

January 10, 2022

Concord City Council
City Council Chambers
37 Green Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: Recommendation for Penacook Library
Greetings Honorable Mayor, City Councilors, and Councilors-Elect,

The Concord Public Library Board of Trustees recognizes the longstanding commitment of the City of Concord to provide library services to the residents of Penacook. This has resulted in maintaining a Library branch building in downtown Penacook. While small, the Penacook Branch has served the community for decades. The COVID 19 pandemic, however, has drastically compromised the ability of the Library to continue to provide services to residents in Penacook and the Penacook Branch has been closed since the start of the pandemic. In conjunction with the City, we have undertaken a careful review of this facility and discussed at length what the priorities of the Library should be for Penacook.

The CPL Trustees remain committed to providing 21st century library services to the residents of Penacook, which in our opinion, includes a continued commitment to providing a physical space. We recognize that a 21st century library is about more than books. Library programming and shared collections build a sense of community and provide valuable services and resources. Maintaining a physical presence in downtown Penacook is important and should remain a priority not just for the Library, but also for the City Council. We, as CPL Trustees, hope that you share our view.

The current facility is inadequate. Among the many deficiencies are lack of parking, insufficient space for social distancing, poor ventilation, mechanical and structural upgrades needed and ADA-compliance issues. The CPL Trustees have been informed by Public Properties Superintendent, Jay Burgess, that the total cost of the recommended and necessary upgrades/repairs comes close to one million dollars after factoring in contingencies and labor scarcity. In the alternative, a new building will likely cost over a million dollars and is not financially viable within the Library's current budget.

Ultimately the decision of whether the City should invest money into the existing building or purchase a new building in Penacook is for the City Council to make. However, in our opinion, investing money in the current building does not seem fiscally responsible. Therefore, we strongly urge the City Council to carefully consider any and all other possible solutions going forward. We, collectively and working together, must determine how the City can maintain its responsibility to meeting the needs of the Penacook community.

The CPL Trustees propose that the City Council carefully consider the following—

- Locating and purchasing a new physical space for the Penacook branch library.
 - Should the current Penacook facility be sold, investing the proceeds from the sale directly into a library account to be used for a new branch library in Penacook.
 - Should the City opt to repurpose the current Penacook facility for another city use, investing funds of equal value into a library account to be used for a new branch library in Penacook.
- Strengthening current Library programming and services offered in Penacook while locating and securing a new physical space. This could be achieved by, but not limited to:
 - Continuing to seek space in an existing facility that will provide a library experience closer to the Heights branch model
 - Revisiting the idea of shared library services with the Town of Boscawen, possibly subsidizing use of that library in the interim for Penacook residents
 - Advocate for more frequent bus service from Penacook to downtown
 - Providing a “RedBox”- like kiosk for materials and holds pick-up by Penacook patrons in Penacook
 - Investing in a pop-up library vehicle that visits Penacook neighborhoods
 - Offering programs – for both children and adults at Penacook-based public schools, daycares, and nursery schools - specifically reaching out to Merrimack Valley Schools to consider forming a school/public library partnership
 - Exploring the possibility of re-utilizing the Penacook Community Center for library services or partnering with the PCC on a new space
 - Partnering with Penacook-based retirement communities to provide library delivery, tech help and programming

Any short-term and long-term solution, however, must carefully consider the input of Penacook residents. Therefore, before any permanent plan is adopted, we urge the City Council to hold several public meetings seeking the direct input of Penacook residents. There are approximately 2,690 households in the Penacook zip code area and we view their ideas and opinions as critical in helping us achieve the best solution to our objective of continuing to provide library services in Penacook.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Becky Herrmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Becky Herrmann, Chair
On behalf of the CPL Board of Trustees