement agreement, parking lot reconfiguration and widening of the alley adjacent to the Elks Lodge, but Scherer said that parking lot could end up being organized differently, anyway, during the design process.

In response to questions about the parking deck, Scherer explained that there would be a two-way ramp off of Douglas Avenue. Snow would be removed from the deck by plowing it off the top into the street or alley (and then removing it from there) or by plowing it directly from the deck into the beds of trucks parked below. He said an elevator and stair would be included in the southeast corner so that people could get from the upper level to the crosswalk. The lower level of the parking lot would have columns inside to support the deck, but it would still be possible to walk out via the alley. No sky walk is being considered.

One member of the audience, Rich VanValin, asked Scherer if he had considered using an automated parking tower which elevates vehicles and parks them on shelves. VanValin said he understood that system would take half the investment, one-third the area, one-quarter the space, and one-fifth the construction time. Scherer stated that such a system was used in New York and Europe and it worked very well for condominiums; however, the cost of maintenance and service agreements is high. Electricity costs are also very high. Scherer indicated that he did not think the system would make sense in this application, but was willing to take a look. He pointed out that another solution would be for the community to choose not to build a second level at all and simply let people walk.

Superimposing transparent cubes (to represent the mass of the proposed building) on Google Earth street views, Scherer illustrated how Option A would compare to existing structures on Douglas and Sixth Streets. He said the height from the sidewalk to the parapet of The Octagon is 49 feet; the south end of proposed library building would be 36 feet. If a third floor were added in the future, the library would be 54 feet high, or five feet higher than The Octagon. On the north end, the height of the oldest section of the library would remain at 32 feet. The parking deck would be 13 feet above the ground, or about 4 feet higher than the first floor of the United Church of Christ. He said the south side of the parking structure could have aesthetic aspects such as plantings, brick, or whatever the community selected. Some sort of structure would also have to be built to enclose the stairs. The design elements are yet to be determined -- Scherer said he simply wanted to indicate that the deck could be designed to fit in with the historic corridor.

There was some discussion about the raised floor and mechanical systems being proposed. Scherer said future library space could be built around the mechanical room on the third level. Initially, the rest of the roof would be available for plantings.

Elements of Option B include:

- a new building across Clark Avenue from City Hall;
- a four-level parking deck and a three-level library;
- access directly into the children's area on second floor from the parking garage;
- space on the upper level for a roof garden or terrace;
- the option of flipping the floor plan to put the parking area on either 5th or 6th Street;
- a bookmobile drive-through on the east side of the building; and
- a book drop next to the City Hall bill payment drop box.

Again showing the mass of the building overlaid onto Google Earth street views, Scherer showed the height of City Hall at 30 feet and a three-story library at 59 feet. He noted, however, that there is more square footage available on the third floor than is necessary for the library, so the west façade could be "peeled back" to keep the front of the building at two stories, more in scale with City Hall. The Red Cross Building south of the site is 25 feet high.

Asked if there would be any basement in the building, Scherer said no; the tunnel under the street would be reconstructed to allow books to be conveyed over to the building for check-in, but he believes the water table is too high and there would be seepage in the lower level. If that site is selected, soil borings will give a more definitive idea about that possibility.

Someone asked if the trees in the parking lot (City Hall Lot N) would be lost. Scherer said they would, but a green roof would be gained.

A member of the audience pointed out that the mechanical room on the third level was not shown on the three-dimensional illustration. Scherer acknowledged that that was an error. It would function did the upper level room on Option A, with the space around it being expandable in the future for another story.

There was discussion about having the children's areas on an upper level. Scherer said the theory is that parents with children want to avoid elevators and stairs. In this concept, having the fourth parking level coincide with the second floor means parents don't have to struggle up stairs with strollers and book bags. In Option B, the adult services area is even higher up. Reasons for that are that higher levels offer a better view and children don't care about the view because they're focused on activity. Also, the higher up one goes, the quieter it gets. Scherer said that in other communities where this approach has been taken, they've found that people like the peaceful areas and stay longer.

Questioned about handicap parking, Scherer said the ramp would have a ceiling height of 10-foot, six inches and eight-foot clearance; the first floor would have van-height clearance.

