



CITY OF CONCORD MEETING MINUTES

CONCORD PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

6:00 PM

Library Auditorium

- Attendance: Jeremy Clemans, Chris Casco; Lisa Sands; Todd Fabian; Becky Hermann; Charles O'Leary.
- B. Hermann opened the meeting at 6:02 p.m.
- The first item was an update from a guest, Superintendent of Public Properties for the City of Concord, Jay Burgess. He briefed the board on the library facilities on the Penacook branch and presented a slide show of the building. The history of the building is that it used to be a police station. It has old style radiators and it is unable to provide good air quality. The building itself is not in bad shape. The roof has 7 more years of life. The heating system is adequate. It will need to be updated in the next 4 or 5 years. The ramp to the building is not in great shape. For ADA upgrades, it is typical that substantial upgrades to a building typically are done to bring them in compliance. The ramp probably needs a rebuild. In order to replace the ramp with a lift, such would cost \$40,000.
- In 2019, the City Council authorized an assessment of the building. In 2020 the entire building was reviewed in detail including all of the building interior systems as well as the exterior. The H.L. Turner Group completed the assessment. The Turner report found several items needing to be fixed. In order to address all needs, it would cost over \$900,000 to bring the building up to 21st Century compliance. It would cost 3 times what the building is worth. It would cost 1.4 million to construct a new, fully usable building with similar square footage of 3,300. Right now, not all of the space may be utilized. The rooms are quite small. For example, T. Fabian commented that the Children's Room does not have sufficient space and he showed a photograph. He said that some of the rooms are vacant. Some life safety issues including the fire escape are being addressed now. T. Fabian also stated that the parking lot near the building is privately owned and is not for the facility. Otherwise, the building does not have any parking available. Most patrons drive to the library. T. Fabian said that most people going there are picking up materials and leaving rather than spending time there. Mr. Burgess stated that the building could be turned into 2 to 4 rental units if it were sold.
- The community center near Merrill Park in east Concord was sold to a private buyer who plans on turning it into housing. The 900 k renovation cost would not necessarily address all problems but it would be a solution for 20 years. This solution, however, would not be a significant improvement for the preferred use as a satellite library, but would maintain it and allow people to return to regularly using the building. T. Fabian stated that in the coming months, the City Council is interested in recommendations from the trustees as to what should happen with the Penacook Branch Library.

- T. Fabian reviewed circulation 2 to 3 years ago and found that 4500 people live in Penacook. He compared it to 45 other libraries with similar populations and learned that we have an extremely low usage, about one checkout per patron in the service area. Compared to the main branch, the usage is minimal. J. Clemans commented that the low use could be due to the quality of the building, and that if it is improved, the circulation may increase. T. Fabian stated that is possible. A lot of comparable libraries in smaller towns are used more. The Baker Library in Bow has over 100,000 annual circulation for a population of approximately 7,890 people.
- Mr. Burgess closed by saying that the city may own property in Penacook, but there may not be a lot of options for a property to be used as a new library site. T. Fabian stated that for 14 months since the branch closed, he did not have any inquiries about the closed facility. In the last month, he has received 12 to 15 calls asking about opening the branch. He had much more interest from residents in reopening the Heights branch. The issue will be put on our November agenda to discuss again. At this time, the branch needs to remain closed because it is unsafe to even put staff in the building due to poor air quality, an insufficient ventilation system, and no ability to socially distance. J. Clemans stated that some other alternatives to a building may be considered to allow patrons to pick up books at specific times but to do so we do not necessarily need to have a building. An alternative could be a library kiosk which will cost \$30,000. T. Fabian said that when the idea of a book mobile was presented in Penacook a few years ago but it was not well received by the public. C. O'Leary commented that due to the limitations of the facility, people may not use it, and therefore, to gauge use with the current facility may not be a fair reflection of how the public would use an updated or new facility. L. Sands stated that 15 years ago when closing the facility due to budget cuts was a reality, many people thought that if closed it would never reopen, and therefore, the public resisted closing because it will be lost forever.
- The next agenda item regarded acceptance of the minutes of the July 12, 2021 monthly meeting. By motion of C. Casco and seconded by L. Sands, the board approved the minutes by unanimous vote.
- Next, T. Fabian gave the Library Director's Report and Monthly Update and COVID plans. He said that NH libraries have been dropping physical newspapers due to high prices. There is less reliance on patrons reading hard copy papers. In the alternative, through a company called Proquest, we can receive digital access to major papers including the N.Y. Times and Boston Globe. This gives access to all of the text but not the photographs. The range is from 1980 to the present. We get a lot more access for the price from numerous other publications. Therefore, moving to digital access for papers is much better for patron accessibility. Next, he stated that we have launched a special children's catalog on the library website that can be searched. It will be filled with children's content. It went live for patrons to access virtually this week. This will provide greater access to content. L. Sands suggested a news release about this to the schools. Finally, he said that he will regularly show the trustees the trust fund report for the city related to the library. There is a fund with money dedicated to Penacook facility that may be utilized. Previously, this information was presented annually to the trustees and members of the foundation. As to COVID, the situation remains fluid. Masks are suggested by signs in the front of the building. For the majority of staff, when working on the desk, they have been wearing masks. The threat of COVID remains and is being taken seriously.
- Old business- the board discussed the status of the strategic plan for a new library. T. Fabian stated that this is still being worked on and will be presented to the trustees at a later date.
- New business- Budget updates- The city council approved a staffing position change that is positive and includes a new title and pay for a position. The Foundation has not met and meets next week.
- Public Comments- None. No one appeared at the meeting from the public.
- Next Meeting: October 4, 2021

- Adjournment- 7:15 p.m. J. Clemans moved to adjourn, seconded by L. Sands and adopted by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted by:

Chris Casco, Trustee

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