



Minutes of City Council Workshop:
Somersworth Library Feasibility Study
for Accessibility
Monday, September 20, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 6:20 p.m. by His Honor, the Mayor, Dana S. Hilliard and, upon roll call, the following Council members were present: Pepin, Vincent, Dumont, Austin, Michaud, Witham, Gerding, Cameron and Paradis. Members of Placework Architecture present at 6:35 p.m.: Brian Murphy, Liz Nguyen, and Maggie Cochrane.

SOMERSWORTH LIBRARY FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR ACCESSIBILITY

City Manager Belmore described two schemes provided by Placework Architecture for accessibility and other upgrades to the Somersworth Public Library. Scheme #1 includes renovations for ADA accessibility and some other usability upgrades. Scheme #2 involves using some of the adjacent park to construct an addition. He explained that the renovations for scheme #2 include an elevator, a new fire suppression sprinkler system, patio area, and an upper -level addition. Belmore mentioned that the addition would provide for a more appealing Children's section and it wraps around to include space fronting Main Street. Manager Belmore stated that a Community survey was completed and one of the takeaways was a desire for more meeting and study space. The addition allows for this increased space.

Manager Belmore explained that a group consisting of himself, Director Scott Smith, Library Director Rebecca Whitney, and City Engineer Amber Ferland reviewed several options provided by Placework, narrowing them to two preferred options. Finally, upon a final review City staff's consensus was scheme #2 – the addition. Manager Belmore reminded Council that the cost estimates are very preliminary.

Mayor Hilliard called a 5-minute recess at 6:35 p.m. and called the meeting back to order at 6:40 p.m.

Brian Murphy of Placework reiterated that the cost estimates listed in the report are his opinion of probable cost and more information is needed before the numbers can be tightened up. Councilor Witham stated he likes that there are alternatives and his first reaction is favorable towards the addition scheme. He said we need to invest wisely and that the library is not just a place where books are kept; rather it is a meeting space, study space, and would like to see even more of that. Councilor Paradis spoke about wanting to look at the future needs of the City's roughly 12,000 residents. Liz Nguyen replied that a City with that population demands about 7200 square feet of book stack space and the addition would get us there.

Councilor Pepin stated a concern with having any kind of children's area in a basement. Councilor Austin stated research is done differently now than it used to. He said upgrades should reflect this and be more multi-media driven. He also expressed the desire to recognize cultural diversity when considering the needs of residents for the library. Councilor Cameron stated she likes the addition and wondered what other unique basement projects the presenters have worked on. Liz Nguyen stated that basements are a challenge, but it could be upgraded for uses other than a children's area. Councilor Gerding agreed with upgrades to keep up with evolving technology. Brian Murphy stated that the

statistics he has seen show that people still go to the library and they are a part of the social infrastructure of any town. Councilor Dumont inquired about the cost of an elevator and mentioned that this project will most likely have considerable soft costs associated with it. Ms. Nguyen replied that the numbers are very preliminary, but the rough estimate is for \$147k.

Councilor Witham said that Council realized an addition was not a good idea with an inferior building when deciding on any improvements to the fire station, and he asked what kind of condition the library is currently in from their perspective. Mr. Murphy stated the library is a great space with interesting levels and great light and it seems to be in good shape. Ms. Nguyen added that the location of the library is perfect being right in the heart of the downtown. Councilor Pepin noted that he would like to see proper elevators installed because putting in a substandard lift makes access during a medical emergency much more difficult. Mayor Hilliard stated that there are 4 multi-media centers in the City's Schools and urged this project to be steered in the direction of syncing up together with the other centers and the services they provide.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Hilliard adjourned the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jonathan Slaven, City Clerk