Scherer stated that both buildings would be constructed to allow for future expansion. Both could have "green" roofs and outdoor areas. Option A includes 200 parking stalls; Option B features 150. The price difference is approximately \$2 million (with Option A costing more), largely related to the cost of renting of space during the construction period and paying for a second move. Scherer said rental and moving costs were just estimates – it is possible they could be free, depending on the situation, but for now he has included a realistic, worst-case scenario. He said they also factored in a higher level of contingency for Option A because of the unknowns in working around the historic structures – again, the additional costs may not be necessary, but the amount remains unknown until the forensics are done. He said the parking deck for Option A is cheaper than B, so that provides some offset, but the Option A price includes the cost of purchasing the property across Douglas at its appraised value. Scherer also said the figures he showed were not today's dollars, but included inflation through February 2013 (the anticipated completion date).

Scherer stated that he was aware of one negative on Option B, which is the uncertainty of what would happen to the existing library. That is a matter the community will have to wrestle with. He cited examples of how two other communities dealt with the problem. Norman, Oklahoma, added another civic initiative and the bond issue included three funding components: the building of a new library, restoration of the old library to create a senior center, and operating cost for both. Fayetteville, Arkansas, built a new library and sold the old building with deed restrictions on the historic structure.

A member of the audience asked why summer 2010 was being considered for a referendum when students are an integral part of the community and most of them would be gone. Scherer

explained that Special City Elections may only be held on the first Tuesday in March, May, August or November.

Scherer asked the audience to try to list as many pros and cons about each option as possible, and the group generated the following list.

Pros and Cons			
Option A		Option B	
+	-	+	-
More landscaping	Requires temporary relocation	Straight, clean lines (no “fiddling”)	Scale too large in relation to City Hall
Retains historical continuity	Tears down the 1984 section	Near transportation hub at City Hall	Potential safety issues in ramp
Better neighbors	More contingencies	Synergy with City Hall	Duplication of parking
More options for future expansion	Higher construction costs	No temporary relocation needed	Requires tree removal
Better scale for the neighborhood	Takes property on east side of Douglas off tax roll	Close to city auditorium (for large events)	More competition for parking
More available on-street parking	Dependent on FUMC church action	Outdoor space on the roof (terrace)	Removes land that could be used for future expansion on City Hall
Parking ramp has fewer multiple uses	Parking ramp has fewer multiple uses	Design costs are lower	No historical connection
Offers a plaza	Maintenance cost of parking ramp and snow removal	Streets don’t need to be changed	Fewer parking spaces
	Takes too much “fiddling”	Staff only has to move once	More cost, if existing building remains vacant
		Positive impact on City Hall neighborhood	Potential increase in traffic around City Hall and Fareway

Scherer next invited Gloria Betcher, chair of the Ames Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), to share some matters of importance to that group. Ms. Betcher stated that the Commission was an arm of City government charged with the stewardship of the community's historic resources. She said the City and State had asked the Commission to get involved in the library's expansion process, so the members compiled a list of pros and cons from the preservation perspective. (The list appears at the end of this document.) She noted that the list was not an endorsement for either site. Some points that Ms. Betcher highlighted follow:

1 – The Commission does not care whether or not library continues to operate at 515 Douglas, but it cares very much that the 1904 and 1940 additions be preserved. She said that the older sections have been deemed eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the Commission has voted to recommend that the City nominate the old section for that listing. Ms. Betcher said that does not mean the library cannot change, and it allows access to grant money for helping to restore the buildings.

2 – The Commission's list of pros and cons does not take into account economics or any other issues outside those related to preservation. It does include the impact changes may have on the historic districts on either side of the library, those being the Old Town District to the north and the Main Street District to the south, as well as the historic corridor that includes City Hall, three churches on Sixth Street, the Post Office, the Elks Club, Bandshell Park, the power plant, and the Municipal Building (old City Hall), currently occupied by Youth and Shelter Services. Since there are historic resources all around, the HPC included its assessment of traffic patterns for the two site options.

3 – The Historic Preservation Commission has no official statement to make about either site, although Ms. Betcher said the massing and scale of Option B is something that came up. There is concern that a possible addition fourth floor on Option B could result in a building with a height as great as 70 feet.

It was also noted that the Historic Old Town Neighborhood Association had gone on record to state that the group is not opposed to a parking deck north side of the existing library, as long as it is tastefully designed and in scale with the surroundings.

The August 20, 2009, regular meeting of the Ames Public Library Board of Trustees will be held in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 7:00 p.m., in order to provide the public another opportunity to provide input. Comments may also be sent via e-mail to aweeks@amespubliclibrary.org or kthompson@amespubliclibrary.org.

The meeting ended at 8:48 p.m.

(Pros and cons identified by the Historic Preservation Commission and by library staff members follow.)